

# Needs Analysis in EFL Teaching in Greece: The Teachers' Stance

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## Abstract

The present research aims at identifying the way teachers in the Greek private sector become aware of their students' needs and how they implement this knowledge in course and syllabus design. More specifically, teachers' beliefs on the role and effectiveness of needs analysis in course and syllabus design were explored through both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The reason for conducting a study of this kind and caliber is the fact that syllabuses are mainly test-oriented within the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in private institutes in Greece, as obtaining certificates is the primary goal, and teachers are asked to align courses and syllabuses to their students' needs. The findings revealed that teachers acknowledge the significance of needs analysis and implement their findings in course design. They also revealed the methods they use in order to become aware of their students' needs. These results will benefit EFL teachers who want to maximize their potential and facilitate their students' learning.

**Keywords:** Needs analysis, Objective needs, Subjective needs, Course design, Syllabus

design, EFL

## 1. Introduction

In the dynamic process of course design, which involves the processes of syllabus design, materials development, teaching and evaluation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), both theoretical and empirical information is taken into account (García, 2010; Richards, 2001, Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). More importantly, teachers, as course designers (Graves, 1996a), must take their students' needs into consideration, so that they tailor their teaching to meet these needs (Long, 2005a).

In order to become aware of students' requirements, needs analysis has proved to be an effective tool (Davies, 2006; Fatihi, 2003; Richards, 2001; Young; 2000, Cunningsworth, 1983) in any learning context (Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004), and especially in learner-centered classes (Young, 2000; Seedhouse, 1995).

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Greece is exam-oriented, as students' primary goal in learning English is to obtain certificates. Apart from the instruction delivered at school, private tutoring (Rixon, 2013) and classes in foreign language schools (Dendrinou et al., 2013) are common, mainly because parents think that children need more time to learn English and consider the materials and the conditions in the private sector to be more efficient (Dendrinou et al., 2013; Rixon, 2013).

In this context, the present paper aims at exploring teachers' beliefs on the effectiveness of needs analysis, the methods used to conduct needs analyses along with potential constraints, and the degree to which the results of needs analyses are utilized in the process of course design. What follows is a presentation of the theoretical background of this research.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Throughout this section, a short review of the literature concerning the course design process is presented in order to support and justify the teacher's role as a course designer in EFL. The use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is also analyzed as, in the private sector, teaching is based upon it. Moreover, a review of the literature on *needs analysis*, as the first step for course design, is defined.

### 2.1 *The Process of Course Design*

Course design is not always a clearly defined process, as it is a dynamic, evolving process that is dependent on various variables that change during the course (Graves, 1996a). Therefore, course designing requires the implementation of theoretically grounded learning and teaching principles. It is important that research-based learning or revising tasks and materials through a systematic and reflective process are utilized (Smith & Ragan, 2005). It is also essential that teachers adapt the syllabus and materials to meet their students' needs, interests and learning characteristics. Adequate and sufficient information about the students, helps teachers design courses effectively (MERA & PI, 2014), or adapt existing ones. This implies that students' needs should be considered in the process of syllabus design in any learning context (Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004).

According to Nation and Macalister's (2010) curriculum design model, the most general factors to be considered in the design process are the principles of teaching and learning, the environment and the learners' needs. These factors provide the theoretical and practical

considerations which will guide the course. Principles of teaching and learning are essential, as they connect theory and research with practice and provide the ground for course and lesson design. The analysis of the environment provides information about the learners, the teacher and the learning situation. Learners' needs analysis sheds light on learners' present and future situation.

Similarly, Richards (2001) suggests that course planning and syllabus design involve needs analysis and planning goals and learning outcomes first. Then focus is drawn on the course rationale, the entry and exit levels, the selection, sequencing and planning of the course content as well as the preparation of the scope and sequence plan. In the same vein, according to Hedge (2000, in Ayakli, 2004), course design is completed through specific steps. First the learners and the context are studied and analyzed, and then the goals and objectives are established, after which the syllabus is planned, and the material is designed. Finally, teaching the course is followed by a summative evaluation.

The process of course development includes planning the course, teaching it and changing the plan during the course and in some cases long after it has been completed. Graves (1996a) explains that almost all teachers have some form of experience in course development. Although some teachers may have never planned a new course, teaching and making decisions about the course, adapting or supplementing materials and making changes are part of their role. In addition, because most teachers teach the same course or use the same textbook over the years, they tend to change their teaching according to their experience. Under this perspective, planning and teaching lessons are similar to and part of the course development process (Graves, 1996a).

Teachers should, thus, consider the following stages of course development: Setting goals and objectives is essential before determining the content and activities that are appropriate for the course. Conceptualizing the content determines the aspects of language and language learning that will be included in the course. Selecting and developing or adapting materials and activities are important processes that enhance students' engagement in the course. Organizing the content and the activities provides shape to the course. Finally, evaluation of the parts of the course development processes provides insightful information on the course (Graves, 1996a). The section which follows probes into the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in course design.

## *2.2 Using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in course Design*

What follows, in this paragraph, are some references which are made to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which is applied by teachers in the private sector to design their courses or adapt their syllabus. The CEFR provides the means for course designers to reflect on their practices with the aim of meeting their students' needs (Council of Europe, 2001). This gives teachers the opportunity, to decide on their own, what materials and methodology they will employ based on their students' needs. Studying and analyzing these decisions and practices has helped us to shed light on how course design is aligned to students' needs. There is evidence that using the CEFR has a positive impact on student achievement (Dendrinou, Zouganeli, & Karavas, 2013). The section which follows answers the question as to what needs analysis is.

### 2.3 What Is a Needs Analysis?

The difficulty in reaching consensus on defining the term *needs* lies in the assumption that needs do not have an objective reality, as they are constructed from judgement and reflect the values and interests of the person who makes this judgement (Ali & Salih, 2013). This is also the reason why different stakeholders, among whom teachers and learners, have different views concerning needs (Richards, 2001). Richards (2001, p. 66) emphasizes that “needs are not objective facts but subjective interpretations of information”.

A needs analysis can be regarded as a device aiming at identifying learners’ needs so that effective courses are designed (Fatihi, 2003). Brindley (1989) defined needs analysis as an analysis that shows “the gap between what is and what should be” (Brindley, 1989, p. 65 in Kormos et al., 2002, p. 4). Needs analysis should not be confused with needs assessment. Graves (1996b) clarified that, although the terms ‘needs analysis’ and ‘needs assessment’ may be used interchangeably, assessment involves obtaining information about students, while analysis involves assigning value to this information.

The learner population is characterized by diversity and heterogeneity in terms of perceived needs, preferred learning strategies and learning styles. Therefore, when teachers select specific tasks or activities, some students are excluded from engaging in the learning process (Young, 2000). It is, thus, essential that teachers conduct a needs analysis, so as to diagnose students’ needs and adapt their teaching according to their learners’ needs (MERA, 2016). According to Tomlinson’s (2010) principles of language teaching, the content and methodology of teaching should be designed on the basis of students’ needs, wants, learning styles and learning objectives.

The outcome of a needs analysis is the definition of students’ needs in the form of a profile that consists of variables and features which interrelate with each other, including “stylistic appropriateness, level of attainment, receptive/productive abilities, medium (speech/writing), units of meaning and forms of English” (Cunningsworth, 1983, p. 154).

Since teachers must adapt their teaching based on their students’ characteristics (MERA, 2016), it is essential that teachers are familiarized with needs analysis, as the output of needs analysis is the input to syllabus and course design (Long, 2005a). Defining learners’ current and future needs as accurately as possible is essential for designing appropriate courses (Cunningsworth, 1983). Richterich (1975, in Fatihi, 2003) posited that the learning process should be responsive to learners’ expressed needs; so that feedback is integrated in the learning cycle and the teacher can identify and address students’ needs as they arise. Under this perspective, even learning activities can be utilized as a form of needs analysis.

However, some issues are raised with respect to the limitations of needs analyses. According to Cunningsworth (1983), one of the main issues is that, in the majority of the learning contexts, predicting learners’ future needs is difficult. Another issue raised is that in a heterogeneous group of learners, needs may differ to a considerable degree. It is also highlighted that needs analysis is heavily dependent on individual judgement. In addition, some of the required information may be inaccurate or missing. Finally, as a needs analysis may result in a range of concepts and functions, it may be impossible to organize them into a coherent teaching sequence. What follows in the next section is the research methodology.

### 3. Methodology

The broader context of this research is Needs Analysis and its role in EFL especially as regards the teachers' attitudes towards the effectiveness of students' needs analysis in the private sector. This section describes the methodology of the research by focusing on the research tools which are the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews

#### *3.1 The Purpose of the Research*

This research aims to explore the attitude of English teachers on the effectiveness of students' needs analysis, if they integrate needs analysis in their practice and how effective needs analysis proves to be in course design. Being aware of their students' needs, preferences, personal styles and attitudes will help teachers to make their lesson more effective, interesting and motivating. It will also guide them to evaluate and select the appropriate material based on the students' needs. The emphasis of this study is on teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of needs analysis. Needs Analysis should propose ways on how the results can be taken into account in designing a learning environment that motivates students to enhance English language learning.

Based on the above framework, the current research attempts to shed light on teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of needs analysis in the private sector, namely private language institutes and private tutoring. More specifically, the objectives of this research are the teachers' awareness of the importance of conducting needs analysis, whether they conduct needs analysis in their teaching practices and if they do so, in which ways do they become aware of their students' needs. This research also examines whether teachers are familiar with the importance of implementing the results of needs analysis in course and syllabus design and, also, how they go about doing that. Last but not least, the constraints of syllabus implementation, in regard to students' needs, is also investigated.

#### *3.2 Research Design*

In order to investigate the teachers' attitudes, and the way they implement needs analysis in course design, a snowball sampling method was applied for the needs of this research, thus reaching out to a sample of teachers who teach all language levels and age groups in a variety of language institutes and in private tutoring. The survey was conducted in Thessaloniki, because it is the second largest city in Greece and has numerous private foreign language institutes which almost outnumber the foreign language institutes in the center of the city of Athens which is the capital of Greece. The teachers who participated in this research were of different academic backgrounds and experience.

The research was carried out via a triangulation process, as qualitative and quantitative methods were both used in a complementary fashion (the questionnaire, was pre-tested to a sample population in order to correct any possible mistakes or change unclear questions, and interviews were also conducted). Triangulation is "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. (Denzin, 1978, p. 291). Multiple viewpoints permit a better understanding of the research and increase the accuracy of research. According to Campbell and Fiske (1959), using more than one method enhances the validation process.

Quantitative research methods are research methods dealing with phenomena under investigation and their relationships (Leedy, 1981), they use mathematical formula and

statistical observations to draw their conclusions. Questionnaires are considered to be one of the most common tools used in this research type.

Qualitative research is a method that develops understanding on social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The researcher plays an important role as he/she may reflect on his/her own knowledge and experience. Qualitative research methods use language instead of numbers. Interviews can help to further elaborate on the participants' responses since they are considered a significant means of collecting data. In this way, an attempt is made to gather information on the teachers' attitudes towards needs analysis, on how the findings are taken into consideration and also on how they contribute to possible changes in a syllabus. For the needs of this research both questionnaires and interviews were used.

### *3.3 Research Tools*

In this section, an attempt is made to analyze the tools that were used in the research. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied for a more vigorous interpretation so as to strengthen the study through triangulation.

#### *3.3.1 The Questionnaire*

The research questionnaire was constructed after a careful review of the literature. A significant number of papers on needs analysis were examined which helped with the construction of the questionnaire of this research. Questionnaires can consist of closed and open questions which permit further points to be analyzed. According to Nunan (1992), questions should not be complex or confusing. In the present situation, the questionnaire included nineteen multiple choice questions and ranking scales. To be more precise, the questionnaire consisted of three parts and was accompanied by a cover letter the purpose of which was to inform the participants-teachers about its contents and the reason why they should complete it. It encouraged them to respond sincerely and carefully.

The first part of the questionnaire refers to the participants' background information. Part I consisted of five questions, multiple choice questions and ranking scales: gender, age, academic qualifications, years of teaching experience and the average number of students that participants-teachers have per class were also recorded. The second part examined their level of training in needs analysis and course design. This part was comprised of five ranking scale questions. The third part of the questionnaire referred to the way they conducted needs analysis for course design. Part three consisted of ten multiple choice and ranking scale questions.

#### *3.3.2 The Interview*

In an attempt to achieve triangulation, and therefore greater validity of the data, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The semi-structured interview consisted of thirteen questions. The starting point of the interview was how long had EFL teachers been teaching English. EFL teachers were also called upon to answer to whether they are in any way involved in course/syllabus design. Furthermore, they were asked whether they generally make any attempts to investigate their students' needs and, if they do, which methods they use to become aware of their students' needs.

Another important topic that was commented upon during the interview was about how EFL



teachers try to address their students' needs. Interviewees also shared their opinions with the interviewer as to what they think the purpose of a needs analysis is and whether they consider needs analysis to be important and in what ways. They were also asked if they had ever conducted a need analysis or the reasons why they had never conducted a needs analysis. The methods used by the participants for the needs analysis and the ways that participants utilize the results of their needs analysis were, finally, also recorded.

### 3.3.3 The Sample

The Sample consisted of fifty-four (54) EFL teachers (6 males, 48 females), who were on average 32 years old ( $M=32.41$ ,  $SD=3.71$ ), and who teach all levels and ages in a variety of language institutes in Thessaloniki. These teachers are also involved in private tutoring. Concerning the EFL teachers' academic qualifications, 27.8% of them hold a university degree (B.A.), 29,6% a Master's degree, 38,9% are working on a Master's degree and 3.7% on a PhD. On average, they have 8 years of teaching experience ( $M=8.24$ ). The average number of students in each class is around 7 students ( $M=7.31$ ).

Participants were chosen via the snowball sampling method as mentioned earlier. EFL teachers recruited other participants for this study (Goodman, 1961). They were asked to recruit other people, but they were not obliged to provide any other names if they did not want to. Data collection was based on the researchers' acquaintances and the participants' acquaintances. Therefore, it is not a random, representative sample, based on probability, and the results cannot be generalized but should be treated with caution. Once the sample size was considered adequate, the data collection procedure was finalized. The only data inclusion rule that was applied was that EFL teachers should be involved in private tutoring in Thessaloniki.

Fifty-four participants took part in the quantitative analysis; however, in the qualitative research only thirteen out of the fifty-four EFL teachers participated. One requirement that EFL teachers had to meet, in order to participate in the qualitative research, was that they had to have more than five years of teaching experience.

### 3.4 The Research Procedure

The research procedure lasted approximately two months from mid-April to June. The quantitative data collection was conducted through an online questionnaire via a Google platform. The researchers conducted a pilot questionnaire on paper first and asked two of their colleagues to complete it in order to make any changes needed before sending out the final questionnaire. The participants were aware of the purpose of the survey. The social media was also used to facilitate the procedure.

The qualitative data was gathered through a semi-structured interview. The researchers arranged several appointments in order to record the interviewees' responses and then transfer them in a written form. In some cases, the interview was completed through an email. All had previously completed the questionnaire which, as aforementioned, was piloted to two teachers. Both teachers made it clear that the research questions were fully understood. In both cases, participants were willing to participate and were encouraged to respond sincerely.

In the section which follows the quantitative and qualitative data analysis is presented in detail.

#### 4. Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis

The aim of this section is to present the quantitative and qualitative data analysis of this research study. Descriptive analysis was performed in the current study. Measures of means and deviations were calculated for the age, the years of experience and the number of students per class. Furthermore, frequency analysis was performed by the researchers so as to understand the stance taken by EFL teachers on the importance of conducting needs analysis in course design. The SPSS23 was used and so was the Microsoft Excel, for the needs of this research.

##### 4.1 Training in Needs Analysis and Course Design

Firstly, all the EFL teachers (N=54) who took part in the current research defined the number of training events (seminars, workshops, etc) on ‘Needs Analysis’ they had attended (live or on-line). On average, EFL teachers had attended one training event on ‘Needs Analysis’ (M=1.24, SD=0.48).

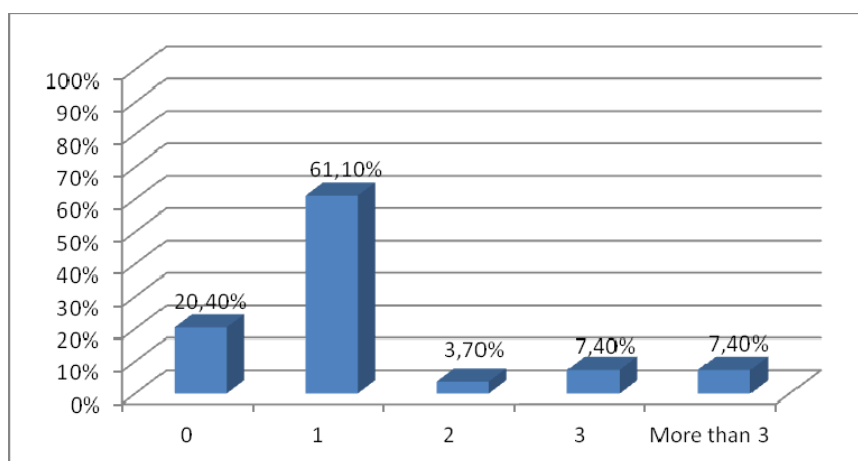


Figure 1. The number of training events on ‘Needs Analysis’ that EFL teachers have attended

More specifically, 20.4% of participants (N=11) had not attended any training event on ‘Needs Analysis’, 61.1% (N=33) had attended one training event on ‘Needs Analysis’, 3.7% (N=2) had attended two and 7.4% of them (N=4) had attended three. Last, but not least, 7.4% of participants (N=4) had attended more than three seminars, workshops, etc. on ‘Needs Analysis’ either live or on-line.

##### 4.1.1 Conducting Needs Analysis for Course Design

Regarding the use of needs analysis in an EFL course and in syllabus design, none of the participants believed that it is ‘of no importance’ to apply needs analysis in EFL courses and syllabus design.



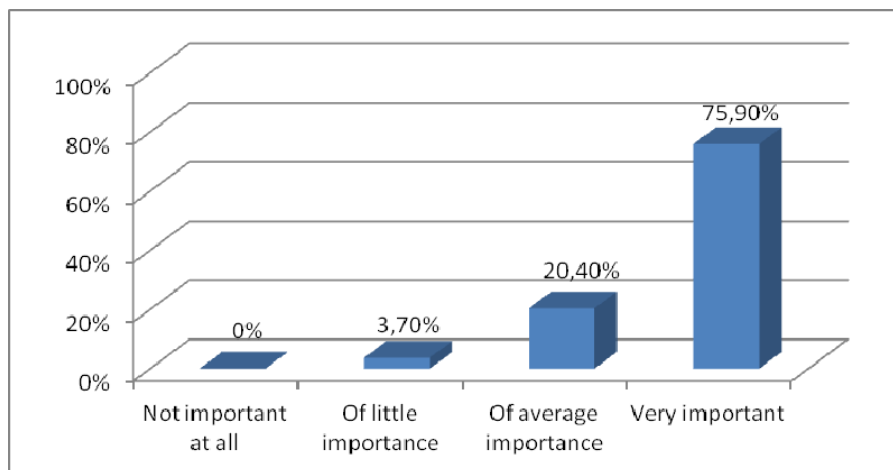


Figure 2. The importance of using needs analysis in EFL course and syllabus design

According to 3.7% of the participants/teachers (N=2), it is of little importance to use needs analysis in an EFL course and in syllabus design. It is of average importance to use needs analysis in an EFL course and in syllabus design according to 20.4% of the EFL teachers (N=11). The majority of the EFL teachers, 75.9% of them (N=41), however, believed that it is very important to apply needs analysis in an EFL course and in syllabus design.

As concerns EFL teachers' answers on how often they conduct needs analyses for course design and syllabus design, the graph below depicts the results.

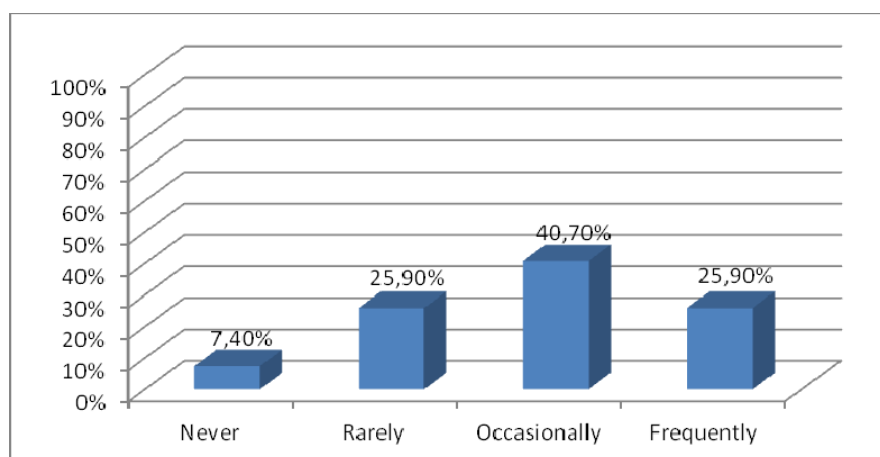


Figure 3. How often do EFL teachers conduct needs analyses for course design and syllabus design

To be more specific, 7.4% of the participants (N=4) have never conducted needs analyses for course design or syllabus design. 25.9% of them (N=14) rarely conduct needs analysis, while 40.7% of them (N=22) occasionally conduct needs analyses for course/ syllabus design. Finally, 25.9% of them (N=14) frequently conduct needs analyses for course design/syllabus design.

Another issue that this study broached was whether the participants/teachers take into account students' needs before designing a course.

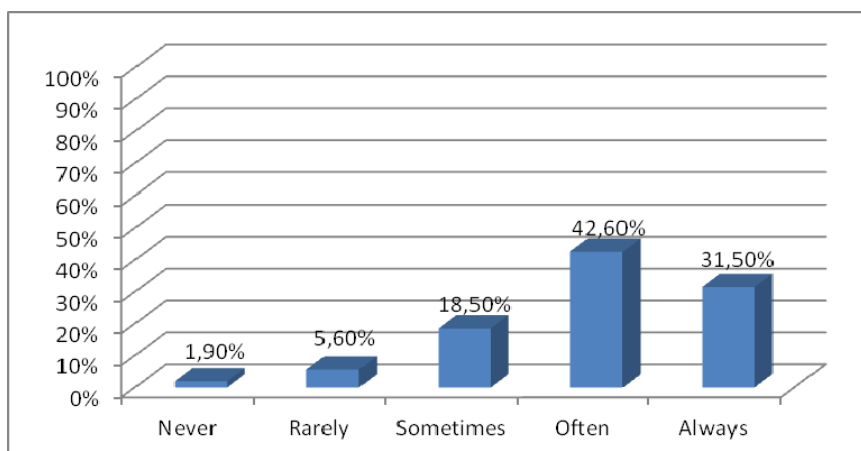


Figure 4. How often do EFL teachers take into account students' needs before designing a course

More specifically, 1.9% of them (N=1) never take into account students' needs. 5.6% of the EFL teachers (N=3) rarely take into account students' needs before designing a course, while 18.5% of them (N=10) sometimes take into account students' needs. A large percentage of the participants, 42.6% of them (N=23), often take into consideration students' needs before designing a course. In addition, 31.5% of the EFL teachers (N=17) always take into account students' needs before designing a course.

What follows are the ways in which EFL teachers become aware of their students' needs.

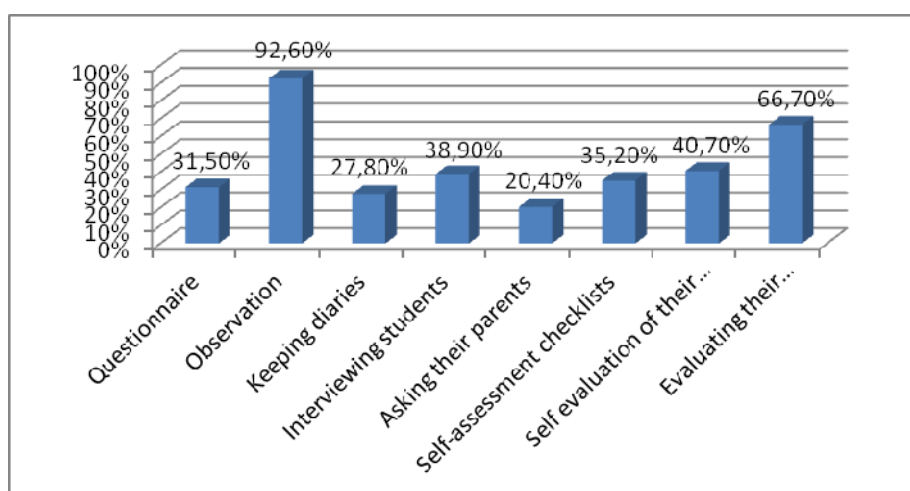


Figure 5. How do EFL teachers become aware of their Students' needs

To be more specific, 31.5% of them (N=17) conduct needs analysis surveys with the use of a questionnaire. However, the vast majority of them, 92.6% (N=50), observe their students in class. Only 27.8% of the participants (N=15) keep diaries and 38.9% of them (N=21)

interview their students. A smaller percentage, 20.4% of the participants (N=11), ask students' parents while 35.2% of them (N=19) provide self-assessment checklists to the students. 40.7% of the EFL teachers (N=22) ask their students to evaluate tasks and activities and 66.7% of the participants (N=36) evaluate students' performance through formal testing.

As for the next question which concerns how frequently teachers find out about their students' needs and adapt their instructional material to meet these needs, the graph below depicts the results.

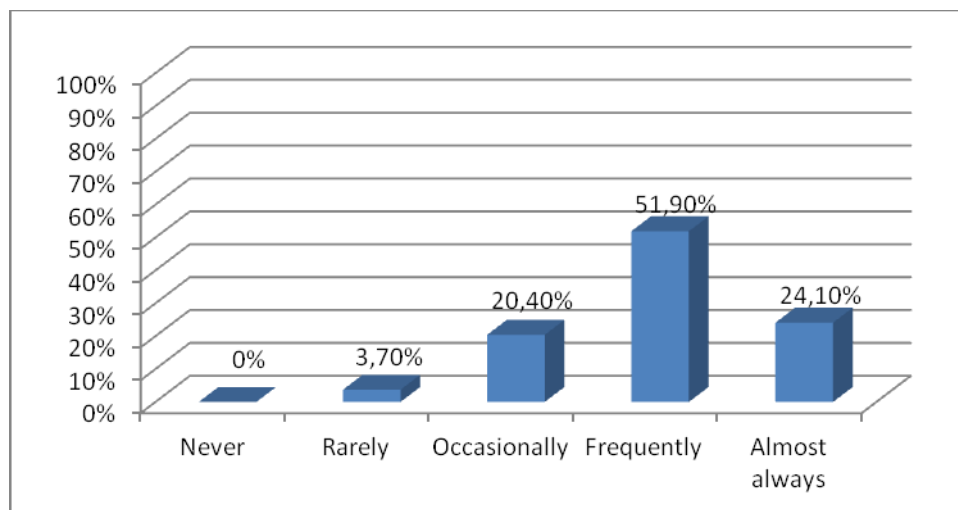


Figure 6. How often EFL teachers try to find out about their students' needs and adapt their instructional material to meet these needs

More specifically, 3.7% of the participants (N=2) rarely try to find out about their students' needs and adapt their instructional material to meet these needs. 20.4% of them (N=11) occasionally try to find out about their students' needs and adapt their instructional material to meet these needs. The majority, however, 51.9% of them (N=28), frequently try to find out about their students' needs and design their course accordingly. Finally, 24.1% of the EFL teachers (N=13) almost always follow this specific rule in order to meet their students' needs. What follows are the teachers' beliefs on the importance of teaching a course which caters for their students' needs.

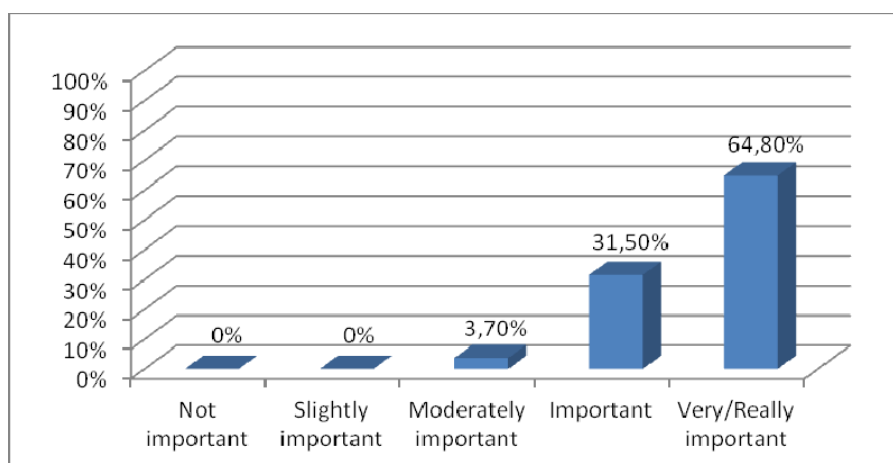


Figure 7. How important is it for EFL teachers to teach a course which caters for their students' needs

Regarding how important it is for EFL teachers to teach a course which caters for their students' needs, only 3.7% of the EFL teachers (N=2) believed that it is moderately important for them to teach a course which caters for their students' needs. 31.5% of the EFL teachers (N=17) believed that it is important for them to teach a course which caters for their students' needs, while the majority, 64.8% of them (N=35), believed that it is very important for the EFL teachers to teach a course which caters for their students' needs.

#### 4.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Apart from the quantitative data analysis, qualitative data analysis was performed with regard to the interview responses. As it was mentioned above, it was a semi-structured interview. Thirteen EFL teachers took part in the semi-structured interviews.

Content analysis was performed to meet the needs of the qualitative part of this research. The researchers encoded all the answers which were given during the interviews, recorded them onto a paper and tried to identify the meaningful messages which could give valuable answers to the research questions.

##### 4.2.1 Involvement in Course/Syllabus Design

First of all, participants were called upon to answer whether they are in any way involved in course or syllabus design. The vast majority (92.3%) of them have already been involved in either course design or syllabus design. Some of the participants said that they conducted a needs analysis for course design in their everyday practice. Other participants have not attended any formal training on 'Needs Analysis for Course Design':

On the other hand, some other participants explained that, indeed, they are involved in course/syllabus design in their everyday life since they are frequently obliged to do so for their work. Their involvement with needs analysis is usually related to the adaptation of the already existing material.

As these participants explained, they managed, in this way, to choose the most appropriate material such as coursebooks, or extra activities to teach English to their students.

One out of the thirteen interviewees (7.7%) was not involved, in any way, in the design of the

course before teaching it to her students. Despite not having been involved in course design, this participant would like to do so, in the future.

With respect to the constraints of syllabus implementation according to the students' needs, EFL teachers admit that they do not always design their courses appropriately. EFL teachers said that the main constraints are lack of adequate knowledge in conducting formal needs analyses and time to modify the materials, especially in exam-oriented classes.

#### 4.2.2 Methods Used by EFL Teachers to Become Aware of Their Students' Needs

Moreover, interviewees were called upon to answer whether they generally try to find out about their students' needs in their everyday practice. All of them (100%) try to become aware of their students' needs. They mentioned, that the reason for trying to find out about their students' needs is that they find these needs very important for the improvement of their students in learning English. Another reason why EFL teachers try to find out about their students' needs is that in this way, they manage to keep their students motivated during the lesson.

Regarding the methods they use to become aware of their students' needs, teachers' answers revealed that different methods are applied such as observation, discussion with students' parents, personal interviews, specific group or individual activities, formal or mock exams, questionnaires and checklists. In the graph below, the methods applied by each participant are reported correspondingly.

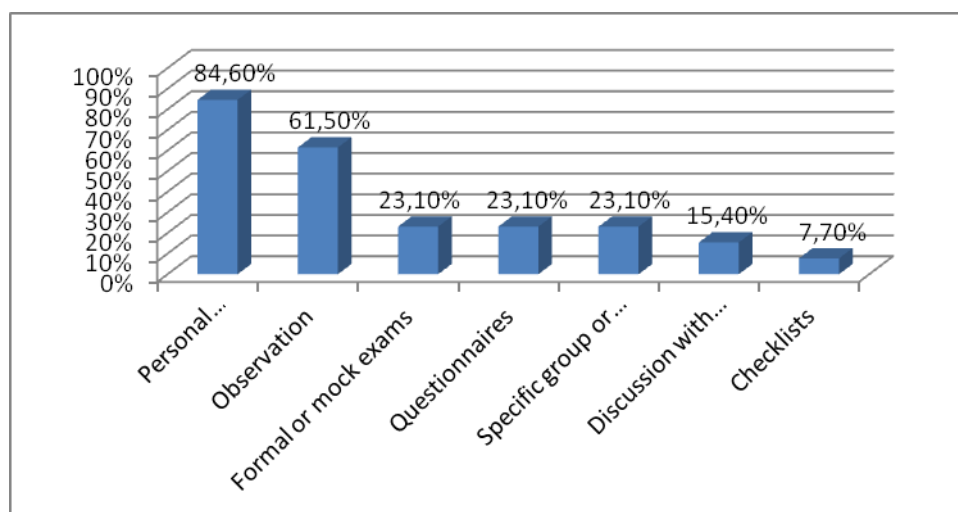


Figure 8. Methods applied by EFL teachers to become aware of their students' needs

As can be seen from the graph above (Figure 8), the majority of the participants mentioned that the most common method they use to become aware of their students' needs is the personal interview. Moreover, the majority of the participants (61.5%) usually observe the way the students interact with their EFL teachers and their classmates in the classroom, as well as their progress in the classroom.

In addition, three of the teachers (23.1%) design specific group or individual activities so as to evaluate their students' improvement in English. More specifically, one of the participants

said that he asks his students to evaluate the activities/tasks which they are assigned. This is one of the ways he chooses in order to become aware of his students' needs. Another participant chooses multiple techniques so as to find out about her students' needs in grammar exercises and in writing or reading tasks.

Furthermore, three interviewees (23.1%) evaluate their students' performance through testing their knowledge. Three of the participants find out about their students' needs through a combination of questionnaires, discussing matters with their students and observing them in class (23.1%).

However, it is important to mention that one of the participants/teachers is actually opposed to using questionnaires, as a way of finding out about his students' needs. He believes that students do not answer their questionnaires honestly and, so, he cannot be aware of his students' real needs one hundred per cent.

Only two participants/teachers (15.4%) discuss their students' needs with their parents so as to find out about their real needs. The majority of the EFL teachers choose to communicate only with their students. Last but not least, only one participant chooses checklists as a method so as to cater for her students' needs.

Therefore, different ways are used for better understanding students' needs by EFL teachers, but discussion with their students and classroom observation are the most ordinary methods.

#### 4.2.3 The Importance of a Needs Analysis

EFL teachers were also invited to answer to the question on whether they consider needs analyses to be important. Their answers are depicted in graph 9 below.

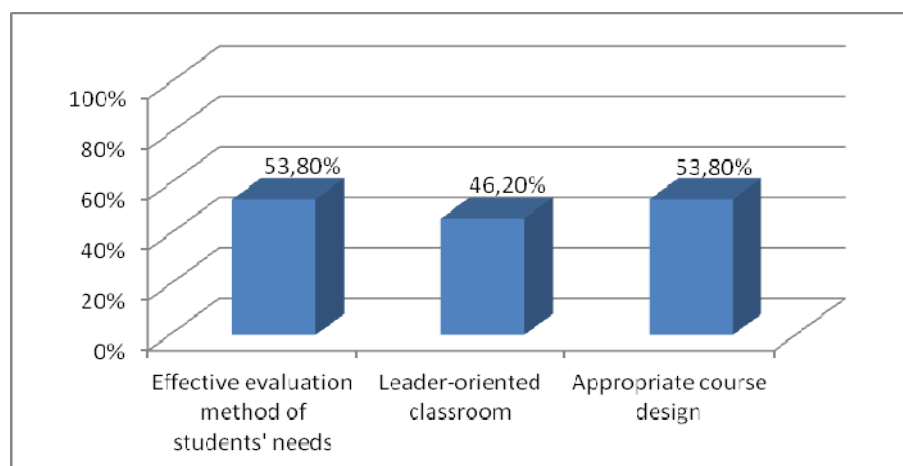


Figure 9. The importance of a needs analysis

As the graph above shows, all of the participants consider needs analyses to be important for different reasons. More than half of them (53.8%) believe that through conducting needs analyses, they are able to evaluate their students effectively in order to understand their needs and help them improve their knowledge.

Another reason for designing a course corresponding to their students' needs is that in this



way EFL teachers can create a more learner-oriented classroom. In this specific classroom, students can improve their self-esteem and motivation. Moreover, EFL teachers can design their course appropriately after having evaluated their students' needs. They can adjust their teaching techniques and the material which they use accordingly. Furthermore, EFL teachers use different methods for needs analyses once they understand that they need to conduct them. The different methods which are used are presented in the graph below.

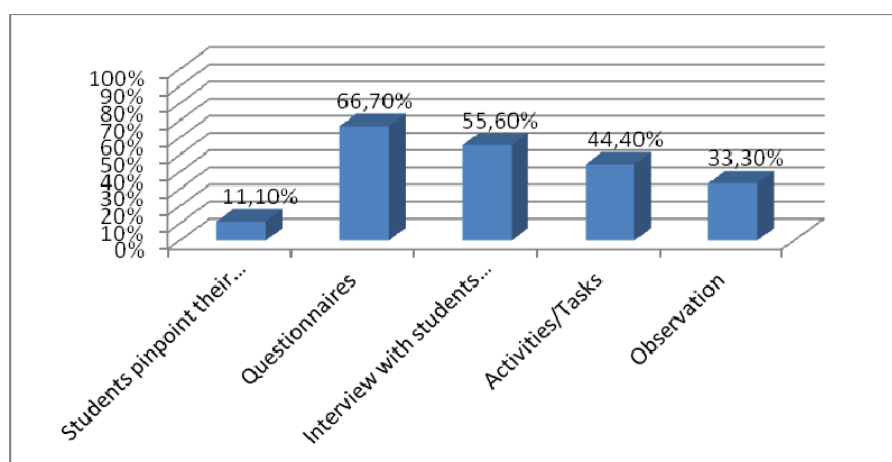


Figure 10. Methods of conducting a needs analysis

One of the methods used for conducting a needs analysis is that students are called upon to pinpoint their needs, or their weaknesses, for instance. One of the participants/teachers finds out about his students' needs through the application of a placement test and as a result, the course design is improved. Another method used is a questionnaire. Most of the interviewees (66.7%) test their students' needs and understand what their weaknesses are through the use of a questionnaire. Conversations, between teachers and students, are another means with which teachers conduct a needs analysis, according to five respondents/teachers (55.6%). EFL teachers have conversations with both their students and their parents in order to understand their students' needs and do their best to teach them and to help them learn. Specific tasks and sets of activities are developed by many participants (44.4% of the participants), so that they can understand their students' needs. This is one of the ways they use to design their courses appropriately and to meet their learners' needs.

Last, but not least, observation is a method used for needs analysis. Several EFL teachers (33.3%) choose to observe their students in and out of the classroom to understand their needs.

However, it is not only important to conduct a needs analysis in different ways and cases; it is also crucial to utilize the results of the needs analysis appropriately and effectively and to try to satisfy students' needs. The ways that EFL teachers utilize these results are reported in the following graph.

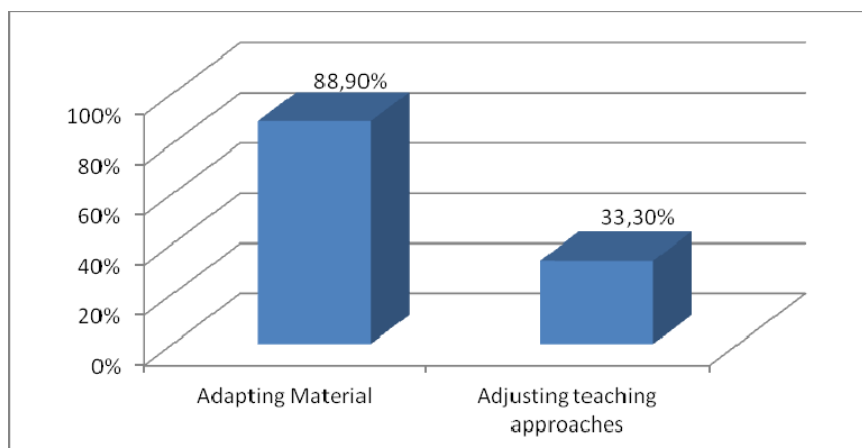


Figure 11. Ways of utilizing the results of a needs analysis

The majority of the respondents/teachers (88.9%) utilize the results of the needs analyses to adapt the material they use in the classroom. They try to modify the syllabus according to their students' needs, based on what they feel learners would need to focus upon the most. Different books and materials are used for this purpose. Furthermore, less than half (33.3%) of the EFL teachers utilize the results of needs analyses to make adaptations to the teaching techniques they follow.

This section presented and analyzed the results of this research. From the results of this research, we can see that needs analysis plays an important role in English language learning and teaching. The section which follows presents a discussion of the research results.

## 5. Discussion

This section summarizes the results of the qualitative data which have confirmed the quantitative data to the greatest extent as both have revealed that teachers acknowledge the importance of needs analysis. This is illustrated by the fact that most of the teachers, who participated in this research, have attended a training course on needs analysis and needs analysis for course design and almost all of them have been involved in course or syllabus design. The results of the study revealed that all teachers agree that needs analysis in an EFL course and in syllabus design is important, and their stance on the effectiveness of needs analysis is in line with Spinthourakis (2004); while the majority of the sample highlights that its importance lies on the purpose of needs analysis. It is surprising that, although teachers acknowledge the significance of their students' needs in course design, most teachers report attending a single training event on needs analysis. The reasons for attending only one training event may lie in the teachers' lack of time, which was also highlighted as the main constraint on the implementation of the results of needs analysis. However, it can be inferred that, since teachers have a limited knowledge on needs analysis, conducting a needs analysis and interpreting its results may seem a difficult and time-consuming task. Therefore, gaining additional knowledge and training on needs analysis may increase the frequency of its use.

Interestingly, teachers describe their involvement in syllabus and course design as a daily practice and include activities that help learners satisfy their needs as an integral part of teaching, as suggested by Graves (1996b). In accordance with the literature (Fatihi, 2003;

García, 2010; Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004; Richards, 2001) which highlights the main tools which are used to collect information on students' needs, teachers use various methods for this purpose. Observation, formal testing, students' evaluation of tasks and activities and self-assessment are amongst the most common ways teachers use to discover their students' needs. Asking students' parents, utilizing checklists and keeping diaries are preferred by fewer teachers. Conducting a needs analysis with questionnaires is not common, probably because teachers are aware of the limitations of the questionnaires, as the answers which derive from these questionnaires may be imprecise or superficial (Richards, 2001). According to a participant's answer, questionnaires are unreliable, because students may not provide true answers.

All teachers believe that it is important for their students to follow a course that has been designed according to their needs. As teachers mentioned, becoming aware of their students' needs can enhance students' motivation in class, as has already been reported in the literature (Tzotzou, 2014). Drawing attention to students' motivation implies a focus on their subjective needs, which is also highlighted by teachers. Teachers are more concerned with the learning process rather than the content of instruction (Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004), as they consider students' subjective needs to be as important as their objective needs.

It is surprising that none of the participants referred to the CEFR, which is a useful tool for course and syllabus design and is commonly used by teachers working in the private sector. This reveals that teachers rely more on intuition and experience, rather than on formal tools of assessment, a stance which is in line with the existing literature (Davies, 2006). It seems that, in the training courses that most teachers have attended, on needs analysis, the CEFR was not highlighted as the basis for designing courses. It can also be inferred that attending seminars and training events sporadically, rather than systematically, does not provide teachers with efficient theoretical knowledge on needs analysis and course design. Because of their limited training on needs analysis, teachers seem to lack theoretical knowledge. Considering the importance of needs analysis in syllabus and course design, it comes as a surprise that teachers in private institutes lack support or systematic formal training on needs analysis for course design, as mentioned by the participants.

It can be concluded that the answers of the interview verified the results of the questionnaire. Needs analysis is considered, by teachers, to be a valuable tool, as, on the one hand, it can inform them about the course and ensure that students' needs are met, and on the other, it can help learners become more purposeful in their learning. However, it is not an easy task. To attempt to interpret the results of a needs analysis in practical ways requires both theoretical knowledge and familiarization with the procedure. Targeted and continuous professional development can be the answer to the limitations discussed. Teachers should prioritize additional training on needs analysis in course design.

## **6. Conclusion**

The present study revealed that teachers in the Greek private sector acknowledge the importance of needs analysis and highlight its usefulness in course and syllabus design. Teachers become aware of their students' needs in various ways, such as through observation, formal testing, evaluation of tasks and activities, interviewing, discussions with students and their parents and using questionnaires. It was proved that teachers utilize the results of their

needs analysis in course and syllabus design, mainly by adapting instructional material to suit their students' needs and to select the appropriate tasks and activities on a daily basis for them. Changing their teaching methods and techniques and adjusting their teaching approaches is also a common practice, while the use of diverse resources and tools have also been highlighted.

### 6.1 Limitations of the Research

The present study has certain limitations. The findings of the present research cannot be generalized to other populations, as the sample consists of EFL teachers working as private tutors or in language institutes in one of the largest cities of Greece, Thessaloniki. A different sample of teachers working in the public sector or in rural areas may provide different results. In addition, a larger sample could have provided different answers to the items of the questionnaire.

### 6.2 Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies can repeat the same methodological design, so that findings can be compared or corroborated among different populations, such as teachers working in the public sector, in rural areas or in more diverse settings such as, for example, in multicultural classrooms.

Moreover, studies with participants teaching learners of different age groups or language levels can shed more light on the importance teachers give to students' subjective and objective needs.

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