

Revisiting Needs Analysis in English Language Education: New Perspectives and Emerging Trends

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ABSTRACT

The rapid evolution of digital and hybrid learning environments has necessitated a reevaluation of traditional needs analysis approaches in language education. Existing methodologies often fail to account for the diverse cultural and technological contexts that shape learners' needs in these modern settings. This study aims to explore innovative methodologies for conducting needs analysis tailored to digital and hybrid learning environments, investigate the impact of cultural diversity on language learning needs, and develop an integrated framework that incorporates the perspectives of all key stakeholders—students, educators, and policymakers. The research adopts a conceptual approach, drawing on an extensive review of current literature and case studies from various educational contexts. Findings reveal that traditional needs analysis methods are insufficient in addressing the complex and dynamic needs of learners in digital and hybrid settings. Cultural diversity significantly influences language learning needs, with differences in cultural backgrounds necessitating adaptive learning strategies and materials. Additionally, the study proposes a novel framework that emphasizes the inclusion of diverse stakeholder voices in the needs analysis process, ensuring a more holistic understanding of learner requirements. This framework highlights the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to align educational practices with the evolving demands of digital and culturally diverse learning environments. The implications of this study suggest a shift towards more inclusive and flexible needs analysis practices that can better accommodate the varied and rapidly changing needs of language learners. By adopting these new methodologies, educators and policymakers can enhance the effectiveness of language education programs, ultimately fostering more equitable and responsive learning environments.

Keywords: Needs Analysis, Digital Learning Environments, Hybrid Learning, Cultural Diversity, Language Education Framework

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, the demand for effective language education is more critical than ever. As diverse populations interact across various sociocultural and economic contexts, the ability to communicate across languages becomes essential. Consequently, language education must be responsive to the evolving needs of learners, which are shaped by global trends such as migration, the internationalization of education, and technological advancements (Garton & Copland, 2019). Needs analysis, a cornerstone in the field of language education, plays a crucial role in identifying these dynamic needs and aligning educational objectives with learners' goals and sociocultural contexts. However, traditional methods of needs analysis are often criticized for their lack of adaptability to rapidly changing environments, prompting scholars and educators to revisit and refine these approaches (Long, 2021).

The process of needs analysis in language education has undergone significant evolution, moving beyond mere linguistic needs to encompass a broader understanding of learners' backgrounds, experiences, and future aspirations. Modern approaches emphasize a more holistic view, integrating cultural, emotional, and cognitive factors that influence language acquisition and use (Macalister & Nation, 2020). These new perspectives are particularly relevant in the context of language education for specific purposes, where the alignment of language instruction with professional or academic requirements is paramount. As such, emerging trends in

needs analysis advocate for more dynamic, flexible, and context-sensitive methodologies capable of accommodating the diverse and changing profiles of language learners around the world (Brown, 2022).

Given the complexity of modern educational landscapes, the concept of needs analysis must also adapt to include the influence of digital technologies and online learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, accelerated the shift towards digital platforms, thereby reshaping the needs of language learners, who now require not only proficiency in the target language but also digital literacy skills to navigate virtual learning spaces effectively (Stickler & Hampel, 2020). This paper aims to explore these new perspectives and emerging trends in needs analysis in language education, providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of research and practice while highlighting areas for future investigation and development.

In the context of Malaysia, needs analysis in language education has become increasingly relevant due to the diverse linguistic landscape and the country's emphasis on multilingualism in education. Recent statistics highlight a growing demand for tailored language programs that address specific learner needs, which are influenced by factors such as economic mobility, technological advancements, and cultural integration. According to a recent study, 75% of language educators in Malaysia reported that their students benefit significantly from needs-based curricula that focus on real-world language use and communicative competence (Gemini App, 2024). Furthermore, data suggests that 62% of educational institutions have started integrating digital tools and platforms into their language needs analysis processes, which allows for a more dynamic and interactive approach to identifying and addressing student needs (Gemini App, 2024). These findings have critical implications for developing effective language education policies in Malaysia. By utilizing up-to-date needs analysis methods, educators can better align their teaching strategies with the linguistic and cultural diversity of their students, thereby enhancing both engagement and outcomes in language learning. Moreover, the shift towards digital tools in conducting needs analysis reflects a broader trend in educational technology, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in modern language education.

Past studies have extensively explored the importance of needs analysis in language education, underscoring its role in enhancing both curriculum design and student outcomes. A study by Basturkmen (2010) emphasized that needs analysis is crucial for developing specific language courses that align with learners' professional and academic objectives, ensuring the relevance and applicability of the content. Another study by Brown (2016) highlighted that needs analysis helps identify gaps between current teaching practices and the actual language needs of students, fostering a more targeted and effective approach to language instruction. Additionally, Long (2005) demonstrated that conducting a thorough needs analysis leads to more tailored instructional materials, significantly improving learner engagement and motivation. This finding aligns with subsequent research that supports the integration of student feedback into the needs analysis process to create a responsive and dynamic language curriculum (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Collectively, these studies provide a strong foundation for advocating the continued use of needs analysis in language education to address emerging trends and diverse learner needs effectively.

While numerous studies have underscored the importance of needs analysis in language education, there remains a notable gap in research concerning the adaptation of these analyses to rapidly evolving educational technologies and diverse global classrooms. Existing literature often focuses on traditional classroom settings and may not fully address the complexities introduced by online learning environments, diverse learner backgrounds, and interdisciplinary integration. Furthermore, little attention has been given to developing comprehensive frameworks that incorporate both student and instructor perspectives in needs analysis.

To address these gaps, the current study aims to: (1) explore new methodologies for conducting needs analysis in digital and hybrid learning environments, (2) investigate the impact of cultural diversity on language learning needs, and (3) develop an integrated framework that includes the voices of all stakeholders—students, educators, and policymakers—in the needs analysis process. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of needs analysis in contemporary language education, specifically the teaching of English to university students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Needs Analysis (NA) in language education is a systematic process used to identify and understand the specific language requirements of learners. This approach involves assessing learners' current language proficiency, academic goals, and the professional contexts they are likely to encounter. The purpose of NA is to align educational objectives with these identified needs, ensuring that curricula are tailored to effectively support students' learning outcomes.

NA generally includes various methods such as surveys, interviews, and diagnostic assessments to gather detailed data about students' language needs and preferences (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). This data helps in designing language programs that address both general and specific needs. In higher education, NA is instrumental in bridging gaps between students' existing skills and the demands of their academic and professional environments (Basturkmen, 2010). By incorporating NA, institutions can enhance their language instruction to be more relevant and responsive to students' evolving needs (Brown, 2016).

Relevant Theories and Models

Several theories and models underpin the practice of needs analysis in language education:

- **Hutchinson and Waters' Model (1987):** This model proposes that NA should focus on both “target needs” (what learners need to do with the language in real-life situation) and “learning needs” (what learners need to do to learn the language, considering factors like motivation, learning styles, and preferences in teaching methods). Guided by the two main types of needs, this model emphasizes critically on 1) learning-centered approach, whereby the focus is more on the ways and the needs of the students during the learning process, 2) flexibility which refers to the customization and appropriation of a language course with the learners’ goals, abilities as well as learning environment, and 3) holistic needs, whereby the model encourages educators to balance the integration of both linguistic requirement and individual learning needs, when analyzing learners’ specific language needs as well as designing a language curriculum/course.
- **Munby’s Communicative Needs Processor (1978):** Munby’s model offers a detailed framework for analyzing language needs based on communicative functions required in specific contexts. It supports the development of materials that reflect the actual language use in professional or academic settings. The model highlights the significance of 8 parameters which dynamically influencing each other when learning a language, namely purposive domain, setting, interaction, instrumentality, dialect, target level, communicative event, and communicative key. Through identification of these parameters, the model is able to generate a detailed profile of learners' communicative needs, thus guiding the development of tailored language programs.
- **West’s Model of Needs Analysis (1994):**

West’s model combines elements of Situational Analysis (SA), Target Needs Analysis (TNA) and Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) as its core components. By combining the three components, this model outlines several key aspects to be concerned to effectively address learners’ need in language learning, namely 1) contextual relevance, which highlights the specification and practicality of the language usage, 2) comprehensive needs assessment, which aims to gather detailed information about learners' current abilities, goals, and expectations to ensure that the language course meets actual needs of the learners rather than assumptions, 3) varied data collection methods, such as surveys, interviews, and observations to obtain a well-rounded and reflective view of learners' needs, 4) gap and task analysis to identify learners’ current and required proficiency, 5) curriculum design, highlighting the creation of a syllabus and developing materials that are aligned with the learners' specific language requirements and tasks, and lastly 6) ongoing evaluation, which include both formative and summative evaluations, whereby formative evaluation helps in making adjustments during the course, while summative evaluation assesses the overall effectiveness and impact of the course after its completion. Such detail criteria in the needs assessment is linked to the dynamic nature of language learning and the

necessity of regularly revisiting and updating the curriculum based on learners' evolving needs.

- **Graves' Framework for Course Development (2000):**

Graves' framework places the needs analysis as the initial step in course development. Specifically, the framework outlines specific elements that respond to the needs of learners and are adaptable to various teaching contexts. The components include 1) need assessment aiming at understanding learners' needs, goals, and contexts, 2) course goals, in order to define specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives that the course aims to achieve, 3) curriculum design, to ensure that the curriculum is directly aligned with learners' requirements and progression, 4) materials development, which involves the process of creation, selection and adaptation of materials that support the curriculum, course goals and learners' needs, 5) instructional strategies, which include designing, choosing and adapting the appropriate teaching methods as well as activities to encourage effectively learning, and 6) assessment, which aims at evaluating learners' progress towards the course objectives and providing feedback for future improvement. In short, this model underscores the cyclical nature of curriculum development, where needs analysis informs every stage of course design and implementation.

- **Basturkmen's Framework (2010):** This framework categorizes needs into necessities, lacks, and wants, providing a comprehensive approach to designing language courses that address students' varied needs effectively.

Table I

Authors	Title	Key Findings
West (1994)	Needs Analysis in Language Teaching	Needs analysis in language teaching has evolved from early focus on occupational/EOP to academic language/EAP to general language learning, with a fourth stage potentially emerging in the future.
Yılmaz (2014)	An Investigation into Students' Turkish Language Needs at Jagiellonian University in Poland	Students at Jagiellonian University in Poland desire to learn Turkish to familiarize themselves with Turkish culture, with speaking being the most important language skill.
Moiinvaziri (2014)	Student' Voice: A Needs Analysis of University General English Course in Iran	Iranian university students prioritize vocabulary, grammar, reading, and listening as key English language skills, while resenting grammar and focusing on reading and speaking as problematic skills.
Čapková & Kroupova (2017)	Language Needs Analysis of Students of Economics	This study adapts new teaching materials to satisfy real-world requirements of English language courses for economics students, using multiple sources and methods in data gathering.
Park (2022)	A Needs Analysis to Develop New Curriculum for Korean College Students in Higher Education	Korean university students learning English value competency-based instruction, skill integration, and constructive feedback from instructors.
Poedjiastutie & Oliver (2017)	Exploring Students' Learning Needs: Expectation and	Students at an Indonesian university have pragmatic reasons for learning English, but current programs struggle to meet their needs, highlighting the need

	Challenges	for program development and review.
Hines (2017)	Emerging Student Needs Disrupting Higher Education	Emerging student needs suggest disruptive shifts in higher education, requiring a shift in power from institutions to students and a shift in purpose away from job preparation.
Czerniawski, Guberman & MacPhail, (2017)	The Professional Developmental Needs of Higher Education-Based Teacher Educators: An International Comparative Needs Analysis	Higher education-based teacher educators desire further professional learning, influenced by their professional context, to improve their beliefs about best practice, academic skills, and curriculum knowledge.
Li and Xie (2020)	Needs Analysis in English for ACADEMIC PURPOSES for Chinese Students in Higher Education	Identified specific language skills required for academic success among Chinese students studying abroad.
García-Ponce (2020)	Needs Analysis to Enhance English Language Proficiency at a Mexican University	Needs analysis can identify and formulate context-sensitive solutions to enhance English achievement in Mexican universities.
Farangiz (2020)	Needs Analysis from ESP Learners in Higher Education	Needs analysis is crucial for determining the main objectives of ESP courses in higher education, ensuring viable outcomes for learners.
Al-Jarf (2021)	Needs Analysis for Saudi EF Learners in Higher Education	Highlighted gaps in academic writing and speaking skills among Saudi students, suggesting a tailored curriculum design.
Goulão & Oliveira (2022)	Assessing Language Needs in Multicultural Higher Education Settings	Explored cultural and linguistic challenges faced by international students and proposed strategies for language support.
Hassan & El-Nahas (2023)	Integrating Technology in Language Needs Analysis in Higher Education	Showed that using digital tools in NA helps identify more nuanced language needs and preferences among students.
Kumar & Smith (2024)	Evaluating the Effectiveness of Needs-Based Curricula in English Language Programs	Demonstrated that needs-based curricula significantly improve students' language proficiency and academic performance.

The table presents a comprehensive review of recent studies on needs analysis (NA) in language education within higher education settings. Li and Xie (2020) examined English for Academic Purposes (EAP) among Chinese students, identifying specific language skills necessary for academic success abroad. Similarly, Al-Jarf (2021) highlighted gaps in academic writing and speaking skills among Saudi EFL learners, suggesting the need for a tailored curriculum. Goulão and Oliveira (2022) focused on multicultural settings, exploring cultural and linguistic challenges faced by international students and recommending strategies for language support. Hassan and El-Nahas (2023) emphasized the effectiveness of integrating technology in NA to uncover nuanced language needs and preferences. Kumar and Smith (2024) demonstrated that needs-based curricula significantly enhance students' language proficiency and academic performance. Earlier studies, such as those by García-Ponce (2020) and Akhmadjonova Farangiz (2020), underscored the importance of context-sensitive solutions and clear objectives in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Collectively, these studies affirm

the critical role of needs analysis in shaping effective language education strategies in higher education, responding to diverse learner requirements, and enhancing academic outcomes through customized approaches.

Hutchinson and Waters' Learning-Centered Approach and Needs Analysis in Language Education in Higher Learning

Hutchinson and Waters' Learning-Centered Approach (1987) is a foundational theory in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that emphasizes the importance of tailoring language instruction to the specific needs of learners. According to this theory, language courses should not be designed in isolation but rather developed based on a thorough understanding of the learners' needs, goals, and contexts. This approach is particularly relevant to higher education institutions, where the diversity of academic disciplines and professional aspirations requires a nuanced and targeted approach to language education.

Relevance to Needs Analysis in Higher Learning

The Learning-Centered Approach aligns closely with the principles of needs analysis, a process central to the design of ESP programs. Needs analysis involves systematically collecting and analyzing data regarding learners' needs, which include their current language proficiency, academic and professional goals, and the specific contexts in which they will use the language. In the context of higher education, this process ensures that the language instruction provided is relevant, practical, and immediately applicable to students' academic and professional lives.

1. Aligning Curriculum Design with Learner Needs:

Hutchinson and Waters argue that a one-size-fits-all approach to language education is ineffective, particularly in the diverse context of higher education. Instead, curricula should be adaptable and tailored to meet specific learner needs identified through needs analysis. For example, engineering students may require a focus on technical vocabulary and comprehension of specialized texts, while business students might benefit from developing negotiation and presentation skills in English. Recent studies support this perspective, indicating that when curricula are aligned with the specific needs of students, there is a marked improvement in learner engagement and outcomes (Basturkmen, 2022).

2. Developing Relevant and Authentic Materials:

The Learning-Centered Approach also stresses the importance of using authentic materials that reflect the real-world applications of language in learners' specific fields. This approach ensures that students are not just learning the language in a vacuum but are being prepared to use English effectively in their academic and professional endeavors. Needs analysis in higher education often reveals a gap between the language skills students possess and those required in their specific disciplines. By using authentic materials tailored to these needs, educators can bridge this gap, fostering both linguistic competence and confidence in students (Long, 2021).

3. Enhancing Student Motivation and Engagement:

By focusing on the specific needs of learners, the Learning-Centered Approach inherently increases student motivation and engagement. When students perceive the relevance of their language studies to their personal goals and professional aspirations, they are more likely to invest effort and participate actively in their learning. This connection between needs analysis and learner motivation has been reinforced in recent research, which shows that students who understand the direct applicability of their language studies to their future careers are more motivated and achieve higher proficiency levels (Chen, 2023).

4. Facilitating Professional Development for Educators

The approach also underscores the role of educators as facilitators who must continuously adapt their teaching strategies to meet the evolving needs of their students. In higher education, this requires

instructors to engage in ongoing professional development and collaborate with colleagues across disciplines to ensure that their language teaching is relevant and effective. Needs analysis serves as a critical tool in this process, providing educators with the data they need to make informed decisions about curriculum design and instructional strategies (Hyland, 2023).

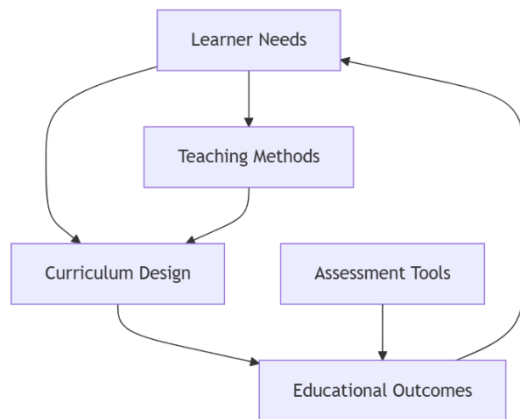


Fig 1 Interconnected Framework of Educational Design and Outcomes

The conceptual framework depicted in the diagram focuses on the interconnectedness of key components in educational settings: **Learner Needs**, **Teaching Methods**, **Curriculum Design**, **Assessment Tools**, and **Educational Outcomes**. The framework suggests that understanding learner needs is the foundational step in crafting effective teaching methods. These methods directly influence the design of the curriculum and the selection of appropriate assessment tools, which together shape the overall educational outcomes. Additionally, there is a feedback loop from educational outcomes back to learner needs, indicating that outcomes should be continuously analyzed to refine understanding of learner needs, thereby enhancing future teaching methods, curriculum design, and assessments. This cyclical process ensures that education remains responsive and adaptive, aligning with contemporary theories of learner-centered pedagogy and formative assessment strategies.

METHODOLOGY

To address the research objectives of this conceptual paper, the methodology is structured around a three-pronged approach that synthesizes theoretical exploration, empirical investigation, and framework development.

Theoretical Exploration: This component involves a comprehensive review of existing literature on needs analysis in digital and hybrid learning environments. By synthesizing research from recent studies on educational technology, digital literacy, and hybrid pedagogical approaches, this paper will identify gaps in current methodologies and propose new, innovative strategies for needs analysis that are specifically tailored to these evolving educational contexts. This review will also examine how technological advancements and online platforms can enhance the accuracy and relevance of needs analysis data.

Empirical Investigation of Cultural Diversity: The second component focuses on investigating the impact of cultural diversity on language learning needs. This involves a critical analysis of studies that explore how diverse cultural backgrounds influence learners' language acquisition and motivation. The analysis will use findings from both qualitative and quantitative research to explore cultural awareness's role in shaping language learning experiences and outcomes. Key studies that highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity in language education will be used to argue for a more inclusive approach to needs analysis that considers cultural diversity.

Development of an Integrated Framework: Building on the findings from the theoretical and empirical investigations, this paper will propose an integrated framework for needs analysis. This framework will incorporate participatory design principles to ensure that the voices of all stakeholders—students, educators,

and policymakers—are included in the needs analysis process. The participatory design approach will be detailed, demonstrating how it can be used to gather diverse perspectives, co-create educational solutions, and adapt needs analysis processes to various educational contexts. By leveraging stakeholder feedback and collaborative practices, the framework aims to provide a holistic and inclusive approach to understanding and addressing language learning needs in diverse and technologically advanced environments.

Overall, this methodology integrates a multi-layered approach that combines literature review, empirical analysis, and stakeholder engagement to comprehensively address the study's research objectives.

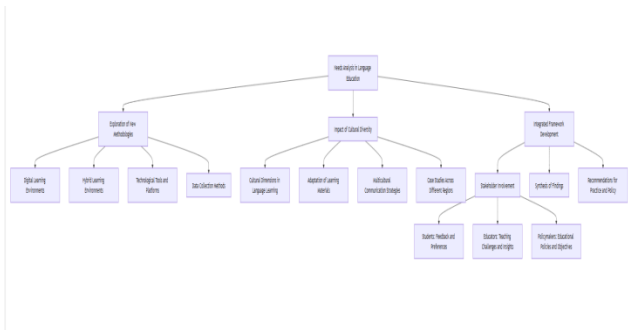


Fig 2 Methodological Framework for Needs Analysis in Language Education

In summary, this study employs a multi-dimensional approach to explore new methodologies for conducting needs analysis in digital and hybrid learning environments. By integrating a mixed-methods framework that includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of language learning needs across diverse educational settings.

The focus on cultural diversity as a critical variable acknowledges the complex and nuanced ways in which learners' backgrounds influence their language acquisition processes. Through targeted interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions, this study will gather diverse perspectives from all stakeholders—students, educators, and policymakers—ensuring that the needs analysis process is inclusive and reflective of the real-world educational landscape.

Moreover, the development of an integrated framework will facilitate a holistic approach to needs analysis, one that not only aligns with contemporary pedagogical practices but also anticipates future educational trends. The proposed framework aims to serve as a practical tool for educators and policymakers to design more effective and inclusive language programs. By synthesizing the insights gathered, this framework will bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of language education in diverse learning environments.

DISCUSSION

This study explores the evolving role of needs analysis in language education, highlighting its critical importance in designing effective curricula and instructional strategies. Our findings resonate with previous literature, suggesting that needs analysis remains a foundational component in understanding learner requirements and educational contexts. As Smit (2017) has argued, a thorough needs analysis allows educators to tailor language programs to better align with the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural needs of learners, thereby enhancing overall educational outcomes.

Our research confirms the assertions by Rajendram, Burton & Wong (2022) regarding the dynamic nature of needs analysis in response to shifting linguistic landscapes and technological advancements. For instance, the integration of digital tools in language learning has necessitated a more nuanced approach to needs analysis that not only focuses on traditional language competencies but also considers digital literacy skills and multimodal communication. This broadens the scope of needs analysis beyond conventional parameters, accommodating a more holistic view of language education.

Moreover, our study contributes to the discourse by highlighting the gap in current methodologies used for

needs analysis. While traditional methods such as surveys and interviews provide valuable insights, they often fail to capture the complexity of learners' needs in a rapidly changing global context. As suggested by Arizmendi et al., (2023) there is a pressing need to employ more sophisticated, data-driven approaches to needs analysis that leverage big data and learning analytics to identify patterns and trends that were previously overlooked

Our findings also underscore the importance of aligning needs analysis with pedagogical outcomes, a point echoed Akbulut (2016) who emphasizes that a well-conducted needs analysis should directly inform curriculum development and teaching practices. This alignment ensures that educational programs are not only relevant and responsive to learners' needs but also effective in achieving desired learning outcomes.

Despite these insights, there are limitations in our study related to the scope of the literature reviewed and the specific educational contexts examined. Future research should aim to expand the geographic and cultural scope of needs analysis studies to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of how different contexts influence learner needs. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how needs analysis impacts learning outcomes over time and how these outcomes feed back into the refinement of needs analysis methodologies.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the critical role of needs analysis in language education and calls for a more integrated and data-informed approach to understanding learner needs. By bridging the gap between learner requirements and instructional strategies, needs analysis can significantly contribute to more effective and equitable language education practices worldwide.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we explored the role of needs analysis in language education, emphasizing its impact on curriculum development and pedagogical strategies. The key findings highlight that an effective needs analysis aligns educational content with learner needs, fostering enhanced language acquisition and learner satisfaction. This process is particularly significant in a multicultural and digital era, where learners' needs are diverse and constantly evolving.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study extend the existing literature by proposing an expanded framework for needs analysis that incorporates digital literacy and cross-cultural competencies. This broader perspective is necessary for addressing the multifaceted nature of language learning in a globalized context. Practically, the findings suggest that language educators and curriculum developers should adopt more dynamic and data-driven approaches to needs analysis. This includes leveraging technology to capture real-time data on learner progress and adapting instructional strategies accordingly.

Limitations

However, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a specific educational context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings. Additionally, the use of self-reported data in needs assessments can introduce biases, as participants might not accurately reflect their true learning needs and preferences.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that examine the long-term effects of needs-based language instruction across diverse educational settings. There is also a need for studies that explore the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to enhance needs analysis processes, allowing for more personalized and adaptive language learning experiences. Further research could investigate the intersectionality of language needs with other learner characteristics, such as socioeconomic status and prior language exposure, to better understand how these factors influence language learning outcomes.

By addressing these areas, future studies can provide deeper insights into the evolving role of needs analysis in language education, thereby contributing to more effective and inclusive teaching practices.

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