

## The Role of Needs Analysis in Designing Relevant Learning Outcomes for EFL Curriculum: Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

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Designing an effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum necessitates a comprehensive understanding of learners' linguistic, academic, and sociocultural needs. This qualitative literature review critically examines the role of needs analysis in shaping relevant and context-sensitive learning outcomes for EFL programs. Drawing upon peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2025, this study applies content analysis to identify recurring themes and gaps in the literature. The findings converge on three interrelated insights: (1) the imperative of constructing learner-centered and contextualized curricula; (2) the detrimental impact of omitting systematic needs analysis, often resulting in decontextualized and ineffective learning outcomes; and (3) the transformative role of participatory needs analysis involving multiple stakeholders. The review reveals that when needs analysis is consistently implemented, it enhances curricular relevance, learner motivation, and instructional alignment. Conversely, underutilization—especially in centralized or under-resourced systems—undermines curriculum effectiveness. The study advocates for an epistemological shift in curriculum development: reconceptualizing needs analysis as a continuous, dialogic process rather than a preliminary task. The paper concludes by proposing institutional strategies for integrating technology, stakeholder feedback, and reflective practice into the curriculum development cycle. These findings offer critical implications for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers aiming to foster adaptive, equitable, and learner-responsive EFL education.

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of an effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum requires more than the arrangement of instructional content—it demands a thorough understanding of learners’ real-world language needs. In recent years, curriculum design has increasingly shifted toward outcome-based education, emphasizing the achievement of measurable and context-relevant competencies (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021). Within this framework, needs analysis plays a crucial role as both a diagnostic and planning tool that enables educators to bridge the gap between what learners currently know and what they need to achieve in their academic, professional, and social lives (Salmani Nodoushan, 2020; Zhaleh & Dastgoshadeh, 2023). A well-executed needs analysis informs not only the selection of content and instructional strategies but also the formulation of realistic and learner-centered learning outcomes. When this process is neglected, curricula often become detached from the learners’ realities—resulting in disengagement, lack of motivation, and poor language acquisition (Kim, 2019; Baharuddin, 2023).

In EFL contexts, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings, the linguistic demands placed on learners are often shaped by diverse socio-economic, cultural, and occupational factors. As such, a one-size-fits-all curriculum is no longer adequate to meet the expectations of today’s learners or the globalized demands of communication. Needs analysis responds to this complexity by systematically gathering data from multiple stakeholders—including students, teachers, employers, and policymakers—to ensure that curriculum planning is both inclusive and relevant (Alduais & Almkhaizeem, 2021; Kusumawardhani & Widiati, 2022). Recent studies have shown that when EFL curricula are tailored based on learners’ specific needs—be it in academic writing, business communication, or technical language use—learning becomes more purposeful and outcomes more measurable (Aprianto, 2021; Song, 2022). Furthermore, such curricula contribute to learners’ self-efficacy and long-term language development, particularly in vocational and higher education institutions (Ranasinghe, 2024).

However, despite its theoretical and practical importance, needs analysis is still underutilized or inconsistently implemented in many EFL programs around the world. This is especially true in developing countries, where curriculum design is often centralized, rigid, or based on outdated models (Mehran et al., 2017). Even when institutions acknowledge the importance of needs analysis, its application may be limited by resource constraints, lack of trained personnel, or resistance to change in pedagogical approaches (Bouzidi, 2015; Cheng & Wang, 2020). As a result, there is a noticeable gap between the aspirations of outcome-based education and the actual practices on the ground. To address this issue, a comprehensive review of how needs analysis is applied across different EFL contexts is needed. By synthesizing contemporary literature

from 2015 to 2025, this study aims to provide a critical overview of the ways in which needs analysis has been utilized to shape relevant learning outcomes, highlight best practices, and identify challenges that persist in its implementation. This qualitative literature review will not only contribute to theoretical understanding but also offer practical insights for curriculum developers, educators, and policymakers who seek to build more adaptive, learner-responsive EFL programs in an increasingly dynamic global context.

However, the practice of needs analysis in the context of EFL curriculum development is still limited and unstructured in many developing countries, including Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to critically examine the practice and role of needs analysis in the preparation of learning outcomes in EFL curricula based on current scientific literature.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In recent years, the development of EFL curricula has increasingly shifted toward outcome-based education (OBE), emphasizing measurable and relevant competencies (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021). Within this paradigm, needs analysis (NA) serves as a foundational tool for aligning instructional content with learners' real-world language demands. It enables curriculum designers to identify gaps between learners' current proficiency and their communicative goals, thus informing the selection of content, pedagogy, and learning outcomes (Salmani Nodoushan, 2020; Zhaleh & Dastgoshadeh, 2023). NA is particularly critical in multilingual and multicultural EFL settings, where learners' linguistic needs are shaped by diverse academic, social, and occupational contexts. Studies demonstrate that curricula tailored through systematic NA—especially in writing, business, or vocational English—result in higher learner engagement and more targeted outcomes (Aprianto, 2021; Song, 2022). Furthermore, NA contributes to increased self-efficacy and more sustainable language development, particularly in higher education and training contexts (Ranasinghe, 2024).

Despite its value, NA is inconsistently implemented, especially in centralized or resource-limited educational systems. In many developing countries, such as Indonesia, curriculum development often overlooks structured NA due to limited expertise, institutional inertia, or lack of stakeholder involvement (Mehran et al., 2017; Bouzidi, 2015; Cheng & Wang, 2020). This gap between theory and practice hampers the relevance and effectiveness of learning outcomes. Therefore, a systematic review of how NA is applied in EFL curriculum development is essential. By examining recent literature from 2015 to 2025, this study seeks to highlight how NA informs relevant and contextualized learning outcomes, the challenges of its implementation, and best practices that can support more responsive and adaptive curriculum design.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative library research approach to explore the role of needs analysis in designing relevant learning outcomes within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum development. This approach was selected due to its ability to facilitate a thorough exploration of existing literature and the synthesis of conceptual insights derived from both theoretical and empirical studies. Data were collected from reliable secondary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and research reports published between 2015 and 2025. These sources were accessed through reputable academic databases such as Scopus, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar, with inclusion criteria that focused on literature relevant to needs analysis, curriculum design, and learning outcomes in EFL settings (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021; Alduais & Almukhaizeem, 2021).

The data were analyzed using content analysis, a method that enables the identification of key themes, argument patterns, and research gaps across studies (Bouzidi, 2015; Kim, 2019). The analysis process followed three stages: organizing the literature based on thematic relevance, coding and categorizing significant findings, and synthesizing the results to build a coherent conceptual narrative (Cheng & Wang, 2020; Kusumawardhani & Widiati, 2022). This method was chosen for its suitability to the conceptual and reflective nature of the research objectives, making qualitative document-based inquiry a more appropriate method than field surveys or experimental studies. To ensure validity, the research adhered to rigorous selection criteria for scholarly sources and relied on peer-reviewed materials, while reliability was achieved by maintaining a systematic documentation process for data collection and analysis procedures, along with source triangulation to minimize potential bias and increase the credibility of the findings (Zhaleh & Dastgoshadeh, 2023).

Furthermore, the method in a qualitative approach includes several related matters: an explanation of the form of the qualitative approach taken; research participants; data collection methods and tools; reflexivity; and data analysis methods. The method is written descriptively in the form of paragraphs.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this qualitative literature review indicate that needs analysis continues to serve as a central, dynamic, and evolving component in aligning curriculum objectives with the real-world demands of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. As educational landscapes become increasingly globalized and learner profiles more diverse, the role of needs analysis in curriculum planning is gaining renewed scholarly attention. Through a critical synthesis of recent studies, three dominant and interconnected themes emerged that underscore the evolving role of needs analysis in EFL curriculum development.

First, contemporary literature strongly emphasizes the necessity of integrating both learner-centered needs and contextual demands into curriculum design. Rather than treating learners as passive recipients of predetermined content, recent models advocate for recognizing their linguistic goals, individual backgrounds, learning preferences, and the real-life communicative functions they are expected to perform. For example, Bouzidi (2015) and Salmani Nodoushan (2020) argue that the inclusion of learners' academic, professional, and sociocultural realities enhances the authenticity and effectiveness of EFL instruction. This approach underscores the importance of contextualization, where curricula are not only theoretically sound but also practically relevant to the learners' environments.

Second, the absence of a systematic and data-driven needs analysis has been consistently linked to the production of generic, mismatched learning outcomes. Research conducted by Kim (2019) and Mehran, Alizadeh, and Pour-Mohammadi (2017) illustrates how many EFL programs—particularly in institutions that rely on outdated curricular models—fail to address the evolving demands of global communication, resulting in disengaged learners and suboptimal language acquisition. These programs often lack alignment between what is taught and what learners actually need, whether for academic success, professional advancement, or intercultural interaction. The literature reveals a growing consensus that overlooking needs analysis can compromise the long-term effectiveness of language programs.

Third, a growing body of evidence suggests that incorporating structured and participatory needs analysis significantly enhances learner motivation, curriculum relevance, and pedagogical engagement. As Alduais and Almkhaizeem (2021) and Kusumawardhani and Widiati (2022) note, involving stakeholders—especially students, teachers, and institutional administrators—in the assessment and planning stages ensures that multiple perspectives are reflected in curriculum decisions. This participatory approach not only increases institutional responsiveness but also fosters a sense of ownership and autonomy among learners, thereby promoting deeper learning and sustained language use beyond the classroom.

When interpreted through the lens of contemporary curriculum theories, these findings reinforce the importance of constructive alignment—a concept emphasizing coherence between intended learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and assessment practices (Bailey & Jakicic, 2017). The reviewed literature aligns with pedagogical movements advocating for flexible, learner-responsive, and data-informed curriculum design models. As Nguyen and Hamid (2021) highlight, instructional goals should be adaptable, grounded in real-time learner feedback, and sensitive to the sociocultural contexts in which learners operate.

In contrast to earlier top-down curriculum development paradigms, which often imposed one-size-fits-all templates, recent studies highlight the benefits of bottom-up and collaborative approaches to needs analysis. According

to Cheng and Wang (2020) and Zhaleh and Dastgoshadeh (2023), involving stakeholders in ongoing cycles of reflection and revision leads to learning outcomes that are more contextually grounded and educationally meaningful. However, the literature also reveals significant variation in implementation. While some institutions have embraced collaborative and systematic needs assessment frameworks, others—particularly in under-resourced or rural contexts—continue to rely on generalized assumptions, outdated materials, or externally imposed curricula that do not reflect the actual needs of their learners.

The implications of these findings are twofold—theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this review contributes to a growing consensus that needs analysis should not be viewed as a static, one-time procedure at the outset of curriculum design. Rather, it should be seen as a cyclical, ongoing process that informs every stage of curriculum development—from planning to implementation to evaluation. This reconceptualization supports the evolution of curriculum theory toward more holistic and adaptive models that respond to dynamic educational environments.

Practically, the findings underscore the urgent need for institutional and policy-level support to implement evidence-based and context-sensitive needs analysis frameworks. This is particularly important in EFL contexts characterized by diverse learner backgrounds, varying levels of institutional resources, and differing language learning goals. Investment in teacher training, stakeholder engagement, and infrastructure for data collection and analysis will be essential in operationalizing these frameworks. Moreover, institutions should cultivate a culture of reflective practice, where curricula are regularly revisited and refined based on emerging needs and feedback.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. Being a literature-based review, its findings are inherently constrained by the availability, accessibility, and scope of published research from the past decade. Consequently, the review may not fully capture emerging or localized practices in regions where such innovations are underreported or unpublished. Additionally, the exclusive focus on English-language publications may have inadvertently excluded valuable insights from studies published in other languages, particularly in non-English-speaking countries with rich traditions of EFL education.

Furthermore, the absence of empirical data limits this review's ability to observe real-time dynamics and challenges faced during the implementation of needs analysis in diverse settings. Future research should therefore adopt field-based approaches, including ethnographic case studies, classroom observations, and interviews with curriculum stakeholders. There is also a growing need to explore how digital technologies, such as AI-driven analytics, learner management systems, and adaptive testing platforms, can support more continuous, inclusive, and data-rich models of needs analysis in both formal and informal learning environments

## CONCLUSION

This qualitative literature review has brought to light the indispensable role of needs analysis in shaping relevant, meaningful, and outcome-oriented curricula for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The findings across multiple studies underscore a consistent theme: that effective curriculum design cannot be separated from a clear understanding of learners' actual linguistic, academic, professional, and socio-cultural needs. In the absence of a systematic needs analysis, curricula risk becoming overly standardized, detached from real-world applications, and ultimately ineffective in preparing learners for authentic language use.

The review identified three major, interrelated findings. First, a strong consensus exists among researchers regarding the need for learner-centered and contextually responsive curricula. In contemporary EFL education, recognizing learners' backgrounds, aspirations, and communicative environments is not optional—it is essential. Rather than applying one-size-fits-all syllabi, educators must tailor curriculum content and learning outcomes to address the heterogeneous goals of learners in academic, vocational, and community contexts.

Second, a critical problem observed in the literature is the widespread use of outdated curricular models, especially in centralized or under-resourced educational systems. These models often disregard the rapidly evolving demands of global communication and fail to align with learners' professional or interpersonal language goals. The neglect of needs analysis in these contexts results in poor learner motivation, minimal language retention, and an overall disconnection between classroom instruction and real-world communicative tasks.

Third, the review highlights the transformative power of stakeholder participation in curriculum development. When students, teachers, institutional leaders, and even employers are actively involved in assessing learning needs, the resulting curricula tend to be more authentic, adaptive, and engaging. Participatory needs analysis fosters a sense of shared ownership, enhances institutional accountability, and ensures that curriculum development becomes a reflective and dialogic process rather than a top-down imposition.

In sum, this study reaffirms that needs analysis is not simply a procedural step—it is a philosophical and methodological foundation for constructing equitable, dynamic, and learner-responsive educational experiences. It has a direct impact not only on what is taught, but also on how teaching is conducted, how success is measured, and how learners perceive the value of their language education.

From a theoretical standpoint, this review contributes to ongoing discourse in curriculum studies by advocating for the integration of needs analysis into the core architecture of curriculum development models. It supports the

view that curriculum design is a cyclical, iterative process, informed by continuous feedback, sociocultural awareness, and the active negotiation of meaning between educators and learners. The reconceptualization of needs analysis as a reflective and dialogic practice aligns with constructivist theories of learning, learner autonomy, and transformative pedagogy.

Furthermore, the review challenges the rigidity of traditional models that position curriculum as a static product rather than a dynamic process. It calls for an epistemological shift in how educational institutions conceptualize curriculum planning—moving away from fixed learning outcomes and linear syllabi toward more flexible, adaptable, and responsive structures.

On a practical level, the findings carry significant implications for institutional policy, teacher education, and educational leadership. Institutions must move beyond symbolic acknowledgment of learner needs and develop concrete mechanisms for implementing needs analysis at all levels. This includes providing teachers with professional development in curriculum design, data collection methodologies, and participatory research practices.

Moreover, the integration of needs analysis must be supported by robust data infrastructures. This includes leveraging digital tools to collect and analyze learner feedback in real time, developing systems for tracking changes in learners' goals, and incorporating these insights into regular curriculum reviews. Institutional cultures should be cultivated to value adaptability, innovation, and inclusivity in curriculum design.

While this review provides a strong conceptual foundation, future research is needed to build a more comprehensive and applied understanding of how needs analysis functions in diverse EFL contexts. First, there is a need for empirical fieldwork—including ethnographic studies, longitudinal case studies, and participatory action research—that examines how needs analysis is practically implemented across different institutional settings, learner demographics, and socio-economic contexts.

Second, future studies should explore the integration of digital and AI-based technologies in facilitating needs analysis. With the increasing digitization of education, tools such as learning analytics platforms, automated feedback systems, and adaptive testing software can offer unprecedented insights into learners' evolving needs and engagement patterns. Research into how these technologies can enhance the accuracy, inclusiveness, and timeliness of needs assessments is particularly relevant in post-pandemic and hybrid learning environments.

Third, scholars should investigate the intersectionality of learner needs, paying attention to how gender, class, ethnicity, disability, and other identity markers influence language learning goals and access. A more intersectional approach to needs analysis could ensure that EFL curricula are not only effective but also socially just.

Fourth, there is a need to examine policy-level influences on the adoption (or rejection) of needs analysis frameworks. Understanding the political, cultural, and economic factors that shape curriculum decisions can inform strategies for advocating more participatory and evidence-based curriculum models in both centralized and decentralized education systems.

Finally, comparative studies across global regions, particularly in underrepresented contexts such as sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, would enrich the literature by documenting locally grounded practices, innovations, and challenges in applying needs analysis to EFL curriculum development. Such research would help diversify the global understanding of curriculum theory and practice beyond dominant Anglophone or Global North paradigms.

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