CHAPTER 3: SITUATION ANALYSIS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the situation analysis (also called the needs analysis) is discussed. Firstly, different definitions are given in order to clarify the meaning of this process and, the reasons for doing a situation analysis are given. The important part that the concept of 'needs' plays in the analysis is also discussed. These needs can arise on different levels of planning and they will also determine the type of situation analysis that should be conducted. Lastly, the different methods and the three different phases of a situation analysis are discussed.

3.2 THE SITUATION ANALYSIS

3.2.1 Definition of a Situation Analysis/ Needs Analysis/ Needs Assessment

In some sources the term 'needs analysis' or 'needs assessment' is used. For purposes of this dissertation and in order to prevent confusion, the term 'situation analysis' will be used. Witkin and Altschuld (1995:4) define the situation analysis in the following manner:

> *a systematic set of procedures undertaken for the purpose of setting priorities and making decisions about program or organizational improvement and allocation of resources. The priorities are based on identified needs.*

According to them, a situation analysis is conducted to gain information and perceptions of values in order to make policy and programme decisions that will benefit a specific group of people (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:5). Thus, a situation analysis "offers a useful and rational approach to identifying and describing specific areas of need, discovering factors contributing to perpetuation of needs, and devising criteria for plans to meet or ameliorate the need" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:5).

According to Krüger (1980:35), a situation analysis entails an entire overview of the fields that will be covered in a specific teaching sequence. It should consist of a detailed analysis of the determinants of the *current* situation as well as the *target* situation. Questions such as What? To

whom? Why? When? and How? should be asked. The situation analysis should thus take into consideration all the determinants that would influence the compilation of the syllabus as well as the teaching and learning involved (Krüger, 1980:51).

Stern (1992:35-36) regards the situation analysis as an analysis of the needs, demands and conditions of the learners in the target group. However, this doesn't mean that only the learners are taken into consideration, but all the factors relating to them are investigated. These include social factors, learner factors, the educational framework, teacher factors as well as the current context of the curriculum.

Barnard and Venter (1996:56) are of the opinion that in a situation analysis, the instructional designer "should consider the total make-up of the learner in his/her social contexts and all its implications". According to them, it is not enough to consider only the demographic details of the students, but factors such as motivation, learning factors, subject background and resource factors should also be taken into account.

All of the above-mentioned definitions have one thing in common, namely that they not only consider the learners themselves, but they also take into account other factors that may play a part in learning. Factors such as their social and political background, home life, the existing curriculum, the teachers as well as educational resources all play a part in conducting a situation analysis.

The needs of the learners themselves play a central part in doing a situation analysis. However, the concept of needs is very complex. This aspect will be defined later on in this chapter in further detail (cf. Section 3.3).

3.2.2 The Reasons for a Situation Analysis

Witkin and Altschuld (1995:10) identify four reasons for doing a situation analysis. The first reason is that it "gathers data by means of established procedures and methods designed for specific purposes" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:10). The situation analysis therefore systematizes

the whole process of gathering information.

Secondly, a situation analysis "sets priorities and determines criteria for solutions" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:10). This is a very important reason for a situation analysis in syllabus design as one of the steps of course design (as proposed by Nicholls & Nicholls (1978:21)) entails the selection of aims (cf. Figure 2.2) .

The situation analysis also leads to "action that will improve programs, services, organizational structure and operations or a combination of these elements" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:10). This reason for undertaking a situation analysis feeds into the third and fourth steps in the model of Nicholls and Nicholls (1978:21), namely the selection and organization of content and the selection and organization of teaching methods (cf. Figure 2.2). Yalden (1987:131) is also of the opinion that "a teacher will need to get more detailed, more specific information about the learners in order to have their input when selecting the modules to be used as well as in choosing and preparing classroom activities". The situation analysis can thus be an aid in determining the actual content of the syllabus as well as the appropriate teaching methods for that specific situation.

Lastly, the situation analysis "sets criteria for determining how best to allocate available money, people, facilities, and other resources" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:10). Resources always play an important role in syllabus design as a lack of those can be very limiting. The allocation of available resources will influence each and every step of syllabus design and a course will not be of any practical use if it hasn't been adapted to the available resources determined by the situation analysis.

3.3 NEEDS

According to Yalden (1987:7-8), some teachers produce their own materials in response to the feeling that what is available is not enough for the needs of the class. However, when something is offered as a solution to what is required before the problem has properly been investigated, other problems often arise in an unpredictable and disorganized way and "the road to their

solution can be an extremely roundabout one" (Yalden, 1987:8). The needs of the learners thus first have to be determined before an effective syllabus can be planned. In the words of Van der Walt (1985:80), "Needs analysis must be included in the broader concept of situation analysis."

3.3.1 Definition of Needs

Most sources declare that the term 'need' is a very difficult one to define (Brindley, 1989:65). According to Witkin and Altschuld (1995:9), the word 'needs' refers to the gap or discrepancy between a present state and a desired future state.

> *Therefore, a need is not a thing in itself but, rather, an inference drawn from examining a present state and comparing it with a vision of a future (better) state or condition. (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:9)*

Brindley (1989:65) also defines needs as "the gap between what is and what should be". However he also notes that

> *needs statements are open to contextual interpretation and contain value judgements. They do not have of themselves an objective reality . The diagnosis made will be based on the practical experience of symptoms of those who diagnose the need (Brindley, 1989:65).*

According to Berwick (1989:52), the definition of needs forms the basis of any situation analysis (or needs assessment, as he calls it). He states that people's perceptions of needs develop from what they believe is educationally worthwhile and that "needs are not simply 'out there' waiting to be counted and measured with the latest innovations of educational technology" (Berwick, 1989:56)

> *Unfortunately, an operational definition must be constructed anew for each assessment because its elements will change according the values of the assessor or influential constituents of an educational system (Berwick, 1989:52).*

Berwick states, however, that a skeletal structure of a definition of needs can be expressed as " a gap or measurable discrepancy between a current state of affairs and a desired future state" (Berwick, 1989:52)

3.3.2 Levels of needs

According to Witkin and Altschuld (1995:10), the statement often made that the situation analysis should be focused on the people in the system, can be confusing. One way of clarifying this statement is to categorize the people involved in terms of three levels of needs (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:10). These are the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of need.

3.3.2.1 Level 1: Primary Level

The people on this level are the ones who receive the service. In an educational context, the learners would find themselves at the primary level of need. The people on Level 1 "are those for whom the system ultimately exists; they are at the heart" of the situation analysis (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:11). When linked to the illustration given in Fig. 2.1 (cf. Chapter 2), the primary level of need can closely be related to the needs experienced on the level of the Teaching-Learning Situation.

3.3.2.2 Level 2: Secondary Level

The people on Level 2 are those who provide the service and who make the policies. In an educational context they would be the teachers, the parents, and the Department of Education. "Those in Level 2 either have some direct relationship to those in Level 1, providing information, services, training, or nurture, or they perform planning, technical assistance, or oversight functions that affect others in Level 2 as well as, indirectly, those in Level 1" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:11). Although these people do not have a primary position in the whole process of course design, they may still have unmet needs related either to their colleagues on the same level of need or to the groups of people on Level 1. The people on this level will also be involved in the process of syllabus design as illustrated in Fig. 2.1 (cf. Chapter 2).

3.3.2.3 Level 3: Tertiary Level

The group of people on this level is either connected to the resources of or the solutions to the situation. These resources and solutions may include elements such as the buildings, facilities, equipment, supplies, technology, programmes, class size, information retrieval systems,

transportation, salaries and benefits, time allocations and working conditions (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995:10). This group of people are either involved in the process of syllabus design or part of the polity determination of the country (cf. Fig. 2.1).

3.4 TYPES OF NEEDS THAT DETERMINE CERTAIN TYPES OF SITUATION ANALYSES

'Needs' is a very important concept in any situation analysis. West (1994:4-5) distinguishes and discusses six types of needs, as this term encompasses so many concepts. According to West (1994:4-5), these different types of needs will determine which type of situation analysis will be used. These different situation analyses are:

3.4.1 Target-Situation Analysis

The focus is on "the desired future state" (Berwick, 1989:52). This type of situation analysis associated with "necessities" is called a target-situation analysis (West, 1994:4). Three levels of the needs in the target-situation analysis are identified. The first level is very basic and "may go little further than identifying which languages are needed" (West, 1994:4). On the second level, the needs are identified in terms of skills and priorities. (These skills usually refer to the four basic skills, namely speaking, writing, reading and listening.) The third level refers to a definition of needs "in situational or functional terms" (West, 1994:4) and can also specify grammatical or lexical components that are necessary for acquiring the target language.

Berwick (1989:54) calls this an "analytic" type of needs assessment. This type of analysis "involves reliance on informed judgement, or expert opinion" (Berwick, 1989:54). Initially, these experts only consisted of linguists, but according to Berwick (1989:54), this type of situation analysis is more effective if it not only relies on the theoretical expert opinions of linguists, but also on the practical expert opinions of, for example teachers.

3.4.2 Discrepancy or Deficiency Analysis

This basically refers to the "gap between what is and what should be" (Brindley, 1989:65). The contents of the course thus depends on the learners' deficiencies in the target language, and the type of situation analysis concerned with these "lacks" is called a "deficiency analysis" (West, 1994:4).

Berwick (1989:53) calls this type of situation analysis a "discrepancy analysis" as it is "based on the discrepancy between what people know and what they ought to know". However, he points out two disadvantages of this type of situation analysis. The first is that areas that are difficult to measure tend not to be included in the analysis, and secondly, this type of analysis implies that needs can be "discovered with mechanical simplicity once observations have been quantified" (Berwick, 1989:53). This can lead to the acceptance of the design without close examination and some crucial lacks may be overlooked in the process.

3.4.3 The Democratic Approach

"Wants" are those needs that the learners have identified for themselves and they may differ from the needs that the sponsors, experts or the teachers have identified in terms of "necessities" or "lacks" (cf. 3.4.1 and 3.4.2), but that doesn't make them less valid. West (1994:4) provides an example of this. Speaking is usually regarded as the least needed skill for EAP (English for Academic Purposes) students. However, in the opinion of many students, oral proficiency is the best indicator of mastery of a language.

Berwick (1989:53) regards this as the "democratic approach" to situation analysis. This type of approach

> *emphasise(s) examination of a reference group's views: when a majority of the reference group wish a change in some form of educational practice and make their wishes known, a need is thereby expressed.*

"Wants" are sometimes also described as "felt needs" (Berwick, 1989:55) or "subjective needs" (West, 1994:4). This type of need is sometimes devalued or diminished (Berwick, 1989:55), but it plays a very important role in the design of a learner-centred course (Yalden, 1987:131).

3.4.4 Strategy Analysis

In this type of analysis, the focus is on learning strategies. There is thus a shift in the theory of situation analysis from the what (content) to the how (strategy) (West, 1994:10). This type of situation analysis is called a "strategy analysis" (West, 1994:10). West (1994:10) identifies two types of learning needs in this instance: Firstly, the learners' preferred learning strategies for progressing from their present state of language proficiency to a desire future state of proficiency. These strategies may sometimes conflict with the second type, namely the teacher's interpretation of suitable strategies for the acquisition of the target language (West, 1994:4).

West (1994:11) sums up ways in which the learners' strategies can be influenced. The first is the learners' attitude towards language learning (e.g. active/passive, participatory/ non-participatory, teacher-independent/ teacher-dependent). The learners' previous school learning experiences will also influence their proficiency and learning style. Thirdly, learning styles can also be closely connected to cultural experience. The learner may have difficulty in learning the target language if the source culture and the target culture differ considerably and the learner has difficulty in adapting to new learning processes.

3.4.5 Means Analysis

The term "means" include "the potential and constraints of the learning situation" (West, 1994:4). This type of situation analysis is called a "means analysis" and consists of the external factors of course design. These factors usually include

> *the resources (staff, accommodation, time) available, the prevailing attitudes or culture, and the materials, aids and methods available. (West, 1994:4)*

The means analysis is also a development in the theory of situation analysis as this was an area that was deliberately ignored in earlier approaches to situation analysis (West, 1994:4). However, at present it is regarded as a very important part of course design because of the fact that external factors have an influence on the extent to which a course can be implemented. If, for example, the course demands many resources which require electricity, a school in a rural area without electricity would not be able to benefit from it.

3.4.6 The Language Audit and the Policy Document

The language audit differs from a situation analysis in scale. Any type of situation analysis is used to determine the various needs of an individual or group while a language audit "defines the longer-term language-training requirements of a company, country or professional sector, and can thus be seen as a strategy or policy document" (West, 1994:5).

3.5 METHODOLOGIES IN DOING A SITUATION ANALYSIS

When conducting a situation analysis, the course planner can choose from a collection of methodologies to suit various planning situations. These methodologies can broadly be divided into two categories, namely inductive methods and deductive methods (Berwick, 1989:56).

3.5.1 Inductive Methods

One of the inductive methods discussed by Berwick (1989:56) is making use of a grid or a matrix. This method is usually used at individual level or for individuals with similar socio-topical profiles. The kinds of people the learner needs to interact with most urgently are arrayed against the topics the learner is most likely to talk about. Language structures and functions can also be added to broaden the scope of the grid and the intersecting cells will thus produce the content basis of an entire course.

Berwick (1989:57) also discusses Freire's 'dialogue method'. This method combines close observation of people in various settings and situations. Recurring themes are identified throughout the observation and these themes, settings and situations are then incorporated into the course.

Case studies are another inductive method. This entails "in-depth investigations of the learning needs and difficulties of individual students or groups" (West, 1994:8). This means that learners are closely observed in order to identify those aspects of the target language with which they are experiencing some difficulties. The case studies can also establish a basis for designing questionnaires or interviews, both of which are deductive methods (Berwick, 1989:57).

Another method, the 'Critical Incident Technique', employs groups in artificial target-like situations (Berwick, 1989:57). These situations should, however, be representative of what the learners may encounter in reality and enough time should be allowed to do a sensitive analysis of these incidents. The idea behind this is that critical incidents might create breakdowns or difficulties in communication which learners experience when attempting to solve a motivating problem.

The 'delphi study' conducted by the Rand Corporation in the 1960s could also be regarded as an inductive method (Berwick, 1989:58). Stakeholders or experts in a specific field were asked to "rank items which constitute important or desirable future conditions" (Berwick, 1989:58). The ranking continues for several rounds and each time the participants are informed on the degree of support for each item. The process continues until consensus is reached on particular items. (These experts never meet each other during this whole process.)

3.5.2 Deductive Methods

West (1994:7) summarizes several deductive methods of doing a situation analysis. The first obvious method would be that of several different types of tests. These would include diagnostic

or placement tests determining the level of proficiency of the students. According to West (1994:7), the "main application of such tests is selection and for this reason diagnostic information tends to be limited". Entry tests on arrival are of greater diagnostic value as they are more precise in identifying the language weaknesses and lacks of the learners. The course designer can also make use of self-placement tests. However, some students tend to underestimate or overestimate their abilities, but "self-assessment has been used with success to enable student learners to identify their own level of language proficiency and areas of special priority" (West, 1994:7). Another type of test is that of the final evaluation or feedback done at the end of the course. These tests can sometimes indicate the soundness of the initial situation analysis and it can be an indication of the improvements needed for future courses.

The observation of classes can be used successfully as a deductive method. Yalden (1987:132) proposes that the observer use a checklist or a set of notes while the class is in progress. "Soon a quantity of information about the learners, organized in a purposeful way will emerge" (Yalden, 1987:132).

Surveys based on questionnaires are a very common deductive method of situation analysis as their main advantage is that of objectivity (West, 1994:7). However, some difficulties are a very low rate of return, and achieving a balance between asking too few or too many questions (West, 1994:7). Yalden (1987:134) stresses the importance of preparing the subjects for the questionnaires as some subjects "may feel distinctly threatened by what they may perceive as an attempt to pry into their personal lives". Other subjects may interpret the questionnaire as "an admission of lack of professional knowledge on the teacher's part" (Why should the teacher have to ask the learners how they want to learn the language?) (Yalden, 1987:134).

A more complete way of covering the information needed, is by making use of structured interviews. This is very similar to a questionnaire. However, the course designer or whom West (1994:7) calls the 'analyst' asks the previously set questions. According to Yalden (1987:135), not "only learners, but also other teachers, administrators, parents, employers, or sponsors can

provide helpful information at times" and sometimes "unexpected or surprising information also turns up". The physical presence of the analyst means that the information given can be clarified and extended (West, 1994:7). Structured interviews can also be used in combination with questionnaires to "exploit the advantages of each method" (West, 1994:8).

Learner diaries is another way of gathering information for the situation analysis. West (1994:8) sums up the four areas that most diaries tend to focus on. These areas are course input, tutor performance, learner performance and external factors affecting study (e.g. home-related anxiety, food and accommodation, and personal variables). Information on these four areas can be very valuable when doing a situation analysis. However, West (1994:8) argues that diaries are essentially retrospective. This means that last year's diaries are useful for next year's course and most of the time, the course designer is not able to spend so much time on this first step in course design.

Previous research can be of great value when a situation analysis is done. This means that the course designer makes use of information about an individual or small group (as gathered through, e.g. case studies) or of surveys done on large groups (West, 1994:8). This type of data will obviously vary according to the subjects (e.g. individual or large group) as well as the instruments used to gather information on the subjects.

3.6 PHASES OF THE SITUATION ANALYSIS

Witkin and Altschuld (1995:14-15) propose a three-phase plan for analysing the situation (or what they call "for assessing needs"). These three phases are preassessment, assessment, and postassessment.

3.6.1 Phase 1: Preassessment

This is a phase of exploration where the existing information regarding the need areas are

identified. The general purpose of the situation analysis is stated during this phase. The data to collect, the sources, methods and the potential uses of the data are determined during this phase. The outcomes of this phase consist of a preliminary plan for Phases 2 and 3, as well as a plan for the evaluation of the situation analysis.

3.6.2 Phase 2: Assessment

During this phase of data gathering, the context, scope and boundaries of the situation analysis are determined. Preliminary priorities are set for the Level 1 needs (cf. 3.3.2). The course designer also performs causal analyses at Levels 1, 2 and 3 (cf. 3.3.2). During the assessment phase all data are synthesized and analysed. The outcomes for this second phase would entail the criteria for actions based on high-priority needs.

3.6.3 Phase 3: Postassessment

This is also called the phase of utilization. Priorities are set for needs at all applicable levels. Alternative solutions are considered and an action plan is developed in order to implement these solutions. The situation analysis is also evaluated and the results are communicated. The logical outcomes for the postassessment phase consists of a written action plan, as well as oral briefings and reports.

3.7 CONCLUSION

A situation analysis plays a very important part in the planning of an ESL syllabus. In this chapter it has become apparent that the concept of "needs" cannot be ignored in this whole process. The concept of needs not only broadens and expands the levels on which a situation analysis should be conducted, but it also determines the type of situation analysis that should be used under specific circumstances.

Furthermore, situation analyses do occur in certain phases, but as in the case of course design (cf. Chapter 2), this process is circular. The postassessment phase paves the way for a next phase of preassessment. During the trial run for this study, Phase 1 have been completed while the rest of the study that is described in this dissertation followed Phases 2 and 3. In Chapter 10, recommendations are made for the continuation of a next cycle of these phases.