



University Ziane Achour, Djelfa

Master One Students

Faculty of Letters and Languages

Didactics of Teaching ESP

Department of Foreign Languages

First Term

English Division

All Groups

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Needs Analysis in ESP

Introduction

Needs analysis in ESP involves the systematic and comprehensive study of the language needs of the target learners, their goals and objectives, and the context in which they will use English. By conducting a needs analysis, ESP practitioners can design a course and develop materials that are tailored to the specific needs of the learners, ensuring that they acquire the language skills and competencies necessary to succeed in their professional or academic contexts. This term provides an overview of needs analysis in ESP, including its definition, types, instruments, steps, and the importance of conducting ongoing needs assessment throughout the course. Additionally, a sample of needs analysis questionnaire is presented to illustrate the practical application of needs analysis in ESP course development.

1. Overview on Needs Analysis

Perhaps the basis of a sound approach to course design is to start with a profile of the needs of the learner, so as to fit what is taught to what is needed. ESP has an advantage over EGP, in that it brought into focus the concept of 'needs analysis'. As Escorcía (1985 :53) notes: *"In the context of ESP, needs analysis has become the dynamic impulse underlying course design, the justification for the S and the P, the driving force that has motivated teachers and course designers throughout the world ever since the magic acronym ESP came in"*.

2. Definition of Needs Analysis

Needs analysis in English language teaching has been defined in several ways. According to Nunan (1988 : 75), needs analysis refers to “*a family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks*”. Expanding on Nunan, Brown (1995) explained needs analysis as the analysis of both subjective and objective data to set up the objectives of the course that meet the requirements of the students and the institute. He later simplified the definition by adopting a more holistic perspective. His revised definition of needs analysis was “*the systematic collection and analysis of all information necessary for defining a defensible curriculum*” (Brown, 2009 : 269).

Furthermore, according to Brown (1995), “needs analysis” is also known as “needs assessment.” In Huang (2010), the concept of “needs analysis” was used interchangeably with “needs assessment” to assess the language learning needs of undergraduate and graduate students. Besides, both terms “needs analysis” and “needs assessment” are used to identify the needs of foreign language teachers for teaching the language skills and strategies that the learners need. The present study uses the term “needs analysis” because it is widely understood by many ESP scholars and makes no distinction between the two terms.

Moreover, according to Holec (1980): “*Needs assessment is a classical procedure by which a close link can be established between the learners and the curricula*. In the same context, Brown (1995 :35) defines needs analysis as “*a process of gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students*”.

Besides, Richterich and Trim (1980) defined needs analysis as follows:

Needs analysis comes to mean the whole cluster of techniques which lead to an understanding of the parameters of the learning situation: ego, learners, teachers, administrators, course-writers, producers, career-expectation and job satisfaction, social dynamics, learner-type and resource analysis, etc, are relevant factors in addition to the original predicted communication behaviour.

To sum up, needs analysis (NA) is generally regarded as a criterion of ESP, although, ESP is by no means the only educational enterprise, which makes use of it (Berwick, 1989 Brindley, 1989). Nagarajan (1988) defines a learner's needs in terms of the reasons for which the learner wishes to learn English and the kind of English he will have to use in future. These aspects are very important in an ESP course design, so needs analysis can determine the type of English which would be needed to be taught, based on the requirements of the subject-specialization of the learner.

3. Needs analysis in ESP Course Development

The term “needs analysis” first appeared in the 1920s but became central to ESP in the 1960s, as needs analysis became a significant part of ESP course development (West, 1994). Although Hutchinson and Waters (1987) highlighted that an awareness of needs distinguishes ESP from general English, their assumption was rejected by Seedhouse (1995), who believed that needs analysis theory and application can be applied in general English courses. Similarly, Long (2005) affirmed that any language course without a needs analysis does not provide detailed and selective goals or academic support to meet the learners' needs in the course time frame.

However, using a needs analysis is still more common in developing ESP courses. Needs analysis is seen to be related to other specific phases of ESP course development: course design, materials selection, pedagogical approaches, assessment, and evaluation. In addition, needs analysis is commonly considered as the initial phase in the linear process in course development, although Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) viewed this as more cyclical (Figure 2). In other words, once overall needs for a course are established, decisions can be made in developing or redeveloping the course in terms of learning objectives, material selection or production, the teaching and learning approach, and evaluation (Jin 2014). Thus, many ESP practitioners have acknowledged that a needs analysis is fundamental to developing any language course successfully (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Kavaliauskienė & Užpalienė, 2003).

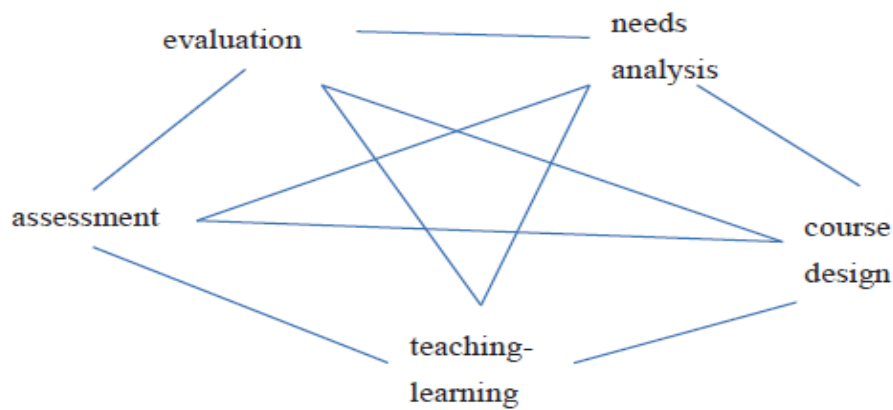


Figure 1: Stages in the ESP process (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p. 121)

3.1 On-going needs analysis

Needs analysis has been traditionally conducted during the initial stage of course development as the first step taken before a course begins (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Jin et al., 2014; Mazdayasna & Tahririan, 2008). However, Dudley-Evans and St. John's diagram of the stages in the ESP process indicates that needs analysis can be conducted at different stages of the course according to each situation. In many cases where the course is in place or an existing one is being revised, an on-going needs analysis may be carried out and justified (Dudley- Evans & St. John, 1998; Mohammadi & Mousavi, 2013). An on-going needs analysis later in a course may lead to a successful revision of an ESP programme (Ahour & Mohseni, 2015; Prachanant, 2012).

The outcomes of an on-going needs analysis can then feed into the course re-alignment, which can be done by revising its objectives and modifying the teaching and materials (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Jocaitė & Petruševičius, 2006; Kavaliauskienė & Užpalienė, 2003). In this sense, an on-going needs analysis can be conducted at various points in a course because the perceptions of learners, teachers and other stakeholders may change as they learn more about their expectations of the course and the students' immediate needs (Lowe, 2009; Robinson, 1991). Therefore, it is essential to investigate potential changes in the perceptions of the stakeholders in different situations in order to assess whether the objectives of an ESP programme need to be revised and the changing needs of the students in the area.



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Types of Needs Analysis

Introduction

Needs analysis is an essential process in developing effective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, which involves the systematic identification of learners' language needs and the context in which they will use English. The process of needs analysis is divided into various types, and each type provides a different perspective on the learners' needs. These types of needs analysis help the ESP practitioner to identify the target learners' language proficiency, their communicative competence, and their learning styles. This course provides an overview of the different types of needs analysis, including target needs analysis, learning needs analysis, and situational needs analysis. It will examine each type's characteristics, benefits, and limitations, and discuss how ESP practitioners can apply them to develop context-specific courses and materials. By understanding the different types of needs analysis, ESP practitioners can design courses that are tailored to the specific needs of the learners, ensuring that they acquire the language skills and competencies necessary to succeed in their professional or academic contexts.

Types of Needs in ESP

Different researchers identify a variety of need within needs analysis, including objective and subjective needs (Brindley, 1989; Richterich, 1980), target needs and learning needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), situational and communicative needs (Richards, 2001), situation and language needs (Brown, 1995), and felt and perceived needs (Berwick, 1989). Brindley (1989) and Richterich (1980) as cited in Graves (1996) distinguish between objective and subjective needs.

They define objective needs as derivable from different kinds of factual information about learners, their use of language in real life communication situations and their current language proficiency and difficulty. Subjective needs are the cognitive and affective needs of the learner in the language situation. According to Brindley (1989 :70), the subjective needs are based upon a variety of

information including “...*affective and cognitive factors such as personality, confidence, attitudes, learners’ wants and expectations with regard to the learning of English*”. In assessing subjective needs, researchers can include information about students’ attitudes toward the target language and culture, and toward learning. Objective needs, on the other hand include information about the students’, which may include country of origin, culture, age, and other personal information.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) make a distinction between target needs and learning needs. Target needs are what the learner needs to do in the target situation and learning needs are what the learners need to do in order to learn. Needs assessment is clearly a sensible task when students have target needs such as needs to work abroad or to study at a foreign university, so teachers can assess and define their goals which can be translated into realistic goals. To analyze learning needs researchers use a checklist of why the learners are taking the course; how the learners learn, and what resources are available.

Situational and communicative needs were defined by Richards (1990). Situational needs focus on the general parameters of a language program and involve the goals, learning styles and proficiency levels of learners. Situational needs involve the teachers’ expectations, teaching styles and techniques. Communicative needs refer to learners’ requirements in the target situation, such as the ability to communicate while working at a hotel reception, or to present papers in a conference.

Berwick (as cited in Johnson, 1989) distinguishes between felt needs and perceived needs. Felt needs are related to the feelings and thoughts of the learners. They can be defined as wants and desires. Perceived needs are thoughts of experts about the educational gaps in other people’s experience. Perceived needs are real and objective because they reflect teachers’ outsider perception of learners’ needs.

Brown (1995 :40) distinguishes between situation and language needs. Some situational needs are based on the programs’ human aspects, such as physical, social, and psychological context in which learning takes place. According to Brown “*such needs are related to administrative, financial, logistical, manpower, pedagogic, religious, cultural, personal, or other factors that might have an impact on the program*”.

Language needs are about the target linguistic behaviors that the learners will acquire. The information about the language needs are the learners’ reasons to learn the target language and details about the situation in which the language will be used.

Figure 2: Jigsaw that Summarizes the Aforementioned Approaches to Needs Analysis





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Instruments for Needs Analysis

Introduction

Needs analysis is a vital step in developing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, and various instruments are used to collect data about learners' needs. These instruments provide a structured and systematic approach to gathering information about the learners' language needs, and they are essential tools in the ESP practitioner's toolkit. This paper provides an overview of the different instruments used in needs analysis, mainly interviews and questionnaires. Each instrument has its strengths and limitations, and understanding how they can be used in conjunction with each other can help ESP practitioners to collect accurate and relevant data about the learners' needs. By understanding the different instruments used in needs analysis, ESP practitioners can select the most appropriate instrument for a particular situation, ensuring that they collect data that is relevant and informative, and that they design courses that are tailored to the specific needs of the learners.

Types of instruments for Needs Analysis

Questionnaires and interviews are two commonly used instruments for needs analysis. Kumar (1996) discusses the advantages and drawbacks of questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires do not take long to administer and it is often possible to get information from a large number of respondents. The responses are anonymous and thus respondents will hopefully offer their opinions and ideas frankly. Interviews are time consuming and because of this the investigator can often only interview a few people. However, in an interview the investigator can probe responses and thus gain an in-depth understanding of the opinions and information offered. Additionally, unclear questions or answers can be clarified during an interview.

Both types of data collection potentially have drawbacks. For example, people tend to think carefully about questionnaire items before responding. This may lead respondents to try to provide idealized responses (responses they see as socially desirable). Good interviewing skills do not come naturally to everyone and some interviewers may let their own opinions come across too strongly and lead to bias in the interview.

Questionnaires and interviews allow the needs analyst to explore people 's opinions of needs, difficulties and the importance of language skills and areas. The following tables summarize the advantages and disadvantages of both the questionnaire and the interview:

Questionnaires	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Less time and energy consuming to administer.	Self-selecting bias. Not everyone who receives the questionnaire returns it and those who do may have different attitudes than those who do not.
Offer greater anonymity to respondents.	-Lack of opportunity to clarify issues. -Do not allow for spontaneous responses.
	Respondents may consult with one another before answering.

Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of the Questionnaire

Interviews	
Advantages	Disadvantages
More useful for collecting in-depth information.	More time consuming.
Opportunity for questions to be explained and responses clarified.	-Quality of the data obtained depends on the skills of the interviewer.
	- The interviewer may introduce his or her bias.
	Less standardized. For example, the quality of the data may vary when different interviewers are used.

Table 2: Advantages and Disadvantages of the Interview

Source: Based on discussion in Kumar (1996)



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Steps in Needs Analysis

According to Brown (1995) there are three steps in needs analysis: first, making the basic decisions about the needs analysis; second, gathering information; and third using this information. Before any needs analysis study takes place, researchers must make certain decisions about the people involved in the needs analysis, and the types of information to be gathered. What will be asked in the needs analysis and how the points of view and program philosophy might interact is important in needs analysis.

Four categories of people may be involved in a needs analysis. These are the target group, the audience, the analysts and the resource group (Brown, 1995). The target group refers to the people about whom information will be collected. The audience refers to all people who will apply the results of analysis, such as teachers and program administrators. The needs analysts are those who are responsible for conducting the needs analysis, in this case an EFL teacher. The last group is the resource group, which consists of any people who may serve as sources of information about the target group. Students, EFL and content teachers may be in the resource group (Brown, 1995).

Gathering information is the next step. There are various techniques that can be used for collecting data for a needs analysis. Information may be gathered through existing information, tests, observations, meetings, interviews, and questionnaires. Brown (1995) claims that the first three instruments may leave the needs analysts in the position of being an outsider, but the other three force the needs analysts back into the process of actively gathering information from the participants.

First, Tests can provide information about general ability levels and specific language problems of students. Next, Observations involve watching individual or group of students and recording their behaviors. Moreover, Interviews are used to gather personal information and views privately or in

small groups with questions that allow more completed response than with questionnaires. Furthermore, Meetings can be useful to reach a consensus among people who have different ideas. Finally, the last tool is the Questionnaire which is more efficient for gathering information on a large scale, requires less effort by the researcher (Brown, 1995; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Questionnaires are also easy to prepare and permit open-ended questions to be included.

The last step is using collected data, which will be analyzed with statistical techniques and interpreted by the researcher. Reliability, validity, and usability compose the sound information gathering procedure. Brown (1995:51) defines reliability “*as the consistency with which a procedure obtains information*”. Reliability must be considered when selecting or creating a procedure for analyzing needs. Reliability can be checked statistically or by commonsense examination of what happens when the procedure is used. If results are the same when it is used repeatedly or by a different analyst, such consistency is an indication that the procedure is fairly reliable.

There are two types of reliability one is internal reliability and the other is external reliability. If someone else collects the same data and gets the same results, it means that its internal reliability is high. To check the internal reliability researchers can get someone and have two interpretations, member check, and make sure researchers have all tools accessible. However, external reliability can be checked by having the procedure replicated by another researcher. If someone applies the procedure in another place and obtains the same result, it means that its external reliability is high.

Validity is defined by Brown (1995 :51) as “*a degree to which the instrument is measuring what it claims to measure*”. Each procedure involved in a needs analysis should be carefully examined question by question to determine to what degree it appears to measure what it claims to be measuring and to what degree that measurement is appropriate for the particular needs analysis being conducted. If the instrument is consistent with each of these, its internal validity is high. External validity concerns issues of the degree to which the sample studied represents the larger group that the study wishes to generalize to. Brown (1995:51) defines the usability as “*...the degree to which a procedure is practical to use, administer, score, and interpret*”. In other words, usability refers to the efficiency in terms of the necessary equipment, the time needed for setting, administering or making the test, that is how easy and quick it is to set or score the test, how much it costs, how simple it is, how much equipment is required to administer it.

The procedure used in the study should be practical, easy to practice and evaluate. Reliability, validity, and usability are interrelated and they are equally important. A procedure should be reliable, valid, and usable before it is used in any needs analysis. Collected data should be analyzed to obtain the results of the investigation. The next step is the interpretation of the results and the discussion. The analysis and interpretation of the results need to be reported in order to be used in curriculum design.



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Importance of Needs Analysis

The discussion of the importance of needs analysis focus on its roles as a starting point or a guide for course design, syllabus design, materials selection, assessment or even classroom activities. Berwick (1989) states that needs assessment is important for decision planners to design the course. Assessment of a course needs involvement of learners' changes concerning learner needs may have to be made during the course with consultation of the learners. Hawkey (1980 :81) says that needs analysis is a tool for course designer. This presupposes a *"language training situation with reasonably specific occupational or educational objectives involving a reasonably homogeneous group of learner"*. Given the information about learner needs a course designer will be able to produce a specification of language skills, functions, and forms as required in the learner needs profile. McDonough (1984 :29) states that the language needs of the learner should be the bases for course development. He asserts that, *"information on his or her language needs will help in drawing up a profile to establish coherent objectives, and take subsequent decisions on course content "*.

Riddell (1991 :75) points to the crucial role that needs analysis plays in syllabus and course design. As he puts it, *"...through it [needs analysis] the course designer becomes equipped to match up the content of the program with the requirements of the student body [what learners need]"*. With reference to the third world context, he considers teaching materials as an important factor. Teachers can use published materials, adapt or write in house materials. Whatever option is taken, the assessment of student needs has to be taken into consideration. Bowers (1980) notes the importance of needs as a guide in syllabus development, materials and examination.

The importance of needs is quoted in Clark (1978), who says that, *"The first step in any language teaching project must surely be to design a syllabus that will reflect the language needs and wishes of the learner concerned, and that will accord with a responsible theory of language learning"* (p.67 in Bowers). According to Jordan (1997 :22), *"needs analysis should be the starting point for devising syllabus, course materials and*

classroom activities". In Shutz and Derwing (1981: 30), needs analysis is considered as the first step that any course planner should take. They stated:

"Many well-intentioned language programs ... have foundered because either no consideration was given to the actual use the learner intended to make of the language or because the list of uses drawn up by the course designer was based on imagination rather than an objective assessment of the learner's situation, and proved to be inaccurate and in many cases entirely inappropriate to his real needs."

Recognizing that language problems can also be traced through sociological context, Schutz and Derwing agree that, *"...a detailed analysis of the situations of language use is a pre-requisite even to the selection of the particular linguistic forms or structures that ought to be taught."* (p.31) Brindley (1980 :64) argues that objective needs should be used as a starting point in course design. He says, *"If instruction is to be centered on the learners and relevant to their purposes, then information about their current and desired interaction patterns and their perceived difficulties is clearly helpful in establishing program goals which in turn can be translated into learning objectives.* He further states that needs analysis is essential in two different ways; (1) as a guide in setting broad goals, and (2) as a guide in the learning process.

We can infer that needs assessment plays a very important role in ESP, it occupies a great measure on the ESP scale. The ESP learners cannot learn ESP courses well and cope well with what they have learnt if they are not aware of their 'needs'. Therefore, 'needs' is a crucial element in the learning process. Further, the ESP practitioners cannot teach the ESP courses correctly and handle the teaching process properly unless they fully understand their learner's 'needs'. Hence, 'needs' becomes the core of the teaching process.

Farhat (2001) states that:

The basic rationale for needs analysis, is the generally accepted fact about the impossibility of learning the language in its entirety. Only part of it can be learned and perhaps mastered. That is why it is important to know why one needs to learn a language and the context within which he learns it, and the situation in which he will use it later.

Furthermore, the ESP designers cannot elaborate appropriate and successful ESP courses unless such courses are based on analyzing the learners' 'needs' for the courses. Needs analysis can then be considered the core and successful guide in course designing. However, the ESP graduates working in the vocational field cannot practise what they have learnt and function effectively, if they do not realize the 'needs' of the situation, therefore, needs analysis is regarded as an important event in the field of application. Above all, one of the main principles of ESP says: "*tell me what you 'need' English for and I will tell you the English that you 'need'*" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). In reality, ESP places great emphasis on 'needs analysis at every stage, i.e., course designing, learning / teaching process and application. Thus, needs analysis should be carried out throughout the course in order to adjust the learning objectives as the need arises. In other words, feedback from the learner can be used as basis for modifying learning objectives. Savage and Storer (1992) discuss the role that learners can have in the process of needs assessment. Learners can contribute substantially to the course if they are actively involved at all stages of the course design; at the initial, during, and final stages of course evaluation.

A Sample of Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Dear Student,

This questionnaire is used to collect data regarding the needs of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) learners, particularly, the needs of first year Master Students of Computing at Djelfa University. All data will be confidential and used only for statistical analysis. Your cooperation in filling this questionnaire as accurate as possible will be highly appreciated.

Instruction: Put a tick (/) mark or fill in what is appropriate.

Instruction : Put a tick (/) mark or fill in what is appropriate.

Section I : Profile of the Respondents

1. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐

Age:

Medium of instruction:

2. Level of English before the entrance to the university:

High ☐ Intermediate ☐ Low ☐

3. Current level of English:

High ☐ Intermediate ☐ Low ☐

4. Do you consider English as:

Very important ☐

Important ☐

Quite important ☐

Not important ☐

5. What are your motives of Learning English as a Foreign Language :

To facilitate studies ☐

To pass exams ☐

For communication ☐

All the above ☐

Section II : Requirements of the ESP Course

6. The time allocated for the course is

Sufficient ☐

Not sufficient ☐

7. What do you think about the current used material ?

Very useful ☐

Little useful ☐

Not useful ☐

8. Evaluate your proficiency in each of the following skills :

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Fully</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Mildly</i>
<i>Speaking</i>			
<i>Writing</i>			
<i>Listening</i>			
<i>Reading</i>			
<i>Vocabulary</i>			
<i>Grammar</i>			
<i>Pronunciation</i>			
<i>Communication</i>			

9. What are your language needs ? *Choose from three different options for every sub-skill.*

Language Sub-skill	Lot of Training	Little Training	No training
Listen to understand questions			
Listen to carry out instructions			
Listen to the presentations			
Listen to answers of questions			
Listen to understand accents			

Asking and answering questions			
Participating in class discussions			
Speaking fluently			
Expressing ideas, opinions			
Giving oral presentations			
Reading books			
Reading course handouts			
Reading articles in journals			
Reading instructions for projects			
Interpreting tables in texts			
Writing assignments			
Writing projects, reports			
Taking notes in lecture			
Writing exams answers			
Writing Master dissertations			

10. What is your preferred teaching style?

Lecturing ☐

Question/Answers ☐

Group discussion ☐

AV Aids ☐

Presentatio ☐

Thank you for your collaboration

Workshop Session

Task

Designing a Needs Analysis Questionnaire for a Field of Specialism of your choice.

Objective: To design a needs analysis questionnaire that can be used to identify the training needs of individuals in a particular field of specialism.

Instructions

- *Select a field of specialism that you are familiar with (e.g., marketing, healthcare, education, etc.).
- * Define the purpose of the needs analysis questionnaire.
- * Identify the target audience for your questionnaire. Who will be completing the questionnaire? What is their job title or position? What level of experience do they have in your field of specialism?
- * Determine the content of your questionnaire. What questions will you ask to identify the training needs of your target audience? Make sure your questions are relevant to the field of specialism and are clear and concise.
- * Decide on the format of your questionnaire. Will it be a paper-based or online questionnaire? Will you use open-ended or closed-ended questions? How many questions will you include?
- * Analyze the results of your questionnaire. What training needs were identified? How can these needs be addressed? Use the results of your questionnaire to develop training programs or materials that meet the identified needs.

Deliverables:

- *A needs analysis questionnaire that includes relevant and clear questions designed to identify the training needs of individuals in your field of specialism.
- * A brief report outlining the purpose, target audience, content, format, and results of your questionnaire.

Good luck with your project!

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