Needs Analysis to Develop the Materials for English as a General Course for Non-English Department Students

Afi Normawati [1,] Dwitiya Ari Nugrahaeni [2]

[1] Universitas Tidar, Indonesia

[1] afinormawati@untidar.ac.id,[2] dwitiya.nugrahaeni@untidar.ac.id

Abstract

Developing appropriate resources for a language learning programme, including those for English as a general course, is pivotal in order for the students' learning to be successful. Prior to the development, the students' needs should be assessed so that the materials developer obtains a comprehensive view of what the students need. This study aims to investigate the students' needs to develop the materials for English as a general course for non-English Department students. The research was conducted at Universitas Tidar, it involved 240 students from different departments. Quantitative research was employed as the approach of the study, and the data were collected by using a questionnaire. The findings show that the students are motivated to learn English for their potential careers in the future and for global communication. In addition, the students claim that they need to master listening, speaking, reading, and writing skill, as well as grammar and pronunciation. Further, the students consider listening as the most difficult macro skill to master and grammar as the most challenging language aspect to learn. Meanwhile, in relation to the topics, the students state that English for everyday, professional, and academic purpose are among the points that should be covered in the materials. In regard to the activity design about in-class activities, the students are most enthusiastic about are practicing pronunciation, learning vocabulary, and watching English-language videos; meanwhile, the students prefer to create videos and work on a project as their assignment. Moreover, they feel enthusiastic when working in groups rather than working in pairs or individually.

Keywords: *needs analysis, materials development, English as a general course, General English*

INTRODUCTION

The need to master English is highly increasing given the fact that most knowledge and information is currently shared in English. By being proficient in English, people are expected to be able to keep up with current advancements in science and technology. Besides, due to its use as a means of global communication, it is commonly assumed that people who speak English have a broader chance to survive and compete in the global community. For this reason, English has become one of the subjects instructed at schools and universities in Indonesia.

English has been learnt by Indonesian students since they study in middle school. That is why, after they graduate from senior high school, it is believed that the students

already master basic skills to communicate in English. When they continue their study at university, English is taught formally as well. English subject is needed to prepare the students to have communication skills needed and to survive in global competition. There are two types of English courses commonly taught in universities: General English and English for Specific Purposes. In General English class, materials presented are directed to the understanding of English in general concepts, while in English for Specific Purposes class materials are focused on one scientific field. Admittedly, despite the significance of General English as a basis for English for Special Purposes (ESP), most studies have focused on ESP. Therefore, an investigation in regards to General English course in the teaching and learning process in university seems necessary.

English teaching approach has been shifted from teacher-centred to learner-centred. Learner-centred approach in EFL teaching is believed to improve the students' learning as it requires students to take an active role in their education (Darsih, 2018). This approach emphasises learners' needs, styles, and targets; and the curriculum implemented, including the objective of the learning, involves discussion and feedback from the students (Brown, 2001). Thus, it can be concluded that in learner-centred classroom, the learning process allows the students to learn based on their needs, objectives, skills, and their learning profile. Therefore, an assessment on students' needs is necessary to make the EFL learning work.

Needs assessment, also referred to as needs analysis, includes activities to collect information as the basis to develop a curriculum designed to meet the needs of a particular group of students (Brown, 2001). In addition, before conducting a syllabus, a need analysis is required to serve as a starting point to establish goals and objectives (Nunan & Lamb, 1996). The information gathered from a need analysis then can be used to define programme goals or, in some cases, to select the most relevant material for the language syllabus. When the students find the materials presented useful and applicable, they will be more encouraged and engaged in the learning.

There are two types of students' needs: target needs and learning needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Target needs focus on the needs of the learner to use the language after they finish the language programme. Target needs include necessities, lacks, and wants. Necessities emphasise what the learner needs to master to communicate effectively in certain circumstance as targeted by the course; lacks are the competence that the learner already has compared to the target competence; while wants are the learner's attitudes to what they need to learn. Meanwhile, learning needs are what the learner need to do to master the target competence. Given the types and components of needs analysis, it can be concluded that thorough investigation is needed when assessing learners' needs. However, despite the challenging procedure, by carrying out a need analysis, when the needs are successfully identified, the teacher can outline the target of the course, the competence that needs to be improved, the students' expectations in learning, and the activities that should be designed in the learning process. As a result, elements needed in learning, including learning materials, will be developed accurately according to the learners' needs.

Needs analysis is crucial in the development of a curriculum of any language programme, including General English course. General English (GE) aims to improve our communication, instead of addressing a specific field (Luo, 2018). Thus, it can be stated that General English aims to develop learners' basic skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, so that learner can improve their competence to communicate. Therefore, it will be meaningful when

GE learning is carried out by prioritising what are most needed and relevant to the learner, and this needs a comprehensive study. However, the majority of the research on EFL students has focused on English for Special Purposesand English for Academic Purposes. Pourshahian et al. (2012)evaluated the demands of Iranian students learning English as a second language and came to the conclusion that the students struggled with writing and grammar. A needs analysis was also conducted by other researchers, one of them is Saleh. Saleh (2018) conducted a study at Tarbiyah and teacher training Faculty of IAIN SultanAmai Gorontalo. He explained how different delivery methods should be used while teaching English. In addition, acquiring vocabulary should be prioritised because doing so will help students grasp textbook content on other topics. However, the most current study should be carried out to reveal further about what students really need today. For this reason, the study explores not only the skills needed by the students and teaching strategies applied in English class, but also what motivates the students to study English, what students need to survive the global era, what materials should be taught, and what learning style the students prefer.

Universitas Tidar, one of universities in Indonesia, has English as a general course as one of the courses the students must take. The course is designed for non-English Department students in the university and developed to improve the students' basic skills in communication in English regardless of their field. As mentioned before, English is instructed in university to prepare students for global competition. Therefore, English taught in university should be oriented to the goal. To achieve this goal, a syllabus that suits the needs of the students should be designed, and this can be obtained by using needs analysis. Needs analysis enables a learner-centred learning since learners become the main consideration (Belcher & Lukkarila, 2011). Thus, it is crucial to professionally investigate a programme when establishing the objectives of learning. By considering the needs of learners, a thorough understanding of curriculum design will be realised. This is in line with Nunan's statement. He argues "no curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centred unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions relating to the processes of learning are taken into account" (Nunan, 1988).

The purpose of this research is to identify the difficulties that students face when learning English, the learning goals they need to achieve, the skills and material that should be taught, and the learning activities the students prefer in the teaching and learning process. This research is expected to contribute to the syllabus and material development for English as a general course in Universitas Tidar and to improve the quality of English language teaching at the university.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach of descriptive survey research to investigate the needs of EFL learners in General English course at Universitas Tidar.This type of survey study illustrates how things are described in a variety of fields, including market research, public opinion polls, and more (De Vaus, 2002). The information about the students' needs was gathered using a questionnaire, which appeared to be the most appropriate tool for gathering the students' opinions and needs. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questions, the questionnaire was adapted from (Seedhouse, 1995) and (Aliki et al., 2021) with necessary adjustments to suit the students' learning context. In order to gather a broader scope of information from the participants, the questionnaire provided open-ended questions where participants could write down any

information that had not been covered by the questions provided. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first section was aimed at gathering the participants' English learning background. The second up to fifth sections respectively sought the participants' English learning motivations, difficulties, learning activities that they engage, and the skills and topics needed.

The participants in this study were 240 students from the Biology Education Department, Science Education Department, Indonesian Language and Literature Department, and Management Department at Universitas Tidar. They range in age of 18 to 22 years old. All of them were Indonesians. The majority of these students did not use English in their daily communications, and they had learned English for 12 to 14 years. The questionnaire was distributed to these 240 students. The frequency of the students' opinions and perspectives on their needs and desires in learning English was treated as data. The percentage and frequency distribution statistical tools were used to analyze the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Motivation

This first section was designed to understand the participants' reasons for learning English. The participants were given fifteen statements from which they might select more than one statement that suited them. Two of the fifteen statements indicated an obligation to learn English where the participants did not have the power to choose. These two statements were found to be the least chosen by the participants, with only 19.5% and 36.8%. Besides, the majority of the participants picked five out of the other thirteen statements as their main motivator to learn English. The first one was on individuals' future careers. They intended to study English in order to acquire a decent career in the future (69.2%). The second and third motivations were connected to their desire to participate in the global community. Participants were aware that they needed to learn English because it is an international language (65.2%) and that they needed to communicate with people from other nations (64.7%). The last two motivations were related to their immediate needs as university students. They studied English because they believed that English could help them in working on their assignments (64.1%) and that they wanted to be able to pass English tests such as TOEFL or IELTS (61.9%).In Indonesia, higher education institutions frequently employ TOEFL-like examinations as one of the graduation requirements for students.

This finding revealed that the participants did not feel coerce into learning English, and it also confirms Seedhouse's (1995) finding in his study that the students were actually aware of their learning needs. This result did not negate the fact that English is taught as a compulsory subject in this University. However, in line with Moiinvaziri, it showed that despite the fact that English is a required subject at this university, the participants still had a positive and enthusiastic attitude towards learning English (Moiinvaziri, 2014).

Learning Difficulties

The second section was aimed at identifying the skills and language aspects in which the participants most often found difficulties. The participants were asked to rate their difficulty in four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing; as well as two language aspects: vocabulary and grammar. The result revealed that listening was the most difficult skill for 59.4% of the participants, whereas speaking and writing were

not too challenging for a little more than half of the participants (52.5% and 54.7% respectively). The participants considered reading as the least challenging skill with the proportion of 69.1%.Forthe language aspects, this study found that both grammar and vocabulary were considered difficult for the participants. In detail, 68.4% of the participants agreed that grammar is the language aspect where they were struggling the most compared to vocabulary where only 53.6% of the participants did so.

In terms of language skills, these findings differ from those of (Wulanjani, 2018) who discovered that listening was the least difficult skill while speaking was the most challenging one. However, (Moiinvaziri, 2014) revealed a nearly same result in which listening was found to be the most problematic for the participants whereas reading and writing were considered the least challenging. The thing that set this study and Moiinvaziri's apart was that her participants considered speaking to be difficult but those in this study did not. Nevertheless, this inconsistency is something that should be expected when conducting a need analysis in general English because as stated by (Liu et al., 2011), students in general English courses tend to have different needs, motivations, and lacks as the course itself is typically not designed to cater for field-specific goals.

Learning Activities

In this third section, the participants were asked to choose their preferred learning activities in their general English course. This section was divided into three aspects: in-class activities, assignments, and working style. With more than 70% preference rate in the first category, the participants demonstrated a positive attitude towards all the in-class activities. The activities that the participants were most enthusiastic about were practicing pronunciation (92.8%), learning vocabulary (91.5%), and watching videos in English (90.5). Whereas practicing grammar exercises, doing role-plays, and studying grammar rules were considered the least preferable although all of them were chosen by more than 70% of the participants (74.5%, 75.8%, and 77.6% respectively).The result of this section also revealed that when it came to assignments, the participants were not as enthusiastic as doing in-class activities. The least preferable assignments for them were problem solving in English (64.1%) and individual video production (65.9%). Whereas the more preferred tasks were working on a project in English (67.3%) and filming group videos (70.9%).The last category in this section was working style. It was observed that among working individually, in pairs, and in groups, 88.3% of the participants favored the last one, while only 65.9% of them chose to work individually.

According to the study's findings, the students preferred to learn in groups when studying. When the students work in groups, they engage in and do well in group work assignments in the language classroom. This finding would be taken into account when desiging classroom activities. However, since the students have different learning styles, various tasks should be included in the learning process as well. According to (Oflaz & Turunc, 2012) using various learning types in the activities helps the learner focus, stay motivated, and perform well. Further in his research, he found that groups created by while taking into account the students' learning preferences demonstrate how learning preferences impact how well groups perform during group work exercises for language acquisition.

Skills and Materials Preferences

This final section focused on observing the skills and materials needed by the participants in their learning process. The questions in this part were distributed in four macro skills: listening, reading, speaking, writing. The result showed that all participants had a positive attitude towards all materials offered in all skills which indicated that they needed all four skills to be addressed in the general English course. In terms of listening, 90.7% of the participants reported that they need to learn listening strategies and 81.6% of them preferred to practice listening to English conversation about daily topics. Only 72%-79% of them desired to have listening activity with academic content.

Inreading, the majority of the participants (84.3%) indicated the need to learn more about reading strategies in general texts and in the academic ones (82.2%). While 80.75% and 79.15% of the participants wanted to have practice on reading about daily topics and academic texts respectively. In terms of speaking, the answers were highly varied with 83.65% of participants wanting to do practice job interviews. Aside from the interview, 77.8% of participants chose to practice their speaking abilities through a role play on everyday issues. The least desired speaking activity in class was practicing presentations in English (61.05%), followed by practicing making professional phone calls (69.75%). Meanwhile, for writing skills, it was discovered that the participants were interested in practicing writing in a professional environment, such as creating a CV and cover letter to apply for a job (84.9%) and writing professional texts such as business emails and business letters (81.65%). They also demanded more practice on writing strategies in various contexts (82.15). The least preferred materials for them were writing different types of paragraphs (73.75%) and writing academic articles (66.8).

These findings show that the students are aware of the skills and materials needed to meet today's challenge. Listening and reading strategies are chosen as the skills needed to improve their communication. Moreover, daily topics are their priority for the students. Their opinion is in line with the study of Putra et al. (2020) which states that due to the significance of using English in daily life, from business to technology to education, learning English is required. Besides, the students are aware of the importance of English in a professional environment as being fluent in English is a huge advantage in today's employment. This awareness is in accordance with the statement of Pandey (2014) that a better social life and future employment chances can both be brought about by enhanced English communication abilities. Communication skills are highly important in all aspects of professional life, from job interviews to the workplace itself, and being skilled in English implies being able to communicate successfully.

CONCLUSION

Needsanalysis is crucial in the development of syllabus and materials for any courses, including English as a general course in Universitas Tidar. The information gathered when investigating the learners' needs will help the university decide the curriculum and the materials included in teaching and learning process. This study shows that the students have relatively high motivation in learning English to secure their future career and to use it for global communication. The research recognises the students' difficulties in learning as well. Respectively, the skill the students find the most to the least difficult to master is listening, then followed by speaking, writing, and reading; while the most difficult aspect to learn is grammar.

In designing learning activities, the students' preferences should be considered to maintain their motivation to be engaged in EFL learning. Based on the investigation, in a classroom setting, the students are most excited to engage in pronunciation practice, vocabulary building, and watching English-language videos. Meanwhile, creating group films and working on an English project are preferred by the students for their assignment; and the students tend to choose working in groups instead of working in pairs and working individually. Furthermore, the students state that English course should address all language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The students need to learn the strategy to master the skills. Moreover, the topics desired to be included in the materials are English for daily, academic, and professional use.

The results imply that EFL students think mastering all English language components and abilities are crusial. Therefore, when creating English curriculum, course designers must pay close attention to the learner's demands and the learners' perceived requirements. The lecturers and course developers should take these demands into consideration, and the present curriculum should be modified to include some omissions and additions that address the needs of the students. Besides, it is suggested that further research use interview to collect more comprehensive understanding of EFL students' needs to develop materials for English as a general course.

REFERENCES

Aliki, K., Makrina-Nina, Z., & Panagiota, D. (2021). A Needs Analysis Questionnaire: Designing and Evaluation. *Journal of English Literature and Language*, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.31829/2767-2964/jell2021-2(1)-107

Belcher, D., & Lukkarila, L. (2011). Identity in the ESP context: Putting the learner front and center in needs analysis. *New Directions in English for Specific Purposes Research*, 73–93.

Brown, D. (2001). *The elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development*. Pergamon Press.

Darsih, E. (2018). *Learner-Centered Teaching: What Makes It Effective. Indonesian EFL Journal*, *4*(1), 33. https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v4i1.796

De Vaus, D. (2002). *Surveys in Social Research* (5th ed.). Routledge.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511733031

Liu, J.-Y., Chang, Y.-J., Yang, F.-Y., & Sun, Y.-C. (2011). Is what I need what I want? Reconceptualising college students' needs in English courses for general and specific/academic purposes. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *10*(4), 271–280. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2011.09.002

Luo, Y. (2018). Discussion of General English and Academic English in College English Teaching. *Proceedings of the 2018 4th International Conference on Education Technology, Management and Humanities Science (ETMHS 2018)*. https://doi.org/10.2991/etmhs-18.2018.30

Moiinvaziri, M. (2014). Students' Voice: A Needs Analysis of University General English Course in Iran. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, *14*(01), 57–75. https://doi.org/10.17576/GEMA-2014-1401-05

Nunan, D. (1988). *Syllabus Design*. Oxford University Press.

Nunan, D., & Lamb, C. (1996). *The self-directed teacher: Managing the learning process*. Cambridge University Press.

Oflaz, M., & Turunc, T. (2012). The Effect of Learning Styles on Group Work Activities. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *46*, 1333–1338. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.297

Pandey, P. K. (2014). *Better English for Better Employment Opportunities International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach and Studies*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264788119

Pourshahian, B., Gholami, R., Vaseghi, R., & Rezvani Kalajahi, SA. (2012). Needs of an ESL Context: A Case Study of Iranian Graduate Students. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, *17*(7), 870–873.

Putra, E., Teknologi, I., & Nopember, S. (2020). *The Importance of Learning English Nowadays*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346400434

Saleh, Y. R. (2018). Need Analysis in Learning English for Non English Program at Tarbiyah and Teacher Trainning Faculty. *Al-Lisan: Jurnal Bahasa (e-Journal)*, *3*(2), 81–93. http://journal.iaingorontalo.ac.id/index.php/al

Seedhouse, P. (1995). Needs analysis and the General English classroom. *ELT Journal*, *49*(1), 59–65. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/49.1.59

Wulanjani, A. N. (2018). Exploring Students' Need for Developing Material of English for Civil Engineering. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching*, *2*(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.31002/metathesis.v2i1.552