

The Analysis of EFL Students' Needs for Writing Materials Development

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Abstract: *This paper discusses the needs and interests of the students of English Education Department of STAIN Parepare, Indonesia for essay writing materials. The students taken as the sample of the research were the fifth semester students of academic year 2015/2016 who registered in essay course classroom. Data on students' needs and interests were found through needs analysis, which used observation and questionnaire as data gathering instruments. Through the needs analysis, it is found that the students have been familiar with writing activities done outside the classroom such as writing SMS, diary, or literary works such as poem, short story, etc.. However, their writing ability was still low, since their mastery in sentence structure was still the basic structure of English sentences. Moreover, they have difficulties in some of writing skills, such as arranging ideas in a paragraph, writing by using correct grammar, and completing the writing on time, which are rooted from their weaknesses in grammar, structure, and vocabulary. In addition, students were interesting to write topics about their real life, that they function language as the representation of reality such as to make statement, to convey facts and knowledge, and to explain or report (Michael Halliday, 1973 cited in Brown, 1994). Finally, the research also found their learning needs such as their preferred classroom participations and preferred places to do writing activities. Students thought group work was more interesting than pair work and individual work. Moreover, students prefer to do writing activities outside the classroom to in the classroom.*

Keywords: needs analysis, interest, essay writing, grammar, writing activities

1. Introduction

A great attention should be given to materials used by teachers in classroom since they contribute to the success of learning. Hamra (2003), for instance in his research finds that the low proficiency of EFL students in Indonesia was affected by poor instructional materials. There are two kinds of materials: the ones produced for general learners all over the world, which sometimes called as commercial textbooks, and the ones developed by teachers for their own students to be used in their own classrooms.

Many English teachers prefer to use the commercial books for many reasons, and one of the reasons is time saving (Brown, 1995: Bell and Gower, 1998). Teachers' tasks are great burden and using the commercial books give them enough time do a lot of teaching tasks maximally, rather than spending most of their time to develop materials for their students, which will reduce their time to prepare their teaching. The other reason is that the commercial books have been tried out and tested professionally so that the contents can be proved effective to develop students' language competence (Bell and Gower in Tomlinson, 1998)

However, some people begin to criticize the use of commercial materials. They view the use of commercial books as a control of the government, which cooperate with the commercial interest to destroy teachers and students creativity ((Bell and Gower in Tomlinson, 1998). Moreover, the commercial textbooks bring the culture of the English countries which very often do not fit the target learners' culture (Bell and Gower in Tomlinson, 1998). Furthermore, the commercial materials often do not match the specific needs of particular students (Brown, 1995).

One of the important principles of materials development is that the contents should be relevant and useful to the

students' needs in real life (Tomlinson, 1998). Following the principle, materials made by teachers are likely better than the commercial materials since they know well their students and the context for which the language will be used. Through needs analysis, teachers can get much relevant information related to their students' needs and interests, which are crucial in materials development considerations. In this sense, teachers-made materials can easily meet the specific needs of their particular students than the commercial materials.

This study was intended to find out the students' needs towards the writing materials used for teaching essay writing at the faculty of Tarbiyah at STAIN Parepare. Data of the students' needs revealed through needs analysis will be the basis for designing a model of essay writing materials that adopts the values of experiential learning theory. However, this study only focused on analyzing the students' needs towards the writing materials used for essay writing course.

2. Review of Related Literature

Needs Analysis

Language experts define needs analysis or needs assessment as an activity to gather information on the students' needs in learning (Brown, 1995). Aware of the students' needs is very important in materials design especially for ESP program (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). However, for general English, the need to explore the students' needs in language learning is also crucial since the information got from the needs analysis can be used as the basis for developing curriculum, materials, tests, teaching activities, and evaluation strategies (Brown, 1995). This is done to produce curriculum, materials, and teaching activities that meet the students' needs and interests.

Needs are distinguished based on the information gathered through needs analysis. There are two well-known needs proposed by experts, objective needs and subjective needs (Brindley, 1990 in Graves, 1996). The first needs related to different kinds of information on learners such as the use of language in their real-life context, their existing language competence, and the language problem they encounter. The second needs deals with information on cognitive and affective aspects of learners such as personality, confidence, attitudes, learners' wants and expectations towards English learning, cognitive style, and learning strategy.

Needs analysis has two aspects, namely procedure and validity. The first means that needs analysis require not only one instrument to gather data on students' needs but various (Brown, 1995). The second means that needs identified in needs analysis should be examined in terms of the validity.

As needs analysis involves a systematic activity in gathering data, some steps are involved. Brown (1995) divides the steps into three main steps, namely making decisions about the needs analysis, gathering information, and using information. The first concerns with some important questions related to people involved in the needs analysis, types of information should be taken, and how points of view and program philosophy interact. In gathering data, needs analysis seeks for information on the context in which the students use the language, the goals for which the students need to use the language, the types of language that the learners will use, and the level of proficiency that students should requires.

Needs analysis also employs some instruments to gather information. Language experts (Brown, 1995: Evans and ST John, 1998) note some instruments that can be used to collect data, such as observation, interview, questionnaire, existing information, tests, discussions, and meetings.

3. Research Method

The main instrument used to gather data on students' needs was questionnaire. Observation was also employed in data gathering. The questionnaire consisted of some questions related to the three aspects of needs analysis (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) namely students' language level, students' language problems, and students' language needs.

There were forty-five students taken as the sample of the research. They were the students who took essay-writing course in academic year 2015/2016. The students came from two classes, and they had taken sentence writing course as well as paragraph-writing course as the compulsory courses before taking this course.

4. Findings and Discussion

As discussed in the previous part of this paper, to reveal the students' needs, it is important to find out some information related to the students' language level, and the students' language problems. Since this study related to writing skill, then the information that the researcher tried to find were

related to the students' writing competence and students' writing problems.

a) The Level of the Students' Writing Competence

There were two questions asked to students to find some important information, which might reflect their writing competence. The first question tried to reveal some writing activities that students have done. The table below shows that most students have ever written SMS in English. They have also written in diary and have written one of these literary works: poems/short story/ novel. The table also shows that none students have ever written English book.

Table 4.1: English Writing Activities Done by the Students

No	Students' English Writing Activities	F	P (%)
1	Write SMS/E-Mail	43	95,5
2	Write in diary	33	73,3
3	Write poem/short story/novel	30	66,7
4	Write book	0	0

The finding shows that the students were quite familiar with English writing activities, not only in classroom but also outside. This also means that students have used English writing in real context, they used English as a means to convey a particular purpose (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

The question also tried to reveal the students' competence in writing the basic English sentence structure such as simple sentences, and the combination of simple sentences with compound sentences and complex sentences in one paragraph. It can be concluded from table 4.2 that students competences in writing English sentence structure were still low for their academic level. Students involved in this research were the fourth semester students, and they have taken English sentences and paragraph writing courses where students should be able to write not only simple sentence, but also compound and complex sentences.

Table 4.2: The Level of the Students' Writing Competence

No	Level of Writing Tasks	Scale					
		Very good (%)	Good (%)	Fair (%)	Poor (%)	Very poor (%)	Total (%)
1.	Write simple sentence	25	55	7,5	5,0	7,5	100
2.	Write simple sentence combined with compound sentence and complex sentence.	5,0	20	65	7,5	0	97,50

b) The Students' Writing Problems

There were nine writing skills which were presented to the students, and they were asked to choose the ones they felt difficult to do. Table 4.5 shows that all of the students felt difficult in the nine skills. The table also shows write using correct grammar and arrange ideas in a paragraph were the most difficult skills while edit and revise text were the least ones. It can also be concluded from the data on table 4.3 that students got problems in most of the important writing skills.

Table 4.3: The Students' Writing Problems

No.	Writing Problems	Scale (%)					Mean
		Always	Usually	Some-times	seldom	never	
1.	Arrange ideas in a paragraph	20	45	32.50	2.50	0	3.82
2.	Write using correct grammar.	17.50	47.50	32.50	2.50	0	3.80
3.	Complete writing on time.	10	50	35	5.0	0	3.65
4.	Arrange sentences well	7.50	42.50	42.50	7.50	0	3.50
5.	Write using correct spelling and punctuations	5.0	40	47.50	7.50	0	3.42
6.	Develop ideas	10	37.50	37.50	15	0	3.42
7.	Write using proper vocabulary	10	37.50	35	17.50	0	3.40
8.	Express ideas properly	10	37.50	35	17.50	0	3.40
9.	Edit and revise text	2.50	47.50	40	10	0	3.40

The questionnaire also tried to find out the sources of the students' writing problems. There were four sources listed in the questionnaire: Low mastery of English vocabulary, inadequate knowledge of English structure, English grammar and inadequate knowledge of topics to write. As shown by table 4.4, students thought their writing problems were caused by various reasons. Low mastery of English vocabulary was identified as the most frequent source of problem encountered by the students, followed by inadequate knowledge of English structure as well as English grammar. Inadequate knowledge of topics to write was also identified as one of the sources of the problems.

Table 4.4: The Sources of the Students' Writing Problems

No.	Language Problems	Level of Frequency
1.	Low mastery of English vocabulary	3,84
2.	Inadequate knowledge of English structure	3,42
3.	Inadequate knowledge of English grammar	3,37
4.	Inadequate knowledge of topics to write.	3,12

Data showed in table 4.4 also reveals that students got problems in the important components of writing, namely vocabulary, structure, and grammar. The students should aware that academic writing needs careful attention on the components since the readers are the ones who are quite knowledgeable about the academic writing style (Swales and Feak, 2008).

The researcher also asked students to write other problems they encountered in writing beside the ones listed above and there were two answered appeared namely limited time to write and inability to start and relate the sentences. 2, 4 percent of students wrote limited time write in classroom as a problem while 2, 2 percent of students considered difficult to start and relate sentences as a problem. Therefore, there

are six writing problems encountered by students in classroom as can be seen from the following table.

No.	The Sources of Students' Writing Problems
1.	Low mastery of English vocabulary
2.	Inadequate knowledge of English structure
3.	Inadequate knowledge of English grammar
4.	Inadequate knowledge of topics to write.
5.	limited time to write

- a. The Needs and Interests of Students
 1) The Writing Needs of the Students

In order to find the students' needs, they were asked about the importance of several writing skills and some interesting topics to write. The students' answers' to the questions are showed in the following tables.

Table 4.5: Important Writing Skills

No.	Writing Skills	Level of Importance
1.	Write text using correct grammar and structure	3,91
2.	Write using correct spelling and punctuation	3,79
3.	Write using correct vocabulary	3,70
4.	Arrange sentences well	3,66
5.	Relate topics to the students' experiences, interests, and background knowledge	3,55
6.	Develop ideas well	3,47
7.	Arrange ideas in a paragraph	3,46
8.	Express ideas adequately.	3.26
9.	Complete text on time	2.95

In terms of the important writing skills as seen in table 4.8 above, of nine important skills presented, students considered write text using correct grammar and structure as the most important skill followed by write using correct spelling and punctuation, and write using correct vocabulary. Besides, students also agreed that arrange sentences well and relate topics to the students' experiences, interests, and background knowledge are important skills to learn. Finally, complete text on time is considered less important.

It is reasonable to know that students thought the three skills above important, since students' competence in the three writing components are still low. As revealed before, students' English writing problems can be traced from their low competence on grammar, structure, and vocabulary. Sheldon (1987) argues that a skill that is hard to achieve and important for the students can be identified as their needs. Since students viewed the three skills above difficult, it can be concluded that students needs to learn more the three skills.

Beside the components of writing, needs analysis also tried to reveal the students' needs and interests towards the contents of the writing materials through the question, "If your lecturer assigns you to write an English essay, what topic you want to write?" Students' answers were various, and they can be categorized into eight subjects namely culture, religion, education, technology, language, social issues, health, and vacation.

Table 4.7: Topics Categorization

No.	Subjects	F	P (%)
1.	Culture	8	20
2.	Religion	7	17.5
3.	Education	6	15
4.	Technology	5	12.5
5.	Language	4	10
6.	Social issues	4	10
7.	Health	4	10
8.	Vacation	2	5
Total		40	

As stated previously, one of the important principles of materials development is that the contents should be relevant and useful to the students' needs in real life (Tomlinson, 1998). Topics and themes are the ones that can give benefits to students if they are appropriate to their needs and interests as Sheldon (1987) argues that the interesting topics will motivate students to understand them and find their meaning. This research tried to find out the students' needs and interests towards the topics of writing materials by asking them to write their favorite topics to write. As seen in table 4.7, topics considered interesting by the students can be categorized into eight subjects, and most of the topics belong to the subject of culture. The other topics belong to the subjects of religion, followed by education and technology. Language, social issues and health come next with the same frequency, followed by vacation, which has the least frequency.

In addition, as shown by the following tables, students chose various interesting topics to write in each subject. The topics were mostly related to their daily lives, their experiences about their hometown, Indonesia as their country, and the world. These mean that students have used language with its functions as the representation of reality such as to make statement, convey facts and knowledge, and explain or report (Michael Halliday, 1973 cited in Brown, 1994).

Table 4.8: The Topics Belong to the Culture Subject

No.	Topics	F	P (%)
1.	How does our country celebrate the independence day?	1	2,2
2..	How do the countries in the world celebrate their independence day?	1	4,4
3.	The celebration of the heroes day of Indonesia	1	2,2
4.	The celebration of mother's day	1	4,4
5.	Father's day	1	2,2
6.	Famous Indonesian women	1	2,2
7.	Love	1	2,2
8.	The local culture, regional, and international culture	1	2,2
Total		8	

Table 4.9: The Topics Belong to the Subject of Religion

No.	Topics	F	P (%)
1.	The history of Islam in the world	1	2,2
2.	Religious issues around us	3	6,7
3.	Fiqh	1	2,2
4.	Buginese traditions and customs that violate the Islamic law	1	2,2
6.	The wonder and beauty of Islam	1	2,2
Total		7	

Table 4.10: The Topics Belong to the Subject of Education

No.	Topics	F	P (%)
1.	Education	1	
2.	Type of learning styles	1	
3.	The benefits of reading	1	
4.	The ideal teacher	1	
6.	The use of Internet in education	1	
7.	The quality of our education	1	
Total		6	

Table 4.11: The Topics Belong to the Subject of Language

No.	Topics	F	P (%)
1.	The effectiveness of studying English by audiovisual media	1	
2.	The way to memorize vocabulary	1	
3.	English as the International language	1	
4.	Students' motivation in learning English	1	
5.	My experiences in studying English	1	
Total		5	

Table 4.12: The Topics Belong to the Subject of Technology

No.	Topics	F	P (%)
1.	The effect of technology for children	1	2,2
2.	The development of technology	1	2,2
3.	The positive and negative effects of technology in modern era	1	2,2
4.	Life in the future	1	2,2
Total		4	

Table 4.13: Social Issues

No.	Topics	F	P (%)
1.	Teenagers in Indonesia	1	2,2
2.	The etiquette of teenagers to adult	1	2,2
3.	How do people in modern era interact with their society	1	2,2
4.	Social problems around us	1	2,2
Total		4	

Table 4.14: Health

No.	Topics	F	P (%)
1.	The effect of fast food	1	2,2
2.	The effect of smoking	1	2,2
3.	The benefits of drinking water	1	2,2
4.	The effect of lack of sleep	1	2,2
Total		4	

Table 4.15: Vacation

No.	Topics	F	P (%)
1.	Interesting places to visit in my hometown	1	2,2
2.	Going on vacation	1	2,2
Total		2	

As stated previously, students' favorite topics to write belong to eight subjects; and as can be seen in the tables above, the topics are the ones they experience in their real life situation. In culture subject for example, students wrote the celebration of their country's Independence Day as the favorite topic. The student has already known the topic, but since each region in Indonesia has its own way to celebrate the day, he/she might think it is interesting to share the differences to the readers. However, one of the students also chose to write the ways the other countries in the world celebrate their independence day. It can be concluded that

student is also interested in the culture of the other countries. The other topic, for example, local culture, regional culture, and international culture shows the student's curiosity to compare the local culture to that of the other regions in Indonesia and the other countries. The familiarity of the topics to the students' life is also seen in vacation subject. In this subject, one of the interesting topics is about the student's hometown that according to him/her has some interesting places to visit.

As shown by the tables above, all of the topics chosen by the students show that they are interesting to write about their experiences with their culture, religion, society, education, technology, and their experiences spending time on vacation. Students already have existing knowledge about the topics. In addition, students are also curious to compare their culture with the culture of the other people.

2) The Learning Needs of the Students

Learning needs are the needs that should be fulfilled to help students learn (Hutchinson and Waters). In order to help students learn writing, it is crucial to find out the students' learning needs. This research tried to find out the model of classroom participation students feel comfortable. As shown by table 4.16, most of the students preferred group work to pair work and individual work.

Table 4.16: Preferred Classroom Participations

No	Classroom Participations	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Individual work	11	24,44
2	Pair work	22	48,88
3	Group work	25	55,55

The students' preferred classroom participations shown by table 4.16 above indicates that group work is more important than pair work and individual work for the students. This means group work is the most interesting classroom participations, followed by pair work and individual work. It might because low-level students take benefits from group work and pair work. They might do the tasks better and finish faster than when they work alone. Conversely, high-level students can help their friends, which might improve their confidence.

In terms of the place of learning, most of the students are interesting to write outside the classroom. Write outside the classroom might give different atmosphere to students that can increase their learning motivation.

Table 4.17: Preferred Places to Write

	Places to Write	F	P
1.	Write in the classroom	19	47.5
2.	Write outside the classroom	36	90

5. Conclusion

The research analyzed students needs and interests for the purpose of developing essay writing materials. Data on students needs were collected through observation and questionnaire. The research found that students have been familiar with writing activities doing outside the classroom such as write SMS, write in diary, write literary works such poem, short story, etc.. However, the students' writing

competence was still low, since students mastery in sentence structure was still about the basic structure of English sentences. Moreover, student's encountered difficulties in some of writing skills, such as arrange ideas in a paragraph, write using correct grammar, and complete writing on time, which are rooted from their weaknesses in grammar, structure, and vocabulary. In addition, it was found that students were interesting to write topics about their real life. This shows that they functioned language as the representation of reality as stated by Halliday (1973, cited in Brown, 1994). Finally, the research also found their learning needs such as they prefer group work to pair work and individual work. Moreover, students are more interesting to do writing activities outside the classroom than in the classroom.

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