



Exploring Students' Learning Needs of Academic Writing Skill as the Base to Design the Learning Materials

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Abstract. Needs analysis plays a vital role in developing academic writing material and is a systematic powerful tool that helps teachers design materials regarding the students learning needs. This research aimed at analyzing the types of students' learning needs for material development in the academic writing course. This research employs a descriptive qualitative study in identifying the students' learning needs through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The respondents are English education study program during the fifth semester and two lecturers of an academic writing course in the academic year 2021/2022. The result shows that most students were preferred a learning model which learning activities related to grammar, writing topics which supported with a picture, learning writing which focuses on the aims of writing text, teacher as a controller during learning activities, followed by feedback giver in the writing activity of the text to be written, the assessor in teaching writing skills, and facilitator to maximize the potential of the learner as the teacher roles. Regarding students' roles, most students agreed with students' role as reviser drafts of writing text and students' role as the drafter. Most of the respondents also agreed the class situation ought to learn in small group learning as a classroom setting.

Keywords: Need Analysis · Academic Writing Material · Learning Needs

1 Introduction

Teaching material plays important role in the success of teaching and learning in the classroom. Good material may have an important role to play as they become the 'de facto' curriculum. It can become a support for less experienced teachers who have yet to gain confidence [1]. As different learners learn in different ways, the ideal materials aim to provide all these ways of acquiring a language for the learners to experience and sometimes select from. However, the reality is that most commercially produced materials focus on informing their users about language features and on guiding them to practice these features. The publisher is primarily motivated by the financial success which aims to produce excellent books which will satisfy the wants and needs of their users but their need to maximize profits makes them cautious and conservative and any compromise with the authors tends still to be biased towards perceived market needs

rather than to the actual needs and wants of the learners. Furthermore, Several experts of material developments state that most commercial materials often lack energy and imagination and are sometimes insufficiently relevant and appealing to the actual learners who use them, only a small proportion of good teachers are also good designers of course materials [2]. Therefore, [3] comments that instructional materials generally serve as the basis of much of the language input that learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. For this reason, to achieve intended characteristics, teaching materials should be well developed, considering the context and the needs of the users.

In addition, the importance of materials in language teaching can be seen from the purpose and need of the material development [4]. They propose five key purposes of material, i. e. materials that meet a psychological need. Through texts, topics, tasks, visuals, and a set of the course, materials can motivate the learner which is difficult for the teacher to sustain. In the case of set course materials, they give learners and teachers at least a sense of ordered progression and meet their expectation that learning involves materials. Second, materials provide exposure to the language. Teachers are important sources of exposure to the target language. Third, materials are vehicles of information. Materials can provide information about grammar and vocabulary and about the TL cultures and other cultures which may be more accurate and comprehensive than the teacher's alone. Next, materials provide a stimulus for other activities. Materials can elicit oral or written genres and styles, different accents, and so on. The last, materials can act like a teacher as teacher education. Materials can provide a good model of practice for teachers, especially if the teacher's book gives a clear rationale for the approach.

Materials development refers to all the processes made use of by practitioners who produce and/or use materials for language learning, including materials evaluation, adaptation design, production, exploitation, and research. Ideally, all of these processes should be given consideration and should interact in the making of language-learning materials. However, some problems appear in the teaching and learning process in the context of English language teaching of the academic writing course. Based on the observation and interview of academic writing lecturers subject at the English education Muhammadiyah University of Mataram, the lecturers stated that they do not have special books related to material for teaching academic writing subject. The lecturers often feel that the available textbook is not sufficient to achieve the various objects associated with language teaching. The materials are not authentic and not relevant to the students' needs. The level of academic writing material is not suitable for the students and the materials are too easy for certain students while other students are too difficult. These phenomena are because students' expectations and needs are rarely identified to fulfill they are exact want to learn English. Teachers have limited time to prepare concrete materials and lesson plans fulfilling the needs of students. The syllabi have been designed without considering the learners' needs. Meanwhile, [5] suggests that the content of a syllabus in a language course should be based on the learners' needs. The second reason is many English learning models and strategies were adapted similarly to the first and original setting and situation of the first and second language learners in which English is considered as the native language learners. This limited efforts on adapting and modifying the original concepts of English language strategies into local uses and settings had influenced the unsuccessful output of English teaching.

Moreover, lecturers who design language and literacy syllabi seldom have the resources to systematically collect and analyze relevant data that would enable them to identify the actual language and literacy task that learners will encounter in the target task and the cultural issues that may need to be addressed to assist students' transition into the workplace, as [6] states different types of students have different language needs and what they are taught should be restricted to what the need. Furthermore, [7] states that learning based on the learners' needs would improve the learners' motivation and thereby make learning better and faster.

Some previous studies conducted studies to examine students' needs and interests in learning writing courses [8–11]. In the study by [10], for example, the students' needs were the ability to develop and organize ideas, to use appropriate language use. But, they could not develop and organize ideas by a mapping concept, have difficulties in writing paragraphs and the internet was preferred dominantly as the source to be included in the instruction, the source of corrective feedback as the learners' needs.

As a result, this paper intended to analyze students learning needs to develop academic writing material in the English department at tertiary education. More precisely, this study aimed to find the answer to the following research question: What are the learning needs of the fifth semester of English department students in learning academic writing skills?

2 Methods

This study aimed at finding the learning needs for academic writing from students' and lecturers' perspectives. The descriptive qualitative study involved 20 students of fifth-semester students at the English study program, Muhammadiyah University of Mataram. This study uses a close-ended checklist questionnaire and interview of lecturers for collecting data.

The questionnaire uses to investigate the students learning needs (i.e. what the learner needs to do to learn). The students' learning needs consist of goals, inputs, procedures, teacher role, student role, and setting. The purpose of delivering a questionnaire is to know what the students need to do to learn. The questionnaire consists of a close-ended checklist statement of students learning needs such as goals, input, procedure, teacher roles, student roles, and setting which consist of 6 statements of students' need to do to learn. The questionnaire is translated into the Indonesian language to ensure that the subjects clearly understand each item. The writing class teacher will help the students to respond to the questionnaire.

The data from the questionnaire were analyzed by descriptive statistics while the data from interviews were transcribed and subsequently categorized and interpreted in a condensed body of information. The data analysis was guided by the research questions. The data were presented in the table, then they were interpreted and concluded. The respondents' answers on the close-ended checklist questionnaire were classified and converted into a percentage.

3 Results and Discussion

The result and discussion will be elaborated based on the result of questionnaires and interviews. The data elaborates students' perspectives of learning needs i.e. goal, inputs, procedures, teacher role, student role, and setting in the academic writing course.

The Students' Learning Needs in Writing Class

This section discussed the students learning needs in writing class. The analysis of the response of learning needs was divided into six main parts: goal, inputs, procedures, teacher role, student role, and setting. The students' views of those needs are displayed below.

1) Goals

Goals deals with the pedagogical purpose of the task in writing. The goals were gathered to deal with the students' goal of learning model in writing skills. The following Fig. 1 presents the students' responses to goals.

Figure 1 showed that most students needed a learning model which learning activities related to grammar (100%), followed by a discourse which concerns one unit of meaning in writing that can be seen from a text cohesion and coherence (76.5%) and genre (94.1%) which deals with the generic structure, social purpose, lexicogrammatically features and mechanics of text. They also need a graphic feature to learn punctuation, pronunciation, text layout, and other (88.2%). This shares a similar result with interviews, in which the lecturers point out that they implement the various model in teaching writing. The lecturers learning model in writing class is displayed in the excerpts as follows:

The approach I implement in writing class is genre-based. Attention should be paid to the purpose and the discourse of the text writing, so that, coherence and cohesiveness can be made by the students. I use mapping and scaffolding techniques to make the text coherence. When coherence and cohesiveness had

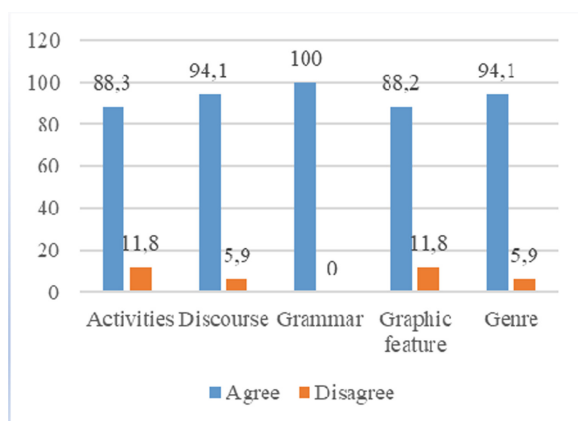


Fig. 1. The result of need analysis on the goal of instruction

been made, discourse and grammar would, of course, be good, too. (Interview of Need Analysis, Lecturer 2).

The respondents reported that almost all of them use a similar model for teaching writing skills. Some respondents (L1, L2) utilize product-based, process-based, and genre-based approaches to achieve students' good writing. The process-based approach emphasizes the process of writing, which starts from the pre-writing, drafting, revising, and publishing stages. The finding was in line with other studies on the goal of instruction in academic writing in which recognizing essays and scientific work, making outlines, and paraphrasing are the skills that are considered most important in academic writing [12].

2) *Inputs*

The next input refers to the stimulus provided by the teacher for the learning to occur. The learning input was viewed from writing materials, The students' responses related to the learning materials are illustrated in Fig. 2.

As it can be seen from Fig. 2, most of the students preferred to have concept mapping of the writing process and the communicative writing aspect (76.5%), writing topics which supported with a picture as needed (76.5%) for the writing material, and writing topic which supported with varied references also preferred by more than half of students (64.7%). This finding implies that students were possibly aware of the writing material aspects so that they need to learn them from the exercises and many sourcebooks. This result is in agreement with [9] which showed that students are interested in material that use the picture as media and picture cued-task as a strategy for writing tasks. Students also preferred the handout, internet, newspaper and magazine, and podcast to be included as instructional material for a paragraph writing course [10, 13, 14]. Furthermore, it shares a similar result with the interviews that lecturers agreed to use the picture, reading text, and concept mapping for students' academic writing material. The lecturers' comments regarding input are shown as follows.

The step that I usually use is reading the text first, so I will ask them to read short stories. Then, I use the pictures as the media, I ask them to analyze

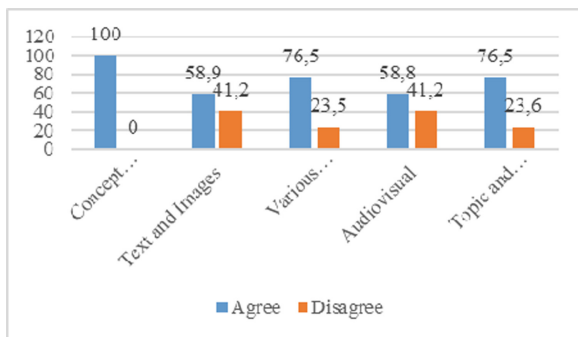


Fig. 2. The result of need analysis of writing material

it carefully. After that, I ask them to write sentences, and then paragraphs. (Interview of Need Analysis, Lecturer 1)

The excerpts above show that all respondents agreed to use the picture, reading text, concept mapping, and teaching material related to writing topics, sentences, paragraphs, and essays for students' academic writing material. One participant (L1) commented that he asked the students to read short stories and analyze text. After that, students practice sentence and paragraph writing. The finding was in the same context as those previous studies conducted by [9, 10] claimed that students are interested in material that use the picture as media and picture cued-task as a strategy for writing tasks.

3) Procedure

Procedure refers to what learners do with the input that forms the point of departure for learning tasks in writing skills. The students' response related to the procedure is illustrated in Fig. 3.

Based on Fig. 3, most students preferred learning writing which focuses on the aims of writing text (100%). They also preferred learning writing that focuses on the process of text composition (94.1%), learning writing which focuses on the topics to be written (94.1%), and learning writing that focuses on the structure of language in the text (94.2%). This study supports evidence from interviews that show lecturers writing activities to improve students writing skills, as can be seen from the excerpt below.

In my opinion, we should maximize the activity of writing. The practice of writing by composing various types of texts that enrich students' vocabulary and practicing their knowledge of grammar. (Interview of Need Analysis, Lecturer 1)

It can be noted from the excerpts above that some lecturers provided students with writing practice that focused on composing various text types that could

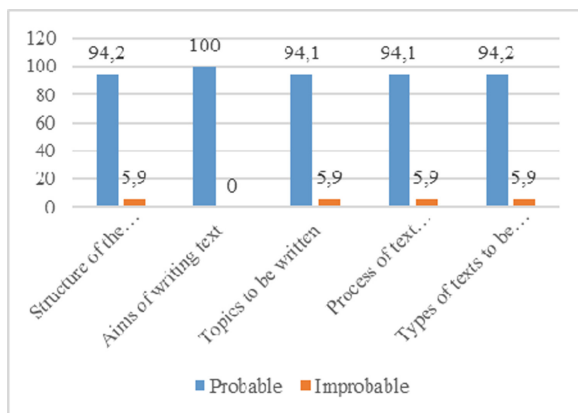


Fig. 3. The result of need analysis on writing activities

improve students' vocabulary and knowledge of grammar. This is relevant to the study conducted by [15], who found that most students preferred writing activities of composing certain text types to be discussed in writing class. It was not surprising because the students would deal with the academic situation such as writing essays, papers, thesis, etc.

4) *Teachers' Roles*

Considering the teacher's roles are important to support the teaching and learning process, various information from the students on the teacher roles is gathered through question number 11. The students' response related to teachers' roles is shown in Fig. 4.

Figure 4 showed that the highest percentage of the response from students was a teacher as a controller during learning activities (100%), followed by feedback giver in the writing activity of the text to be written (100%), the assessor in teaching writing skills (100%), and facilitator to maximize the potential of the learner (100%). Meanwhile, some students agreed that the role of the teacher as an information provider (94.1%) and organizer in teaching writing skills (88.2%). That result could be expected to come out because, somehow, the teachers do have certain roles in the classroom. These roles can make it students feel easy to write any kind of text relating to the topics provided. Such rules of teachers are in line with [16], who argues that the role of a teacher in this era of communicative language teaching is more like facilitating and controlling the process of learning. This finding is consistent with [17–21], who claimed that to succeed the language teaching, the teacher should implement those roles. This shares a similar result with interviews which point out that the writing lecturers play important roles in writing classes. The roles include controller, facilitators, organizer, information provider, and assessor. The description of teachers' roles is elaborated as follows.

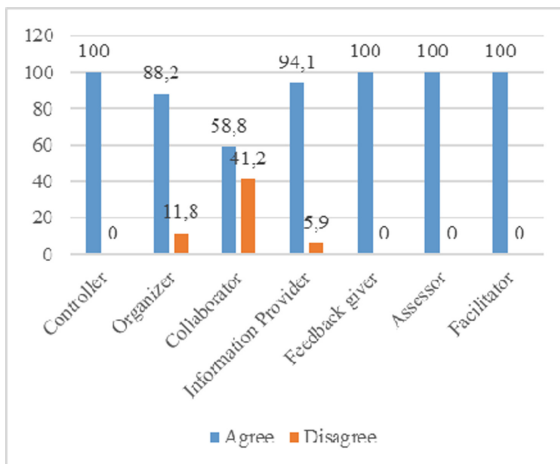


Fig. 4. The result of need analysis on teachers' roles

First, I am acted as an organizer, a lecturer who manages everything that gives guidance and direction. Then, the lecturer could also be a partner when students do the writing practice, the lecturer could give assistance, feedback, or provide information to finish their writing task. Then, another important role is a lecturer as assessor, assessing students' writing products. Through the assessment, the instructor provides feedback on the correction of the mistakes made by the students, and the feedback would enhance the writing skills of the students. (Interview of Need Analysis, Lecturer 2)

From the excerpts above, all lecturers interviewed shared their experiences about their roles during the teaching and learning academic writing course. Most lecturers stated that the roles of the lecturer as controllers, facilitators, organizers, information providers, and assessors. It supports [17, 22] idea that the success of classroom learning is very much dependent on how students relate to each other, what the classroom environment is, how effectively students cooperate and communicate with each other, and of course, what roles the teacher and learners play.

5) *Students' Roles*

Turning now to the needs analysis evidence on students' roles, the writing classroom should also consider the students' role to achieve the success of teaching and learning. The students' response related to students' roles is shown in Fig. 5.

As shown in Fig. 5, more than half of the students perceived that they agreed with students' role as reviser drafts of writing text (94.1%). Meanwhile, most of them also agreed on that students' role as the drafter (94.1%). About the students' roles as a presenter in the performance of the written manuscript, some of them preferred (88.2%) for their writing and corrector of the manuscript (88.2%). However, few students' disagreed with the students' role as the planner of the manuscript (76.5%). These results are consistent with data obtained in interviews, which showed that all

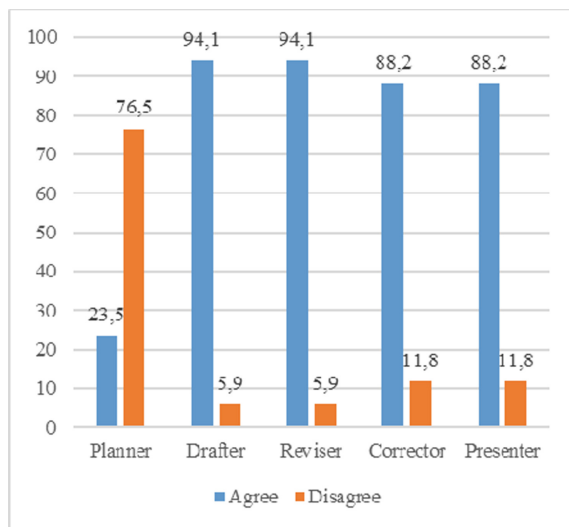


Fig. 5. The result of need analysis on students' roles

teachers shared their understanding of dealing with learner roles to the need analysis. They all argued that the students' role comprises a corrector, and presenter in the academic writing class. The elaboration of students' roles is elaborated as follows.

Students' roles should be as a corrector for their classmates. Initially, they write individually, then correct each other's works and discuss their writing products in front of the class. (Interview of Need Analysis, Lecturer 1)

It could be inferred from the above excerpts that the lecturers emphasized that the roles of students were corrector, reviser, drafter, and presenter. L1 remarked that students' roles should be as a corrector for other students in writing classes and discussed their writing product in front of the class.. Students improved their writing skills by presenting their final writing in front of the class. It is in line with [23, 24] that the roles of students are the doer who actively participates in the learning and responsible for their success of learning a new language.

6) *Setting*

The next section of the need analysis was concerned with the setting. Setting refers to the classroom arrangement specified or implied in the tasks. This aspect is viewed in question number 13 of the need analysis questionnaire.

It was apparent from Fig. 6 that most of the respondents agreed the class situation ought to learn in small group learning (100%) as none of the respondents rated it as disagree, followed by individual learning (82.3%) and finally pair learning (65.2%). However, learning in a large group is less preferred by the students (52.9%). This data indicated that they could collaboratively solve the problem they face by learning together with their friends. In conclusion, the classroom setting of the TBLL model in teaching writing skills is designed in (1) group work, (2) pair work, and (3)

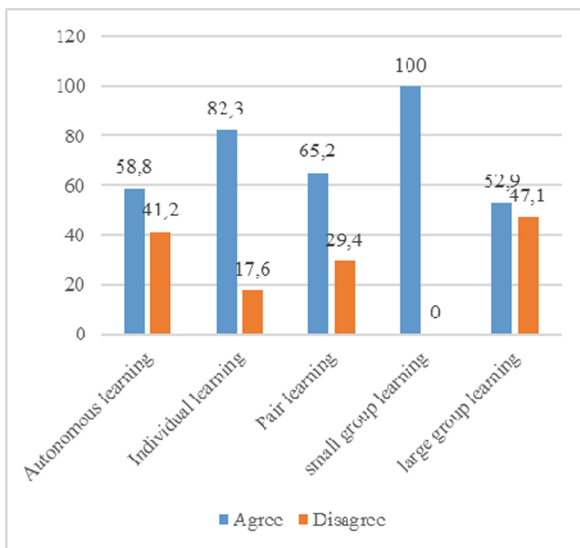


Fig. 6. The result of need analysis on the class setting.

individual learning. This finding is consistent with that of [8, 9, 13], who found that by studying in groups, students can collaboratively solve the problem they face. These results are in agreement with those obtained from interviews of four academic writing lecturers who shared various answers dealing with the classroom situation. It can be observed from the excerpt below.

The class situation that I want, of course, is the one that is not boring, students write text individually, work in small groups, and then larger groups. (Interview of Need Analysis, Lecturer 1)

From the interviewee comments above, it can be stated that participants expected students' works in pair work, group work, and individual work. This result is in agreement with [8] finding that group work is the most interesting classroom participation, followed by pair work and individual work. They might do tasks better and finish faster when they work alone, and high achiever students can help their friend do their tasks.

In summary, this result of need analysis implies that writing class should include writing learning models such as concept mapping of the writing process and the communicative writing aspect, and writing topics which supported with the picture, learning writing which focuses on the aims of writing text, writing lecturers were expected to be organizer, controller and information provider for learning sources, students' role as a planner of writing text and the author of the draft, and to learn writing subject in a small group.

4 Conclusion

Need analysis is an important stage in developing English as a foreign language teaching material that is appropriate with the learners' characteristics and learners needs. The result of the needs analysis questionnaires and interview shows that students and lecturers have a positive attitude toward the learning needs of students. Regarding the learning needs, most students were preferred material that is in line with the schematic structure of text type, discourse, grammar, and graphic features. Concerning the input needs, they need materials that could help them write articles, essays and help them to write a thesis. Most students preferred the material that learning writing focus on the structure of the language in the text, focus on the aims of writing text, focus on the topic to be written, focus on the process of text composition, and learning which focus on types of text to be written. Teacher rated positively as controller, collaborator of the task, organizer of learning activities, provider of learning sources, feedback giver, and assessor for the performance of the learner and facilitator to maximize the learner. In addition, asked about students' roles, most of the students have positive responses that students as the planner of writing text, writer of the draft, revised draft, editor of manuscript, and presenter of text manuscript. Students rated positively on the classroom situation, they expected learning by not dependent on others, learning in pairs, learning in groups and they did not prefer learning in a large group.

Based on the conclusion, it is highly recommended that there will be a model of teaching material of academic writing which is appropriate with the students' learning needs, characteristics, curriculum, and purposes of English department students of Muhammadiyah University of Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara Indonesia.

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