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NEEDS ANALYSIS: THE POTENTIAL ROLE IN EAP PRE-SESSIONAL COURSE DESIGN

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyse the potential role of needs analysis in the process of English for Academic Purposes pre-sessional course design for English-medium university student candidates in Indonesia. Based on relevant literature about the nature of needs analysis related to learners' descriptions and their context, the contribution of needs analysis on course design/implementation is discussed. The paper considers learning-centred approaches as an appropriate way to define learners' needs in the process of negotiating the meaning, deciding what will be achieved, and how the learners learn, especially for English-medium university student candidates in Indonesia. By having these steps, the EAP course could be developed in accordance with learning objectives of every group of learners. Finally, a plan of conducting a needs analysis through questionnaires implemented for the learners before designing the programme is described. The result of the needs analysis conducted could benefit some institutions, instructors, and the learners in designing their EAP courses.

Keywords

English for Academic Purposes, English for Medium of Instruction, Learning-Centered Approach, Needs Analysis

1. Introduction

Nowadays, English has become very familiar amongst learners in Indonesia, no matter how English is used in daily life communication – as a foreign language. There are some factors, which make English more popular, such as from 2015, Indonesia has become a member of ASEAN Economic Community where most people are encouraged to be able to communicate in English and compete with some ASEAN countries related to some aspects such as job field, health, and education. This economic development has broadly affected people's outlook regarding the importance of English language education, international programmes, or study abroad where English is used as a medium of instruction. The demand for learning English in higher education has given rise to English for Academic Purposes programmes to address the educational demands in Indonesia. Not only the learners, but also the instructors of English language are required to improve their knowledge and skills related to English in Use. Thus, some EAP programmes are also prepared to give short courses and professional certification for English language instructors.

Regarding these issues and problems and based on related literature, conducting a needs analysis remains central to the design of appropriate EAP courses. A needs analysis is the foundation to create learning objectives, choose learning activities, and create learning materials so that the speciality of EAP courses can be determined. EAP courses should be able to match different learning objectives, thus one programme could not be directly implemented generally to all learner groups without any adaptations. All of the differences can be gathered by conducting an appropriate needs analysis.

2. Method

This research is based on a qualitative inquiry and interpretative paradigm or constructivist worldview (McKay, 2006). Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand individuals' views on the world (Bell, 2010). As this research explores and finds out the potential role of needs analysis in the process of English for Academic Purposes pre-sessional course design for English-medium university student candidates in Indonesia, it is therefore a practitioner research, which is known as natural setting (Cohen, 2000; Robson, 1993; Wallen and Fraenkel, 2001). Therefore, the social context in which the research event appears is important (Neuman, 1994).

This qualitative research is an exploratory activity (Wellington, 2000, p.133) and it is shaped by an interpretation process (Denscombe, 1998; Denzin and Norman, 2000). As Creswell (2014) states, qualitative research is 'the approach for exploring and understanding the meaning

individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem' (p.4). Allwright (2005) defines Exploratory Practice (EP) as an indefinitely sustainable way of language teaching and learning, to develop understandings of life in language.

In this research, the EAP focus is on course development for university student candidates who aim to pursue an undergraduate programme in English language education, English literature, International programmes, or even planning to study abroad, – where English is used as a medium of instruction. In this context, the learners might need to develop their study skills related to the use of English for the learning process. For instance, learning how English is used is very important for student candidates since in Indonesia, English is used as a foreign language where English tends not to be frequently used in their communication. However, in this specific learning environment, the learners should be able to undertake listening and note taking while having lectures/seminar/conferences and also write academic assignments using an appropriate register of language and competent referencing skills. The student candidates better acquire this qualification before they pursue their university programmes so that the learning process can be effectively followed. Moreover, these skills might not be taught in their Senior High School level due to lack of resources such as the teachers, books and time which may not sufficiently promote the skills needed in undergraduate level.

Besides those qualifications, student candidates are also required to be familiar with the use of language structure and vocabulary necessary in their study programmes. Recognising these EAP demands, various study situations or activities with study skills needed by student candidates based on learning environment should be explored to find the real needs of the student candidates before designing an appropriate EAP course. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) differentiate learner-centred with learning-centred, where learner-centred focuses on the learner as learning determiner while learning-centred focuses on the process of negotiation. Therefore, the needs also consist of target needs as what the learners need to do in the target situation, and learning needs as what the learners need to do in order to learn.

Although needs analysis is considered as important in the process of designing EAP course, many institutions offer ready-made EAP programmes for their learners. This might happen because the institutions lack resources to conduct a needs analysis for the target learners and also the learners might prefer be offered some EAP published materials as their options, without thinking hard about what they would learn and how they prefer to learn. Thus, after the programmes are implemented, the target learning might not match the real needs of the learners and the result may satisfy neither the institutions nor the learners.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 A Description of Learners and Their Context

Learner group may consist of those who have finished their Senior High School level from some parts of Indonesia who are going to continue their study to a university where English is used as a medium of instruction. In Indonesia, there are some well-known universities, which offer international classes for some study programmes as well as English literature, or English language education study programmes where English is used as a medium of instruction, or the learners intend to continue their study abroad. These are often called pre-sessional EAP courses which prepare learners to pursue their future academic study (de Chazal, 2014), are built around developing academic and language skills and are related to wider cultural aspects and raising cultural awareness. The learners might propose to study in different universities, different study programmes, and even a different country. Therefore, cultural development involves the institutional culture of the universities or other educational establishments. The universities could also be located in different cities or countries, thus the approach to cultural development may be related to academic culture, and ‘softer’ cultural skills to interact with people from different cultures. Since the learners come from different regions of Indonesia, and the culture of the learners depends on their origins, this might become one aspect of cultural development.

Even though there are some cultural aspects, which need to be considered, the specific purpose of the learners to follow English for Academic Purposes programme could unite the learners. In this context, the specific purpose for learning English is to increase learners’ competencies in English for Academic Purposes related to academic reading, academic writing, listening to lectures & note-taking, academic vocabulary, grammar, and speaking & pronunciation.

Besides the differences related to cultural development, some relevant factors of the learners might also be different. The learners’ language ability would be in a range of real beginner or beginner which is proved by their ITP TOEFL test of B1 and A2 level or less. In this case, learners who need help to gain appropriate skills and knowledge about English before continuing their study. On the other hand, for learners who has already achieved high English competence, this EAP course could become a lower priority programme to join, but would undoubtedly be highly beneficial.

Another way to check learners’ basic competence is by delivering a placement test to acquire information about the level of their English language. Learners’ language ability may vary since in Indonesia English is used as a foreign language – where every society uses English to a

differing extent, depending on the level of familiarity of English. For example, for learners who come from Java Island, English may be more popular since the percentage of tourists who use English is substantial. Conversely, for learners who come from East and West parts of Indonesia, such as Papua and Borneo, the use of English is not really popular since people still do not realise the need for English in their daily life, except for national examinations. I could conclude this information since I have taught English in Java, Moluccas and Borneo islands, thus the different demand of learning English create specific challenges in teaching English.

Since the learners finished their Senior High School level, their age might be around 18 years old and more. They could be learners who directly continue their study to the university, or others may have been working for some time and then wish to continue their study. Thus, the age in this programme could be various as long as they finish their senior high school level and plan to continue their study to undergraduate programmes where English is used as medium of instruction. Student subject knowledge could also be varied as well, related to the learners' interests of what and how they learn. Their ages may also affect learners' preferred learning styles. Generally speaking, for some learners who have finished their senior high school programme for more than five years, printed learning resources may be more popular. For learners who have just graduated, wider use of technology may be preferred. However, the age differences might not be too great since mostly learners in Indonesia would directly continue their study to undergraduate programmes right after they finish their Senior High School level.

Furthermore, in this context, learning an EAP course does not only happen in the classroom where the learners meet their community who have the same purpose and could implement English with mutual support. In fact, the learners could increase their commitments outside of the course to autonomously apply what they have learned in the programme, as well as doing all assignments whole-heartedly so that they could reach their target learning – to be able to become university students and acquire considerable knowledge regarding their undergraduate programmes where English is used as a medium of instruction.

3.2 The Nature of Needs Analysis

It has already been established that the needs analysis has the potential role as the starting point for devising syllabuses, courses, materials and the kind of teaching and learning, which take place (Jordan, 1997, p. 22). Therefore, in this EAP course design context, the importance of needs analysis is stated as the foundation to design appropriate teaching and learning programme for university student candidates. According to Brown (2005) needs analysis is 'the systematic collection and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate

defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation' (p. 36). Thus, to design an EAP course for learners in Indonesia, needs analysis may become the first step to establish what the real needs are related to the content of studying English, what materials are needed to reach learning objectives, and how teaching and learning will be organised.

By doing needs analysis, specific and systematic information and fact findings about learners and learning demands would match curriculum, syllabus, materials and other resources needed by a group of learners. These data could come from a variety of sources and can be collected by various methods by putting some fundamental questions to define the appropriate type of analysis and the information needed (Richterich 1983). Important questions need to be asked to analyse the gap between students' present and target abilities. It is also important to consider the strategies, enabling features and constraints of the learning situation. The options of how to conduct the needs analysis should be considered as appropriate to the particular needs analysis (e.g. interview, observation, questionnaire or mixed methods).

There are some approaches, which could be applied in analysing learners' needs under the umbrella of needs analysis. The first approach is Target-Situation Analysis (TSA) by Munby (1978) where at the end of language course, the learner may need to improve their English to pass future assignments and to acquire competence in having discussion, presentation and seminar, as their target-level performance. The focus of TSA is Communication Needs Processor (CNP) where 'the variable that affects communication needs by organizing them as parameters in a dynamic relationship to each other'. Finally, the information about learners' communicative competence specification is acquired as the source to draw up syllabus. However, this approach seemed to be complex, inflexible and time-consuming and the data is more about the learner not from the learners. Thus, a second approach might complete any shortcomings of the first. It is Present-Situation Analysis (PSA) by Richterich and Chancerel (1987) to ascertain learners' state of language development at the beginning of the language course. Through this approach, the information about level of ability, resources, and view on language teaching/learning is acquired as the learners are at the centre of the system including surroundings, society, and culture.

Based on the context of EAP course design in this research, it could be concluded that the primary approach used in this research is the combination of positive roles of TSA and PSA through learning-centred approach by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) who state that learning as a process of negotiation between individuals and society. By doing this approach, target needs consisting of necessities & lacks (objective) and wants (subjective) could be acquired. The

necessities of the learners in this context might be to function effectively in lectures, seminars, and discussions and to understand the discourse components and linguistic features—such as functions, structures, vocabulary which are, used in their study programmes. Since the learners could plan to join English department programmes, then they might focus on linguistic features in the department. Meanwhile, for learners who would join international classes of other study programmes, the target linguistics features specific to their discipline family may be chosen. Lacks are the gap between the target proficiency and what the learners know already; thus, this could be known by acquiring information about learners' basic English competence, then relate them to the target competence. And 'wants' may be affected by learners' motivation in the learning process. When the learners realise their real willingness to learn, then their motivation is high. Therefore, in this context, the learners should have planned to continue their study in intended study programmes, so that they could define their wants and build up their motivation to learn in the pre-sessional EAP course. However, the learner's want might be very subjective and personal, which may mean that the 'want' may not be in accordance with the real needs in their future study. Therefore, the EAP course designers should consider and find the solution so as not to destroy the learner's 'want' but also keep the target specifications on track. In this case, the solution could be through the technique and methods of teaching and learning implemented to deliver the materials and topic of learning, which follow the target specifications.

After applying a learning-centered approach, the next approach is strategy analysis (Allwright, 1982), where the focus is on the methodology used in the course in both method of teaching and method of learning. This approach really helps the design on EAP course in this context to find preferred learning style and strategies of the learners. Strategy analysis relates to preferences in group size, correction procedures, and methods of assessment, which become important to achieve effectiveness in the EAP course. In analysing strategy, it is important for EAP course developers to raise awareness on cultural differences, academic cultural conventions, differences in learning strategies and methods of teaching. In this context, the learners might come from different regions with different cultural background; their strategy of learning and accepting teaching methods would be different as well. Some of them may not be accustomed to learn in groups, while some others may not be able to learn independently. This could affect the effectiveness of the EAP programme; consequently, the importance of learner training and the development of learner autonomy should be addressed in order to prevent learners' frustrations (Garnett, 2008).

3.3 The Contribute of Needs Analysis to the Course Design and Implementation of the Learners

In this situation, since the learners might not attend the same international study programmes, their needs on what and how they would prefer to learn require further exploration. Learners who are planning to continue their study programme in English departments may be classified into the same group, and still, the learner needs and learning needs should be gained in order to design an appropriate EAP course for them. Information which could be usefully collected are their 'target situation' as university students, their existing knowledge and abilities, their educational background as Senior High School level, their preferred learning styles, their desires and the resources which fit their needs.

This type of information related to needs analysis on EAP course design could be completed by some information about learners' profile which consists of level, maturity and their background which is very important to define learning groups. Then, the objectives are developed for the learners as well as the means, such as management, staff, resources and materials, which are developed and affected by variables and constraints. Afterwards, syllabus design with appropriate type including the content and components of language and skills and the timetable, is developed. Based on the needs analysis, the methodology is created to organise the learning and teaching process which consists of individual and groups activities, and requires development of teaching materials. Finally, the assessment, evaluation and feedback format are developed to complete the steps of course design and implementation based on needs analysis (Jordan, 1997, p. 57).

Relating to devising syllabuses and content, there are some factors which affect the development, they are needs, aims, means which consists of the teachers, materials, equipment, facilities, time, and finance, and variables or constraints which consist of limitations of the 'means' which become 'constraints'. The types of syllabus which is appropriate to this EAP course design could be content or product syllabus which focusing on the end result of learners' grammatical, structural, language form, national-functional, situational, topic and content-based. The skills of this EAP course may consist of language skills and sub-skills or micro-skills, while the method or process could focus on the means to an end, including process, procedural or task-based, learning-centred or negotiated (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Hutchinson & Waters (1987) state that good materials contain interesting texts, enjoyable activities that engage the learners' thinking capacities, opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge and skills, content which both the learner and teacher can cope with. The

principles of learning are learning is development, learning is a thinking process (cognitive), learning is an active process, learning involves making decisions, learning a language is not just a matter of linguistic knowledge, learning achieves communicative competences, learning is an emotional experience (affective), learning is not systematic, and learning needs should be considered at every stage of the learning process. Through this process, the principles of teaching use pair or group work to minimise the stress of speaking in front of the whole class, Structuring tasks to enable learners to show what they know, giving learners time to think and work out answers, putting more emphasis on the process of getting the answer rather than the product of the right answer, making interest, fun, and variety primary considerations in the design of tasks and activities. Then, motivation is important related to cognitive and affective sides as the desire to think about learning.

3.4 Further Discussion

To achieve the above steps of designing and implementing an EAP course for the learners, this research will explore Jordan's (1997, p. 23) important steps in conducting needs analysis to match the exploration of fundamental questions. In this context, learners may be taking the course through the same approach with how they learn, which relates to their background, experiences, concept of teaching and learning, methodological and materials preferences, and preferred learning styles and strategies, which are related to age, sex, ethnics, first language, subject knowledge, interests, sociocultural background, attitudes to subject or discipline, and what they know related to their first and second language abilities, proficiency in English, writing experiences and genre familiarity.

The purpose of the analysis is to design an appropriate pre-sessional EAP course and the learner population would be university student candidates who need help to improve their English ability in pursuing their study programmes. As the approach has been decided in the previous section, then the limitation could be on the time and place to implement the course and also the variety of learners from other geographical regions of Indonesia. As this course would be held in one of the future universities, then learners who come from other parts or island would need more effort to join the programme. Except if this EAP course becomes one support session for learners, who need to improve their English competence before joining the university programme, and the learners who are from rural areas of Indonesia are supported by the university to improve have pre-sessional course in order to enrich their competence and merge with new culture in the university.

Thus, to conduct a needs analysis on designing a pre-sessional EAP course for university student candidates, the methods of collecting data could include research tools through a short attractive flyer consisting of information about what EAP is, who might join EAP, what EAP offers, how EAP could be implemented and other useful information about EAP as the observation. Other tools are a questionnaire related to learners' interests in joining EAP as a pre-sessional course for them to pursue university level, and investigate their specific needs during the EAP course. This way of deliberating flyers and questionnaires could directly inform many Senior High School students who are going to finish their study and planning to continue to higher education level. This way may be useful and more time efficient than doing interviews; the information about learners' needs could be gathered. This way could be applicable for general EAP, but for specific EAP, deeper information about learners' needs might need to be explored more. In specific EAP, the target learners might also consist of a small specific group, while in my case, the EAP design is more general and needs to encompass the needs and interests of many target learners.

Since the data is gathered from third graders of Senior High School, the EAP programme designer could have networking with some school and universities where the learners are going to study. The questionnaire could be deliberate for students, while with the university, interviews could become one method of collecting data as well as finding some support for implementing this EAP course. After the data has been collected, the instructors and programme designers would analyse and interpret results to determine objectives of study then implement the decisions in the form of syllabus, content, materials and methods. The most important process after the design is evaluation of procedures and results.

4. Conclusion

Having analysed the potential role of needs analysis in the process of EAP course design for university student candidates based on my experience in teaching and as a learner, an EAP course could be developed in accordance with learning objectives of every group of learners. The success of an EAP course is not achieved by offering some fixed products to be chosen by the learners, but through how the power of needs analysis could contribute to the whole process of course design and implementation. In this context, a pre-sessional EAP course is designed in order to help learners prepare themselves for pursuing university level, where English is used as a medium of instruction.

Learner description and context affect how needs analysis is implemented in designing and applying in EAP course. With the growing need for EAP courses in Indonesia, it is hoped that this paper will provide some preliminary thoughts on possible directions for tackling the needs analysis. Further research on the relative merits and impact of different approaches is required and will provide additional data and assist future decision-making

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