ENGLISH LEARNING NEEDS OF NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: This study was a part of a program development and aimed at finding out the English learning needs of non-English major students of Yogyakarta State University. The study was a triangulated survey technique employing questionnaires as the main instrument to collect the data and was completed with interview, observation, and document study. The subject of the study included students, English teachers, and managers at all levels, sampled randomly. Data from the questionnaires were analyzed descriptively and were validated with the data from the other techniques.The findings show that students find English skill very important for their life and their study, and they need to learn it in order to achieve various goals, such as to communicate with foreigners, to read books and articles of their majors, to get high score of TOEFL, to be able to use internet better, and even to be able to sing English songs in good pronunciation. Despite their awareness of the importance of English and their still low level of English ability, most students were reluctant to learn English autonomously.

Key words: *English learning needs, non-English majors, higher education*

1 INTRODUCTION

English competence is very crucial in higher education context and it is one of quality indicators of a good university in Indonesia.To facilitate the students to acquire this competence, universities offer English as a compulsary subject in their curriculum, and it is offered in various numbers of credit units. Some offer it as a two-credit unit course, but some others offer it for more credits from 3 up to 24 credit hours. Different views related to English teaching in higher education is not only found among univerities, but also among study programs within the same university, such as the case of English as a general course program in Yogyakarta State University.

Yogyakarta State University (UNY) is trying hard to improve its quality to reach the status as a world class university. To reach this, an appropriate English program to prepare all its students to master English as an international language is a must. Good programs can only be developed following the steps of program development. Needs assessment is the first step

in designing a program and it aims at finding students' needs in order to determine goals and contents of the program (Richards, 2001, Nation & Macalister, 2010). Hutchinson & Waters classified needs into target needs (necessities, lacks, wants) and learning needs. Nation & Macalister (2010) propose the terms present knowledge to refer to *lack*, *required knowledge* to refer to *necessities*, both of which are included in the *objective needs*, and *subjective needs* to refer to *wants*. Learning needs refers to what students need to do in the learning process of English. Needs assessment is the process for identifying programmatic needs that must be addressed in designing a curriculum or an instructional program.

There are two approaches in assessing needs, the perceived needs and empirical needs approach. The perceived needs approach is a way of finding learning needs by referring to theories or experts while the empirical needs approach is done through collecting information from the program users or related stake holders (Richards, 2001). Ideally these two approaches go hand in hand to picture clearly and accurately

what students in a certain context really need in their study. That is why needs assessment starts from reviewing literature before conducting a survey. The result of the needs assessment then can be used as the bases in determining the goals and contents of the program.

English used in higher education is commonly called English for academic purposes or EAP (Hyland, 2006). EAP is needed by all higher education students in their academic life since English has become the language of science and technology and academic publication. More and more books, references, journal articles are written in English, and this requires students to master English in order to read them (McKay, 2012: 34). EAP at its first development was more focused on academic discourses, which are used in certain academic fields such as law, medicine, economics, engineering, etc. In the later development EAP includes not only academic discourses but also all activities students do in their learning, such as listening to lectures, participating in discussions and tutorials, reading textbooks or articles, writing essays, doing exams problems, and even more specific learning activities such as asking questions, making notes and summaries. Related to this development, Hyland (2006) classifies EAP into two, EGAP (English for General Academic Purposes) and ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes).

EAP is what students of higher education need, and this has been studied by many experts such as Richards, Nations, Chaudron et al. According to Nation (2013: 56), students learning English for academic purposes need English language skills in order to develop their study skills. Students need listening skill (note taking), speaking (presenting a prepared talk, taking part in discussion, following discussion, and discussing academic reading), reading (note taking, reading academic texts, using library sources, and using internet sources), writing (coping with written assignments, understanding and applying the classic research articles format, understanding referencing conventions, avoiding plagiarism, developing skills in computer use such as word processing, spreadsheets, library

and journal searches, referencing programs, and writing emails), language learning (coping with technical vocabulary and increasing vocabulary size), and the last one is skills related to university requirements (understanding attendance, work, and assessment requirements) (Nation, 2013: 56). Based on these experts, there is so much to master in EAP since it requires a high level of English proficiency. Nation (2013) further states that in order to be able to use English for academic purposes, students need to master at least 5000 word families, or 8000 word families is better, plus academic words.

Skills proposed by Nation (2013), afore mentioned are those needed by students learning in English speaking countries, such as the US, UK, Australia, or New Zealand. Do students in Indonesia need the same skills? If so, it requires a really serious big English program, and therefore, it can hardly be achieved with only a two-credit course such as that of English as a general course program in UNY. Among those skills, what are the most needed by Indonesian students to facilitate their learning? To answer this question, this study was conducted.

2　RESEARCH METHOD

This study was a triangulated survey. According to Long (2006), it is a survey technique employing questionnaires as the main instrument to collect the data, which then, were triangulated with observation, interview, and document study to make them more valid and reliable. Questionnaires used to collect the data were developed based on Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Nunan (2004), and Nation (2013). There were two kinds of questionnaires, one for the students and the other for the teachers. Student respondents were chosen by stratified random sampling technique. The number of complete returned questionnaires was 128 coming from 6 faculties. Students' responses were descriptively analyzed employing percentage and mean score, and then, validated with data from other resources.

3　FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the needs assessment is grouped into three, English necessity for the

students, students' lacks, and students' preference in learning English (wants).

3.1 English necessity for students

The first question asked was whether English was important for students. It was found that English was considered important by 99% respondents, whether it was for their life, study in university, or for their career later when they graduated. Related to the use of English for studying in the campus, English was mostly used for reading, especially learning materials from lecturers, reference books or articles in the internet as shown in the following table.

Table 1.The use of English in the teaching and learning process

English uses	%
To read learning materials	71
To read course books/references	70
To listen to lectures	55,5
To communicate with lecturers in English	54
To present in front of the class	48
To write ideas in English	48
To write articles in English	45
To write exams responses	41

Besides being used in the teaching and learning process in the classroom, English was also used when students were online. Reading was still the most dominant activity done when they were online, such as for browsing and reading articles.Writing follows when they were chatting and emailing.

Table 2.Online-use of English by students

Online use of English	%
To read articles on the internet	91
Chatting in English	78
Reading and writing emails	77
Online activities in general	59

Reading is apparently the most needed skill in Indonesian context, and it is strengthened by the study-program-teacher confessions, stating that they often gave students English learning materials, asked them to read textbooks,

references, articles in English, but they seldom used English in daily communication. Assignments and examination were mostly not written in English, but rather, in Bahasa Indonesia.

The next question asked was the goals students need to achieve from the English program they took.

Table 3. Students' goals in learning English

Goals	%
To be able to communicate with foreigners	99
To improve TOEFL-like score	97
To be able to read books on their major	96
To be able to read materials related to their major	96
To get good grade	96
To use internet better	94
To sing English songs in good pronunciation	94

Apparently, students had many goals to reach from the English program they took. Firstly, they needed to be able to communicate with foreigners. This is understandable since English is right now being used in all aspects of international communication. The next goal was to improve TOEFL-like scores, which is realistic, since YSU now impose a new regulation that in order to graduate from this university, students should reach TOEFL-like score of at least 425. The next goals were to be able to read books and other materials related to their major, and to get good grades for the course.

3.2 Students' Lacks

Students still found difficulties in all language skills. The most difficult one was writing (77%), followed by listening to lectures in English (63%), oral communication/ speaking (58%), and reading (54%). Students also found difficulties in all components of language. Grammar was the most difficult one (89%), followed by productive vocabulary (86%), receptive vocabulary (82%), and pronunciation (73%). These data were similar with that from the English teachers. They stated that in general students' English level was still very low. This

fact is also supported by students' TOEFL-like scores gained when they started studying in the university. From the test conducted in 2013, students' means score of TOEFL-like was 400, meaning that some part of them only reached less than 400. This score is not enough for the students to be able to use English independently. According to ETS (2005) to reach the threshold level so that students can use English independently, they need to reach TOEFL score of at least 460. In addition, observations to the teaching learning process of English also support the previously mentioned data.

In a teaching learning process of English, a group of students were given a worksheet containing a reading passage, tasks on vocabulary and reading comprehension. When asked to find meaning of some chosen words from the text, the students were busy opening their dictionaries. When asked why they should open their dictionaries while actually most of the words were only of high frequency words, they only laughed. When asked again how many words they could mention the meaning without opening the dictionary, they answered half of them or 50%.

To measure students' vocabulary size of that group of students, a simple vocabulary test was administered. It was the first 1000 words test developed by Nation (2000). It consisted of 40 items and the result is as follows.

Table 4. The result of Students' vocabulary test

N	Highest score	Lowest score	Means
39	35	21	28.2

The test result was so surprising for it means that students did not understand more than 25% of the words tested. The average vocabulary size of the group of students was only 705. This means that students will find difficulty in understanding even very simple reading passages.

Related to the reading skill, which is mostly needed by students, it was shown that they could find topics and main ideas of reading passages when the answers have been provided (in multiple choice or supplied format test items), but when they have to find the answers

by themselves, they were unable to do that, especially when they had to mention it in English. What they could do in the reading task was mentioning the title of the passage and finding information which was very clearly stated in the text. They still found difficulties in many tasks, such as finding references, differentiating between facts and opinions, finding inferences, guessing meaning of vocabulary in context, making summaries and paraphrasing. From this students' current knowledge, it needs such a long way to reach the goals of EAP.

3.3 Students' Learning Needs

Students' learning needs include anything students need to do in learning the language in the program, such as topics they want to discuss, input texts they want to get, learning techniques, learning activities, learning media, mode of tasks, and mode of assessment they prefer.

Related to the topics to discuss, students seem to have broad interest. All the topics offered got high percentage of agreement. It means that they were interested in various issues, such as social and humanity, global issues, environment and demography, education, religion, science and technology, and also law, justice, and civil welfare.

About input texts they want to read, articles taken from magazines and newspaper was the most preferred ones (88%), followed by articles taken from the internet in the second place (86%). Other than written texts, students also wanted oral texts about dialogues or interviews on campus life (83%). Kinds of input texts students least interested were journal articles (63%), and reference books (74%).

The learning methods they liked most was listening to lectures (98%), working in small groups (91%), doing project related to their major (87%), and group discussion (80%), while the least preferred was learning autonomously through modules (66%) and online independent learning (71%).

Table 5.Students' preference on learning methods

Learning method preference	%
I like to listen to lectures	98
I like to do tasks in small groups	91
I like to do a project related to my major	87
I like group discussion in English	80
I like independent practice online	71
I like independent learning through modules	66

From this data, apparently students have not developed autonomy in learning. They prefer traditional methods in learning, attending lectures and learning in the classroom, while this method of learning is very limited, either in time or space.

Learning activities students like most was speaking practice with friends (96%), doing language tasks in small groups (89%), and doing tasks in pairs (84%). Students seem not so interested in individual or independent learning.

Table 6. Students' preference on learning activities

Learning activities preference	%
I like speaking practice with friends	96
I like to do tasks in small groups	89
I like to do tasks in pairs	83
I like to read and understand text independently	80
I like to do independent vocabulary practice	74
I like independent pronunciation practice	67
I like independent grammar practice	63

This data support the previous thesis that students have not developed autonomy in learning. They still depend much on their teachers and friends.

Learning media students preferred most was their lecturers. They prefer to learn directly from teacher explanation (80%). The second choice was through modules (75%), and they do not prefer learning through IT, either CD or internet.

Table 7. Students' preference on learning media

Learning media preference	%
I like to learn directly from my teacher's explanation	81
I like to learn from course books/ modules	75
I like to learn online	54
I like to learn through CDs	47

This data, again, support the thesis that students have not developed autonomy in learning. They still depend much on the teachers. They were not so interested in the media with which they can learn independently outside the classroom.

In terms of assessment, students prefer to be assessed authentically based on their everyday learning activities (87%) and also based on the result of their project work (79%), while traditional assessment was least preferred.

Table 8. Students' preference on assessment mode

Preferred assessment mode	%
I like being assessed based on my daily learning activities	87
I like being assessed based on the result of my project work	79
I like being assessed based on my performance	66
I like being assessed by my peer	64
I like being assessed by portfolio	63
I like being assessed traditionally	61

The data show that students do not seem to like traditional tests. Tests tend to make students anxious and force them to work hard to prepare themselves for the test. It implies that students may not have developed the culture of hard working. They tend to enjoy themselves much.

When students were online, the activities they preferred most was entertainment, such as watching movies or you-tube (93%) and listening songs (93%), and not for learning English.

Table 8. Students' preference on online activities

Online activity preference	%
I like watching movies or you-tube	80
I like listening to English songs	80
I like chatting in English	53
I like reading articles	49
I like to do interactive vocabulary exercises	41
I like to do interactive grammar exercises	32
I like to listen to podcast	32
I like emailing in English	28

PROSIDING ICTTE FKIP UNS 2015
Vol 1, Nomor 1, Januari 2016
Halaman:

ISSN: 2502-4124

ICTTE
FKIP UNS 2015

This data confirm the previous thesis that students have not developed the culture of hard working and tend to enjoy themselves too much, since they prefer entertainment to learning. However, this thesis may not be true. Students seldom do online for learning English perhaps it is because they do not know that they can learn English in the internet in a fun way, that there are many sites in which they can find abundant interesting resources for learning English independently. This is related to students' experience in using internet for learning or e-learning.

Students' experience in using e-learning is still low (65%), and the experience was not so pleasant, therefore more than half of the students (52%) do not like e-learning.

4 CONCLUSIONS

English is very important in higher education, and it is used by students in their learning, both inside and outside the classroom. Among the four language skills, reading is the most needed one, since every students has to read English in their work and study. Students are commonly required to read learning materials, textbooks, references, and journal articles written in English.

Students take the English program to reach various goals i.e. to be able to communicate with foreigners, to increase their TOEFL-like scores, to be able to read books and articles in their majors, to get good grades in order to graduate, and other specific goals, such as to be able to sing English songs in good pronunciation.

To achieve all these goals, they need much training on language learning and study skills. To be able to use English in academic context, students need a high level of English proficiency. However, students' English level was still very low in all aspects, and therefore they need to work really hard and extra hours practice to reach their learning goals. This ability can hardly be achieved by simply depending on the teacher's explanations in the classroom. They should become independent learners in order to succeed. However, students do not seem to have developed autonomy in learning. They still depend too much on the teachers and real classroom activities which are very limited in time and space. Students need to be trained in various learning strategies and study skills that can be used in their own learning. They also need to be introduced with various virtual learning sites in which they can learn English independently in a fun way outside the classroom.

5 ACKOWLEDGEMENTS

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