

ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES COURSE FOR TERTIARY EDUCATION STUDENTS: A NEED ANALYSIS

Oleh: Marham Jupri Hadi

(Lecturer at English Language Education Faculty of Teacher Training
and Education The University of Nahdlatul Wathan Mataram)

Abstract: *This article presents need analysis as the outset for designing an English for Academic Purposes for participants learning in English Language Education of a private owned university in West Nusa Tenggara. The course was intended as a bridging program to enhance participants' ability to use academic English for a variety of purposes in particular to accomplish their assignments throughout their study. However, further analysis was carried out to gain deeper understanding about the participants learning needs through online survey, questionnaires and discussion with lecturers. This article further describes the rationale for conducting a need analysis, participants, and the steps of doing need analysis.*

Key words: *Need Analysis, English for Academic Purposes, Techniques*

Need Analysis

University students in English Language Education Program are required to have certain level of ability to use academic English both aural and written. They are also required to be able to understand formal speeches, lectures presentation along with comprehending a variety of academic writing like journals and textbooks. However, the number of students, especially those who have just graduated from schools and become freshmen, are likely to lack in those aspects. Therefore, organizing a bridging program in the form of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course which will enable them to possess such study skills and knowledge seems to be the best solution. However, to run a successful program, it is necessary to conduct a pre course analysis as the initial step toward the program design (Basturkmen, 2010). Therefore, the focus of this essay is to describe the participants of the course, the procedures need analysis, identification of language demands

placed on the participants and the description of any contextual factors which might affect the decision of designing an EAP courses.

Rationale for Conducting a Need Analysis in an EAP Course

Before describing the course participants, it is worth understanding the rationale of conducting a need analysis and designing an EAP course in this context. In Indonesia, one of the most popular majors in the tertiary education, recently, is English Language Education. It is a program aiming at preparing the learners to be professional, resourceful, and competitive English teachers at primary schools and secondary education by providing high quality services and continuous improvement (UNW, 2008). Its main attraction would be due to the availability of a broad range of jobs for the graduates beside being teachers. For instance, they can work in a tourism offices or run bussiness related to language teaching. Also, the opportunity for students exchange program to other countries has been another reason why more school leavers have decided to enroll in that major. As a matter of fact, this field of study has been at the highest ten with the number of enrollment in Indonesia (Alifan, 2012). The number of sudents enrolled in this major shows an increase every year. For instance, in the *University of Nahdlatul Wathan* (UNW), in the second year of the program the number of registration was almost doubled, from around 60 students in the first year, to around 100 in the second year (UNW, 2008). What is interesting about this trend is that those who enrolled had quite diverse language skills. Some of them were more fluent in spoken English and some others were good at grammar and reading (ibid).

Regularly, the language department teaching staff evaluate the program on the effectiveness and efficiency of their curriculum, teaching methodologies, evaluation system, and other aspects whose results will be used to improve the services to the students. One of their findings is that students almost in all levels, from sophomore to the senior, seem to have

difficulties in academic English (ibid). Although they have passed many subjects regarding with academic language skills, for example presentation skill and academic writing, they still make a number of technical errors when doing presentation or when assigned to write essays, reports and their undergraduate thesis. Their main errors are quite basic. For instance in writing, they are still unable to write a good thesis statement, to develop paragraph and link the ideas in a cohesive and coherent way. These, as the evaluation findings suggest, are caused by the low skills that the enrolled students possess. They do not have sufficient prerequisites skill to be successful in doing such academic work (ibid).

EAP Course as a Bridging Program

In response to such a dilemma, the teaching staff have come up with a recommendation, that is to conduct a *bridging program*, an EAP program, whose main goal is to help its participants to meet certain prior skills before starting their study at the university (ibid). The program should be focused on developing students' academic language skills in order to succeed in their study. The participants are specified for new or higher semesters students facing difficulties with academic English. However, prior to starting the program, it is necessary to design a flexible course which include goals/ outcome setting, syllabus design and planning a set of evaluation or tests. In order to design an effective EAP course, it is crucial to carry out a need analysis which will allow the ESP designers to identify what tasks or assignments in which the students will use the language knowledge and skills (TSA) (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Need analysis will also inform teachers what language the learners will study, to be able to tackle the tasks or assignments (Basturkmen, 2010). In addition, having sufficient knowledge about the participants' learning environment, their learning styles and teaching preferences will enable the ESP practitioners to design the course flexibly (ibid). For those reasons, carrying out a need analysis is paramount.

Further aims of this course are to facilitate these learners to gain required skills to be able to produce academic essays, writing practicum reports, research proposals and reports. They are also required to get engaged actively in asking questions and giving their opinion, participating in group discussion both in the classroom or in the online forum and giving presentation regarding their subjects assignment or their research proposals or reports. The other demanding aspects they should be able to do is to read effectively by applying reading skills and strategies along with referencing resources for their written projects. All of these are the learning objectives they must gain before graduating from the English language department (UNW, 2008).

Course Participants

As mentioned previously, the participants of the EAP course, for whom I will design the course, consists of the new enrolled university students and any advanced level learners facing difficulties with study skills. These new enrolled learners graduated from both private and public schools and have experienced different learning situations. Those graduated from public schools tend to have better proficiency in English than those of private ones. However, both groups passed the university entrance exam which, to a certain degree, does not really test the students language knowledge and skills. The test only consisted of multiple choice which only tested their grammar and vocabulary. There was no essays, or aural interviews. As a result, it was rather difficult to figure out their real proficiency although most of them are good at grammar and vocabularies.

Again, as the department recommended, this program should facilitate the students to have sufficient knowledge and study skills and to be able to use them for academic purposes whilst of after graduating from English language education (UNW, 2008). However, referring back to the department evaluation on both beginning to advanced level students' progress, most of them seem to be unable to achieve such

institutional objectives. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that students any advanced level with study skills difficulties participate in this course.

Having such pieces of information above are unlikely sufficient to figure out the participants' needs comprehensively as they only provide a few information. These information could not provide comprehensive need analysis which I can use to set up the EAP course. However, such a situation gave me a good starting point to do further analysis. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, a need analysis procedure that I will employ to get comprehensive information will be discussed.

How to Carry Out a Need Analysis

Previously, the reasons why I need to carry out a need analysis has been mentioned. However, it is worth considering that need analysis is a way to develop a course (Basturkmen, 2010). This indicates that need analysis is the foundation of the ESP course implementation in that it informs how ESP practitioners will develop or design the EAP program. Before the design, there are some aspects which should be assessed. As suggested by ESP experts (Hutchinson, & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & John, 1998; Basturkmen, 2010) all aspects of establishing an ESP course environmental situation should be assessed. These include a) *the task and activities learners will be using English (TSA)*, b) *factors which may affect the way the students learn*, c) *the learners' current skills (PSA)*, d) *the gaps (lacks) between the target language needs (TSA) and their present language proficiency (PSA)*, e) *effective ways to learn the language (means)*, e) *what students want from the course (wants)*, f) *other aspects like institutional expectation as well as the learning environment where the course will be run*. All these information will be necessary to set up the learning objectives, to design syllabus, to select materials, media and the manner of evaluation.

Techniques to Collect and Analyze Information

Prior to the analyzing those elements above, I will have to collect related information from the learners themselves, their lecturers, the language education program coordinator, and from documents such as subject outline, students' essays or entrance exam results. In order to collect relevant data, I will need to use in some techniques. Schroder (1989, in Robinson, 1991) suggests four essential techniques for collecting data regarding needs: the questionnaire, the detailed interview, participating observation, and press ads, indicating language needs of the job. Besides, I will also consider what Basturkmen (2010) has suggested. That includes observation of interactions and analysis of language use in the target situation and tests of performance which might be in the form of diagnostic tests. Also, I will use documentation as the additional technique for data collection. The reason for using these ranges of form are due to the expectation to have a more detailed picture of the participants' necessities, wants and lacks.

Having decided those techniques, I will move on to design the questions asked in the questionnaire, list of aspects to observe, items to discuss in the interviews and types of questions in the diagnostic tests. Questionnaire, as revealed by Robinson (1991), is likely to seek information about what language skill students will need in the future, i.e. in advanced levels or after their graduation (TSA) and the information about their current language skills (PSA). Therefore, for the sake of this course, I will administer the questionnaire to both lecturers and learners. The points to ask would be *"what lecturers think about what language skills the learners should be able to after completing the EAP course"*. It will also ask the lectures to explain what *sorts of academic language skills their students found difficult in general*. For students, similar questions will be asked. However, some other personal questions regarding their previous learning experiences, learning styles, teaching methods preferences will also be asked. These would be helpful to figure out what they expect from the course (wants).

Using Online Survey

The questionnaire will be distributed to the whole lecturers and the targetted participants. It will be distributed and filled in online through **Survey Monkey**, an online survey website. By using this online technique, it would easier and faster to see the analysis result as Survey Monkey provides such facilities in the form graphs or charts. Further, questionnaire in the form of online survey would limit the access to broader information. Therefore, a detailed interview to some selected lecturers and students regarding the PSA and TSA will be done. Interview will be structured and the questions will be guided through the questionnaire (Mackay, 1983. See Robinson, 1991). The benefit of using indepth interview is that it enables the clarification of some ambiguous answers from the questionnaire which might be caused by linguistics problems in the questionnaire. Tarantino (1988. See Robinson, (1991) advocates that by using interview, the interviewer can help the respondents with linguistics clarification and to record their answers and explanation. To record their reponse, a voice recorder will be used. However, prior confirmation to the respondents would be done.

Participants Observation

To get information about the environment in which the EAP program will be carried out, participating observation will be employed. The observation will be on the facilities such as classroom, internet access, computers and even the students daily interaction at campus. Being knowledgable about these contextual factors is necessary to best plan where, when and how the course would be carried out. If learning environment is supporting, then probably the EAP learners can be exposed to online writing projects, for instance by using blogs.

Discussion with Lecturers

Lecturers' information, about what these learners should be able to do after completing the course and what the learners

expect to be able to do after completing the course, are likely insufficient to figure out the whole picture of what they actually need to be able to do immediately during their study at the University. It is necessary to apply other techniques of data collection, i.e. document analysis. At this point, I will analyze the subject outline, teaching syllabus, EAP textbooks and some journal articles specifically discuss EAP. Also it is necessary to carry out diagnostic test in addition to analyzing the entrance exam result. The test would be written, in the form of essay, and aural, through speaking. IELTS spoken and written test seems to be relevant for this purpose. After completing the test, the document can be analyzed afterwards. By assessing those documents, it is expected that a thorough understanding about what language demands placed on the learners can be gained.

Results of the Need Analysis

EAP Course Objectives

As the specific aim of this course is to facilitate learners to meet certain study skill or academic skills, it is necessary to understand what has been known as EAP. As defined by ETIC (1975, see Jordan 1997) EAP is "concerned with communication skill required for study purposes in formal education system". This includes the four major skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing skills which learners need to get engaged successfully in their study, for example, when having to write essays, read journals, listen to lecturers and give presentation or when doing oral or written exam. Therefore, the language they would learn would be any language aspects needed to help them achieve the learning objectives while studying in higher education, in this case in English language department.

Skills Needed to Writing Academically

Different study skills will be necessary in different study situation. Jordan (1997) has identified eight contexts in which

different study skill or academic English are needed. The situation are in a) lectures/ talks, b) seminars/tutorials/discussion/ supervision, c) practicals/field works/, d) private study/reading (journals and books), reference materials/ library use, e) essays/ reports, projects/ case studies/ articles, f) research, g) examinations (written and oral). In lectures, for instance, the skill needed are listening and understanding, note taking, and asking questions for, i.e. repetition, clarification and all information. However, in private study/reading, Jordan (ibid) suggests that the skills needed are reading efficiently: comprehension and speed, scanning, skimming; evaluating, summarising and paraphrasing. The skill would be different when they have to write essays or reports. The skills include planning, writing drafts, revising, summarising, paraphrasing, synthesizing, using academic writing style, using quotation, footnotes and bibliography, finding and analyzing evidence; using data appopriately (ibid).

As there are a large number of language aspects required in EAP learning, therefore. at this juncture, the language demandsto study in the course would only be the language aspects needed inacademic writing. To write academically, learners should be familiar with writing genre, styles, referencing techniques and grammar. As suggested by Jordan (1997), the writing genre includes, a) description, naration, instruction, explanation, definition, exemplification, classification, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, expressing: purposes, means, prediction, expectancy, reservation and result, generalization and spesificity, discussion and argumentation, and drawing conclusion. For grammar, singular/ plurals, use of articles, verb tenses, preposition, using the appropriate vocabularies and logical connectors. They also need to learn spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, distinguisng formal and informal language, academic style, and referencing conventions (ibid). Discussing these in an EAP course is paramount because, in most cases, those aspects tend to be problematic in learners' essays.

Conclusion

Having discussed all things above, need analysis is vital as it becomes the starting point of designing the EAP course and or to set the learning objectives and syllabus. All aspects of establishing an EAP course context like PSA, TSA, lacks, wants, learning preference, supports, i.e. facility and budget, should be assessed at the outset to be able to design and run the course flexibly. To collect the data regarding those aspects, a range of techniques like interviews, questionnaire, test, document analysis, literature reviews, and observation should be employed. For academic writing purposes, for instance, language demands should include genre, styles and grammar. However, although all those above have been done, it is necessary to analyze the data through focused group discussion and participatory need analysis involving lecturers and learners. It is also recommended that evaluation on the course should be done before (through need analysis), while and after the course in order to ascertain the attainment of learning objectives of the EAP course or as Robinson (1991) highlights, to control the quality.

Reference

- Alifan. (2012). *Jurusan Kuliah Paling Diminati di Indonesia*. Retrieved, 04 September, 2013. From <http://mancinginfo.blogspot.com.au>.
- Basturkmen, H. (2010). *Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes*. University of Auckland, New Zealand. Palgrave Macmillan. New York.
- Dudely-Evans, T. & John, M.J.S. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes. A Multi-disciplinary Approach*. Cambridge Language Teaching Library. Cambridge University Press. Victoria, Australia.
- Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes. A Learning-centered Approach*. Directions in Language Teaching. Bell & Bain. Glasgow.
- Jordan, R.R. (1997) *English for Academic Purposes. A Guide and Resource Book for Teachers*. Cambridge Language Library. Cambridge University Press. Melbourne Australia.

- Robinson, P. (1991). *ESP Today. A Practitioner's Guide*. Language Teaching Methodology Series Prentice Hall International.UK.
- Universitas Nahdlatul Wathan Mataram. (2008). *Hasil Evaluasi Tahunan Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*. Mataram. NTB.