

NEED ANALYSIS FOR ENGLISH READING AND WRITING MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	04/5/2023	The merit of needs analysis for material development has been widely incorporated in the field of language teaching and learning. This research aimed at identifying students' needs for the English reading and writing skills as the solid foundation in order to develop supplementary workbooks for the students' further reading and writing practice. The participants of the study embraced 264 the first-year English majors and non-majors at the School of Foreign Languages – Thai Nguyen University. Questionnaire was employed to capture the students' target and learning needs in the study. Data was analyzed quantitatively with the use of SPSS for descriptive statistics. The results unfolded that the students strongly wished to further practise a variety of reading and writing tasks/activities. Additionally, they expressed their desire for vocabulary and grammar tasks in each of the unit; and topics concerning daily life and culture. Also, the respondents wanted their teachers to take on the roles as a facilitator and a guide in the teaching. The implication of the findings served as the strong base in designing the English reading and writing workbooks appropriate for the first-year students majoring in English and other languages.
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PHÂN TÍCH NHU CẦU CỦA SINH VIÊN LÀM CƠ SỞ ĐỂ XÂY DỰNG BỘ TÀI LIỆU LUYỆN ĐỌC VIẾT TIẾNG ANH

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài: 04/5/2023	Phân tích nhu cầu của người học làm cơ sở để phát triển tài liệu đã được ứng dụng rộng rãi trong lĩnh vực dạy và học ngôn ngữ. Bài báo này nhằm xác định nhu cầu của sinh viên về kỹ năng đọc và viết tiếng Anh làm cơ sở để xây dựng bộ tài liệu giao bài tập cho hoạt động luyện đọc và viết. Đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu gồm 264 sinh viên năm thứ nhất, chuyên và không chuyên tiếng Anh tại Trường Ngoại ngữ – Đại học Thái Nguyên. Bảng câu hỏi được sử dụng để thu thập dữ liệu về nhu cầu học tập của sinh viên. Phần mềm SPSS được sử dụng để phân tích số liệu thống kê mô tả. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên rất muốn được thực hành nhiều hơn nữa các nhiệm vụ/hoạt động đọc và viết. Ngoài ra, sinh viên cũng muốn được cung cấp thêm các bài tập để luyện từ, ngữ pháp trong mỗi bài học; và các chủ đề liên quan đến cuộc sống hàng ngày và văn hóa. Hơn nữa, sinh viên cũng muốn giáo viên đảm nhận vai trò là người hỗ trợ và hướng dẫn trong hoạt động giảng dạy. Kết quả nghiên cứu này là nền tảng vững chắc giúp cho việc thiết kế sách giao bài tập đọc và viết tiếng Anh phù hợp với sinh viên năm thứ nhất chuyên ngành tiếng Anh và tiếng khác.
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1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a shift in the paradigm of learning from teacher-centred to student-centred learning. In this new paradigm, students are expected to increase the responsibility for their own learning or learning autonomy regarding what they will learn, how they will learn, and how they will assess their own learning [1]. Such learning is strongly believed to exert a positive impact on learners' language learning in terms of enhancing students' language knowledge and skills [1]. To support students in their independent learning, developing supplementary materials is particularly crucial for students' enrichment, or remedial purposes since it can address a gap between students' needs and a textbook [2], [3].

Tomlinson [4] defined material development as "anything which is done by writers, teachers or learners to provide sources of language input and to exploit those sources in ways which maximize the likelihood of intake" (p. 2). This concept suggests that the material developers should provide a thick account of language experience in ways that learning materials are designed to enhance language learning. According to [3], in developing materials, what needed to be considered are learners' needs and the objective of the learning. Then, the materials can be designed by adapting them in order to perfectly accommodate learners' needs. Additionally, Graves [5] proposed several considerations as guidelines for developing the materials in order that these materials do not diverge from the goals: 1) learners (experiences, background, target needs), 2) learning (discovery, problem solving and analysis), 3) language (grammar, functions, vocabulary, etc.), and 4) activity or task types (variety of medium, variety of organization, variety of skill). It is necessary for the researchers in the study to consider such guidelines while they design the supplementary materials for the reading and writing course.

Needs analysis is considered the first and significant step in designing a curriculum or a learning material [6], [7] as it can help to narrow or even remove any gap among students, teachers, and learning materials [8]. In this study, need analysis was conducted to gain deeper insights into first-year students' expectations for supplementary materials of English reading and writing skills.

As defined by [9], needs analysis is a method that helps to work out the difference between the desired conditions with the existing conditions. Brown [10] defined needs analysis as a procedure for capturing information about learners' needs. Its aim is to obtain key learning outcomes and requirements in the design and delivery of a learning course. According to [11] (p. 30), "the needs relate to the characteristics, concerns and potential constraints of the students. The analysis seeks to match possible techniques and materials to these needs and thus identify whether the design is appropriate to the intended goals." All of these definitions except for the one by [11] do not emphasize a match between possible techniques, or materials and students' needs, and the design and the goals. For the purpose of the study, the concept by [11] was selected as the working definition in the research study.

Linguistic scholars have categorized types of needs from various perspectives [12], [13], [6]. In this research, we adopted the classification of needs in [6] embracing target needs and learning needs for its prevalence in multiple studies in the globe [14], [3]. According to [6], target needs are what learners need to be able to perform in the target or requested situations. It is beneficial to consider target situations regarding necessities, lack, and wants. Necessities (objective needs) refer to what learners need to know in order to efficiently communicate in the target situation. For example, the businessman required to know English for communicating in the sales conference. Lacks is understood as the gap between the learners' target proficiency and their existing proficiency [15]. Hence, it is essential to comprehend what learners already know to detect which of necessities they can lack [6]. Wants (subjective needs) are the learners' consciousness toward their wishes and desires. In contrast, learning needs refer to the requirement for learners in order to be able to perform in the target situation. Accordingly, this type of need directly correlates to the path to the destination set by the target situation [16].

Reading, a receptive skill, and writing, a productive one are of paramount importance in language acquisition. As ascertained by [17] (p. 65), “receptive skills are the skills to understand the message being heard and read, while the productive skills are those that produce messages or ideas through spoken and written text”. For English learners, mastering these two skills is crucial if they wish to utilize language academically and communicatively. Over the last decades, there have been a vast number of studies on need analysis as the base to develop learning materials in various global contexts [18], [19], [14], [7], [3]. However, to my best knowledge, studies pertaining to need analysis of reading and writing skills for material development have been unexpectedly limited, especially in Vietnamese context. To bridge this gap, the current paper, therefore, was conducted with the aim to investigate the students’ learning needs as a robust base to design supplementary materials for the first-year English majors’ and non-majors’ further reading and writing practice at SFL. Specially, this research project aimed to address the following research questions: *What are the students’ needs for English Reading and Writing workbooks?*

The following sections delineates research methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion and implications.

2. Methodology

The participants in this study comprised 264 first-year major and non-major students of English at SFL - TNU with 8 males and 256 females. The age of the students varied from 18 to 20. At the time of the study, they were in their second term of the school year 2021-2022, and their English proficiency were at the pre-intermediate level (A2). In this research project, survey questionnaire was employed as the only instrument for the data source. The rationales underlying the use of this instrument were provided. First, questionnaire is one of the most efficient techniques of capturing data on a large scale [20]. Additionally, as proposed by [21], it can be employed to gather three types of data: (1) factual data that gives biographical information about participants; (2) behavioral data which provides information on the participants’ present or past practices, lifestyles and habits; and (3) attitudinal data that gather information about participants’ beliefs, attitudes, opinions, values and thoughts. We adopted and adapted the questionnaire by [3] to gather a source of data as it was developed on the basis of prior literature reviews pertinent to need analysis, material development, reading and writing skills. It encompassed two sections concerning the respondents’ demographic information such as age, gender, experience in English learning, and English proficiency; and their target and learning needs for additional reading and writing practice with 14 questions categorized under necessities, lacks, wants, inputs, students’ roles and teachers’ roles. The questionnaire was then translated into Vietnamese to promote ease of administration, validate its accurate findings and comprehensibility [22] before being delivered to the students. Regarding the analysis of questionnaire results, data from the participants’ responses was entered into a data file and statistically analysed to generate descriptive statistics using the computer software program Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26.

3. Findings and Discussion

The following section reports the results of needs analysis embracing the students’ target and learning needs.

3.1. Target Needs

3.1.1. Necessities

Most of the students were at the pre-intermediate level of reading and writing (86%), while the number of students at the intermediate level accounted for 40%. However, none of the students reported their writing and reading ability at the advanced level.

What is more, all of the students reported that they needed supplementary exercises in order to enhance their reading skills such as skimming, scanning, predicting, and making inferences, and develop their writing, for instance, using punctuation marks correctly in discourses, writing sentences correctly, and writing a short composition on a topic.

3.1.2. *Lacks*

Generally, the respondents encountered numerous challenges in learning reading skills. Clearly, the students experienced the greatest barrier in comprehending implied meaning on texts (98.5%), followed by understanding communicative purposes of texts (97.3%); developing strategies in reading like scanning (95.1%); skimming, and guessing, comprehending particular meaning in words and different grammatical forms (89.0%); reading for the main ideas and specific information (86.0%); recognizing the main ideas and supporting details of texts, predicting the content of a text (85.2%). Surprisingly, with the percentages of 16.7% and 4.9%, identifying tenses, subject-verb agreement, and pluralization in sentences; and grammatical word classes such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, were considered the least challenging issues by most of the students in their reading comprehension.

In terms of writing skill, the participants, on the whole, raised a large number of barriers in learning their writing skill. It is evident that their most challenge was identified in developing writing strategies such as brainstorming, clustering, paraphrasing and soliciting feedback, accounting for 98.5%. Also, they reported other huge barriers in writing, for instances, selecting the right and appropriate vocabulary (97.7%); ordering ideas into a good piece of writing (96.2%); writing complete sentences using different types of sentences like simple, compound and complex sentences (94.7%); selecting and brainstorming ideas (93.6%); recognizing sentence problems such as run-on, fragment, stringy (91.3%); producing a composition with correct grammar and vocabulary; and using punctuation marks correctly in sentences, which made up 86.7% and 70.8% respectively.

3.1.3. *Wants*

Findings from the survey unveiled that all of the students, in general, demonstrated their robust agreement on their wants in supplementary exercises to enhance their reading comprehension in terms of scanning and skimming; guessing meaning of particular words in various settings; recognizing the main ideas and supporting details, inferring; distinguishing facts from opinions; and predicting information with the range from 84.5% to 99.2%.

On the same vein, the students generally exhibited their strong desire for fostering their writing skill. Evidently, the respondents strongly wished to write complete sentences using different types of sentences such as simple, compound and complex sentences; and develop strategies in writing such as brainstorming, clustering, paraphrasing and soliciting feedback, both of which accounted for 99.2%. Apart from these, they demonstrated their strong wants in creating a composition with correct grammar, vocabulary and punctuation; producing sentences with correct grammar, vocabulary and punctuation; developing ideas effectively; and organizing ideas into a good piece of writing with the values of 98.9%, 97.7%, 86.4% and 85.6% respectively.

3.2. *Learning Needs*

3.2.1. *Inputs*

According to the statistics in the students' learning needs, most of the students expressed their preference for the familiar topics in reading and writing lessons related to daily life such as families, schools, sports, and education (98.9%); and local and international cultures, for instance, customs and festivals (86.7%), whereas the topics about science, economy and politics were favoured by a few students (12.5%).

Regarding the reading skill, most of the respondents preferred the reading tasks/activities such as multiple choice questions, answering questions, gap-fill, True/False, and matching with the values ranging from 87.9% to 98.1% in a reading workbook. However, only few of them were in favour of ordering tasks, accounting for merely 17.0%. It is suggested that such preferred tasks/activities should be designed in the reading workbook to improve the students' reading skill.

Similarly, the participants reported their preference for almost all of the tasks/activities proposed in a writing book. It is evident that building sentences was favoured by most of the students (97.3%) whereas correcting mistakes was least preferred by the students (4.9%). The other tasks such as writing a composition, rewriting sentences, filling in the missing punctuation marks in sentences, identifying sentence problems, using appropriate punctuation marks in texts, punctuating sentences with appropriate punctuation marks, joining sentences with conjunctions, identifying types of clauses and sentences, and completing sentences were all strongly favourable with the students with the percentage ranging from 77% to 97.0%. It is recommended that the preferred tasks/activities should be provided in the writing workbook with the aim to enhance the students' writing skill.

With reference to the task number, findings indicated that a greater proportion of the respondents (83.7%) demonstrated their strong agreement with the number of tasks in a reading unit which should embrace five to ten, while a smaller number of students (81.8%) stated that there should be less than ten tasks in a writing unit. Interestingly, none of the students chose more than ten or fifteen tasks in reading and writing lessons.

In terms of lexical tasks, the students, in general, strongly expressed their desire to have vocabulary tasks/activities in the supplementary reading and writing workbooks. Clearly, the task pertaining to completing sentences/paragraphs was found the most favourable with nearly all of the respondents (96.2%), accompanied by the tasks concerning 'matching an item with its meaning provided; completing sentences/ paragraphs with missing words; scanning for new words on a text; and identifying the meanings based on the context provided', accounting for 94.7%, 92.8% and 73.9% respectively. However, 'scanning for new vocabulary on a text and finding out the meaning in the dictionary' was the least welcome by a majority of the students making up only 12.5%.

Likewise, most of the respondents robustly wished to embrace grammar tasks/activities in the supplementary reading and writing workbooks. Evidently, the students preferred the types of tasks or activities that could enable them to remember grammatical patterns (97%); make sentences grounded in patterns taught (95.1%); produce a short composition using the grammatical structures learned (94.3%); and recognize sentence errors and then correct them (90.9%).

3.2.2. Students' roles

In terms of the students' role, the respondents generally favoured their significant and active roles in the reading and writing tasks/activities. As reported by the participants, most of them (91.7%) preferred to discuss and be actively involved in an investigation to solve problems and do the tasks. Additionally, they demonstrated their preference for individually investigating and performing the tasks and proposing their questions and opinions being creative in doing the tasks with the values of 76.1%, 71.6%, and 63.3% respectively.

3.2.3. Teachers' roles

With regard to the teacher's roles, the students were highly in favour of the teachers' roles in supporting their task/ activity completion in the reading and writing workbook. It is evident that the students strongly wished their teachers to give advice, correction, and comments in the result of their work (99.2%); give examples before they perform the tasks (98.1%); control every step of completing the tasks; and facilitate and help them in doing/finishing the tasks, both accounting for around 97%.

The findings of the study are, to greater extent, convergent with those of numerous previous research projects [3], [14], [18], [19] in which students' target and learning needs established a significant foundation for learning material development. According to [6], there are three important aspects in target needs: necessities, lacks, and wants. The results of the target needs in the study were considered as the basis for developing the contents of supplementary reading and writing workbooks for students' practice purposes. Meanwhile, according to [23], the learning needs revealed some aspects, such as input, learner role and teacher role, etc. The data analysis in the research indicated that the required inputs encompassed some theoretical reviews, a variety of task types such as multiple choice questions, answering questions, gap-fill, True/False, and matching, and a wordlist covered in the reading workbook; and building sentences, writing a composition, rewriting sentences, filling in the missing punctuation marks in sentences, identifying sentence problems, using appropriate punctuation marks in texts, and punctuating sentences, etc in the writing workbook. For the learner and teacher roles, the analysis indicated that the students preferred their creativity in doing the tasks, individually investigated and proposed their questions and opinions. In addition, they needed to be facilitated and helped in the process of doing/finishing the tasks, and to be given advice, correction, and comments in the result of their work. Finally, all of the students needed their teacher to provide them with examples before doing the tasks to help the students to do the tasks successfully. These findings demonstrated a match with the principles of target analysis proposed by [6] and the components of tasks proposed by [23].

4. Conclusion and Implications

Drawing on the results of the needs analysis, it can be concluded that the students encountered multiple challenges in their reading and writing. Accordingly, they needed supplementary workbooks for fostering their reading and writing skills. In terms of the target needs, the students needed supplementary exercises in order to enhance their reading skills such as skimming, scanning, predicting, and making inferences; and develop their writing, for instance, using punctuation marks correctly in discourses, writing sentences correctly, and writing a short composition on a topic. In relation to learning needs, the analysis uncovered that the expected inputs that embraced some theoretical reviews; a wide range of task types from guided to freer activities as well as from less demanded to more demanded activities concerning reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar structures; five to ten tasks/activities in a unit; and glossary presented in the reading workbook. Regarding the learner and teacher roles, the results indicated that the students preferred to discuss and be actively involved in investigations to solve problems and do the tasks, individually investigated and proposed their questions and opinions. Additionally, they wanted to be facilitated and helped in the process of doing/finishing the tasks, and provided advice, correction, and comments in the result of their work. Finally, all of the students needed their teacher to give them examples before doing the tasks. Thus, examples were provided before most of the tasks to aid the students to do the tasks easily.

Despite certain limitations concerning the only instrument of data collection and a small number of participants, it is highly recommended that the findings of the study should serve as the base to develop the supplementary workbooks appropriate for students' further reading and writing practice outside the classroom and accommodate the goal of the English Reading and Writing 1 course. It is expected that there will be any further studies focusing on the development of supplementary materials for students to further practise their language skills and be autonomous learners.

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