

Students' Needs in Learning English in the Medical Faculty of Muhammadiyah University at Malang

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Abstract: The English course offered in medical faculty of Muhammadiyah University of Malang (MUM) was not based on the needs of the students. This may cause lack of students' motivation and participation in the course. The purpose of this study was to identify the most fundamental needs of the medical students in learning English. Identification of students' needs in English course was conducted to 36 students of medical faculty by using questionnaire. The results indicated that 18 respondents (50%) stated that they needed English for developing career, finishing study and widening international relationship. Eighteen respondents (50%) stated that they needed speaking and reading skills for their future career. Further, twenty-seven (75%) respondents explained that they needed the materials relevant to their study.

Keywords: students' needs, English course, medical students.

During recent years, English has increasingly become important for learning many subjects especially at the university level. Students of scientific and technical subjects depend largely on text books written in English. It is also the case with students of the medical faculty of Muhammadiyah University at Malang (MUM). Suitable English course materials that meet the students' needs are considered necessary. The English course which is offered in the medical faculty of MUM begin

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with some assumptions rather than based on the students' needs analysis; therefore, the students have poor or low motivation towards English program.

In developing English materials for special purposes such as the ones for medical students, it is, of course, necessary to determine the English materials that emphasize the students' needs. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), the material is the first component of the level of design in the instructional system. Furthermore, they claim that it deals with how learners are expected to learn in the system and with how teachers are expected to teach with respect to a particular set of instructional materials organized according to the criteria of a syllabus. In line with Richards and Rodgers' statement, Dick and Carey (1985) mention that in order to have effective instructional materials, there must be a match between students and materials.

According to Richards (1990), there are three purposes of doing needs analysis. The first purpose is providing mechanism for obtaining a wider range of input into the content, design, and implementation of language programs through involving such people as learners, teachers, administrators, and employers in the process. Then, identifying specific language needs that can be addressed in developing objectives and content for a language program becomes the second purpose. The next is providing data that can serve as the basis for reviewing and evaluating an existing program. It can be concluded that doing needs survey is very beneficial.

Definitions of needs vary depending on the purpose of the analysis, but all take the learner as a focus of analysis. Lawson (1979) defines *need* as 'something that is recognized' but it is not in any sense *discovered*, and its *existence* derives from whatever criteria are thought to be relevant in making the diagnoses. This implies that in order to recognize *need* one would have to carry out some kind of assessment or evaluation of the existing situation and the diagnosis of assessment results would reveal some deficiency. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) make a distinction between 'target needs' and 'learning needs'. The target need refers to what the learner needs to do in the target situation and the learning need refers to what the learner needs to do in order to learn. They further subcategorized target needs into (1) necessities: what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation, (2) lacks: the discrepancy between necessity and what the learner already knows, (3) wants: what the learner actually wants to learn or what he/she

feels he/she needs. The learner's *wants* may or may not conform with those perceived by the teachers or course designers. The learning need is equated to the route of learning. This concerns things such as how learners learn the language, why they learn it, what resources are available to help them learn.

Altman (1980) explains types of learner needs based on individual differences within the framework of learner-centered language teaching. According to Altman (1980), learners should be placed properly based on their age, level of language proficiency, maturity, time available. This requires the institution to make flexible educational arrangements to allow all learners to access to learning that is appropriate to the types of needs they have. In this way, the content and mode of learning will be influenced by the options available at their disposal. The type of modifications of learning resources are made accordingly to meet the kinds of individual differences with regard to time, goals, mode, or expectations of learning.

Given the background, i.e the lack of suitable teaching materials relevant to the needs of the students of the medical faculty of MUM and the important status of English in the school curriculum, this study will, of course, be primarily conducted on that basis. In other words, this study has two purposes: to gather information about the needs of medical students of MUM toward learning English and to know the most fundamental needs of medical faculty toward learning English. Further, this study is focused mainly on the topics about students' needs in learning English. This study is limited to medical-faculty students, especially the third year students of 2001/2002 who have experienced learning English to elicit some information on their needs. Based on the above discussion, two questions are formulated as follows: (1) What are the needs of the medical students of MUM toward learning English? and (2) What is the most dominant need of the medical students of MUM toward learning English?. The results of this survey will function as the main data for determining suitable materials for medical students. Therefore, needs analysis does not end in itself.

METHOD

This is an initial part of a descriptive study which is aimed at describing the students' needs in learning English. The survey method is frequently used to collect descriptive data (Borg & Gall, 1983). They stated further that surveys are used simply to collect information. The aim

of using survey method is to get the fullest and most authentic description of the field of study. The medical faculty was chosen since it is a new faculty, the students of this school are serious, and most of them are smart since this school only admits students who have high rank/score. Therefore, this school is chosen in order to get information about the needs of the students in learning English.

The sample of this study was taken from the students of medical faculty of MUM. The total number of the population was about 70 students; however, 36 students were present. The instrument for collecting the data about the students' needs in learning English was a questionnaire. In developing the questionnaire, the writer referred to factual information gathered from the writer's observation. The questionnaire consisted of items regarding English instruction and what the students need from that instruction.

The questionnaire consisted of closed questions with four option statements in which the respondents should give their judgment. The questions asked in this study were of five topics. The topics used to elicit the respondents' needs were the purpose of learning English, the reasons for learning English, the way of learning English, the skills needed in learning English, and the difficulties faced in learning English. The respondents were permitted to bring the questionnaire home. They were given one day for filling in the questionnaires.

The students' responses to the questionnaires were classified and analyzed to know the real needs. The data were analyzed descriptively based on the percentage of the students' responses toward the researcher's questionnaire. As a whole, the data were used to find out the medical students' needs in learning English.

RESULTS

The Students' Target Needs in Learning English

The questionnaire given to the medical students consisted of 13 items covering the level of the students' mastery, the purpose of studying English, the important English skill they needed to master, the role of using English in their work, the expectation of the students to work in the future, the frequency of using English, the skills of English the students will use in their career, the appropriate materials for English program, the most appropriate techniques of teaching, the appropriateness of materials with students' expectations, the level of difficulty of the materials given.

Based on the results of the data analysis, it was found that in daily needs, 16 students (44.4%) stated that their English proficiency was fair, 10 respondent (27.8%) stated that his English was more than fair, and 10 respondents (27.8%) stated that their English was poor. In addition, based on the results of the data analysis of the purpose of learning English, out of 36 respondents, 10 respondents (27.8%) stated that they needed English for developing future career, 3 respondents (8.3%) admitted that English was useful for finishing their study, 5 respondents (13.8%) stated that English was used for international relationship, and 18 respondents (50%) stated that English was used for the combination of the three.

The results of the data analysis on the students' expectation of their work field show that out of 36 respondents, 24 respondents (66.7%) chose health service, 5 respondents (13.8%) chose educational institutions, 4 respondents (11.1%) chose governmental institutions, and 3 respondents (8.3%) chose business. Regarding the frequency of using English was used in their work field, 7 respondents (19.4%) stated that English would be used most of the time, 10 respondents (27.8%) said that English would be used much of the time, 15 respondents (41.6%) stated that they would use English some of the time, and 2 respondents (11.1%) responded that English would almost never be used in their future work.

Based on the results of the data analysis on the medium of English they will use in their future career, it was found out that out of 36 respondents, 18 respondents (50%) stated that they would use English in the form of speaking, 18 respondents (50%) stated that they would use English in the form of reading, none of them claimed that they would use English for writing and listening.

The Students' Learning Needs in Learning English

The learning needs of the students in learning English program covered the appropriate materials, the important skills needed to master immediately, the appropriate method of teaching, the students' hope after joining the English program, the students' opinion about the English materials and the students' opinion about the English program. The results of data analysis on the major English skills they need to master immediately show that out of 36 respondents, 1 respondent (2.7%) chose listening, 15 respondents (41.6%) chose speaking, 15 respondents (41.6%) chose reading, and 5 respondent (13.8%) chose writing. Based on the results of data analysis of the appropriate English materials, out of 36 respondents, 27 respondents (75%) stated that they needed the relevant

materials with their study and 9 respondents (25%) stated they needed the different material from what they have studied.

Dealing with the method of teaching, it was found out that out of 36 respondents, 4 respondents (11.1%) chose lecturing, 6 respondents (16.7%) chose presentation, 16 respondents (44.4%) chose game as the appropriate method of teaching, 8 respondents (22.2%) chose discussion and 2 respondents (5.6%) chose question and answer. The results of data analysis on the students' interest concerning the text show that out of 36 respondents, 2 (5.6%) stated that they were strongly interested, 29 (80.5%) stated that they were interested, 5 (13.8%) stated they were less interested toward the text, and 0 (0%) stated they were not interested strongly toward the text.

The results of data analysis on the appropriateness of the English materials to the students' expectation show that out of 36 respondents, 16 respondents (44.4%) stated that they just got a part of the materials, 14 respondents (38.8%) stated that they did not get the materials they wanted, and 6 respondents (16.7%) stated that they had already gotten the appropriate materials they wanted. The results of the data analysis on the students' opinion about English programs show that out of 36 respondents, 10 respondents (27.7%) stated they did not sufficiently support the English program, 17 respondents (47.2%) stated that they fully supported the English program, and 9 respondent (25%) stated that they did not support the English program.

The Most Dominant Needs of the Students in Learning English

Based on the results of data analysis of the most dominant needs of the students related to the target needs, the students' purpose in learning English, 18 (50%) of the students stated that the purpose was the combination between deloping carrier, finishing the study, and widening international relationship. Concerning the students' hope of their future work field, 24 (66.7%) respondents chose health services. Related to the medium of English they will use in their future career, 18 (50%) respondents chose speaking and 18 respondents (50%) chose reading. Related to the most dominant learning needs, 27 (75.0%) respondents explained that they needed the materials relevant to their study.

The most dominant skill that the students need to master immediately was speaking 15 (41.6%) and reading 15 (41.6%). They suggested that game and discussion can be used as the appropriate method of teaching English. Concerning the students' interest toward the text, out

of 36 respondents, 29 (80.5%) stated that they were interested with the text given. Related with the appropriateness of materials to the student's expectation, 16 (44.4%) respondents stated that they just got a part of the materials. Concerning the students' opinion about English for medical studies that has been programmed, 17 (47.2%) respondents stated that the materials strongly supported their English comprehension.

Further, in terms of the level of difficulty of the materials given, out of 36, 19 (52.7%) respondents stated that listening materials were difficult, 17 (47.2%) respondents claimed that speaking materials were difficult, while 20 (55.6%) respondents assumed that reading materials were easy, and 15 (41.6%) respondents stated that writing materials were easy too.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings concerning the target need, it was found out that the students need English program due to the demand of the target situation, that is, the program of the university, especially for the medical faculty. The students realize that English program is very important to help them in supporting their study and also their future career because English is beneficial for every aspect of their career. Most of them who chose health service as their future work stated that the materials are already appropriate with their study. They think that speaking and reading are the most important medium that will be used in their future career because speaking is the main English skill that the students have to master first so that it will be easy for them to master the other English skills. Reading is also highly prioritized since by reading the students can get more information so that their knowledge will improve to support their future work.

Related to the learning needs, the findings suggests that almost all of the respondents need the materials relevant to their main study. The study shows that the students still have difficulties in their study and they hope that the English program can help them in supporting their study. The students who choose speaking as the main English skill to master immediately need to master speaking as soon as possible so that it will be easier for them to comprehend English without ignoring the other English skills.

The most dominant needs of the students related to the target needs show that they learn English to develop career, to finish study and to widen international relationship because English program is

compulsory for all students of MUM and they have to join this program to fulfill the university program. Their future work field that they expect was in health service. They also stated that speaking and reading are the most dominant media that will be used in their future career, that is, in health institutions.

The most dominant needs of the students' related to the learning needs show that they need English program to support their study. They need the relevant materials in their study. Game and discussion are suggested methods of teaching to make it easier for them to understand the materials. They also stated that the text has been in accordance with their interest. In terms of the material, they stated that listening and speaking were difficult materials while reading and writing were easy for them.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The results of this study will surely help to shape the development of materials, teaching strategies, and skills needed in the medical field. Based on the results of data analysis of the most dominant needs of the students, it seems that the medical students of MUM needed the materials relevant to their study. Therefore, needs should be seen as an indispensable aspects of syllabus designed in order to link the present students' academic needs with their needs in their prospective career. In addition, needs involve not only the students but also all parties in the educational system and relevant users institutions that ultimately employ students.

Suggestion

This research offers several suggestions. For teachers, it is really urgent for them to be more familiar with the needs of the learners, so that they can enjoy materials that teachers give. The English materials should be based on the students' need in which materials are relevant to the content subjects of medicine. Teachers have to develop their teaching materials in order to fulfill the learners' interest. For the curriculum developers, the results of the study are very important to suit the materials with the students' needs and condition, since if they are suited with those aspects the English teaching will be achieved. For the learners, the students need to have positive attitudes toward English program to increase their knowledge and proficiency.

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