

BRIDGING THE EXPECTATION AND THE ACTUAL LEARNING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating the gap between students' perceived needs and the actual learning experience as a step in course evaluation. It employs a descriptive qualitative design, in which the instruments cover two kinds of questionnaire and an interview. There were 61 freshmen and three lecturers voluntarily join this study. The study suggests that the highest gap score were on vocabulary practices and listening skills. On the other hand, all productive skills got the lowest gap score. Thus, it is a need to carefully design reading materials to accommodate students' needs on learning vocabulary by arranging them based on certain topics and repeat the specific words in several texts. Meanwhile, it is also suggested to develop a module on listening as a supplementary exercise.

KEYWORDS: perceived needs, gap, matriculation course, EFL learners.

INTRODUCTION:

There have been several researchers who highlight on the urge of conducting needs assessment as a step on the curriculum development (Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017) or course evaluation (Simbolon: 2018; Astuti: 2009) or materials development (Rohmah: 2009; Sismiati & Latief: 2012). Conducting needs assessment or needs analysis for an educational institution or faculty is essential (Richards: 2002) as it is used to define the goals of learning, meet the learning objectives, design the materials, and later fulfill the university demands, that is produce better graduates.

As a private university, it is not allowed to open the national screening test for freshmen students. This may suggest that students who enrolled in a private university are those who academically are not accepted in those state universities. This may also imply, further, that those who are enrolled in English Education Department in the university have various low English proficiencies (Liskinasih & Lutviana, 2016), and it might happen that they also have low motivation in learning English due to various reasons. Poedjiastutie and Rhonda (2017) state that students who may not be accepted by State Universities seem to have an impact on the selection process, in turn, the English level of the students.

Matriculation course aims at equipping students with basic English skills until they reach pre-intermediate level. However, the result was not satisfactory (Weganofa & Hariyanto, 2015) yet. Thus, this paper presents the first step in the course evaluation of Integrated Course; specifically it tries to shed the light on what the students expected before joining the course and their actual experience after joining it. This study belongs to one of Poedjiastutie and Rhonda (2017) definitions of perceived needs; that is a need to revitalize both the content and the method for some existing course.

To date, there have been some attempts to investigate the effectiveness of a kind of matriculation course, one of which done by Cahyono (2002) stating that there is a significant difference between pretest and posttest score gathered from 626 students from eight universities. Another study was conducted to measure the correlation between in-class interaction and students' motivation (Sriemulyaningsih, 2014), indicating a positive strong correlation. However, although Integrated Course might be similar to Intensive Course which is implemented by some other universities, there has not been any publication yet on addressing the gap between the students' perceived needs and their actual learning process practices. Besides, students' profile differences among universities might result to different formulation of identifying the needs. Hence, the result of this research supplies a specific concept and rules in the course evaluation.

METHODS:

This study employed a case study, in which it is intended to explore and describe in-depth the gap between students' perceived needs and their actual learning experience attending their first semester course. Thus, this study is qualitative in its design (Borg, W.R. and Gall, M.D. 1983: 402). There were 61 freshmen students voluntarily joined this study. In the urge to answer the research problem, the researcher used two kinds of questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaires are intended to gather information on students' perception towards the implementation of the course. The data gathered from these questionnaires, later, were cross checked using interviews with several lecturers who teach in the second semester.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

Students' Perceived Needs towards Language Components:

The language components discussed cover pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. The result shows that the students had high expectation towards the learning of language components, intensely vocabulary. This indicates that the students see themselves are not confidence enough to use English yet that they need to study the basic and simple language components. From this finding it can be claimed that the students demand the lecturers to equip them with a lot of vocabulary, drill them with pronunciation practice, and push them to memorize grammar rules through examples.

Students' Learning Experience on Language Components:

The result indicates that they had not enough learning experience compared to their expectation. The students had moderate learning experience on grammar and vocabulary. In other words, they might not be satisfied with the learning process on those language components. However, the students might say that they got sufficient pronunciation practice as they rated the scale high.

Comparing the result between what the students expect at the beginning of the course and their learning experience, it is clearly seen that there is a gap between them. Interestingly, pronunciation gets the lowest gap. In other words, the students might think that they had got enough pronunciation practice because the lecturers provided a lot of pronunciation drill during learning process. U-shape seats in the classroom allowed both students and lecturers to move freely around the class while checking and modeling the pronunciation.

On the other hand, vocabulary got the highest gap between what the students expected and the actual learning experience. They might think that they did not get enough vocabulary exercise or the lecturers did not explicitly ask the students to memorize vocabulary. Interviewee C states that not all of the students had wide vocabulary size; some students even did not know the everyday words, such as throw, arrow, the White House and pub. This poor vocabulary size might be caused by content unfamiliarity of the textbook. Although the textbook used was arranged based on the topic, however some words might appear only once or two. This might hinder the students from enriching their vocabulary, as Sutarsyah (2008) claim that there is a tendency for a reader to forget the low frequency words, because they do not meet the words again elsewhere in the text.

Meanwhile, the gap between students' expectation in learning grammar and the actual learning experience shows moderate gap. Although students are able to mention basic grammar rules, such as simple present, present continuous and simple past, their comprehension towards its use and function are still shallow.

Students' Perceived Needs towards Language Skills:

Table 1 indicates that the students had high expectations in learning productive skills. These numbers also imply that the students demand the lecturers to provide many exercises and practices on these skills. Listening skill also shows high score. It might also indicate that the students see themselves are lack of these skills. Interestingly, the students' expectation towards learning language skills is higher than language components. This may later suggest for syllabus writing to be performance-based syllabus.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Expectation on Language Skills

Language Skills	Total Score	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Category
Writing	1303	21.44	22.00	3.269	High
Speaking	1340	21.97	23.00	2.871	High
Reading	1150	18.85	19.00	4.065	Moderate
Listening	1324	21.70	22.00	3.159	High

Students' Learning Experience on Language Skills:

Table 2 shows that productive skills got high category. This indicates that the lecturers had provided enough practices and exercises on these skills. Also, the teaching-learning activities had promoted sufficient achievement for students. Moreover, the score of reading skill exceeds the students' expectation. However, the students thought that they did not get enough listening exercises.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Learning Experience on Language Skills

Language Skills	Total Score	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Category
Writing	1254	20.56	22.00	4.284	High
Speaking	1292	21.18	21.00	3.329	High
Reading	1158	18.98	19.00	4.048	Moderate
Listening	1195	19.59	20.00	4.035	Moderate

Table 3 shows the interpretation of the gaps. In general, the teaching-learning activities on language skills show positive interpretation. Both productive skills got low gap, moreover reading skills did not show any gap between what the students expect and their learning experience. On the other hand, the result of interview with Interviewee C contradicted with the result of the gap. Interviewee C claimed that the students in the beginning of second semester were poor in writing skill. They did not know parts of speech, how to compose a simple sentence, or how to combine one sentence with another sentence.

Table 3. Gap between Students' Perceived Needs and Learning Experience on Language Skills

Language Component	Perceived Needs	Learning Experience	Gap	Interpretation
Writing	1303	1254	49	Low
Speaking	1340	1292	48	Low
Reading	1150	1158	-	-
Listening	1324	1195	129	High

The one that the researcher should concern about is listening skill. The gap between the students' expectation and the learning experience is high. Among all language components and skills, listening becomes the second highest gap after vocabulary. This indicates that the students expect massive listening practices, but the course did not provide it. Thus, it is suggested to develop a supplementary module on listening.

CONCLUSIONS:

In conclusion, the study shows several findings regarding the gap between what the students' expected before attending Integrated Course and after joining the course. First, the students shows high expectation on learning language components, which they expected to learn massive drill on pronunciation, vocabulary and rules on grammar. Second, the students show high demand on learning productive skills, specifically listening practice.

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