Assessing EFL Undergraduate Students' Needs for the Development of Writing Learning Materials

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Abstract
Learning materials are important components of the language teaching and learning process, including the writing course. To develop writing learning materials, particularly for higher education, it is crucial to identify the students' writing needs. As the initial step in developing learning materials to support teaching writing, this study aims to investigate undergraduate students' current abilities and needs, as well as the appropriate ICT tools. The study for needs assessments was responded by 184 English department students from various Indonesian universities and six of them were interviewed. The findings indicated that students of various capacities have the desire to acquire knowledge and improve their writing skills. The results highlight the undergraduate students' learning experiences and insufficient writing abilities, with problematic areas in grammar and the organization of ideas, as well as challenges in writing independently during the learning process. In addition, teachers should either have or improve their pedagogical expertise and be adaptive to the evolution of information and technology to fulfill the needs indicated by students. Further study is needed to take the next step toward developing and providing learning materials with a range of activities, assignments, assessments, and applications to excite students' interest and engagement in the writing course.
Keywords: needs analysis, writing skills, learning materials.

1. Introduction

Writing is a crucial academic skill, particularly for university students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. It plays central role not only in academic success but also in developing students' cognitive, social, and communicative competence (De Silva, 2015; Kerschbaum, 2016). However, despite its importance, writing remains one of the most challenging skills for many students, especially at the undergraduate level (Benzie & Harper, 2019; Mulyono & Artarini, 2021). Studies have shown that Indonesian EFL students often struggle with generating ideas, organizing content, and applying appropriate vocabulary and grammar (Aunurrahman et al., 2017). These difficulties reflect both linguistic limitations and a lack of critical thinking and self-regulated learning skills.

In higher education in Indonesia, writing is taught at various levels, often through courses classified according to student advancement. These courses typically combine both product- and process-based approaches. However, students' diverse needs and abilities are not always adequately addressed through the materials currently used. Writing instruction in these settings is often rigid, textbook-driven, and lacks integration with digital tools and relevant topics. This misalignment between instructional materials and learners' actual needs calls for a more systematic and data-informed approach to curriculum development.

One effective way to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of writing instruction is through needs analysis, a practice rooted in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) theory. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) define needs analysis as the initial and essential stage in course design, helping educators determine learners' necessities, lacks, and wants—collectively referred to as target needs—as well as their learning needs, which focus on the processes and conditions for learning. Similarly, Graves (2000) emphasizes needs assessment as an ongoing process that guides instructional decisions and material development. Needs analysis thus serves as a bridge between what students are currently capable of and what they must achieve in a target learning context.

Previous studies have underscored the value of needs analysis in language teaching and curriculum development. For example, Nunan (2004) underlines the role of learner-centered approaches in language learning, while Hutchinson & Waters (1987) outline the importance of target needs and learning needs in materials development. In the Indonesian context, several researchers have conducted a needs analyses for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses (Damanik et al., 2021; Gultom, 2016; Pranoto & Suprayogi, 2020), but relatively few have focused specifically on writing courses within undergraduate English departments. Moreover, those who have addressed writing often lack a comprehensive investigation into students' academic, linguistic, and affective needs, as well as their preferences for instructional materials and classroom practices.

In addition to identifying needs, exploring learners' interaction with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is also increasingly relevant in today's digital learning environments. ICT tools such as blogs, social media platforms, and collaborative writing apps have been recognized as motivating and supportive in the development of writing skills (Tomlinson, 2023). However, little research has investigated how students themselves perceive and prefer to use ICT in the context of writing instruction, particularly in Indonesia.

Despite the existing literature on writing instruction and needs analysis, there remains a research gap in understanding undergraduate EFL students' specific learning needs and preferences for digital tools in writing classes. While previous studies have explored writing difficulties and material design in general, they often lack a focused investigation into students' self-assessed abilities, targeted learning goals, and preferred modes of instruction using ICT. This study serves as a foundational stage in the development of writing learning materials that are responsive to the real needs of undergraduate EFL students in Indonesia. Guided by the frameworks of Graves (2000; Hutchinson & Waters (1987), this study aims to conduct a comprehensive needs analysis to inform material development for writing courses.

Specifically, the objectives of the studies are to identify the current writing abilities of undergraduate EFL students, assess students' target and learning needs related to writing instruction, and explore students' preferences for ICT tools in learning and practicing writing. By addressing these objectives, the study contributes practical insights for developing more relevant and engaging instructional materials that align with both the linguistic and technological realities of today's learners.

2. Method

This study applied a mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2012) to comprehensively investigate the needs of EFL undergraduate students in writing instruction. As the initial stage in developing writing learning materials, this needs analysis aimed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to ensure a deeper and more nuanced understanding of

learners' target and learning needs. The participants were 184 undergraduate students (40 male and 144 female) from three Indonesian universities, specifically from English Departments where writing courses are compulsory components of the curriculum. All participants had completed at least one basic writing course. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants, as the study targeted students with direct experience in academic writing instruction. For the interview phase, maximum variation sampling was employed to ensure representation from different institutions, gender groups, and perceived proficiency levels. From the larger sample, six students were invited for follow-up interviews based on their willingness to participate.

Before data collection, participants were informed about the study's objectives, voluntary nature, and confidentiality. Two instruments were used to collect the data: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire, delivered via Google Forms, served as the primary instrument. It included 25 items focusing on target needs and learning needs. Most items were multiple-choice or Likert scale-based, allowing participants to select more than one response where appropriate. The questionnaire was reviewed by two TEFL experts for content validity. The semi-structured interviews aimed to clarify and deepen the understanding of the data obtained from the questionnaire. The interview protocol included open-ended questions addressing the students' experiences in writing classes, their specific challenges in academic writing, preferences regarding learning materials and teaching strategies, and suggestions for improving current writing instruction.

The questionnaire responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, to identify general trends and distributions. The data were organized around the key components of needs analysis. The qualitative data from the interviews was recorded and then transcribed. The data in the form of interview transcripts was analyzed based on the data analysis from Miles et al., (2014). After transcription, responses irrelevant to the study focus were excluded (data reduction), and relevant responses were coded manually. Themes that emerged were mapped to the categories explored in the questionnaire, such as difficulties with coherence, feedback preferences, and expectations for more contextualized materials. The integration of both data sets was done during interpretation.

3. Results
3.1. Findings
3.1.1. Necessities

In relation to the necessities, Table 1 describes the main reason for the students to study English as being for their future jobs (63%). It means that they need to master English in order to help them find jobs that require English skills. Most students also had another reason to learn English: they need it when they continue their studies. This table shows that 91% of students indicated that speaking was the most important skill, followed by writing, listening, and reading in order of importance. Most of them desired to be able to communicate orally. In terms of the importance of writing skills, almost all of the students (more than 70%) believe that writing will be helpful to support their learning, their success in the recent study, and as well as their future work.

Table 1. The results of necessities

No.	Statements	Percentage
1	The students' reasons to learn English: for their future jobs for their future education for communication with foreigners for travelling abroad	63% 55% 44% 30%
2	The most important skills: Speaking Writing Listening Reading	91% 48% 44% 32%
3	Writing skills to support students' learning: very important important	75% 25%
4	Writing skills to support students' success in study: very important important	74% 26%
5	Writing skills for students' future work: very important important	72% 28%

The data suggests a clear necessity for writing instruction to be goal-oriented, aligned with students' professional and academic aspirations. Although speaking is seen as the top skill, writing is highly valued for long-term success. Therefore, developing writing materials that support both academic and occupational functions, possibly integrated with speaking activities, will better meet students' needs and expectations. In addition, students' preference for speaking over writing was evident in both the questionnaire and interviews. Some students reported feeling "*more spontaneous and certain when speaking*" while finding writing "*hard and confusing*." This suggests that integrating speaking into writing instruction, such as through oral brainstorming, verbal drafting, or collaborative discussion, might help reduce anxiety and activate background knowledge.

3.1.2. Lacks

The results of the identification of the student's lacks consist of three aspects related to the students' difficulties in writing in general, writing during online learning, and using some learning apps for writing. Table 2 shows that the main difficulty for students in writing was the use of proper grammar (82%), followed by the difficulty in organizing ideas (62%), and word choices (58%). In relation to the obstacles encountered during online learning, most students highlighted their lack of ability to write independently (63%). It also happened because they still depended on their lecturers' explanations and guidance in practicing writing (45%). Other issues encountered by students during online learning included unstable internet connections (42%), and a lack of writing materials (30%). In

addition, most students also lacked the skills to use learning apps for writing (58%), some of them did not know what kinds of apps could be used to improve their writing skills (42%), and there were problems related to devices and connections (33%).

Table 2. The results of lacks

No.	Statements	Percentage
6	The main difficulties in writing: grammar organizing ideas word choice supporting details topic sentence	82% 62% 58% 30% 27%
7	Difficulties in writing during online learning: lack of ability to write independently lack of explanation from lecturers unstable internet connection lack of writing materials limited devices	63% 45% 42% 30% 16%
8	Difficulties in using learning apps for writing: unskilled in applying the apps I do not know the apps yet limited devices and connections	58% 42% 33%

The table highlights significant linguistic, pedagogical, and technological gaps that EFL students face. Curriculum development should integrate explicit grammar and organization instruction, foster independent writing practices, and ensure inclusive, tech-accessible learning environments. Addressing these lacks is essential for enhancing both writing competence and student confidence in the writing process. Interview responses revealed a lack of peer review and insufficient writing practice. These findings suggest that students' writing difficulties may stem from inadequate teaching strategies, limited opportunities for practice, and ineffective or minimal feedback. From the interviews, the students identified linguistic challenges, particularly in grammar, as a major obstacle in their writing process. One student shared, "*The most difficult part is grammar. I always get confused about tenses and sentence structure. That makes it hard to write a good paragraph*." Additionally, it revealed that students often depend heavily on the materials and topics provided by their lecturers. This over-reliance limits their exposure to broader content and learning strategies, thereby constraining their ability to develop as independent learners. One student remarked: "*Mostly, we use the topics that our lecturer gives us. There aren't many other materials. So, we just stick with what's given*." These statements illustrate a lack of training in utilizing external resources, such as library materials, online articles, or writing forums. The student's reflection suggests a gap in resource literacy, a crucial skill for academic writing development.

3.1.3. Wants

As shown in Table 3, the information about what the students wish to learn in the writing course was described. 70% of students chose "daily life" as an interesting topic, and it became the most appropriate context in writing materials. They also wanted to learn some topics about updated news, followed by those about experience and profession. Related to the specific topics for class discussion, the students preferred to learn about essay organization and development, and they wanted to study argumentative essays rather than other types of essays. For activities in the learning process, most students chose reviewing the examples as the most interesting activity. Regarding the learning method for writing, many students preferred lectures and discussions to be done in the classroom. Furthermore, half of the students indicated journal writing as their favorite assignment, and their needs about the type of assessment came from both lecturers and students.

Table 4. The results of the wants

No.	Statements	Percentage
9	The context of the materials to be learned: daily life updated news experience profession	 70% 48% 38% 37%
10	Specific topics to be studied: essay organization and development argumentative essays comparison and contrast essay classification essay	 69% 61% 36% 34%
11	The activities in the learning process: reviewing the examples brainstorming ideas and discussion analyzing text structure writing ideas based on the topic given	 85% 46% 38% 12%
12	Types of learning methods for writing: lecture and discussion presentation mind-mapping	 70% 43% 15%
13	Types of assignments for writing: Journal writing Observation Project	 54% 41% 40%
14	Types of assessment for writing: from lecturers from students	 57% 50%

15	The time allocation to write one essay is:	
	four hours	33%
	two hours	30%
	three hours	28%
	an hour	9%
16	Types of learning models for writing:	
	Blended or hybrid learning	63%
	Face-to face learning	39%
	online learning	19%
17	Activity during the learning process:	
	work in small groups	48%
	work in pairs	38%
	work individually	23%

The table shows the students desire practical, engaging, and supportive writing instruction focused on: real-life relevance, clear structure and example-driven teaching, argumentative and developmental essay skills, instructor-led feedback and guidance. Designing a curriculum that addresses these wants can greatly enhance motivation, participation, and writing outcomes. This data also emphasizes students' need for extended, structured time to develop their writing, a blended approach that combines the benefits of both in-person and online instruction, collaborative activities to enhance engagement and writing quality, designing writing programs that reflect these preferences can improve both motivation and outcomes. Based on the interview results, the students explained that they got limited writing materials because they only depended on the topics prepared by the lecturers and lacked the skills to use other learning resources effectively. Meanwhile, in response to the question about the type of learning model, most students preferred blended or hybrid learning, while the others chose face-to-face learning. They chose it because, in some situations, they needed to discuss things directly with the lecturers and their friends during the learning process. In addition, the students preferred to work in small groups and in pairs during the learning process. They described how working with friends could help them develop their ideas in writing

3.1.4. Students' current ability

As shown in Table 4, the students were asked about their current ability, particularly in writing skills. Half of the students (54%) were from poor and very poor categories, implying they still lacked ability in writing. This is also related to the types of text that can be written by the students; most of them (79%) chose to write daily notes such as a diary or about their experiences, and only a few students could write essays and produce creative writing. The previous learning system had an impact on the students' writing frequency (77%), showing most of them did not practice writing in English regularly. The most popular writing strategy used by the students was translating the draft of their work after they wrote it in their first language (Indonesian). Only a few students used an outline as their strategy for writing an essay.

Table 4. Current ability of the students

No.	Statements	Percentage
18	Based on their self-assessment, the writing ability of students: very good good poor very poor	2% 44% 49% 5%
19	Types of text that can be written by students: daily notes (diary/experience) essay creative writing (poem or short story) email/messages	79% 37% 37% 33%
20	Students' writing frequency: always often sometimes rarely	2% 21% 54% 23%
21	Strategies used in writing: drafting text in Indonesian/translating learning from the internet study the examples from lecturers making an outline	68% 46% 38% 34%

This table underscores that most students lack confidence and regular practice in academic writing, often relying on informal genres and translation-based strategies. These findings point to the urgent need for writing materials that are level-appropriate, strategy-focused, and capable of scaffolding academic writing skills through practice and feedback. From the interviews, several students noted that they felt more confident writing diaries because "*there is no pressure to be grammatically perfect*" and "*I can write freely without worrying about academic style.*" This preference can be linked to students' limited exposure to academic writing, low self-efficacy, and a lack of explicit instruction in genre-based writing.

3.1.5. The Use of ICT tools

Finally, the last category was about the use of ICT tools, as shown in Table 5. Most students described social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter as types of media used to practice writing (74%), followed by notes on their smartphones or laptops (72%). When asked about appropriate ICT tools for writing, most students preferred mobile apps (50%) and e-learning (45%). Related to the types of learning platforms used during online learning, many students chose Google Classroom (83%) or their own e-learning platform provided by the universities (66%). It means that the integration of technology is also needed to support the writing course. Most students also preferred Google Docs (63%) as appropriate apps to improve writing skills, followed by game apps (31%). It also takes the lecturers' capabilities in choosing and using appropriate ICT tools and train the students to utilize them. Based on the interview results, the students also prefer to use ICT tools that are easy to use and have free access.

Table 5. The use of ICT tools

No.	Statements	Percentage
22	Types of media used to practice/write in English: social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter) notes on a smartphone/laptop blog YouTube	 74% 72% 9% 6%
23	Appropriate ICT tools for writing: mobile apps e-learning YouTube blog	 50% 45% 37% 31%
24	Types of learning platforms used during online learning: google classroom campus e-learning Edmodo Microsoft Teams Zoom/Google Meet	 83% 66% 22% 18% 4%
25	Some apps used to improve writing: google docs game app Write & improve Blog/novelist	 63% 31% 14% 8%

The data from this table suggests a strong reliance on convenient and familiar tools like mobile apps, social media, and Google Classroom. However, more specialized writing tools (e.g., Write & Improve, blogs) are underutilized, pointing to an opportunity for further awareness and integration into learning strategies. In terms of preferred learning approaches, students reported a strong preference for interactive and digital tools. Social media platforms such as Instagram and blogs were favoured writing outlets. This preference was reinforced by several interviewees who described social media as "*fun and familiar*," and "*a platform where I can write without being judged*." This reflects the interactive and non-threatening nature of social media, which supports informal practice. The use of social media in writing instruction can thus bridge students' informal digital habits and formal writing development.

3.2. Discussion
3.2.1. Necessities

The study revealed that students see English writing as vital for future academic and professional success, even though speaking is often prioritized. This supports findings by Cheung (2016), who notes that writing is often undervalued in language learning despite being critical for academic advancement. In alignment with Kerschbaum (2016), students in this study recognized writing as essential for structured communication, particularly in academic and workplace environments. The desire for materials that are professionally relevant aligns with Pratami et al., (2021); Rachmawati (2020), who emphasized that

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) materials should be developed based on learners' projected roles in the job market. Incorporating speaking-to-writing strategies, as suggested in Badger & White (2000) process-genre model, can be a beneficial approach to reduce anxiety and ease the transition from oral to written communication.

3.2.2. Lacks

The most critical lacks identified were grammar proficiency, organization of ideas, and digital literacy—all of which are consistent with the barriers cited in Aunurrahman et al., (2017); Hyland (2003). Grammar remains a foundational weakness among EFL students, which affects their ability to construct coherent academic texts. Students' over-reliance on instructors and their lack of independence. Additionally, Mulyono & Artarini (2021) emphasized the importance of developing rhetorical awareness and genre knowledge—areas where many participants in this study lacked exposure. The technological gap, particularly in navigating ICT tools, reflects the findings of Ervansyah et al., (2019) who observed that while students are digitally active, their literacy in academic technology is limited. This suggests a pressing need for integrating digital literacy training into writing instruction.

3.2.3. Wants

Students expressed a strong preference for learning through real-life contexts, engaging topics (e.g., daily life and current events), and structured essay types like argumentative writing. These preferences align with Tomlinson (2023) claim that meaningful, relatable content enhances learner engagement and facilitates deeper cognitive processing. Furthermore, the demand for example-based activities supports Nation & Macalister (2010) assertion that modelling and task-based learning improve learner outcomes. Their findings emphasize that writing tasks should mirror real-world applications, with clear objectives and formats. The preference for journal writing and group-based activities corresponds with Sharp (2016) who emphasizes the value of reflective writing and social collaboration in developing writing fluency and metacognitive awareness. The data also confirm that students are more comfortable and productive in blended or hybrid learning models, reinforcing the benefits highlighted in Benzie & Harper, (2019) who found that digital tools enhance student autonomy when appropriately scaffolded.

3.2.4. Current Abilities

The findings indicated that students' current abilities are relatively low, with most feeling unprepared to produce academic texts. This supports Emilia & Hamied (2015), who attributed students' weak performance in academic writing to a lack of explicit instruction in genre-based writing and rhetorical structure. Students' reliance on translation-based strategies instead of pre-writing or outlining is problematic. As Nation (2009) notes, developing fluent and coherent writing requires training in drafting and revising, not merely translating from a first language. This reinforces the importance of structured, strategy-based instruction that introduces academic genres gradually.

3.2.5. Use of ICT Tools

Students favour social media and familiar digital platforms for writing, yet are underexposed to specialized tools like Write & Improve or blogging software. The preference for collaborative tools such as Google Docs aligns with Benzie & Harper (2019) who emphasize that cloud-based platforms support co-authoring, feedback exchange, and learner engagement in distributed learning environments. Moreover, the use of social media as a low-anxiety space for writing is consistent with Tomlinson (2013), who argues for bridging formal and informal writing practices. To support students' comfort and

familiarity with digital tools, instructors need professional development in ICT integration—a recommendation also echoed and teachers must be equipped to incorporate technology into curriculum design effectively (Eryansyah et al., 2019).

By conducting a needs assessment, some problems in learning can be analysed, whether related to the teaching strategies, learning materials, the students lack of interest in learning, etc. The results can be used to develop an alternative model of teaching that can be applied as a solution in English language teaching or for particular writing skills. Syatriana (2016) suggested that when designing an English coursebook, teachers should consider students' needs so that they can encourage themselves to develop their own learning strategies and become autonomous learners without fear of making mistakes. From the activity of needs analysis, some aspects of learning can be identified and taken into consideration for future language teaching and learning processes. The results of the needs analysis conducted in this study showed that the needs of students in learning English skills, especially writing, are to support their current educational attainment. Learning topics that interest them are things related to their daily lives and issues that are currently viral. In addition, learning activities that are varied and supported by the use of appropriate technology can help them improve their language skills.

4. Conclusion

This study was conducted as an essential initial stage in the development of writing learning materials for the undergraduate students of the English Departments in Indonesia. The findings emphasize the importance of designing materials that are grounded in students' target needs, such as academic writing proficiency, and learning needs, including preferences for interactive, context-based, and technologically supported activities. The study revealed that students with varying levels of proficiency have distinct preferences and challenges in writing, highlighting the need for differentiated instructional materials. These materials should accommodate diverse skill levels, allowing for scaffolded learning and personalized support. For example, incorporating progressive tasks—starting from informal genres like diaries and progressing toward academic texts—can help build student confidence and competence gradually.

In practical terms, the findings suggest that future writing materials should integrate digital tools and platforms (e.g., blogs, social media tasks) that align with students' habits and increase engagement. It also needs to combine speaking and writing activities to support idea development and reduce writing anxiety. The materials should provide explicit instruction on structure, coherence, and academic vocabulary through models and guided practice. Additionally, the study underscores the need for teachers to enhance their pedagogical and digital competencies to effectively implement these materials. Teacher training or professional development programs should be aligned with the material development process to ensure coherence in delivery. Future research should focus on the design, implementation, and evaluation of these writing materials, ensuring they contain varied and meaningful activities, authentic tasks, and assessment strategies that reflect real-world academic writing needs. It is expected that such materials will not only stimulate student interest and participation but also significantly contribute to achieving course learning objectives.

Although this study provides valuable insights into the needs of undergraduate EFL students in writing instruction, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was limited to a sample of students from three Indonesian universities, which may not fully represent the diversity of undergraduate EFL learners across the country. Future research

should include a broader range of institutions and geographical locations to increase generalizability. In addition, the study focused primarily on student perspectives. While this learner-centred approach is essential, incorporating teacher viewpoints and institutional curriculum policies would provide a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities in writing instruction.

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