English Reading Materials in Non-Formal Education: A Need Analysis

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Abstract

Conducting a needs analysis is imperative for customizing educational content to align with students' specific learning prerequisites, especially in the realm of reading skill development, which is acknowledged as a challenging domain. This study investigates into the necessity for tailored English reading materials within non-formal educational frameworks, with a focus on junior high students at the Gosmart Institution in Yogyakarta. Utilizing a combination of surveys and interviews, data was collected from 50 students, revealing a strong inclination towards vocabulary enhancement and the extraction of detailed information from texts as their primary learning objectives. The analysis uncovers students' difficulties with presentation activities, largely due to confidence issues, alongside a pronounced preference for reading materials enriched with illustrative and social media images. Additionally, the study points out the scarcity of authentic reading resources, which hampers the effectiveness of teaching strategies. The findings advocate for the integration of these insights into the development of English reading materials, proposing a targeted approach to ameliorate reading instruction and address the highlighted educational needs. This study underscores the importance of adapting educational resources to meet learner preferences and challenges, thereby enhancing the overall teaching and learning experience in reading skills development.

Keywords: Need analysis, non-formal education, reading materials, EFL learner.

INTRODUCTION

In English language learning, students are expected to master four essential skills, among which reading is fundamental. Reading is essential for students to enhance their capacity for critical information exploration (Lestari & Pratolo, 2019). For non-native learners, reading is particularly challenging due to its complexity and the need for meaning construction from texts (Brooks et al., 2021). Reading is critical in cultural comprehension, democratic engagement, and professional achievement (Castles et al., 2018). It enables

students to grasp textual ideas, understand subjects thoroughly, extract specific information, and appreciate authors' viewpoints and evidence. Consequently, phonemics, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension strategies, and fluency are identified as crucial components of reading proficiency (Akyol & Boyaci-Altinay, 2019). Enhancing these aspects is essential for students and teachers to fulfil the objectives of effective reading instruction.

The enhancement of reading skills is vital for academic success and plays a significant role in building students' self-image and character. Students often need help with unfamiliar vocabulary, complex writing styles, or excessively lengthy information, which can hinder comprehension (Mirza et al., 2021). To mitigate these difficulties, the active involvement of teachers in facilitating reading activities becomes crucial. This support can be augmented using interactive learning media, diverse learning activities, and engaging materials (Leow & Neo, 2014). Reading materials must be carefully prepared to meet students' needs, ensuring a structured learning and teaching process (Kalenda, 2015).

Investigating learners' needs is a critical aspect of developing educational materials. This process is essential for determining the appropriateness of materials crafted by educators. Hence, the primary goal of a needs analysis is to evaluate students' communicative requirements to achieve specific educational objectives, as Clement et al. (2015) outlined. This analysis encompasses various elements of the teaching and learning journey, including students' backgrounds, their current level of language proficiency, and their goals for learning English (Vongvilay et al., 2020). A needs analysis directs educators to identify and define students' target and learning needs, which include their lacks, wants, and necessities, according to Menggo et al. (2019). "Lacks" refers to the essential knowledge or skills students need to acquire. "Wants" addresses students' preferences in their learning journey. "Necessities" relate to the goals students aim to achieve through language use. Consequently, reading materials must be designed to encompass critical components such as phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, ensuring they align with these identified needs.

Learning materials play a crucial role in the curriculum, significantly enhancing students' understanding and knowledge of various topics (Utami et al., 2019). These resources support the acquisition of competencies related to the learning content, encourage students to apply concepts, and facilitate evaluation opportunities (Sastrawati et al., 2021). The effectiveness of the learning and teaching process is heavily influenced by the availability and quality of these materials (Frimpong, 2021). Thus, the suitability of learning materials is directly linked to students' academic performance, highlighting the importance of educators' expertise and professionalism in material design (Savasci & Tomul, 2013).

Research on needs analysis within educational settings has been extensive. One study by Ronaldo and Zaim (2021) analyzed the need for English learning materials among higher education students, focusing on the specific needs of Engineering students in their current academic and professional environments. This study highlighted that well-suited English learning materials enhance students' motivation. Another study targeted the development of English instructional materials for integrated Islamic elementary schools (Utami et al., 2019), providing insights for English teachers on selecting appropriate instructional materials to engage young learners, specifically in the context of integrated Islamic

elementary education. These studies underscore the importance of tailored educational content in motivating students and addressing their unique learning needs.

The current research landscape on the needs analysis of English reading materials in non-formal education settings is still being determined, focusing on the broader spectrum of English language learning needs. While non-formal education can result in certification, similar to formal education, it employs a less systematic assessment methodology and is managed by professionals like teachers and technicians. This educational approach focuses on understanding individual needs and social interactions, in contrast to formal education's emphasis on knowledge acquisition (Cao, 2019; Moldovan & Bocoş-Binţinţan, 2015). This paper seeks to delve into the specificities of English reading materials as perceived by students at the Gosmart institution. Doing so aims to illuminate these students' target and learning needs concerning English materials, particularly emphasizing reading skills. This nuanced approach intends to fill the gap in understanding the distinct requirements for reading materials, thereby providing insights into how these materials can be better tailored to enhance the English reading proficiency of students in non-formal educational contexts.

METHOD

This study aimed to investigate the need for English reading materials among junior high school students at the Gosmart Institution in Yogyakarta, utilizing a descriptive research approach with surveys and interviews as primary instruments. The survey sought to identify the students' target needs and learning requirements, while the interviews were conducted to gather in-depth data. A total of 50 students participated in the study, all selected purposively based on their experience in a reading course, adhering to a purposive sampling technique defined by Campbell et al. (2020) and Etikan and Bala (2017) as selecting samples based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives.

The survey consisted of 26 closed-ended questions, adapted from Rohmah (2015), and categorized into lacks, wants, and necessities. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were carried out with both teachers and students to complement the survey findings. Three students were chosen as representatives for the interviews, which included 13 questions—5 directed at students and eight at the teacher. The analysis of the survey data involved calculating frequencies and percentages to evaluate the needs assessment, with the design of future materials determined by the highest frequency and percentage responses. Percentages were calculated by dividing each response's frequency by the total number of respondents and multiplying by 100%.

Besides, the interviews utilized a semi-structured approach with open-ended questions, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences in the English Community freely. This method was chosen to create a comfortable setting for genuine expression. Qualitative data were analyzed through content and thematic analysis, often confused as identical (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis process comprised three steps: condensing data to highlight essential themes, organizing data for clarity, and drawing and verifying conclusions.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Learning needs analysis enables students to articulate specific educational material requirements, ensuring effective learning outcomes and teaching strategies. The findings from this analysis are detailed below.
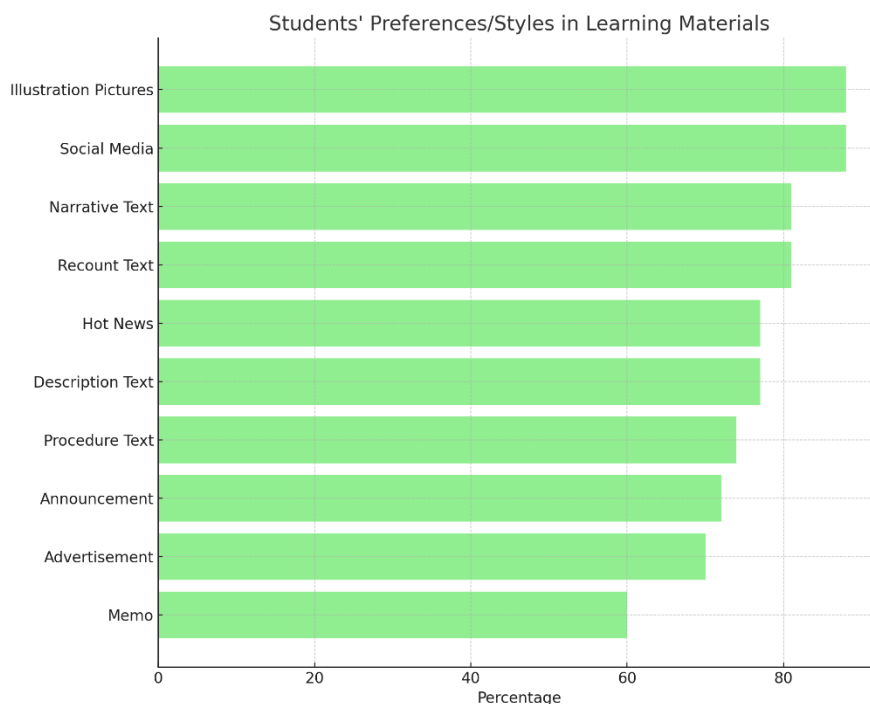
Figure 1. Students' responses toward Learners' Preferences/Styles

Figure 1 demonstrates a clear trend in student preferences regarding learning materials. Illustration pictures and social media content emerge as the most popular formats, with 88% of students positively responding to each. This suggests that incorporating visual elements and real-world connections found on social media could significantly increase learner engagement. Students also strongly prefer narrative and recount texts (81%), indicating an interest in stories and firsthand accounts. Hot news, descriptions, procedure texts, and announcements hold moderate appeal, with preference levels between 70-77%. These formats can be more engaging by connecting them to current events or real-life applications. Memos represent the least favoured content type with a 60% preference level, suggesting a need to rethink their presentation, perhaps by incorporating visuals or interactive elements.

Overall, the data in Figure 1 emphasizes the importance of a student-centred approach focused on visually appealing materials, diverse text formats with a storytelling element, and real-world relevance. Therefore, illustration pictures and social media have emerged as the most preferred topics for the Reading course. They play a crucial role in vocabulary enhancement, a fundamental aspect of language learning (Marzuki, 2018). Pictures assist students in recognizing unfamiliar words and interpreting their meanings, serving as effective visual aids (Khafidhoh & Carolina, 2019). Furthermore, pictures

stimulate students' curiosity, engage their minds, and support teachers in clearly conveying learning concepts (Shabiralyani et al., 2015).

Table 1. Student's difficulties in reading activities

No.	Reading Difficulty	Percentage
1	Presentation	86%
2	Finding the meaning of vocabulary	72%
3	Finding main Ideas	66%
4	Discussion	62%

Table 1 highlights the key challenges students face during reading activities. The most significant difficulty lies in how the material is presented (86%), suggesting that the text's format, organization, or clarity can significantly impact comprehension. Finding the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary is another major obstacle (72%), indicating a need for more excellent vocabulary support. Identifying main ideas is also challenging for many students (66%), highlighting the importance of teaching strategies for understanding the core message of a text. Finally, discussions about the reading material (62%) also present a difficulty, potentially due to a lack of confidence in expressing understanding or difficulties in articulating ideas verbally.

Presenting competency refers to an individual's ability to effectively and persuasively communicate a message, leveraging verbal and non-verbal cues to achieve specific objectives (Borisova et al., 2019). Emotional competencies, which often develop through the experience of presenting, are crucial for managing the challenges associated with public speaking (Rautakoski et al., 2021). One significant barrier to effective presentation is students' anxiety about public performance, which can hinder their ability to convey their work confidently (Kho et al., 2015). Furthermore, presenting information is challenging as it requires individuals to articulate their understanding of a text before their peers (Henriques & Madeira, 2017). To mitigate students' anxiety and address these challenges, intensive practice of presentation skills is recommended. This practice aims to build confidence and proficiency in public speaking, enhancing presentation competency.

Table 2. Students' responses toward learners' necessities

No.	Learners' Necessities in Reading	Percentage
1	To improve my vocabulary	89%
2	To increase my score at school	85%
3	To support my future study level	84%
4	To train my concentration	82%
5	To understand books/magazines/newspapers comprehensively	79%
6	To build up my confidence in understanding written information	79%
7	To develop my critical thinking skill	76%

Table 2 highlights the primary reasons why students consider reading a necessity. The overwhelming majority of students believe Reading is essential for improving vocabulary (89%), increasing their academic scores (85%), and supporting their future studies (84%). Additionally, Reading is perceived as crucial for training concentration (82%), comprehending written materials like books or news (79%), and boosting confidence

in their understanding (79%). Finally, a significant portion of students (76%) recognize the role of reading in developing their critical thinking skills.

This data underscores the multifaceted benefits students believe reading offers for academic success, personal growth, and intellectual development. Rochman (2018) found that a student's level of understanding in Reading significantly enhances their ability to memorize new words. Consequently, reading proficiency boosts students' immediate comprehension and contributes to their long-term knowledge retention (Alghonaim, 2020). Students with limited vocabulary often need help understanding texts (Brooks et al., 2021). Conversely, a higher vocabulary level improves a learner's overall English proficiency, especially in reading skills (Zhang & Graham, 2020). This improvement is due to their enhanced initial comprehension, which facilitates the acquisition of additional vocabulary from auditory input (Zhang & Graham, 2020).

Table 3. Students' responses to preferred reading activities

No.	Favorite Reading Activities	Percentage
1	I like to read a text and find details information	91%
2	I like to read and answer comprehension questions	91%
3	I like to find the meaning of the vocabulary in the text	77%
4	I like to read a text and find the main ideas	77%
5	I like to find the synonyms of specific terms in the text	72%

Table 3 reveals a strong student preference for reading activities promoting active text engagement. Finding detailed information and answering comprehension questions are the most popular activities (91%), suggesting that students enjoy delving into the content and demonstrating their understanding. Additionally, focusing on vocabulary development (77%) and identifying main ideas (77%) remains essential to students. Finding synonyms (72%) is a favoured activity, likely because it contributes to vocabulary expansion and a more nuanced understanding of the text. These preferences indicate that students favour reading activities that challenge them to analyze the text, expand their vocabulary, and extract critical information.

This approach facilitates reader engagement with the text, enabling them to explore and comprehend its diverse knowledge in detail (Rochman, 2018). Such in-depth understanding aids learners in effectively addressing provided questions (Febrijanto et al., 2022). It empowers readers to accurately describe and efficiently process the information presented (Winsler et al., 2022). Moreover, mastering the skill of examining detailed information enhances note-taking abilities, significantly contributing to the retention and encoding of information for long-term learning (Siegel et al., 2020).

The reading guide emerged as the preferred activity, highlighting its effectiveness in meeting student's needs, especially their interest in uncovering specific information within texts. One student expressed, **"I prefer the activity where the teacher guided me regarding unknown words or meanings from the reading text we are studying."** (P2-TSER- ATT), underscoring the value of direct guidance in navigating textual nuances.

A reading guide is a strategic approach that encourages students to focus on comprehending the text (Yoshimura, 2009). It involves student-centric activities that encompass discovering, processing, and presenting information from a text under the

guidance of an instructor or teacher (Wilawan, 2022). This method is beneficial for facilitating deeper understanding and engagement with the material. Teachers are encouraged to implement such interactive classroom activities, enabling students to thoroughly explore and elucidate the content of texts (Ayyub, 2011). This approach not only aids in vocabulary expansion and concept understanding but also fosters a more interactive and immersive learning environment.

The findings from the interviews reveal that reading texts about social media is perceived as more engaging and enjoyable, preventing boredom in the learning and teaching process (Adu-Sarkodie et al., 2015). One interviewee mentioned, **"Social media is interesting as I can engage with this current situation."** (P2-PFR-SMA), highlighting social media's relevance and dynamism to learning. With the advent of diverse new social media platforms, learners have opportunities to enhance their language skills through engaging in relevant, real-time activities and practising the target language on their own (Dhanya, 2016).

Furthermore, students use social media to exchange academic content and insights, learn to apply language skills in real-world contexts, improve pronunciation, and broaden their vocabulary (Aravind & Bhuvaneswari, 2022). Additionally, using illustrative pictures in reading materials was impactful. Another participant expressed, **"I like guessing the words of certain pictures because my concentration is filled."** (P3-PFR-IPS), indicating how illustrative pictures can captivate attention and aid in language acquisition.

Reading materials featuring illustration pictures are simple yet impactful topics that help sustain students' focus (Zhao et al., 2020). The role of images may facilitate students' comprehension of linguistic elements in texts, aiding in the integration of word recognition, syntax, and prior knowledge through matching and mapping processes (Erfani, 2012). It is noted that both social media and illustrative pictures enhance the enjoyment and engagement of students in developing their reading skills.

Besides, data from the teacher revealed that students' vocabulary mastery needs to be improved, hindering their comprehensive understanding of texts (Sari & Aminatun, 2021). Task types were introduced to improve students' textual comprehension and vocabulary encounters (Makhmudovna, 2022). Additionally, the teacher noted the need for more practice to enhance students' critical thinking abilities. However, there was an acknowledgement that the exercises and materials provided needed to address the learners' needs more effectively, resulting in diminished student motivation towards learning activities (Pitesa & Thau, 2014). Authentic learning materials were emphasized, as such resources can significantly increase classroom engagement and relevance by connecting with students' existing knowledge and experiences (Dhanya, 2016).

Teachers shared insights such as, **"I give them time to read it first and guess the meaning by the context..."** (Q4/A4/TR), and, **"Time to exercise, they need to train their logic to find the meaning of the difficult text"** (Q6/A6/TR), illustrating strategies to improve comprehension and critical thinking. However, the absence of teacher-specific materials was highlighted: **"This course doesn't have materials for teachers as a guide..."** (Q8/A8/TR), pointing out a resource gap.

Furthermore, it was argued that learning materials should be engaging, accessible, current, and practical. The challenge of sourcing authentic materials was identified,

underlining the need for the institution to provide such materials to foster real-world application of knowledge and skills (Umirova, 2020). Surprisingly, there needed to be more authentic material for teaching guidance, forcing the teacher to source materials independently. Additionally, the teacher's difficulty interpreting vocabulary meanings complicates students' ability to discern word significance. Developing teachers' interpretive skills is critical, as it directly affects students' capacity to grasp key concepts, differentiate facts from opinions, and make informed analyses of texts (Ma, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This research aimed at Gosmart Institution, Yogyakarta, has illuminated significant insights into students' target and learning needs concerning English reading materials. The analysis underscored a definitive student preference for vocabulary enhancement as a critical objective in their reading practice. Furthermore, students expressed a strong predilection for engaging with text that provides an opportunity to delve into detailed information, reflecting a deeper engagement with the material. An exciting finding was the students' favour towards illustrative pictures and social media content in reading classes, suggesting these mediums significantly enhance the learning experience by aligning with students' interests. Despite these insights, a critical challenge emerged: the lack of authentic materials for reading instruction, which compromised the effectiveness of teaching efforts and presentation skills, became the main challenge in reading classrooms because students often feel depressed presenting their work in front of the class. This gap underscored the need for innovative solutions and highlighted the importance of teacher creativity and adaptability in the face of limited resources.

Based on these findings, it is imperative to recommend integrating authentic materials that resonate with students' interests and the current digital landscape into the curriculum. This approach addresses the resource gap and fosters a more engaging and effective learning environment. Therefore, this study advocates for the thoughtful development of English learning materials, particularly those tailored for reading courses, to better meet students' needs and enhance learning outcomes. The insights from this research should serve as a valuable reference for educational material developers, providing direction in creating relevant and impactful content for students' reading proficiency and language acquisition.

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