



## EXPLORING THE ACADEMIC NEEDS OF RURAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PRE-INTERMEDIATE GRAMMAR COURSE

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Accepted :

10 March 2024

Published :

10 June 2024

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### ABSTRACT

In order to assist lecturers in customising their teaching strategies and course materials for pre-intermediate grammar students living in rural locations, this study focuses on doing pre-lecture needs analysis. Using a quantitative method, 24 students enrolled in Universitas Sulawesi Barat's English Language Education programme for the academic year 2023–2024 were given closed-ended questions via a WhatsApp group. To find patterns in the gathered data, statistical analysis and purposeful sampling were applied. The results shed light on a variety of student characteristics, including age, mother tongue distribution, performance in the basic grammar course, ability to build simple English sentences, mastery of verb tense formulas, lexical proficiency, preferences for learning and assignments, and skill targets. The study draws attention to a variety of factors, including student skill objectives, favourite activities, assignment preferences, performance gaps, and vocabulary problems. Teachers and policymakers can improve the quality of English language instruction, particularly in grammar classes, and establish a supportive learning environment for students in Indonesia's rural areas by acknowledging and addressing the issues and preferences that have been identified. Furthermore, teachers around the world can use the needs analysis tool, the WhatsApp polling technique, and the pre-lecture activities as a source of inspiration and guidance to deliver engaging, balanced, and professional lectures that are customised to the needs of their students and meet graduate competency standards.

**Keywords:** *Needs Analysis, Academic Needs, Rural University Students, Pre-Intermediate Grammar*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of a need analysis in English language learning is to identify the precise resources that students need to advance their proficiency in the language. It entails gathering information about the goals, interests, and past knowledge of the students in order to determine the appropriate teaching strategy and the required course material. In order to successfully achieve the desired outcomes, it is important to ensure that the teaching methods and resources are appropriate and successful in meeting the needs of the students (Amalia & Albiansyah, 2023).

Conducting a needs analysis is a strategic step that universities can take to guarantee that the teaching technique used by lecturers and the needs of the students are aligned. This needs analysis shows how professionally the lecturers have conducted themselves in their capacities as mentors and educators for this particular course. In essence, the needs analysis serves as the first step in the careful planning, directing, and carrying out of lectures in order to best meet the goals of the course. Napiyah (2022) states that in order to understand the needs of the students in learning English, a needs analysis is carried out. This study includes engaging

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materials, everyday language usage, and abilities regarded essential in the acquisition of the English language.

Experts are regularly doing numerous studies on needs analysis in English language learning, both in Indonesia and beyond. Prior research (Sari & Sari, 2020; Sakkir et al., 2021; Aysu & Özcan, 2021; Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021; Stevani & Tarigan, 2022; Hamhij et al., 2022; Leotta & Dolidze, 2022; Sarwanti et al., 2023; Abidah et al., 2023; Ke & AlSaqqaf, 2023) have utilised needs analysis in the creation of materials and curriculum design aimed at diverse subjects from different disciplinary backgrounds. The collective findings of these research highlight the value of requirements analysis in a range of situations as well as the improvement of English language proficiency. Thus, classes in English language study programmes should adopt the practice of conducting needs analyses at the start of sessions, particularly in nations where English is still taught as a foreign language. The application of requirements analysis not only makes it possible for new phenomena to arise, but it also creates possibilities for the distinctive qualities of each individual in particular English learning groups to be revealed.

In the pre-intermediate grammar course, a needs analysis is essential to evaluate the overall readiness of students. In this context, the lecturer must determine whether students' performance in the previous basic grammar course has adequately prepared them for the subsequent level. Essentially, the lecturer aims to assess the extent of students' readiness in terms of both competency and learning motivation. Moreover, it is crucial for the lecturer to identify the specific challenges and difficulties that students encounter prior to attending the lectures. This aligns with the research by Ngan and Lan (2023) which highlights the varying needs shown by students in English language learning.

Consistent with this, Bulbula et al. (2023) emphasize the significance of educators, whether teachers or lecturers, in recognizing students' needs prior to developing materials, exercises, and supplementary activities to enhance students' interest in learning English.

The subjects—mostly native Indonesians—are categorised as English language learners rather than native or bilingual speakers, which emphasises the significance of doing a needs analysis for the students prior to enrolling in the pre-intermediate grammar course. This suggests that the students' approach of acquiring the language is different from that of learners in nations where English is regarded as a second language or in settings where a large proportion of the population speaks the language natively. The importance of this requirements analysis is further highlighted by the variations in learning styles, settings, cognitive processes, and motives resulting from their prior schooling in elementary, junior high, and senior high school before enrolling in university. Moreover, the availability of needs analyses focused on pre-intermediate grammar students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) can offer fresh perspectives to curriculum designers, instructional models, and English language teaching policies in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas that are still developing and lack infrastructure. Most notably, there is still a dearth of research on the needs analysis of EFL learners in rural Indonesia for grammar classes. To succeed on English proficiency exams like the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System), which are necessary for both academic and survival reasons, you will need to master the essential skills covered in this course. As a result, this study offers scholarly value as well as a foundation for discussion, a point of reference, and an attempt to address the disparity that exists between the demands

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placed on students—particularly those who attend schools in rural Indonesia—and the goals of grammar instruction. The results of this study can be used by educators, instructors, scholars, policymakers, and other change agents who are directly involved in this matter to improve English language training, especially in the area of grammar instruction.

**2. METHODS**

The methodology utilised in this study is utilising the polling feature of WhatsApp to distribute multiple questions to members of the group. This polling feature functions similarly to a standard Google Forms questionnaire, however it is completed online using WhatsApp instead. 24 participants, first-year students at the University of Sulawesi Barat's English Language Education programme for the 2023–2024 academic year, can easily and promptly respond with this technique. Purposive sampling, which selects participants based on their alignment with the research category, was used as the sample strategy in this study. Students who live in rural areas and are not frequently exposed to English-speaking situations nearby were the focus of the study in particular.

There are just closed-ended question kinds available. Structured questions with a predetermined list of possible answers are known as closed-ended questions. The purpose of these questions is to elicit precise and targeted responses, which facilitates the analysis and quantification of the gathered data. Closed-ended questions assist ensure consistency in the data and make the analysis process more effective by restricting the range of possible answers.

Closed-ended questions are used in the need analysis for the study on first-year rural university students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) to obtain precise information about the participants'

expectations, readiness, goals, confidence levels, and anticipated challenges in the grammar course. Closed-ended questions are intended to guarantee that the answers fall into the predetermined categories of requirements, wants, and lacks. This allows for a methodical evaluation of the needs and viewpoints of the participants. Closed-ended questions also facilitate the process of gathering data and make it easier to form conclusions based on the responses provided by respondents.

The study approach was entirely quantitative and concentrated on the analysis of numerical data. Quantifying the replies obtained is the first step in the data analysis process, which is initiated by using WhatsApp polls to collect data. Statistical analysis is used in this quantitative technique to find trends and patterns in the data. The researchers want to quantify important data that can shed light on the demands and viewpoints of first-year rural university students studying English as a foreign language (EFL). To do this, they want to use statistical approaches. It is anticipated that this meticulous analysis procedure will yield numerical results that corroborate the study's suggestions and conclusions.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

During this phase, the researchers present the results derived from inquiries utilizing the WhatsApp polling feature to 24 participants. Subsequently, the researchers descriptively present these results concerning the occurring trends and establishes connections with the research objectives.

**Table 1. The distribution of students' age**

Students' age	Frequency
18	6
19	18
20	0

Table 1 illustrates that students enrolled in the pre-intermediate grammar course typically have an average age of 19, with 18 students falling within this age

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bracket, while the remaining 6 students are aged 18. This age demographic mirrors the typical age of recent Indonesian high school graduates or first-year university students.

Hastuti and Rovianti (2021) assert that the acquisition of grammatical knowledge supports the enhancement of language proficiency, particularly in foreign languages, among individuals aged between 18 and 19. This observation underscores the positive trajectory of students undertaking the pre-intermediate grammar course towards enhancing their capacity to independently formulate sentences and express themselves in English. Furthermore, the sequencing of this course in the second semester, subsequent to the completion of the basic grammar course in accordance with the prescribed curriculum, underscores the alignment between students' preparedness and the requisites of English language education at the University of Sulawesi Barat.

**Table 2. The distribution of students' mother tongue**

Students' mother tongue	Frequency
Mandar	14
Mamuju	4
Bugis	2
Mamasa	4

Table 2 presents the distribution of students' mother tongue in the pre-intermediate grammar course, where 14 students speak Mandar, 4 students speak Mamuju, 4 students speak Mamasa, and 2 students speak Bugis. This diversity highlights the presence of four distinct regional languages that may influence the learning process in the pre-intermediate grammar course.

In their research endeavor, Qomariana et al. (2019) unearthed that errors in grammatical structure within English compositions by students may be influenced by the linguistic background of the learners. These inaccuracies may manifest in phonological nuances, lexical choices, and syntactic structures, arising from disparities

between the foreign language being acquired and the students' mother tongue.

**Table 3. The students' performance in basic grammar course**

The students' performance	Frequency
Satisfied	2
Partially satisfied	0
Unsatisfied	22

Table 3 illustrates the students' performance in the Basic Grammar course. Out of the 24 students, 22 expressed dissatisfaction with their progress in the prerequisite Basic Grammar course taken in the first semester. Only 2 students reported feeling satisfied with their achievements in the course. This underscores the importance of providing students with enhanced guidance and support to improve their academic performance.

Rasmita et al. (2022) assert that learning basic grammar is crucial in the English language as grammar serves as the primary foundation for comprehending and utilizing English correctly. Acquiring knowledge of basic grammar aids individuals in constructing clear and precise sentences, thereby ensuring that the intended message is effectively conveyed to the interlocutor. Moreover, a grasp of grammar also facilitates the expansion of vocabulary and enhances communication skills in various contexts, be it in daily conversations or formal settings. Through understanding basic grammar, individuals can evade common errors in English usage, consequently boosting their confidence in speaking and writing in the language. These reasons underpin the significance of students undertaking and successfully completing the Basic Grammar course before progressing to the Pre-Intermediate Grammar course.

**Table 4. The students' skills in constructing basic English sentences**

The students' skills	Frequency
Able	3
Partially able	2

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Unable	19
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Table 4 illustrates the distribution of students' proficiency in constructing basic English sentences. Of the student cohort, 3 demonstrate the ability to independently construct sentences, 2 exhibit partial proficiency, while the majority of 19 students lack this capability. These findings elucidate the diverse spectrum of proficiency levels in sentence construction among students, underscoring the necessity for additional support and enhancement in this linguistic skill domain.

According to Saleh (2021), teaching kids how to build sentences on their own is an essential first step towards improving their overall English language skills. This suggests that students' capacity to talk, express themselves, and interact effectively in English is influenced by their competency in building sentences in the language. Put another way, by mastering this ability, students can improve their confidence, sharpen their creative English usage, and increase their vocabulary and grammar. Furthermore, being able to form sentences on their own helps students learn proper English grammar and sentence structure, which improves their capacity to communicate clearly and precisely. Additionally, they may more successfully understand and interpret material offered in English thanks to this talent.

Systematic measures are necessary in the pre-intermediate grammar course to help students recognise different types of simple sentences and apply them in English. This is in line with the data shown in Table 4, which indicates that a significant portion of students still struggle with the construction of basic English sentences. These results highlight the need for careful planning in curriculum creation and instructional practices in order to successfully address the reported competence gaps.

**Table 5. The students' proficiency in mastering verb tenses formulas**

The students'	Frequency
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proficiency	
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Fully memorized	1
Partially memorized	3
Not Memorized at All	20

Table 5 presents the distribution of students' proficiency levels in mastering verb tenses formulas. One student is fully memorized, three students are partially memorized, and a majority of twenty students have not memorized the formulas at all. These results shed light on the varying levels of proficiency among students in grasping verb tenses formulas, highlighting the importance of targeted support and reinforcement in this linguistic area.

While learning verb tenses is a fundamental aspect of understanding and effectively using the English language, particularly for EFL students (Wirawan, 2022), verb tenses are an integral component of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) still widely utilized in English language education, especially in rural areas (Sukraningsih & Karmini, 2023). When correlated with the data from Table 5 indicating that students generally do not master verb tenses before enrolling in the pre-intermediate grammar course, there is a need for specialized materials and methods to be implemented to ensure that students can grasp verb tenses without the need to memorize sentence formulas tediously.

**Table 6. The students' lexical proficiency and utilization in English sentences**

Students' lexical proficiency	Frequency
Excellent	0
Adequate	17
Limited	7

Table 6 depicts the distribution of vocabulary proficiency and English sentence usage among students. Within the student cohort, none exhibit a high level of proficiency, 17 demonstrate adequate proficiency, and 7 show limited proficiency. These findings indicate that the majority of students possess sufficient English vocabulary but struggle to integrate them into



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simple sentences, as evidenced in the data from Table 4. Furthermore, Table 5 further strengthens the argument that despite having adequate vocabulary memorization, students' lack of mastery in verb tenses will impede their English language proficiency.

The dynamics in Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6 indicate that students from rural areas, who lack daily English-speaking environments in their surroundings, still require a sufficient command of vocabulary, adequate tense proficiency, and practice in independent translation processes to develop comprehensive English language skills. Lubis (2020) asserts that vocabulary mastery is crucial as it serves as a key element in mastering the English language. However, the reinforcement of methods such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) as applied by Sukraningsih & Karmini (2023) and the incorporation of interactive methods like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as implemented by Wu et al. (2023) also need to be integrated into pre-intermediate grammar lectures to achieve optimal outcomes.

**Table 7. The students' Preferences in Learning Activities**

Students' Preferences	Frequency
Translating sentences	10
Memorizing tenses	1
Memorizing vocabularies	4
Direct speaking practices	9

Table 7 presents the students' preferences in learning activities. The table displays the frequency of each activity chosen by the students. Translating sentences emerged as the most favored activity, with a frequency of 10, followed by direct speaking practices with a frequency of 9. Meanwhile, memorizing tenses and vocabularies garnered frequencies of 1 and 4, respectively. This data indicates that students require two main activities in learning: translating sentences and speaking practice. These two focal points need to be formulated in lectures, alongside providing supplementary materials on

vocabulary and sentence structures without the obligation of memorization.

**Table 8. The student assignment preferences**

Students' Preferences	Frequency
In-Class	20
Take-Home	3
Long-Term Projects	1

Table 8 illustrates the students' assignment preferences. The table displays the frequency of each type of assignment favored by the students. In-Class assignments were the most preferred, with a frequency of 20, followed by Take-Home assignments with a frequency of 3. Long-Term Projects had the lowest frequency, with only 1 student selecting this type of assignment. This data suggests that assignment activities need to be provided systematically and structured within the classroom setting, without additional take-home assignments and long-term projects, while still achieving the learning objectives. This implies that the allocation of time for content and assignments needs to be appropriately managed.

**Table 9. The Students' Skill Objectives in Learning**

The Students' Skill Objectives	Frequency
Able to vary sentence structures	24
Able to translate sentences independently	24
Able to create everyday conversation expressions	24
Able to expand vocabulary memorization	24

Table 9 displays the students' skill objectives in learning. The table indicates the frequency of each skill objective identified by the students. These objectives include the ability to vary sentence structures, translate sentences independently, create everyday conversation expressions, and expand vocabulary memorization, each with a frequency of 24. This data demonstrates the

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consistent and balanced emphasis given by students in developing crucial language skills in their learning journey. Consequently, all 24 participants share identical ambitious learning objectives within the pre-intermediate grammar curriculum. Thus, a comprehensive review of data from Table 1 to Table 8 is imperative prior to instructional delivery. Notably, students necessitate ambitious targets, a methodical approach, and a balanced workload to optimize their learning experience.

**4. CONCLUSION**

Important information about the needs and preferences of rural university students taking the pre-intermediate grammar course was gleaned via a needs study of the students. The results highlight the importance of customising instructional strategies and resources to meet the needs and goals that pupils have been identified with. The implications derived from the thorough needs analysis are summarised in the following important points:

**1. Diverse Linguistic Backgrounds**

The mother tongues of the kids, which range from Mandar to Mamuju to Bugis to Mamasa, demonstrate the potential impact of regional languages on their English language acquisition process. Comprehending these language origins is crucial for tackling possible obstacles in acquiring grammar and constructing sentences.

**2. Performance Discrepancies**

In order to close proficiency gaps, the majority of students reported unhappiness with their performance in the Basic Grammar course and emphasised the need for further help and supervision. It is essential to address students' difficulties with building simple English sentences and learning verb tenses formulae in order to improve their language skills.

**3. Vocabulary Proficiency and Utilization**

While students demonstrate adequate vocabulary memorization, integrating these vocabularies into coherent sentences remains a challenge for many. Efforts to enhance students' lexical proficiency and promote effective sentence construction are essential for comprehensive language development.

**4. Learning Preferences**

Students exhibit a preference for activities such as translating sentences and engaging in direct speaking practices. Incorporating these favored activities into lectures can enhance student engagement and foster practical language application.

**5. Assignment Preferences**

A substantial majority of students prefer in-class assignments, showing a liking for structured learning tasks in the classroom environment. Balancing assignment types and managing time allocation effectively are essential considerations for optimizing the learning experience.

**6. Consistent Skill Objectives**

All of the emphasis on important language skills—such as memorising a wider range of vocabulary words, translating sentences on their own, and using a variety of sentence structures—highlights the students' aspirational learning goals. To maximise learning outcomes, instructional delivery must be in line with these specified skill objectives.

To sum up, the requirements analysis is a fundamental stage in creating curriculum content, instructional methodologies, and supplemental resources that are specifically designed to address the changing needs of rural university students enrolled in English language programmes. Teachers and policymakers can improve the quality of English language instruction, especially in grammar courses, and create a welcoming learning environment for students in Indonesia's rural areas by recognising and addressing the issues and preferences that have been identified.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The successful completion of this research is attributed to the abundant grace and mercy of the Almighty. The researchers self-funded this study as a testament to their commitment and dedication to advancing education, particularly in the realm of English language learning in Indonesia

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