

Students' Needs and Preferences for Digital EFL Learning Materials

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Abstract

While research on digital language learning materials has received lots of attention, there was a scarcity of studies focusing on specific locations, like Sambas in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Located near the border of Indonesia and Malaysia, Sambas has a unique EFL learning environment influenced by its geographical location and diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Understanding students' needs and preferences in local contexts is crucial in designing culturally relevant teaching materials. This study aimed to assess the needs and preferences of students in Sambas and provided valuable insights into optimizing the utilization of digital teaching materials for English language learning. This study employed a survey research design to elicit information about current materials, the student's needs, perceptions, and preferences concerning digital materials in English students' needs and preferences, and technological resources. The participants of this study were first-year students of junior secondary school (20 students) in Sambas. The findings revealed that students need videos, movies, and songs with English subtitles as learning materials. Furthermore, the study might shape future research in developing and implementing digital EFL materials customized to the Sambas' cultural context, including local language, customs, and traditions, and their effectiveness in engaging students and improving English language acquisition.

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1. Introduction

Conducting a comprehensive needs analysis has impact on EFL learners' motivation and sustainability. Teachers can examine the EFL learner's motivation, goal, and settings to help designing language learning materials to promote language proficiency. Consequently, learners will be more motivated by the importance of acquiring English proficiency for handling global concerns rather than merely studying English.

While research on digital language learning materials has received lots of attention, there is a scarcity of studies focusing on students' needs analysis in specific locations. Understanding needs and preferences in local contexts is crucial in designing culturally relevant teaching materials. Teachers can foster student engagement and motivation in the learning process by including practical activities and culturally relevant themes and aligning materials with students' interests. The need analysis findings can also ensure that the materials cater to students' specific linguistic needs, making English learning more meaningful and applicable to their lives.

Sambas has a unique geographical location and socio-economic background for EFL learning because it is located near the border between Indonesia and Malaysia. The data from a school nearby show that most of the student's parents are farmers, and many others are involved in cross-border work in timber industries, palm plantations, construction, domestic care, and transportation agents. This condition has shaped the students' perception that learning English is insignificant because they will most likely not need English in their future work. Moreover, the absence of parents due to work also leads to a situation where they need more parental support to learn English.

Given their parents' situation, where they receive little parental support for EFL learning, students in Sambas may perceive that English learning could be more relevant and significant. That makes the teacher experience difficulty in motivating students to study English, which highlights the importance of conducting a need analysis study on digital EFL learning materials. Understanding students' needs can support the development of materials that connect classroom learning and actual language use. When knowledge is constructed based on the student's needs, they are more likely to relate to it (Nur Fitria, 2022). Moreover, students considered the teacher-made coursebook relevant to their needs, detailed, and the topics interesting and practical, easy to follow, and engaging (Nur Fitria, 2022). Therefore,

producing personalized learning materials based on the learners' needs can enhance the students' learning experience.

The crucial stage before producing the material is need analysis. It is the basis of material selection ([Gonzalez, 2020](#)) and provides comprehensive information about needs before developing language learning material to determine which language points students must acquire ([Ikhsanudin, 2020](#)). It links student's current knowledge to the materials, assists teachers in establishing a direction for their instruction, and connects the students' actual needs to the lesson plan.

Need analysis assists instructors in identifying students' future goals and responsibilities and modifying the curriculum to match the learners' specific requirements, what the students understand, and what they need to learn to achieve these needs (Graves in [Lapele, 2019](#)). Data collection approaches include interviews, observations, conversations, assessments, and surveys ([Desi Rizma Yanti, 2019](#); [Lapele, 2019](#)).

In her study about need analysis on developing E.S.P Speaking material, ([Lapele, 2019](#)) cited the work of Borg and suggested that teachers conduct a needs analysis to identify and address students' needs that are correlated with acquiring the learning objectives in the process of developing materials, aligning with Tomlinson's ([2011](#)) concept of conducting a comprehensive analysis of students' needs. For developing the materials, Lapele mentioned that the teachers used four types of needs analysis: Target Situation Analysis, Wants, Means, Subjective Needs Analysis, Present Situation Analysis, and Lack Analysis.

Muthmainnah et al., ([2021](#)) underline the importance of needs analysis in designing ICT-based EFL learning materials. The findings revealed that students from various nations require materials relevant to current situations, easy to communicate, and accessible via the students' technological devices, with content delivered in both L2 and L1. Most of the participants wanted to use ICT in their learning process.

Needs analysis involves asking questions about the demands, deficiencies, and requirements of the target learners and presenting inquiries concerning the circumstances and context where learning occurs ([Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020](#)).

English proficiency and effective communication are crucial in developing sustainable education for global challenges. However, many EFL students learn English just because it is a compulsory subject, not because they need it or get interested in learning it as they believe they will not use English in the future ([Desi Rizma Yanti, 2019](#)). Therefore, students' perception is also important to support the need analysis.

Ikhsanudin ([2020](#)) stated that language learning materials (LLMs) are representations

of language that serve as resources for language activities to provide language experiences for language learners. He proposes LLMs examples like labels or product information, such as noodle packaging, boxes for household appliances, and instructions for using electronic devices.

Materials refer to any resources with educational objectives or pedagogic purposes that teachers and students use to assist in language acquisition (Mishan & Timmis, 2015). In short,

materials are any resources that enable learners to acquire or learn a language efficiently through meaningful and purposeful tasks. Tomlinson cited in (Mishan & Timmis, 2015) refers to materials as anything that students and teachers use to aid language learning. Materials include emails, videos, YouTube, grammar books, dictionaries, readers, workbooks, and printout work. They might also be newspapers, food cartons, pictures, talk shows with native speakers, teacher instructions, written assignments on cards, or conversations with students. Based on the definition above, Mishan specifies the materials as digital media, conventional paper-based material, realia, and processes. Furthermore, (Mishan & Timmis, 2015) argue that materials are those resources that can expose students to the language.

In EFL, using authentic materials in the classroom is highly encouraged (Nur Fitria, 2022) as there are many benefits of using authentic materials in EFL. It helps students to understand their culture, gets students familiar with various text genres, and provide real context of language use. Authentic materials also aid students in acquiring language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), vocabulary, grammar, and more. Authentic materials are crucial to language learning, as they expose actual language use (Ikhsanudin, 2020). Teachers should teach authentic text, such as cooking recipes, advertisements in newspapers or magazines, product labels, or procedures for using specific electronic devices. Those texts are real-world resources featuring language that occurs naturally in communication in native-speaker settings produced for functional purposes.

Although authentic materials are encouraged for language learning, teachers should also consider the disadvantages. According to (Basuki et al., 2018), authentic materials have some disadvantages: first, non-essential words in the text. Second, there will be cultural, which can confuse students. Next is the difficulty level with the materials, as authentic materials may contain many unfamiliar words, and teachers should work harder to adopt them, especially for low-students. Nur Fitria, (2022) underlined the complexity of language and the long preparation time when using authentic materials. She suggests that teachers should select with care the material that is suitable for the student's level. Teachers can adjust

the level of difficulty and delete inappropriate items.

The present study focuses on need analysis for junior secondary students considered children and early teenagers (11-13 years old). Children are more energetic than adults, have a short attention span, and acquire language at certain phases of development. Teachers use singing, drilling, story-telling, reading aloud, and dictation to teach English to young learners, demonstration and presentation practice, producing activities, and using games (Avezova, 2022). Demonstration and presentation practice, producing activities, and using games are the most successful ways. Avezova also emphasized the importance of active learner participation, fostering collaboration and supportive learning groups, incorporating activities related to body movement and responsibilities, using connected exercises and many different vocabularies, focusing on meaningful tasks with clear learning objectives, providing scaffolding and encouraging learner-generated materials, implementing thematic lessons with familiar content, and integrating fun activities. Avezova believed that having native speakers in the classroom was a good activity.

In Avezova's view, several techniques can enhance engagement and joy in vocabulary learning. These include using songs, demonstrating unfamiliar words with visualization, using mnemonic methods with grammatical rules, having spontaneous discussions during the lesson, and using games and role-play to refresh vocabulary.

Textbooks are essential resources for exposure to English and the vocabulary that is worth learning in EFL situations (Yang & Coxhead, 2022). However, with the recent technological advancement, a teacher must rely on more than existing printed textbooks. Integration of technology is needed to match the student's needs. That is why teachers need to consider the use of digital materials.

The production of teaching materials is a process of preparing for learning (Ikhsanudin, 2020). Ikhsanudin asserts that the creation of materials resulted in two types of products: (1) theoretical designs with specific or general material; and (2) original or prototype instructional materials using such designs.

Basuki et al., (2018) claimed that no vocabulary book meets all students' needs and qualifications of the coursebook perfectly. Therefore, it is a good idea for teachers to design personalized E.L.T. materials to accommodate the syllabus requirements and their students' characteristics and needs. According to research, creating e-books can help teacher candidates gain digital literacy and technological pedagogical subject expertise (Ikpeze, 2018). The results of this qualitative case study show that creating e-books does help teacher candidates gain knowledge of technological pedagogical material and digital literacy. The project also

supported the personalization of instruction with the knowledge of instructional design.

Many researchers have undertaken studies on the development of digital EFL materials. Hardiyanto, (2020a) created an e-book for pre-intermediate grammar with the Research and Development approach. The study concluded that the e-book was appropriate for use in terms of content, language use, and medium. Hence, the use of the e-book is recommended for pre-intermediate grammar classes. He used a questionnaire to investigate the students' perceptions of the e-book. The students perceived the e-book as excellent.

Other digital media is a song. Songs have always been perfect ways to express feelings, thoughts, and ideas. They are a universal language that everyone on the earth understands. Songs have been effective as educational tools for a wide range of vocabulary items relating to almost every element of life. Rusmanayanti, (2019) explored YouTube music in English learning as a media innovation. The findings revealed that students learned numerous new terms, as well as the meaning and pronunciation of the lyrics. Similarly, an action research study was conducted at Dharma Karya UT Junior High School class VII, with 25 children as participants, demonstrating a notable improvement in English language abilities through song (Hadi, 2019).

Abdul Syakur et al., (2020a) also conducted a study employing the research and development (R&D) method to produce digital textbooks in D3 Pharmacy departments. The answers to the questionnaire suggested that students had positive responses to the digital textbooks. This finding aligns with the result of a previous study conducted by Hardiyanto.

Another study of a content analysis on the sixth-grade English textbook "Grow with English" using the Ellis-proposed list of 10 SLA principles (2005) also demonstrated that game-based activities and consciousness-raising tasks in e-books helped aid L2 acquisition, as it taught explicit and implicit knowledge (Nida, 2021a).

The students of lower secondary schools nowadays are referred to as the digital native, net generation, or Gen Z (Lapele, 2019), where they use technology, connect, communicate, and share actively through internet connection 24/7. Several suggested activities will connect these students with their interests and learning materials like watching videos or movies on YouTube or television with English subtitles, online quizzes and games, using powerpoint, listening to English songs, projects with other students, conversation with a native speaker, social media project, find related texts on the internet, and use IELTS questions for practice.

Hutauruk, (2020) supports these findings by highlighting the reliance of Gen Z students on digital tools and the internet, indicating the need to integrate these tools into the English curriculum to enhance students' language learning experiences at school. The

participants in this study were 105 senior high school students, and a ten-question questionnaire was utilized to gather data. The questionnaire responses revealed that these students enhance their English skills by watching television, listening to songs, reading books, engaging with social media, playing online games, and attending IELTS classes.

Several examples of digital learning materials based on earlier studies can be listed below.

1. Ebook ([Ikpeze, 2018](#)), ([Hardiyanto, 2020](#)), ([Abdul Syakur et al., 2020](#)), ([Nida, 2021](#)).
2. Texts on the internet ([Lapele, 2019](#))
3. Videos with English subtitles ([Lapele, 2019](#))
4. Television broadcasting with English subtitles ([Lapele, 2019](#))
5. Movies ([Lapele, 2019](#))
6. Online quizzes ([Lapele, 2019](#))
7. Online Games ([Hutauruk, 2020](#) and [Lapele, 2019](#))
8. Ppt ([Lapele, 2019](#))
9. Online songs ([Hutauruk, 2020](#) and [Lapele, 2019](#))
10. Social media/social media project ([Hutauruk, 2020](#) and [Lapele, 2019](#))

2. Method

Data collection is a crucial stage in the research. The data collection technique applied in this research was a survey. This study employed a survey research design to explore the students' needs for digital EFL learning materials. The researcher collected the data at a junior secondary school in Jawai Selatan Sambas (West Kalimantan-Indonesia). Twenty students of grade VII participated in this research. The participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique. A questionnaire was employed as the data collection instrument. The questionnaires were distributed to the participants, and they filled out the questionnaire anonymously for their convenience. The researcher provided assistance and guidance for the participants when they completed the questionnaire. The researcher then evaluated the data from the questionnaire descriptively.

The questionnaire was designed by using the following blueprint (Table 2 and 3)

Table 1. Blueprint Of Students Questionnaire

Aspect	Questions	Number of Questions	Questions
Means	Digital materials used	11	1-11
	The most useful digital materials	11	12-22
	The most useful aspect	10	23-32

Target-Situation Analysis	The main purpose of using digital materials	11	33-43
Present Situation Analysis	Prior learning experience in using digital material	2	44-45
Wants	Learner's learning expectation when using digital material	9	46-54
	Learner's preference	6	63-68
Lack Analysis	Learner's difficulty	8	55-62

The questionnaire's reliability was tested and measured by using Cronbach Alpha. The score obtained was 0.70 means it is a reliable instrument. The questionnaires consists of 68 statement items.

$$\alpha = \left(\frac{k}{k-1} \right) \left(\frac{s_r^2 - \sum s_i^2}{s_x^2} \right)$$

Table 2. Student Questionnaire Reliability

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
.757	68

According to Creswell (2014), data analysis involves transcribing the interviews, reading through all the data, coding or organizing data into categories, using the coding to generate descriptions, preparing to present the descriptions and creating the interpretation. data which were collected from the questionnaire was then analyzed. For the questionnaire, the researcher provided descriptions based on the result and drew a conclusion. The data from the questionnaire were described qualitatively. The data was then interpreted by using the following table.

Table 3. Categories of Students Needs in Digital EFL Materials

No	Score of Needs Aspects	Interpretation
1	0-5	Not Needed
2	6-10	Rather Needed
3	11-15	Needed
4	16-20	Highly Needed

3. Results and Discussions

There were 68 statements in the questionnaire with 0.757 reliability score which

consist of means analysis, target situation analysis, wants analysis, and lack analysis. Based on the participants' responses, the mean score is 32.316. The standard deviation score is 7.387, which is between 9.07 and 4.8, indicates that the data are well spread out.

Table 4. Highly Needed Aspects

No	Aspect	Frequency	Interpretation
3	Means	19	Highly needed
4	Means	20	Highly needed
5	Means	17	Highly needed
6	Means	16	Highly needed
24	Target situation	17	Highly needed
43	Target situation	18	Highly needed
52	Target situation	16	Highly needed
55	Lack Analysis	19	Highly needed
56	Lack Analysis	16	Highly needed
59	Lack Analysis	17	Highly needed
65	Lack Analysis	16	Highly needed
68	Lack Analysis	16	Highly needed

Based on the table, 12 items out of 68 items show the aspects the students need most. There are four items of students' need related to the means aspect of digital EFL learning materials. They are videos, movies, and online songs with English subtitles. They also utilize online texts available on the internet. The highest frequency (20) in the means aspect is video with English subtitles.

The next item that students most frequently need is item 55, about the students' need for compatible gadgets to access digital EFL learning materials. Item number 59 is where the students can access the digital materials. It scores high in frequency in the Lack aspect. Item 65 (lack aspect) scores 16 is about the price of digital learning materials. Item 68 (lack aspect) score 16 is the student's need for compelling materials.

From the result, there are 15 items out of 68 items interpreted as needed (score between 11-15), they are questions no. 10, 14 (means); 21, 25, 28, 34, 35, 41 (target situation); 44 (wants), 53, 57, 60, 61, 63, 64 (lack).

Based on the findings, it can be inferred that the students mostly need videos as the source of EFL learning. It is found that students mainly utilize videos as the English learning resources. This confirms the findings of a study mention earlier ([Lapele, 2019](#)), that students utilize videos with English subtitles for English language learning. They also actively use online songs, English movies and TV broadcast for EFL learning. This is in line with the previous research results which considered students nowadays as digital native and that this generation use videos as learning media ([Hutauruk, 2020](#); [Lapele, 2019](#)). The findings also

indicate that the students considered digital materials interesting. However, although these students are really familiar with digital materials. Surprisingly, the students do not consider online dictionary, ebook, and social media as the English learning resources, although previous studies has proved that these resources are considered excellent by students ([Abdul Syakur et al., 2020](#); [Hardiyanto, 2020](#); [Ikpeze, 2018](#); [Nida, 2021](#)). They have no idea that Instagram, Tiktok, and Facebook can be beneficial resources for learning English. In addition, students do not use online dictionary, social media and ebook for some reason. First, since they are new students, they have just learned English a few days so that they do not know that social media have such contents for English language learning. They also have not installed online dictionary. None of them have ever been introduced to ebook.

Students consider online songs and text on the internet as valuable learning resources. This is in line with the studies by Hadi, (2019) and Rusmanayanti, (2019) which pointed the benefits of using Youtube music and songs. As the researches suggested, songs have many benefits for English language acquisition. These materials are free and easy to access. Moreover, need analysis can determine the specific language points students need to acquire. The findings reveal that the students want to improve their speaking and reading skills.

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

In conclusion, students in Sambas consider videos with English subtitles is the most needed digital EFL learning materials. Movies with English subtitles and online songs are also their choices. In addition, they also prefer to use texts from the internet. They like materials that are easy to use and access.

Furthermore, the students consider learning English crucial, so they attend the class. They need clear learning objectives when they learn English by using digital materials. Their purpose of using digital materials is to improve speaking and reading skills. Based on their experience, the students believe digital materials can help them to understand English lessons. They consider digital materials to be easy to find and use and also have reasonable prices. They know where to find them, and they have compatible gadgets for them.

The limitation of this research is that the number of participants was only 20, regarding the large number of junior secondary students in Sambas. Additionally, the research did not cover cultural aspects. Therefore, further studies can explore more on this topic.

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