

NEEDS AND LACKS IN WRITING SKILL AMONG GENERAL MEDICINE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS OF HANOI MEDICAL UNIVERSITY – A SURVEY REPORT

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ABSTRACT

Methods: In a cross-sectional survey utilizing a self-reported structured questionnaire, a sample of 277 general medicine first-year students from Hanoi Medical University agreed to be enrolled.

Results: 42.9% and 45.4% of participants considered English-writing skill to be “very important” and “important” for their career development, respectively. And 36.8% and 48.3% of students stated that English-writing skill was “very important” and “important” for further studying in the future.

81.4% of students were not confident enough to have written communication in English with others. And “lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures” was raised by 83.9% of participants as a reason for their in-confidence.

Regarding the subskill of “writing topic sentences and conclusion sentences”, 18,7% and 41,1% of students reported that they “usually” and “sometimes” had difficulty, respectively. With the subskill of “connecting and writing supporting sentences”, 21.6% and 40,4% of students stated that they “usually” and “sometimes” had difficulty, respectively. And 20,2% and 37,9% of students reported that they “usually” and “sometimes” had difficulty in “organizing and structuring writing types, e.g. formal letter, informal letter, discussive essay”, respectively.

68.3% of students expected the high frequency of practicing “writing short tweets on given topics”. Following were “detecting and correcting mistakes” (59%), “paraphrasing” (52.6%) and “writing emails” (50%). “Writing posters, Ads or TV commercials” was expected by the smallest number of participants, with only 30,2%

Keywords: Learning needs, wants, lacks, writing skill, Hanoi Medical University, Vietnam.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Needs and Types of Needs in ESP

Need analysis is the process of examining "what the learners know already and what they need to know" [1]. Another definition proposed by Nunan is that needs analysis was stated to refer to a family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks for use in syllabus design [2]. Relatively similar with Nunan's definition, Brown stated that needs analysis (also called needs assessment) is the process of gathering information functioning as the basis for developing curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students [3]. According to Robinson, ESP course is based on a need analysis [4]. In other words, need analysis plays an utmost important role in the development of the closely relevant ESP course. It helps the curriculum designers take relevant and useful things to learn into consideration whenever developing the curriculum. Like Robinson, needs analysis is also considered as a crucial component of systematic curriculum development. In Brown's systematic curriculum development model, needs analysis is the first phase of an ongoing quality control

process, which notices that needs analysis is a crucial starting point for curriculum development. Brown reported that needs can be stated in terms of goals and objectives which, in turn, can serve as the basis for developing tests, materials, teaching activities and evaluation strategies [3]. In brief, needs analysis is vitally important in designing a course, and therefore, in developing or choosing materials. In this study, learners' needs were sought for in order to shed the light on the extent to which the textbook meets with the learners' needs. Up to now, there have been a variety of dichotomies on needs introduced by different researchers: situation needs versus language needs; objective needs versus subjective needs [3]; target needs versus learning needs [5]. Among these dichotomies, target needs and learning needs have been widely used in literature; therefore, they were chosen to be in use in this study.

Target needs

Target needs are defined as "what the learner needs to do in the target situation" [5]. In order to have clearer sight into this broad term, it is wise to look into it regarding to necessities, lacks and wants.

Necessities:

According to Hutchinson & Waters, necessities are what the learners have to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. For example, medical students might need to find information for their studying of medical subjects at the university, s/he might need to be able to deal with necessary reading skills, medical terms and grammar structures commonly used in these kinds of specialist documents. After graduation, for instance, they might need to communicate effectively with foreign patients. In this situation, s/he might need the ability to speak clearly and listen correctly so that s/he can make the proper communication. Therefore, s/he might need to learn how to deal with communicative situations commonly happen between health care workers and patients in hospitals.

Lacks:

Hutchinson & Waters reported that the identification of necessities alone is not enough in ESP. It is wise to know "what the learner knows already, so that you can then decide which of the necessities the learner lacks" [5]. The gap of the matching process between the learner's target proficiency and the existing proficiency can be referred to as the learner's lacks. Medical student, for example, needs to read the medical documents so as to find needed information effectively. S/he is currently well equipped with medical terms and grammar structures commonly used in medical context. However, s/he does not know how to deal with reading sub-skills so as to find the needed information quickly and efficiently. These difficulties in reading skills are student's lacks.

Wants:

Target needs are considered not only in terms of necessities and lacks but also in terms of wants. Wants are what the learners feel they need. It is discussed that "a need does not exist independent of a person. It is the people who build their images of their needs on the basis of data relating to themselves and their environment" [5]. Wants perceived by learners may conflict with necessities perceived by sponsors or teachers.

Learning needs

Learning needs are linked with the "route" to the destination set by target situation. It is naive to base the course design and the whole ESP program merely on target needs [5]. Learning needs aim at the personal concerns of the learners including methodological, administrative and psychological needs. Like target needs, they influence and affect the overall ESP program ranging from syllabus designing to testing and evaluation. ESP learning is not a mechanical project to be imposed mechanically on the learners. The whole ESP program is an enjoyable, pleasing, manageable, generative, creative and productive activity. If needs analysis is the major distinction of ESP program, the learning needs then have the pivotal role to play in needs analysis. Any need analysis without involving learning needs may be a weak model, excluding the major psychological, sociological and methodological concerns of the ESP learners.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Setting

This study conducted a cross-sectional survey using a self-administered structured questionnaire to assess first-year general medicine students' needs and lacks in English writing skill. The survey was conducted in January, 2023 at Hanoi Medical University (HMU). The university is located in Northern Vietnam, one of the leading universities in the country, and a leading medical education institution among eight medical universities in Vietnam. HMU, which is an important source of high-quality health workers for the whole country, trains general practitioner and specialist doctors, traditional Vietnamese medicine doctors, nurses, medical technicians and public health workers at both the undergraduate and graduate level. For many years, HMU has been a focal point for creating and disseminating innovations in medical education and medical research.

Participants and Sampling

Subjects surveyed were first-year students majoring in general medicine in Hanoi Medical University. The sampling frame for students was derived from a list of all undergraduate general medicine first-year students attending the 2022-2023 academic year, except for some students who were allowed not to attend the English subject classes thanks to their standardized international certificates such as IELTS, TOEFL or equivalents.

Measurements

Students' confidence in writing English was measured by a close-ended question. Student were asked to choose only one answer.

Reasons for students' in-confidence to write in English with others; students' difficulties during writing practice sessions and students' wants regarding to writing skill practice activities in the next term were measured by close-ended questions with different response choices and students could choose more than one options.

The importance of English-writing skill was measured on a 4-point semantic scale (from *very important* to *unimportant*).

Research Ethics and Data Collection

The survey was approved by the HMU Management Board, Department of Science and Technology, HMU and Department of Foreign Languages, HMU; then all attending general

medicine students were informed of the survey objectives and invited to participate in this survey voluntarily. Both male and female medical students were anonymously surveyed, filling out the survey on their own. Due to the uncontroversial nature of this study, there was no requirement for a formal approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of HMU. 277 questionnaires were distributed to students and 277 were completed, giving a 100% response rate.

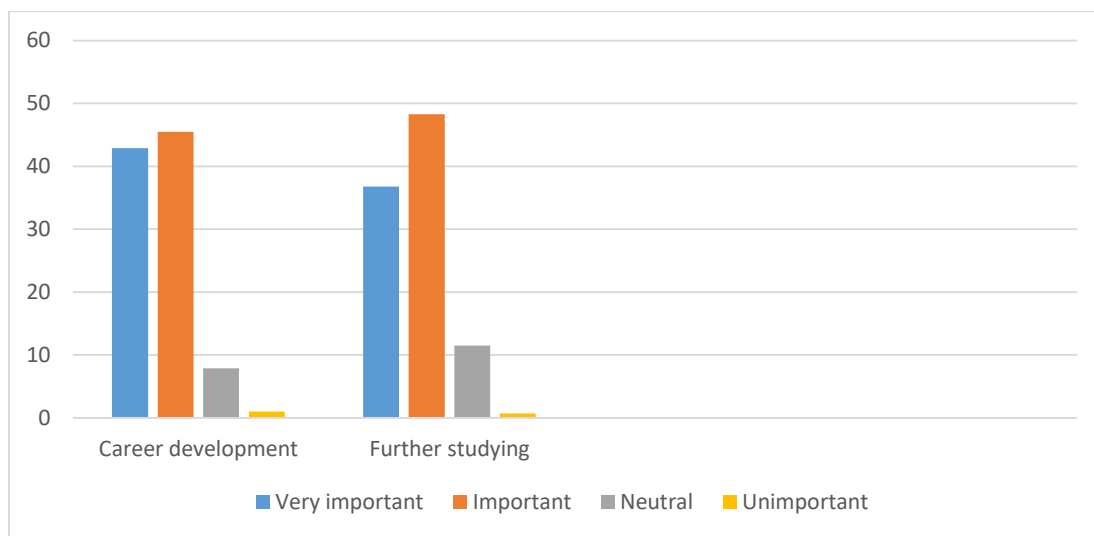
Statistical Analysis

Data was entered using EXCEL, and then transferred into STATA 10.0 for analysis. After cleaning the data, descriptive statistics were calculated for analysis.

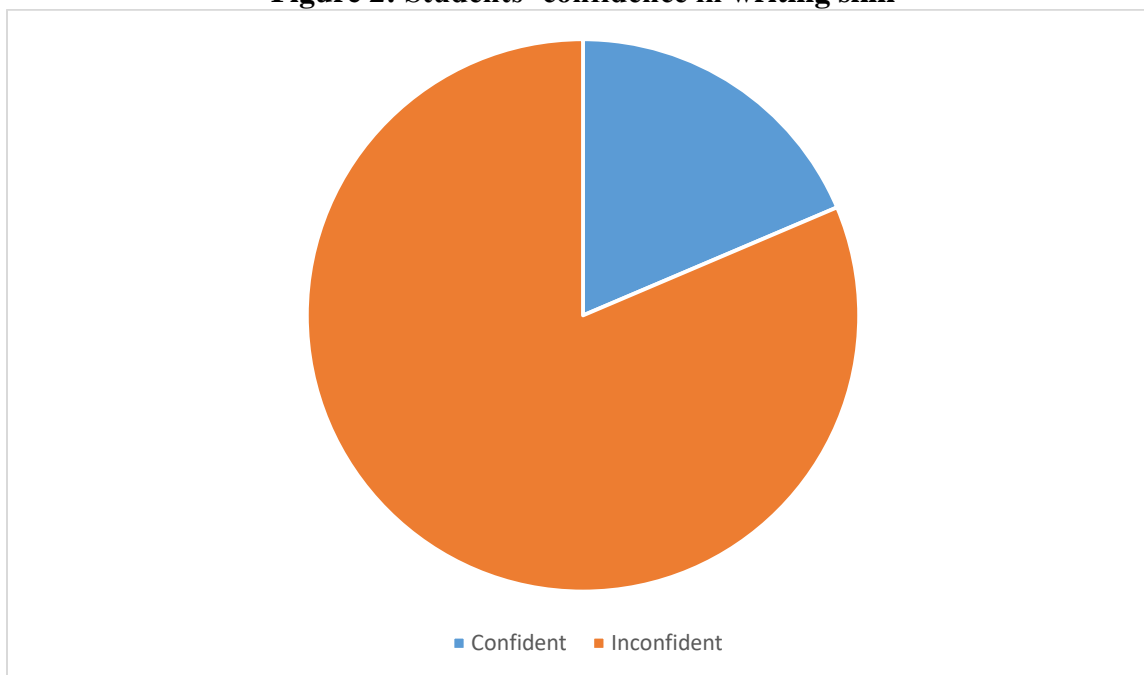
RESULTS

Figure 1 shows students' opinions on the importance of English-writing skill. 42.9% and 45.4% of participants considered English-writing skill to be "very important" and "important" for their career development, respectively. And 36.8% and 48.3% of students stated that English-writing skill was "very important" and "important" for further studying in the future.

Figure 1: Students' opinions on the importance of English-writing skill



When being asked whether they were confident in writing in English with their teachers, their friends or foreigners; 81.4% said that they were not confident enough, which can be clearly seen in the figure 2.

Figure 2: Students' confidence in writing skill

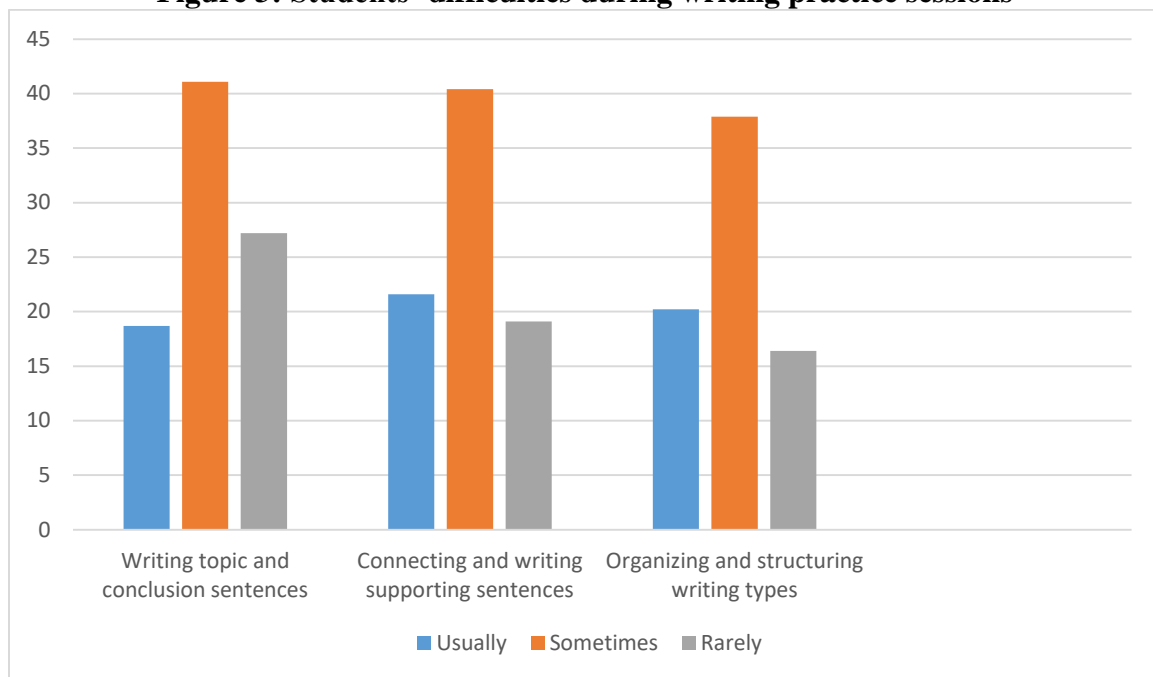
And the reasons for their lack of confidence in English writing skill are illustrated in table 1.

Table 1: Reasons for students' in-confidence to write in English with others

Variables (n=277)	n (%)
Being afraid of making mistakes	103 (43.6)
Lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures	198 (83.9)
Lack of ideas to write about	148 (62.7)
No environment for English writing (teachers and friends communicate most Vietnamese and there are no foreigners for writing practicing)	79 (33.5)

The table 1 reveals the reasons why students were not confident to write in English with other. "Lack of vocabulary and grammatical structures" was raised by 83.9% of participants. Standing next was students' lack of ideas to write about, reported by 62.7% of students. Moreover, 103 students mentioned that they were afraid of making mistakes. And finally, no environment for English writing were stated by 33.5% of participants.

Figure 3 illustrates the sub-skills which students had difficulties during writing practice sessions. Overall, students were having troubles during their writing practice lessons. In particular, regarding the subskill of "writing topic sentences and conclusion sentences", 18,7% and 41,1% of students reported that they "usually" and "sometimes" had difficulty, respectively. With the subskill of "connecting and writing supporting sentences", 21.6% and 40,4% of students stated that they "usually" and "sometimes" had difficulty, respectively. And 20,2% and 37,9% of students reported that they "usually" and "sometimes" had difficulty in "organizing and structuring writing types, e.g. formal letter, informal letter, discussive essay", respectively.

Figure 3: Students' difficulties during writing practice sessions**Table 2: Students' wants regarding to writing skill practice activities in the next term**

Variables (n=277)	n (%)
Writing short tweets on given topic	183 (68,3)
Writing emails	134 (50)
Writing posters, Ads, TV commercials	81 (30.2)
Detecting and correcting mistakes	158 (59)
Paraphrasing	141 (52.6)
Writing stories, narratives	118 (44)

The table 2 shows the findings to the question: “What do you want to focus on when practicing writing skill in the next term?” The majority of students, 68.3%, expected the high frequency of practicing “writing short tweets on given topics”. Following were “detecting and correcting mistakes” (59%), “paraphrasing” (52.6%) and “writing emails” (50%). “Writing posters, Ads or TV commercials” was expected by the smallest number of participants, with only 30,2%.

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