



ANALYZING NEEDS OF ONLINE-BASED EFL ACADEMIC WRITING COURSE: STUDENTS' VOICES IN COURSE DESIGN

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Abstract

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Need analysis is a process of collecting information about the needs of teaching and making decisions about the course. This paper reported the learners' needs on online-based EFL academic writing course during emergency remote teaching. The needs covered two dimensions: present situation analysis and learning situation analysis. The participants were the students who registered for the Academic Writing academic year 2020/2021. The information was collected through a writing test and online questionnaires taken in the initial meetings of the course. The findings showed that the student-participants were heterogeneous in educational background and academic experiences. They found themselves as high-motivated, independent learners with fairly confident writing skill. They confirmed an agreement to the learning objectives to write academic essays and research articles. They revealed that video conferencing and learning management systems were selected for facilitating learning. Moreover, individual work activity using text analysis and essay development was more preferable as learning activities and type of assessment. Students' sample texts indicated that their writing was sufficient in content and organization though some inaccuracies occurred in grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. These present and learning situations found on need analysis can be considerations in making decisions of teaching system.

Keywords: Academic Writing; EFL; Emergency Remote Teaching; Need Analysis; Course Design

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INTRODUCTION

WHO declared the COVID-19 disease as a global pandemic on early March 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020) due to the increasing number of confirmed cases in many countries around the world. It brought multiple effects on economic, health, and education. World Bank predicted that the pandemic, national restrictions, and economic recession probably caused more than 49 million people were vulnerable to poverty (Mahler, et.al., 2020 cited from Olivia, Gibson, & Nasrudin, 2020). In educational sector, UNESCO estimated that national school closure has been implemented in 107 countries to curb the spread of the Covid-19. It affected 862 million children and young people, who used to go schools, to stay and study from home (Viner et al., 2020). As a consequence, teaching system was rapidly changed from face-to-face conventional mode into online remote teaching. This teaching situation can be regarded as emergency remote teaching since it involves unplanned teaching system. This teaching mode can be situated in a temporary shift of instructional as an alternate mode due to crisis situation, such as pandemic, war, or natural disaster (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020).

The extensive studies about online emergency remote teaching situation in higher education have revealed that the experiences and perceptions on this type of teaching were not full of a success story. At first, virtual online learning looked quite excited and sophisticated due to its flexibility and access (Sujarwo, Sukmawati, Akhiruddin, Ridwan, & Siradjuddin, 2020). However, some constraints also found in the middle of the process, such as technological barrier, internet cost and access, content/materials. In paradoxical term, it is flexible but challenging at the same time (Rahiem, 2020). In higher level of constraints, undergraduate- and postgraduate-students have undergone various problems, such as depression, anxiety, poor internet connectivity, and unfavorable study environment at home (Kapasias et al., 2020). Though digital platforms, such as mobile application or video conferencing, were there to facilitate teaching, it is not surprising that most of the students thought face-to-face conventional classes still became their preferences (Amin & Sundari, 2020). Despite all challenges and problems, adaptation to the new system is one of realistic solutions to maintain professional teaching, such as adaptation in learning activity and combination between synchronous and asynchronous mode (Moorhouse, 2020).

When academic year 2020/2021 has come amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the teaching should be managed in online remote system through internet. However, this time teachers have a plenty of time to prepare their courses. The course preparation is crucial and important in overall teaching system. In the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), a need analysis becomes an initial stage of course design in which target academic community's discourse and students' current capacity are investigated (McGrath & Kaufhold, 2016). The information from the need analysis will give directions to course in the terms of curriculum design, text selection, task design, and materials development (Huang, 2010).

Conceptually speaking, a need analysis (NA) is the process of making connection between the theories and principles of language learning and practices in considering why a course being taught and what the learners need to get it (Nation & Macalister, 2010). It includes an on-going process, systematic process of collecting information about the learners' needs and preferences, interpreting it, making decisions related to the course design, and evaluating the decisions (Graves, 2000). To serve learner-centered approach to teaching English for specific purposes (Hutchinson & Waters, 1991), information about the needs can be subjective and objective to satisfy language learning requirement in particular setting and context of particular institution (Brown, 1995, in Liu, Chang, Yang, & Sun, 2011). In more simple words, a need analysis is set of procedures to gather information about learners' needs (Richards, 2001) to identify and determine course objectives, strategies, and activity to improve teaching and learning quality (Zhu & Liu, 2014).

In doing need analysis, it can be grouped into three different approaches of analysis: the target situation analysis, the learning situation analysis, and the present situation analysis (Dudley-Evans & St. Johns, 1998 in Zhu & Liu, 2014). Target situation analysis refers to a macro-analysis of the requirements toward the course teaching by a society, institutions or some certain industries. Identification of a target situation depends on the analyst's ideology (Benesch, 1996). Learning-situation analysis focuses on students, including their attitudes, experiences, and expectation on course. Meanwhile, present-situation analysis involves an investigation on students' current language levels and their learning constraints and gap. A term 'need' in need analysis for language course design brings numerous points of view. The word 'need' can be an umbrella term for two aspects: target need and learning need (Hutchinson & Waters, 1991). Target need is what the learners to do in the target situation; on the other hand, learning need refers to what the learners to do in order to learn (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Target needs can be

divided into necessities, lack, and wants, see Table 1. Simply speaking, need can be defined as a measurable discrepancy or the gap between the existing situation and the expected future state (Berwick, 1989 in Eslami, 2010).

Table 1.
Types of Needs

Types of Needs	Descriptions and Related Questions	Tools
Necessities	Required knowledge. The demands of the target task. What is necessary in the learners' use the language?	Conducting interview Learners' documents such as assignment
Lacks	Present knowledge. Where learners are at present? What do the learners lack?	Looking at learners' assignment task. Interviewing learners. Giving tests. Teachers using a think-aloud protocol
Wants	Subjective needs. Learners have their own views about what they think is useful for them. What do the learners wish to learn?	An interview or questionnaire

Source: Nation & Macalister (2010)

Research and studies dealt with need analysis have been extensively conducted in ESP field involving various learning settings and contexts. For instance, there were a need analysis for Speaking and Listening in a Health-Care Setting for nursing program by Boshier and Smalkoski (2002) and analysis of needs for academic legal English courses by Deutch (2003). Moreover, analyzing needs for tourism topics and English linguistics has been conducted by Dirgeyasa and Ansari (2015) as well as a description of college-students' needs in English for General Purposes (EGP) and ESP/EAP courses in Taiwan by Liu et al., (2011).

In EAP settings and academic writing contexts, a need analysis has also been organized by some course instructors and analysts. Ali and Salih (2013) investigated the teachers' perceptions on the use of need analysis and found that the teachers believed need analysis is a basis for ESL materials development. However, need analysis using survey method by (Eslami, 2010) found that there was some different perceptions between learners and instructors related to the course system. Furthermore, after conducting need analysis in academic writing course for graduate and undergraduate programs, Huang (2010) reported that there is much overlap of skill items categorized as "very important" between graduate students and graduate instructors and also between undergraduate students and undergraduate instructors.

The analysis of learning needs in EAP and particularly in academic writing course has brought some insights that need analysis has become inseparable part of course design, and the voices from instructors and students, as bottom level of the hierarchy, do matter. However, the needs of online-based academic writing course are still little to know. Indeed, it is highly suggestive to plan the online course for better learning (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). And the students' point of view should be considered as valuable and important because assessing needs from only one direction is insufficient (Tait, 1999).

Therefore, this small research was addressed in exploring the needs of online-based academic writing course on the EFL students' points of view.

METHODS

This article reported the needs of online-based academic writing course on the EFL students' perceptions. The participants were 49 students who registered on academic writing course in English Education Program academic year 2020/2021 at a private university in Jakarta. They were twenty males and twenty-nine females with the age ranged between twenty to more than thirty-five years old, see figure 1. Their educational backgrounds were mostly from English education major, meanwhile a small number of participants hold a bachelor's degree in English/Japanese/Chinese Letters, Computers, Elementary Teaching, Architecture, and Accounting, and one participant has received a master's degree in education technology. Twenty-seven participants had professional jobs as English language teachers at school; meanwhile the others were not working in the field of education sector.

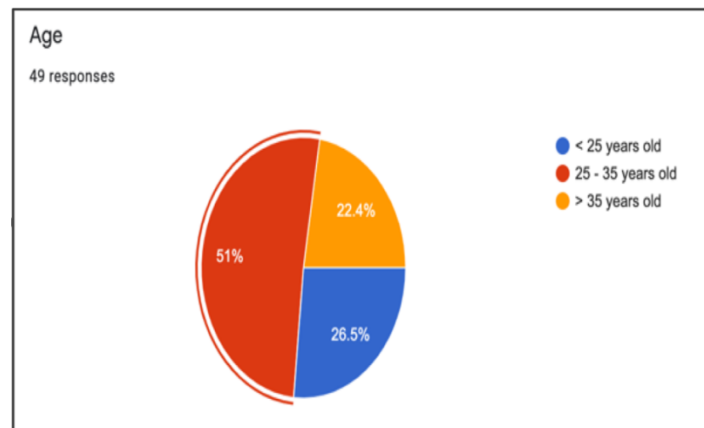


Figure 1.
Participants' Age

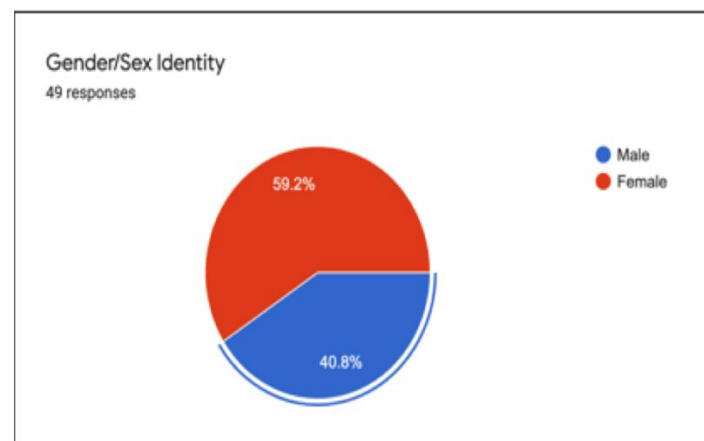


Figure 2.
Participants' Gender

For collecting information about the needs, two dimensions of approach were selected: present-situation analysis and learning-situation analysis (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998 in) and the present information and future information (Graves, 2000), as seen on Table 2. Two instruments were designed to collect these types of information. The writing test was distributed to obtain the students' current writing proficiency. at the first meeting, the instructor has briefed the students about the course description, orientation and classroom procedures. At the end of the session, they were assigned to take one picture or photo of their learning/teaching situations and describe it in at least 150 words. They should submit and upload it on Google Classroom. For scoring and grading the students' writing products, TEEP attribute writing scales by Weir (1990 in Weigle, 2002). It covers seven criteria or aspects of writing: relevance and adequacy of content, composition organization, cohesion, adequacy of vocabulary for purpose, grammar, and mechanical accuracy (punctuation and spelling) with 4 scored levels ranged between 0 to 3. From the scale, the lowest score is 0, and the highest score receives 21 points.

Table 2.
Types of Information on Assessing Needs

Present-situation Analysis	Learning-situation analysis
1. Who the learners are	1. Learners' expectations and goals
2. The learners' level of language (writing) and proficiency	2. The target context: roles, topics, and content
3. Their preferences and attitude	3. Language modality on the course

On the second meeting, the students were asked to fill out the online questionnaire to examine the students' attitudes, expectation, and experiences about the course. After collecting the data, it was analyzed and categorized descriptively. Then, data was presented in the form of chart, diagram, tables, and textual expressions.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The needs of the academic writing course were presented into two categories: present-situation and learning-situation. And then, each category has several subcategories as designed on the types of information.

Results of Present-situation analysis

a) The learners

From the questionnaire, it was revealed that a half of the participants (53%) has ever taken academic writing course before they took this one. And, on the question "have you ever published any article/paper on journals?", 89% or 44 participants said "No"; on the other hand, five participants stated that their papers have been published on journals. It indicates that the student-participants on this course are heterogenous in their academic experiences.

On the item-question related to self-identification, the student-participants are asked to assess themselves as a learner. The options are concerned on motivation, achievement, and independence or regulation. Most of them were identified themselves as high-motivated learners (55.1%) and an independent/self-regulated learner (34.7%). Only a small number of participants stated that they had low

motivation (14%) and can be categorized as a low achiever (10.2%), as seen on Figure 3.

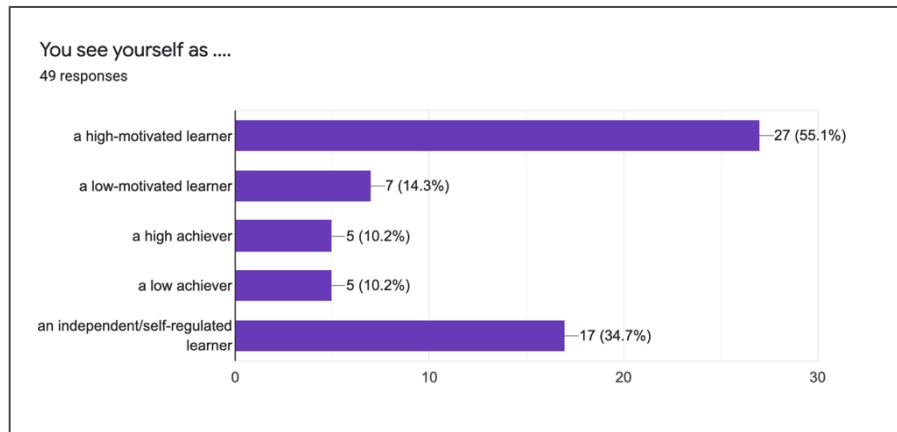


Figure 3.
 Students' Self-identification

Next item was concerning to the students' confidence or efficacy in performing writing tasks and achieving the writing competences on the course. It was led by the expression "how confident are you that you are able to ...". Several items related to the writing competences and learning objectives followed it. The responses can be seen on the table below.

Table 3.
 Student Confidence towards writing tasks

How confident are you that you are able to...	Not confident at all	Fairly confident	Completely confident
constructing sentences with correct structures and rules?	5	35	9
paraphrasing and summarizing texts?	11	29	9
writing paragraphs with appropriate linguistic features and purposes?	10	35	4
composing essays with well organization and insightful content?	16	29	4
developing scientific paper/article with sound concepts and adequate references?	19	23	7

b) The learners' writing levels

The essays made by the students were mostly about their teaching situations as a teacher. Besides, some described their feelings, thought, plans and daily activities as a student in this semester. The number of paragraphs on the sample texts were various. A few wrote only 1 paragraph; most of them composed more than one paragraph, as seen on Figure 4.

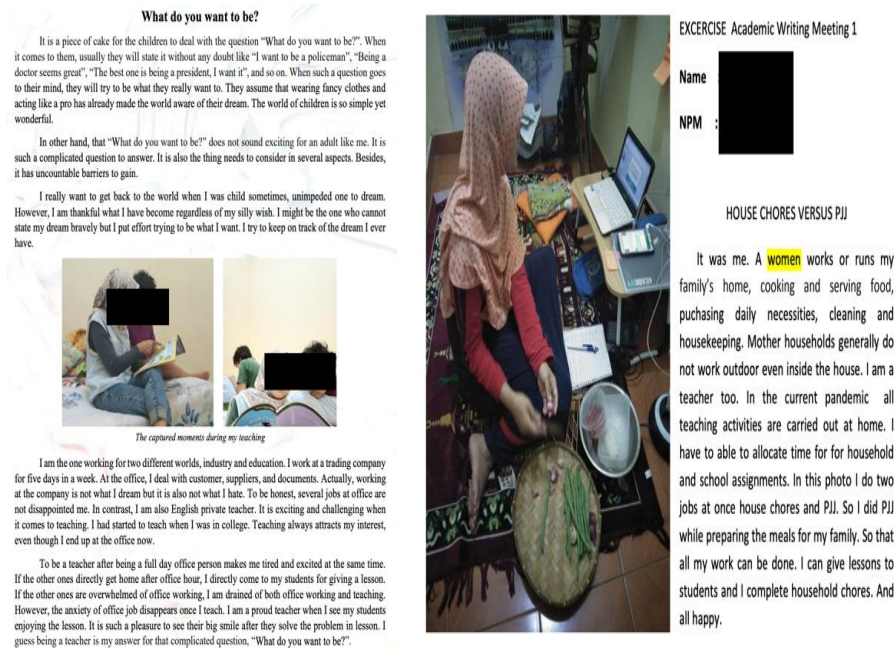


Figure 4.
 Students' Sample Texts

Based on the writing scale, the students' sample texts received scales ranged from 0.67, as lowest scale, to 3.00 as the highest score. Their writing ability at this stage were various from *excellent* to *need improvement*. However, they were mostly in scale two which some inaccuracies were found in grammar and mechanics; and some inadequacies occurred in content, organization, and cohesion. However, they have performed good at organization skills, communication and contents. The students' writing scales can be seen on the table below.

Table 4.
 Students' Writing Scales

Scales	Criteria	Students Samples
0.00 - 0.99	The text bears no relation to the task direction. Totally inadequate. No apparent organisation of content. Cohesion almost totally absent. Writing so fragmentary caused no comprehension of intended communication Vocabulary inadequate even for most basic parts Almost all grammatical patterns inaccurate Ignorance of conventions of punctuation Almost all spelling inaccurate	2
1.00 – 1.99	Text of limited relevance to the task direction. Possible major gaps and/or pointless repetition Very little organisation of content Unsatisfactory cohesion may cause difficulty in comprehension of most of the intended communication Frequent inadequacies in vocabulary. Frequent lexical	16

	inappropriate and/or repetition Frequent grammatical inaccuracies Low standard of accuracy in punctuation Low standard of accuracy in spelling	
2.00 – 2.99	Most of the part on the text, may be some gaps and redundant information. Some organisational skills in evidence, but not adequately controlled Certain parts of the communication are not always effective Some inadequacies in vocabulary. Some grammatical inaccuracies Some inaccuracies in punctuation Some inaccuracies in spelling	27
3	Relevant and adequate content on the text	3
3	Overall shape and internal pattern clear Satisfactory use of cohesion resulting in effective communication Almost no inadequacies in vocabulary. Only rare inappropriacy Almost no grammatical inaccuracies Almost no inaccuracies in punctuation Almost no inaccuracy in spelling	

c) The learners' attitude about the course

After a brief explanation about the course description and orientation given by the instructor, the student-participants were asked on their opinion about the course they would experience. Four descriptions have been given as the options from positive attitude to negative attitude. And most of student-participants perceived that the course benefited them (51%); at the same time, it brought challenges in improving writing skill (44.9%).

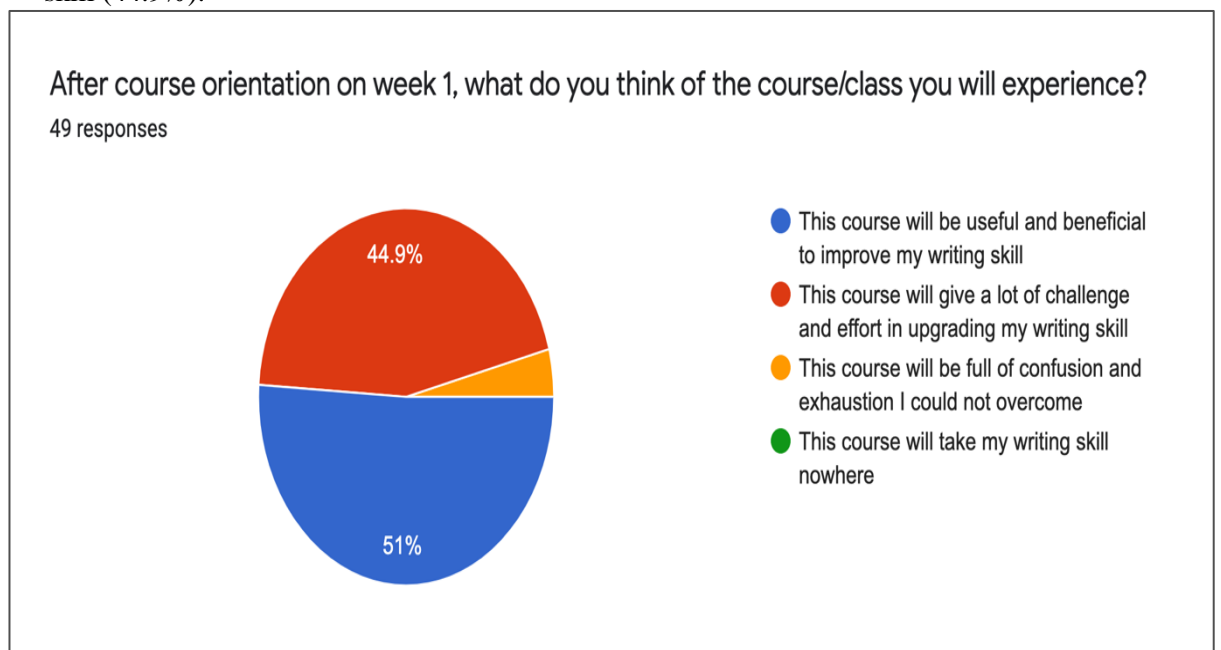


Figure 5.
 Students' attitude about the course

Results of Learning-situation analysis

a) Learners' expectation on goals/objectives and content materials

Concerning to the learning objectives, the student-participants were asked to declare their agreement on the formulated learning objectives and selected content materials prepared by the instructor. The students' responses can be seen on table below.

Table 5.
 Learner's expectation on goals and content

Statements	Strongly disagree	disagree	agree	Strongly agree
Learning objectives are clear	2	-	35	12
Learning objectives are important and appropriate	2	1	28	18
Learning materials (argumentation, review, research paper) are important and necessary	2	1	25	21
Learning materials are well-organized and well-planned	2	2	30	15

b) Learners' preferences on teaching system

The teaching system here refers to material delivery, teaching method/techniques, types of activity, and types of assessment/tests. On the item-question about material delivery, student-participants perceived that zoom video conferencing, Google Classroom and PDF file format are more preferable in delivering materials with scores 41, 31, and 30 respectively.

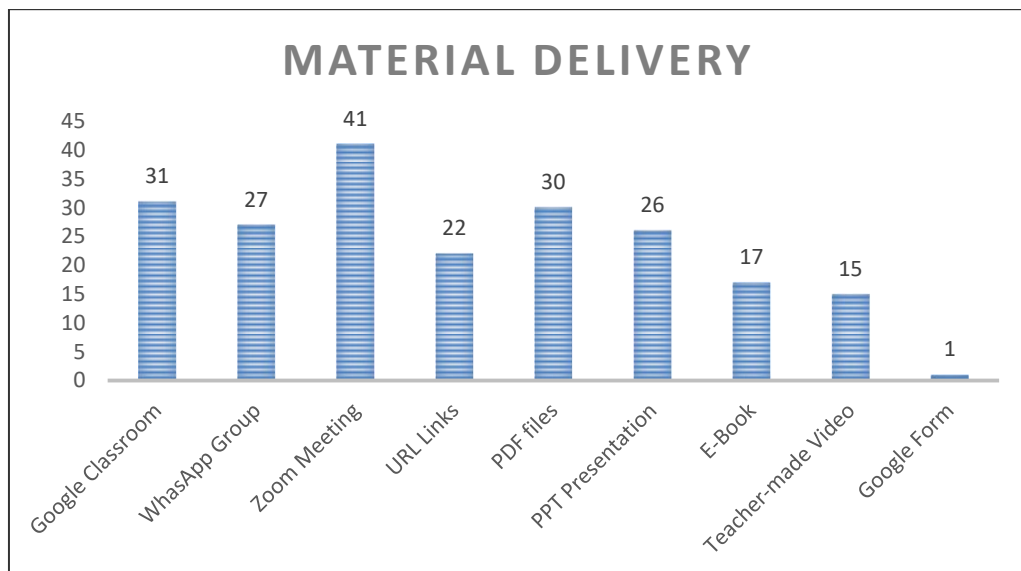


Figure 6.
 Students' Preferences on Material Delivery

On teaching method/techniques, the three approaches mentioned on the option received responses more than 40%. Process writing approach and genre-based approach gained positive responses. Almost a half of the student-participants were

ready to learn and practice writing through these approaches. However, the student-participants thought that 3-phase/structure lesson was the most preferred, as seen on the Figure 7.

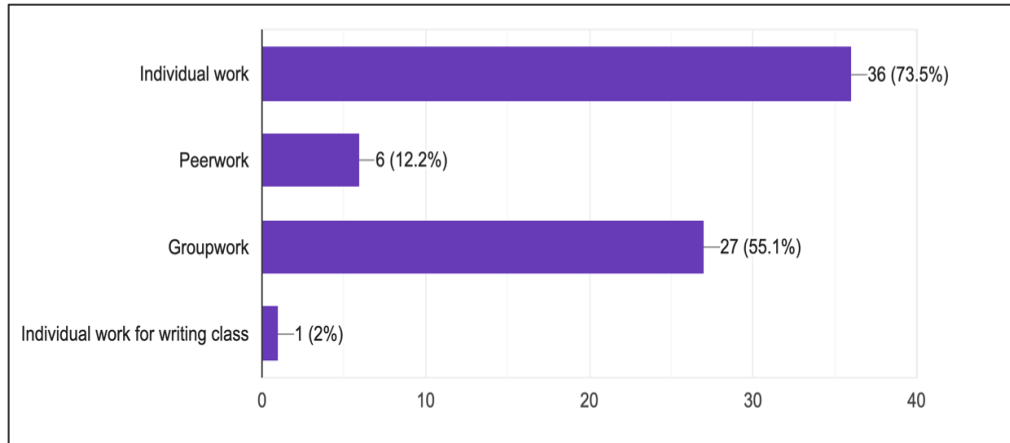


Figure 7.
Students' Preferences on Teaching Methods

The student-participant found that individual work and group work were more effective for academic writing course with the score 73.5% and 55.1% respectively. On the other hand, peer-work was less preferable, as seen on Figure 8.

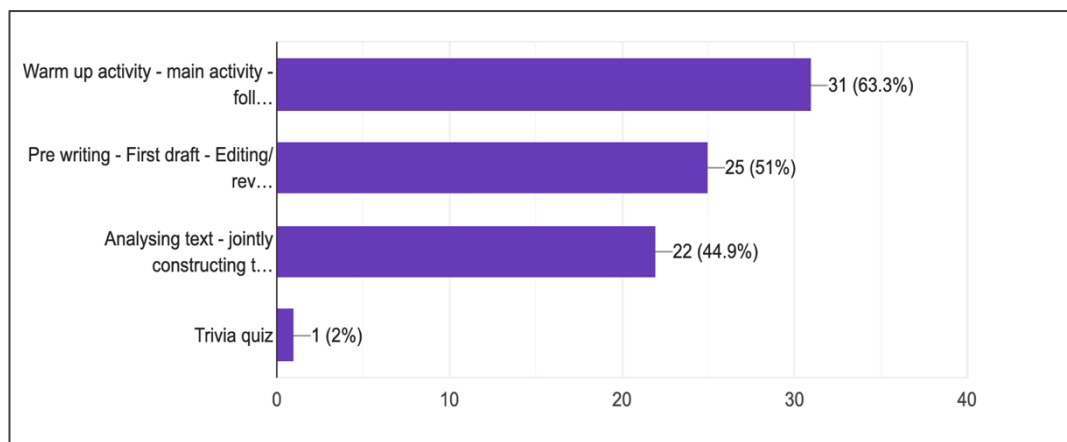


Figure 8.
Students' Preferences on Types of Activity

On the item-question about types of assessment, the student-participant responded that text analysis and essay development were more preferable. The second type was article development (40.8%). Meanwhile, text joint-construction was less preferable for academic writing course.

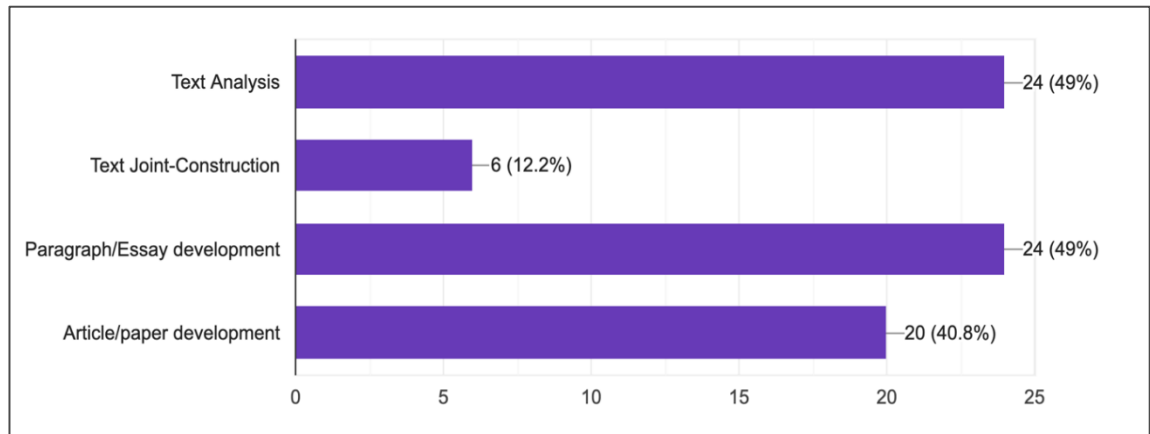


Figure 9.
Students' Preferences on Types of Assessment

Academic writing course for English as a foreign language has very specific objectives so that it can be categorized as one of ESP/EAP subjects. A group of particular learners in a particular learning situation requires a particular need of learning. To bear this in mind, need analysis is regarded important. On this current investigation of needs on academic writing, the student-participants are seemingly a group of high-motivated adult learners with sufficient basic writing skills. Motivation can be an investment (Pierce, 1995) that may be one of many factors in contributing a successful language learning.

The student-participants agreed that the course enables them to write essays and academic genre types. This is consistent to study by Hole et. al. (1996, cited in Paltridge, 2004) found that students in the field of social sciences and humanities were mostly required to write exposition and argumentation text types, such as cause/effect essay and compare/contrast essay, and longer research essays.

CONCLUSION

This paper reported the needs of online-based academic writing course during the emergency remote teaching. The needs cover present situation analysis and learning situation analysis. on the former analysis, it reveals that the most students on this course have sufficient basic writing skills. They see themselves as high-motivated and independent learners They come from various educational background and some has gained academic writing experiences, even few of them has published article on journals.

On the aspect of learning situation, the student-participants agree with the learning objectives that enable them to write essays and research articles. They prefer Zoom video conferencing, Google Classroom and PDF format for delivering materials. Moreover, a 3-phase lesson and process writing in individual work are more preferable for teaching techniques. Concerning to writing test, they felt text analysis and essay development are more appropriate for this course.

In some ways, the collected information on this need analysis may implicate the decisions about teaching system. What students voiced can be considered to select the way materials deliver and the way writing skill assessed. The further investigation may lead the academic writing course evaluation and how effective it is.

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