

DEVELOPING ONLINE COURSE BOOK FOR ENGLISH FRESHMEN

Fariq Shiddiq Tasaufy¹,

Universitas Islam Darul ‘Ulum Lamongan,

Email: tasaufy@unisda.ac.id

Syifa’ Khuriyatuz zharo²,

Universitas Islam Darul ‘Ulum Lamongan,

Email: syifazahro@unisda.ac.id

Abstract

Until these days, the possibility of a face-to-face teaching-learning process in any universities is quite low. Therefore, the need for online learning materials for online or/and blended learning is inevitable. The present research aimed to develop an online book for the Reading 1 course at 3 universities in Lamongan. Unlike other online ELT books which is western-oriented, this online course book was developed based on Lamongan-Javanese’ local wisdom. A total of 135 freshmen and 3 lecturers were involved as the subjects. The results of need analysis showed that 1) the freshmen have positive a attitude towards English reading even though they confronted by some problems, 2) the lecturers seemed to have different interpretations of their freshmen’ reading preferences, and 3) the students’ reading comprehension level needed to be improved. Some implications regarding these findings were discussed as well in this research.

Keywords: R & D, course book, reading comprehension

Introduction

As a foreign language, ELT at university level has different character compared to school levels. The availability of contextual-learning media is expected to be able to improve the learning goals. Nowadays, in a digital society, reading competence is not only fulfilling the cognitive aspect but also a medium of literacy that develop awareness towards many aspects such as social, cultural, economic, and politics (Amiama-Espailat & Mayor-Ruiz, 2017). Reading is a part of social custom, and it is closely related to social norms which represent textual culture in some societies (Amiama-Espailat & Mayor-Ruiz, 2017).

Reading skills are one of the components of scientific and skills courses (MKK), which is a group of subjects oriented towards the assignment of certain knowledge, competencies and skills (Depdiknas, 2001). This MKK aims to hone students' skills in

understanding text structure, master contextual vocabulary, understand the ideas contained in each paragraph, and perform text deduction and induction activities.

The IAEEA publication on 29 November 2007 on reading interest from 41 countries informed the reading ability of Indonesian students at the level of the southern states of New Zealand and South Africa. The results of the preliminary study show that lecturers still use textbooks in the learning process. This greatly affects the reading interest of students who live in an information society. The development of English vocabulary is strongly influenced by developments in information technology (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018). Based on preliminary observations, the success of students in getting reading skills is very much influenced by the competencies expected by the lecturers and the learning instruments (SAP, ROO, and textbooks) Reading for Beginner.

Beginner students tend to experience various difficulties in reading, lack of vocabulary, grammatical understanding of English, and formulation of main ideas. From some of these factors, it can be formulated that the difficulties of students in mastering reading skills are: 1) language barrier; 2) psychological factors (low motivation); 3) learning environment (lecturers, friends, topics, modules); and 4) mother tongue (L1) and second language (L2). Thus, there are more than fifteen factors that encourage difficulty in reading skills (Romly, Abd Rahman, Supie, & Nasharudin, 2018).

To achieve the goals of the reading for beginner course and instill the values of national identity through local wisdom, material contextualization is required, and easy access for students and lecturers in online teaching material. Good teaching material is more than just a collection. It should be formed of a coursebook that is aimed specifically for a course, written by experts, fulfilled the standards of coursebook, and published legally by qualified publishers. The book should accommodate flexible learning techniques based on learners' needs dan goals (Depdiknas, 2001). That is why, it requires the need analysis which explores the level of difficulty, especially if it is related to grammar difficulty as an effort to fulfill the learners' needs towards sufficient reading skill.

Based on the rationales above, there is a need to optimize reading for beginner courses through developing RPAS and SAP which are represented in online course book. This research is expected to provide benefits in optimizing the teaching-learning process.

Theoretical Underpinning

While reading in English, L2 readers encounter many challenges than L1 readers. According to Carrell and Grabe (2002), L2 readers use different processes from L1 readers because the L2 readers have limitations in linguistic knowledge and they do not have general cultural and social knowledge in the English context (Hood, 2002).

Grabe and Stoller (2002) showed that there are three main differences in contextual reading between L1 readers and L2 readers. The differences namely 1)

linguistic and processing, 2) individual and experiences, and 3) cultural-social and institutions. The linguistic and processing difference covers the amount of lexical knowledge, grammatical, and discourse, the higher metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness in L2, and any linguistic difference between those two languages. These problems are significantly related to the learners' success in achieving the standard competence and learning goals in Reading for Beginner (Hood, 2002).

Local Wisdom and Reading for Beginner

The definition of local wisdom is varied depends on the references and limitations. However, of all definitions, there are some keywords namely knowledge, values, skills, experiences, manners, and ethnical customs which are conducted by society in a specific area as the national identity and personality (Keraf, 2002; Wibowo & Gunawan, 2015). Language is part of local wisdom. Values, views, social customs, and beliefs are the components that form an identity on a person. In society, social customs, beliefs, values, and languages are the main components that shape the person's identity and reality. The mindset of a person is influenced by his/ her social-cultural background.

Contextualizing passages based on local wisdom is urgently needed by the aim to ease the learners to understand the contents of the passages. This issue has a significant impact on English language acquisition and English reading skills. Through the contextualized passages which closed to the readers, the main idea will be delivered easily, and the learning goals will be achieved (Pratiwi & Pritanova, 2017).

Reading for Beginner in EFL context

Reading competence consists of 6 elements: decoding, fluency, vocabulary, sentence construction and cohesion, reasoning and background knowledge, and working memory and attention. Vocabulary knowledge is one of the elements that becomes the EFL learners' problem. In these two decades, the importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension becomes the main focus of second and foreign language research (Anjomshoa & Zamanian, 2014). Many researchers believed that ESL/ EFL learners have disadvantages in comprehending the parts of passages because of their insufficient vocabulary knowledge (Al-Darayseh, 2014).

One of the main factors why some learners are successful in their literacy and some others confront difficulties in completing the reading-list is the graded reading (Kuhn & Rasinski, 2009). This is why graded reading involves various reading activities which are conducted by EFL learners. Basically, reading activities are divided into three interrelated components: 1) cognitive component – introduction and comprehension of words, 2) psychological component – motivation and interest, and 3) ecological component – environment and family culture (Al-Darayseh, 2014). The course 'Reading for Beginner' is the most basic level equal to the pre-intermediate level in some of its characteristics. First, based on the word counts, it contains passages that contain 300-500 words and only 5-10% of difficult words. This material has other supportive media such

as pictures, diagrams, illustrations, and etc. It contains language used in daily activities, short sentences, and a variety of passages (Kuhn & Rasinski, 2009).

Methodology

This research adapted Borg and Gall's (2007) research & development design with three main stages: need analysis, model development, and model validation. The subjects of this research were 3 lecturers and 145 freshmen of *Reading 1* at three different universities in Lamongan which due to research interests, the researcher decided to write down the third party of the university with alias; Campus A, Campus B, and Campus C.

There were five instruments applied to collect the data namely questionnaire, reading comprehension test, interview, and evaluation sheet. All of the data collection processes were conducted without any face-to-face meeting. This decision was taken due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation. All instruments were constructed by the researchers based on their teaching experiences. These instruments had been approved by the ethics committee and some minor changes had been arranged.

To start the data collection, firstly, the researchers distributed the link to every lecturer who teaches *Reading 1* in his/her class university. Then, all lecturers shared that link to his/ her students. Secondly, some students and all lecturers who are willing to be the participants of interviews were called via phone. The phone interviews were running for 15-25 minutes. There were 11 freshmen and 3 lecturers who are willing to be participants in the interview. Thirdly, the online reading comprehension test was shared to all students via *WhatsApp*. It is used to measure the current level of students' reading comprehension. The researchers adopt the TOEFL reading section which consisted of 50 multiple-choice questions. This test should be finished in 40 minutes. The data of the questionnaire and the reading test were automatically analyzed by *google*. The results were shown in the numbers. Meanwhile, the results of interview were analyzed based on its themes.

Findings and Discussion

This research was a part of the bigger project. The researchers only presented some of its fruitful findings. Here, the findings were distinguished into three sections; the freshmen' need analysis, the lecturers' need analysis, and the freshmen' reading comprehension level. All participants' names had been changed into pseudonyms.

Freshmen' Need Analysis

To begin with, most of the freshmen in Unisda, Unisla, dan Unilfath were nineteen up to twenty years old. They consisted of forty-one males and ninety-four females. More than half of them came from Lamongan. Other students came from other satellite-towns around Lamongan such as Gresik, Tuban, etc. All freshmen are residence of East Java.

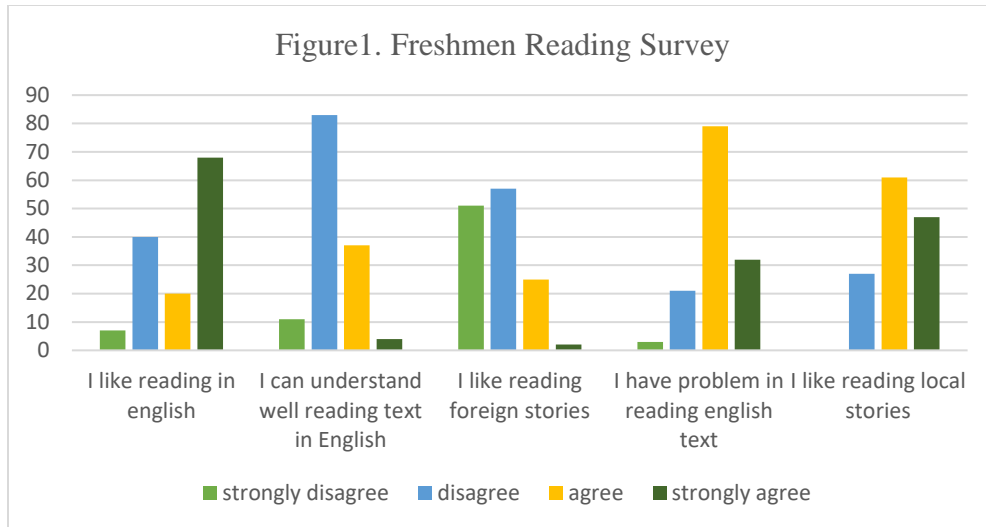
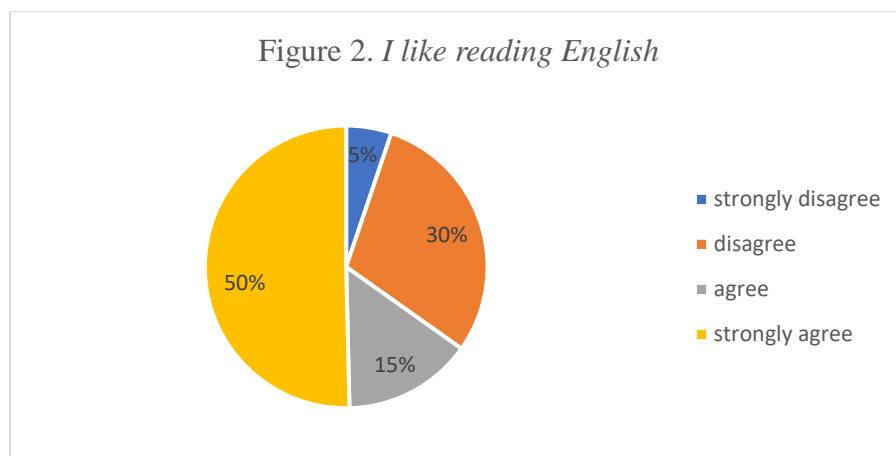


Figure 1 showed the result of five statements addressed to the freshmen (line X) and the numbers of the freshmen who gave respond (line Y).



First, more than half of the freshmen admitted that they like to read English. This finding showed that freshmen have a positive attitude towards English reading activity. In addition, according to the students' interviews, many of them gave positive answers such as...

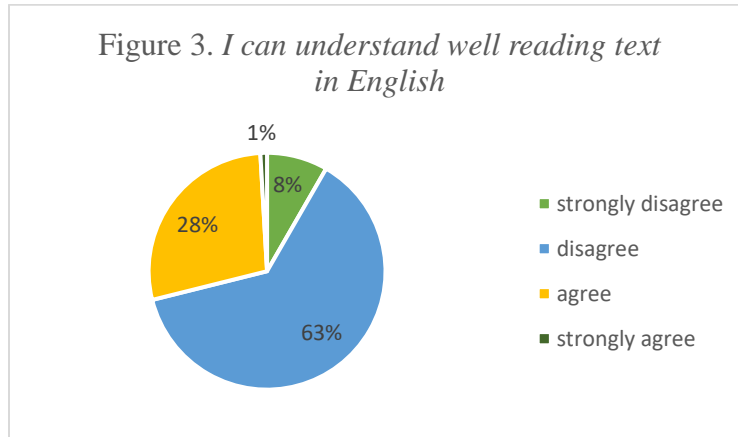
"yes, I like reading in English because it looks cool" (Bayu/ Unilfath/ interview)

"when I was kid, my parents pushed me to read anything, now I love to read many things, including English" (Arian/ Campus A/ interview)

"my English lecturer used to help me when I have problem in reading, he always teach his students passionately, that's why I can enjoy English reading" (Citra/ Campus B/ Interview).

This finding is in line with Lien's (2017) study which found that EFL college students tend to enjoy reading. The researchers believed that this similarity is related to

the students' psychological status. The students start to aware that they have already adults who have full responsibility for their own study and their own success.



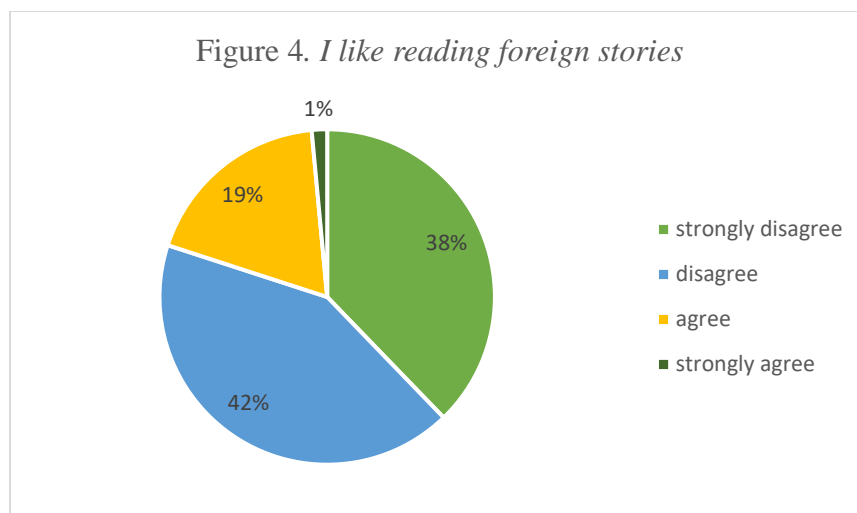
Second, even though the freshmen have a positive attitude but, unfortunately, their understanding of English text was negative; 70% of them stated that they cannot understand English reading. While in the interview, the researchers tried to give some questions to get better a understanding by asking “*can you describe your problem in understanding English reading?*”, thus they answered...

“I don’t know, at first I thought that I can understand English reading if I know many words but it’s more than that” (Eva/ Campus A/ interview),

“the more I study about reading as an English skill, the more I don’t know what understanding is about, it’s tricky” (Anindya Pradipta H/ Campus B/ interview),

“I feel like I have better understanding in English reading if it is compared to non-English students, but that will be different if I should be compared to other English students, I usually think that I am not better than her/him” (Fajri/ Campus C/ interview).

This finding was similar to Floris’ (2008) study where she found that the self-rating of the English students’ proficiency in reading was rather low even though they are in the fourth or the sixth semester. This phenomenon is rather unusual because there should be a reason why do English students have doubts about their proficiency; despite the fact that they are in freshmen, sophomore, junior, or senior years. It needs a further inquiry to explore the source of the students’ self-judgment.

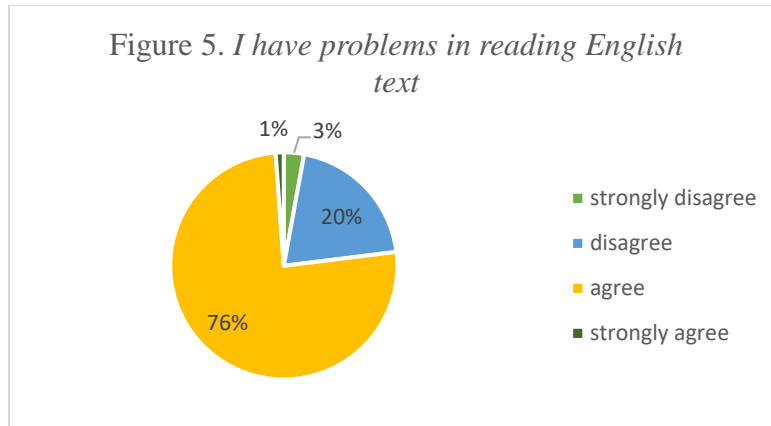


Third, there were only 20% of them like reading foreign stories. Indeed, these kinds of stories are quite popular and animated by *Disney*. Many people around the world have watched *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Rapunzel*, *Winnie the Pooh*, etc. Although the animations are loved by its fans, it does not guarantee that the fans will love to read the book stories as well. The freshmen provided some explanation on why they have some interest in foreign stories such as...

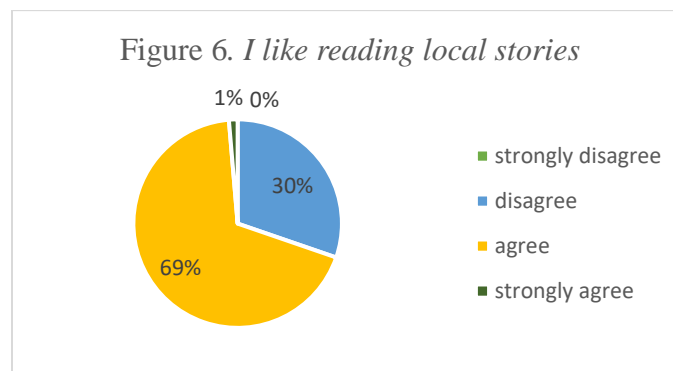
“of course I like foreign stories. It’s so full of imagination. I like something new, something I have never knew about that, about beautiful forest, snow, magical worlds, etc.” (Fajri/ Campus C/ interview)

“by reading foreign stories, I know their culture, their style, fashion, their foods. For example, I thought that all honey is stored inside the clay barrels, like Pooh, but it doesn’t. It only exists in the writer’s imagination” (Arian/ Campus A/ interview).

In other words, it indicated that freshmen like reading foreign stories because they can find something new which is not commonly found in their area. However, reading passages are possibly contain some inappropriate cultural values for the readers who have a different culture. Even more, some writers intentionally put their negative thoughts or values in their writings in order to brainwash the readers (Chao, 2011; Kirana & Methitham, 2019). To prevent this negative effect, teachers should aware of this hidden curriculum before they select texts or books for their students.



Fourth, for the statement ‘I have problem in reading English text’, 74% of the freshmen admitted that they are *agree and strongly agree* to that statement. This finding was also found by Syaifudin (2015), Artini (2017), Romly, et al. (2018). It also strengthened the result of second statement ‘I can understand well reading English text’ where most of the freshmen were *disagree and strongly disagree*.



Fifth, almost 70% of them were *agree and strongly agree* that they like reading local stories. Some of the given statements were...

“I wanna know more about these kinds of story, my mother used to tell me that stories when I was a kid. As a kid, I thought the stories are interesting because of the plots. But as an adult, I think the characters are more interesting.” (Eva/ Campus A/ interview)

“I knew some of the settings in those stories, and and all of the places are beautiful, when I visited it, I feel like I am the main character of a story haa haa haa...” (Bayu/ Campus C/ Interview).

“it (local stories) represents ourselves, our culture, we should love them more than foreign culture” (Arian/ Campus A/ interview)

This finding was congruent with Wulandari, et al. (2020) and Arifani (2016). One of the most possible rationale is that local stories are able to carry out the readers’ sense

of belongings to their readers. The feeling of familiarity or even *dejavu* affects the readers' psychology; especially their personal emotions.

Lecturers' Need Analysis

Compared to the freshmen's statements in general, the lecturers' answers were slightly different. First, all lecturers said *agree* that their freshmen like reading in English. Here, there was no difference between the lecturers and the freshmen answer. The lecturers answered (all the lecturer's are written in alias)

"I believe that my students are bookworms, even not all of them, maybe half, but I think that is good enough. The others may not bookworms but they do understand that they need to read even though they don't love it, at least they don't hate reading... hha hha haa.." (Pak CA/ Campus A/ Interview)

"of course, they like reading, sometimes I brought magazine like Nat Geo, Encyclopedia, newspapers, etc. We also discussed some popular memes on internet. Reading is not only about words but also pictures, colors, symbols, etc." (Bu WJ/ Campus C/ interview)

"they should like reading, it is not a choice, it's a need, their primary need. Some students seemed not too interested in reading, maybe because they have not met the texts that attract their attention or make them fall in love." (Bu DS/ Unisda/ interview)

It was clear that both lecturers and freshmen have the same positive attitude in readings. This attitude is significant on how the lecturers' beliefs will represent their teaching. Although this belief is not seen or explicitly stated, the freshmen were able to absorb this affection through teaching-learning process.

Second, when the lecturers asked "*do you agree that your freshmen can understand well reading text in English?*", there was only one lecturer who answered *agree*. It meant that the other two lecturers believed that their freshmen may have an insufficient understanding of what they read. This answer was in line when the lecturers asked "*do you agree that your freshmen have problem in reading English text?*". The two lecturers said *agree*.

"Yes, I agree with that, they (the freshmen) are bookworms, therefore they are smart, they know what they do, understand what they read." (Pak CA/ Campus A/ interview)

Pak CA's answer was less certain because there was no enough evidence to strengthen his statement. This finding is in line with Alsheri & Etherington (2017) which exposed that there is nothing wrong when a lecturer has a different perception with his students. Some lecturers maybe had much better analyze skill than others and they are able to use it for making much precise estimation on their students' needs. However, for

lecturers who have not to earn that skill, they should apply other strategies to gather and analyze the students' needs.

Third, regarding the reading preferences, the lecturers answered *agree* and *strongly agree* that their freshmen like reading foreign stories. The lecturers said *disagree* and *strongly disagree* that their freshmen like reading local stories.

“if I have to guess, I think my students prefer foreign than local stories. The use of English is much more suitable for foreign stories than local. Some local stories have been translated into English but the sense is quite different. I personally cannot get the sense when I read local stories in English. I think my students will feel it too” (Bu DA/ Campus B/ interview)

“because some students always ask me about the foreign stories, they said that they like fantasies or magics. It helped them to acquire creative imagination skill” (Pak CA/ Campus A/ interview)

Once again, the lecturers' expectation was different from the freshmen's statements. Some of the freshmen may have been represented by the lecturers' expectations above. Nevertheless, the majority of freshmen' statements were not exposed. In this case, the lecturers needed to confirm or even re-confirm this issue before they continued their course. Reading preference is more than just a modest thing for the freshmen. It becomes the reason for their motivation which may bring enjoyment to them before, during, or/and after doing reading any English stories.

Freshmen' Reading Comprehension Levels

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) levels (from A1 to C2), the students were classified into 2 levels. Most of the students were classified at A2 level. Whereas some of them have even achieved a higher level, that was B1.

Table 1. Result of Reading Comprehension Test

Number of freshmen	Score	Level
16	48-56	B2 (Intermediate English)
119	<48	A2 (Elementary English)

Indeed, this problem needs to be solved. There are, at least, practical solutions that can be applied. First, the literature circle, this activity was empirically proven and successful to improve the students' reading comprehension (Varita, 2017). Second, extensive reading materials, according to the EFL college students' survey, this material gave enjoyment to them and was helpful (Lien, 2017). Third, visualizing, this strategy was also proven to earn a better reading comprehension score (Aziz, 2018). As the proverb says *one size doesn't fit all*, one or all of these choices may not be suitable for

those English freshmen. The best thing that can be done by their lecturers is to apply and evaluate every possible solution.

Conclusion

There were three notable conclusions that can be drawn from the results of need analysis. First, the comparison between the freshmen' and their lecturers' answers produced mixed results because there haven't any opportunity to deeply discuss this issue. On one side, it seemed that the lecturers only focused on their lesson plans and reading lists. They rarely asked their freshmen about book preferences, word count, comprehension levels, etc. On the other side, the freshmen were unsure that their reading preferences and any other opinions were something important that should be conveyed to the lecturers. Second, most freshmen have insufficient reading comprehension for the level of university students because they didn't teach to read based on their grade or difficulty level. All in all, bridging between the lecturers and the freshmen communication is a critical thing. Both sides should have the willingness to open discussion with the aim to produce the best agreement which are benefits for all. Last, the researchers should remind that these results are not the final yet since this article only presented the need analysis. The development stage and the validation stage are discussed in another articles.

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