DIFFICULTIES IN COMPREHENDING ESP READING MATERIALS ENCOUNTERED BY BUSINESS-MAJORED STUDENTS

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Abstract: It is indisputable that English for Specific Purposes plays an important role in helping students to excel in their future careers. However, many undergraduates claim that they struggle to use the English language, especially reading skills. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the difficulties in comprehending reading materials provided in the ESP course encountered by business-majored students. In order to answer the research questions, the researcher distributed surveys to 185 students to examine the difficulties they experienced while reading ESP materials and solutions to overcome the challenges. Findings show that many participants needed help understanding and memorizing the meanings of technical terms.Moreover, long and complex sentences are another burden. To solve these problems, most learners aspire to improve their vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Furthermore, learners' lack of interest and background knowledge of reading texts also hindered their reading comprehension. As an attempt to overcome the difficulties, the majority of respondents stated that they should read specialized texts that are related to their future jobs more often. Lastly, undergraduates admitted that they lacked reading skills (specifically answering comprehension questions and applying the skimming strategy) and that they would like ESP teachers to teach them reading strategies.

Keywords: ESP, ESP reading materials, reading comprehension, difficulties in reading comprehension.

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1. Introduction

Since Vietnam is a developing country, the importance of teaching and learning English is strongly emphasized, especially in tertiary education, in which students are equipped with the fundamental knowledge and skills required for their future careers. Foreign Trade University is one of the universities in Vietnam that offers ESP courses, which are organized by the Faculty of English for Specific Purposes. Students enrolling in this institution have a tendency to work as future sales executives and policymakers in both domestic and international businesses. As a result, English will be important in their future employment because students will need it to collaborate with foreign colleagues, read documents about their field, understand technical jargon, contracts, reports, product descriptions, etc.

In order to become a competent English user, reading is one of the skills that language learners need to master. In spite of the efforts of both teachers and students, teachers frequently consider their students' reading skills to be disappointing, failing to meet the university's requirements. Several studies investigate learners' difficulties in reading ESP materials (Ali, 2012; Ha, 2011; Hazmani, 2019; Nguyen & Hoang, 2018; Tran & Duong, 2017). Students often encounter challenges related to vocabulary, different genres of ESP reading materials, the lack of reading strategies, and background knowledge (Ha, 2011; Hazmani, 2019; Nguyen & Hoang, 2018; Tran & Duong, 2017). Moreover, Tran and Duong (2017) found that time allocation for reading ESP texts is another factor causing students' difficulties. In addition, participants in Hazmani's (2019) study reported facing challenges in understanding ESP reading materials due to complicated grammatical structures and learners' lack of motivation to read.

On the other hand, students were reported adopting various solutions to overcome the difficulties. With regard to solutions adopted by students, it is advisable that they look up the meanings of

technical vocabulary and read materials provided beforehand to expand their vocabulary and background knowledge (Nguyen and Hoang, 2018; Tran and Duong, 2017). Additionally, Nguyen and Hoang (2018) suggested that learners improve their grammatical knowledge and take into consideration the importance of reading ESP materials in their future study and work. In terms of recommended solutions for ESP teachers, Tran and Duong (2017) believed that teachers should provide students with reading materials beforehand so that they could understand terminologies and concepts used in the materials. Moreover, teaching methods in reading lessons should be more communicative and interactive (Ali, 2012; Ha, 2011); specifically, teachers should organize different pre-reading activities to trigger learners' background knowledge (Nguyen and Hoang, 2018; Tran & Duong, 2017). Lastly, it is suggested that teachers teach reading strategies (Ali, 2012; Nguyen and Hoang, 2018) and modify reading materials into simpler and more motivating versions with less new words (Ha, 2011).

In the context of Vietnam, there are a few empirical studies conducted to investigate students' difficulties in reading ESP materials (see Ha, 2011; Nguyen and Hoang, 2018; Tran and Duong, 2017). Regarding the contexts and participants of the aforementioned research, Tran and Duong (2017) investigated English-majored students, Nguyen and Hoang (2018) focused on first year nursing students at a medical college in the city of Can Tho, while the participants in Ha's (2011) research were sophomores at the Vietnam-Korea Technical College. However, there is little to no research whose participants are business-majored students. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct a research on the difficulties that business-majored students at Foreign Trade University encounter while reading ESP materials.

The findings of this paper could be helpful to ESP students and lecturers in improving learners' comprehension of ESP reading materials. Moreover, the results could also encourage institutional

changes in textbook selection, curriculum development, and policy formulation.

The study's overall aim was to explore how business-majored students processed the reading materials provided in the ESP course. To serve this overall aim successfully, first, the researcher desired to investigate the difficulties encountered by students in comprehending those provided reading materials, whose content is closely related to their major as perceived by students. Secondly, suggested solutions to such difficulties as reported by students were also what the researcher aimed at.

2. Literature Review

2.1. English for specific purposes

ESP, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Robinson (1980, as cited in Hanifi, 2021), is an approach of language education in which all decisions made on content and method depend on the learner's learning objectives, which could be academic, professional, scientific, etc. More information on ESP learners was provided by Dudley-Evans (1998, as cited in Shahani & Biria, 2016), who stated that ESP is tied to specific disciplines that are intended for adult learners with some prior understanding of the English language.

2.2. Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is the process of understanding the meaning of a spoken or written communication through a reciprocal, comprehensive exchange of ideas between the message and the interpreter (Durkin, 1993; Harris and Hodges, 1995). Comprehension, according to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (p. 11). Although there are various definitions of comprehension, they all share a

similarity, which is that students need to be active readers who digest what they read, construct a mental image, summarize, and make inferences. Readers utilize critical thinking skills in this process to balance between the writer's intentions and the readers' understanding of the text.

2.3. Difficulties in reading comprehension in ESP

According to Ha (2011), there are four factors that cause students' difficulties in comprehending ESP reading materials, which are technical vocabulary, students' competence, authenticity of ESP materials, and lack of specialist background knowledge.

A technical word can be easily identified as belonging to a specific topic, discipline, or field (Nation, 2001). Specifically, indexical words, borrowed words, and general scientific words from the common language make up technical vocabulary (Wignell, Martin and Eggins, 1993, as cited in Ha, 2011). Unknown technical terms cannot typically be disregarded when reading because they are directly related to the topic at hand. It is also difficult to deduce the meaning of the words from context unless the reader already has a solid understanding of the subject. Looking up the word in a dictionary does not provide much satisfaction for the same reason. Therefore, studying technical terms is obviously linked to learning the subject (Nation, 2001).

The language proficiency of a foreign language reader is crucial in influencing his reading comprehension. The reader's proficiency in the language's linguistic components is related to how well he comprehends the text. Students may have no trouble processing the material if they have an extensive vocabulary, understand the many coherent devices, and recognize the various sentence patterns. Without initially attending to the linguistic information displayed on the page, which acts as a stimulus that helps enhance the reader's comprehension, he cannot make predictions and anticipate the text's meaning. As a

result, if the reader does not grasp what is on the page, he cannot keep speculating and anticipating. Consequently, the reading process is hampered by a lack of language competence (Hasan, 2017; Labiod, 2007).

Coffey (1984) claimed that the most important factor in ESP exercise typology is authenticity. Coffey (1984) and Morrow (1980) (as cited in Ha, 2011) shared the idea that it was necessary that learners in ESP courses use ESP materials that contained the same skills and tactics as those needed in the target situation.

According to Ha (2011), students can find a meaningful context for the terminology and structures learned in ESP classes if they have knowledge of the topic area. As a result, learners can use the subject knowledge that they already know to help them learn English. The more authentic and realistic the setting, the greater the interest and, as a result, the greater the success of learning.

2.4. Review of related studies

Ali (2012) looked into the challenges in reading comprehension faced by Iraqi engineering students at a university where the medium of teaching and communication was not English yet students were expected to read materials in English. The difficulties that students faced in reading comprehension were identified using a standardized test. According to the findings of this study, engineering students had considerable difficulty in reading and understanding texts in English that are relevant to their major and common topics. Therefore, the researcher provided several suggestions, which were interactive and communicative reading courses, introduction of reading strategies, exposure to different reading purposes and tasks, etc.

In the context of Vietnam, Ha (2011) investigated the challenges students had with ESP reading and the reasons for their poor reading comprehension. The participants were 100 sophomores at Vietnam-Korea Technical College who completed a questionnaire for the data

collection procedure. The findings revealed that while reading with ESP texts, students frequently had difficulties in various aspects and components of the language, including ESP discourse, vocabulary, subject background knowledge, and reading skills. Students' poor reading comprehension was caused by inadequate subject background knowledge, insufficient ESP vocabulary, teaching methods, etc.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted at Foreign Trade University (FTU), which is a public university in Hanoi, Vietnam, founded in 1960. FTU is regarded as one of Vietnam's most distinguished colleges, with a long history of contributing brilliant alumni to the Vietnamese economy.

Regarding ESP courses organized at FTU, each course could be divided into 3 different types of classes, which are:

• Standard class: are classes in which students study the entire program and adequate course credits as prescribed by the training program.

• Two-skill class: are classes for students with TOEIC Listening and Reading Certificate. This type of class is not available to students in the Honors Program.

• Four-skill class: are classes for students who participate in the English language entrance test that could score 60/100 or higher, or have an internationally recognized English certificate which integrates four English skills.

Research participants are business-majored students in the Faculty of International Economics at Foreign Trade University. The population size is 321 students. The majority of respondents are 20 years old (accounting for three fourths of the participants) and the others' age range from 19 to 25 years old. Students enrolling in ESP courses, which are English 5, English 6, and English 7, come from all

four undergraduate years since the requirement for joining in the ESP courses is that students have completed previous General English courses. Moreover, students enrolling in English 5, English 6, and English 7 courses study the same course book, which is Market Leader 3rd Edition Intermediate. The difference between the courses is that English 5 course covers unit 1 to 4 of the book, unit 5 to 8 are taught in English 6 course, and English 7 course focuses on unit 9 to 12. Students are at least 18 years old, with Vietnamese as their L1 and English as their L2.

Among the three aforementioned types of ESP classes, the researcher decided to conduct the study on students studying in standard classes. While lectures for standard classes are held weekly, there are only one to two lectures being delivered throughout the course for two-skill classes and four-skill classes. Therefore, it is apparent that students in standard classes have more interaction with ESP lecturers, explaining the researcher's choice of participants.

The researcher decided to target the entire student population (with an expected response rate of 55%) rather than using sampling techniques. With a confidence level of 95%, a confidence interval of 5, and a population of 321 pupils, a total of 175 responses is required, according to the Sample Size Calculator run by Creative Research Systems. In total, the number of learners enrolling in the three ESP courses namely English 5, English 6, and English 7 is 63, 12, and 246 students respectively. After distributing the survey to the entire student population, the researcher received 185 responses, roughly 22% of which were from students in English 5 courses, 5% were from learners in English 6 courses, and approximately 73% were from students in English 7 courses.

3.1. Research questions

- *What are the students' difficulties in comprehending the reading materials provided in ESP courses as perceived by the students?*

- *What are the possible solutions to overcome the difficulties as proposed by the students?*

3.2. Data collection

The study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design, which is generally utilized to obtain information about a specific characteristic or phenomenon of a particular population or sample in their natural setting (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Specifically, the researcher believes that surveys should be used in this study because of their established validity and reliability for similar purposes in many contexts. The questionnaire was developed with reference to previously published studies on the topic of difficulties in reading comprehension by Ha (2011) and Tran & Duong (2017).

To answer the study's two research questions, online questionnaires were used as data collection instruments. The original questionnaire was written in English; however, the researcher translated the survey into Vietnamese so that participants could better understand the questionnaire. The survey consisted of four primary groups of questions, the majority of which were rated using a Likert scale, which proves to be advantageous since data could be collected from a large sample size in a short amount of time. Moreover, the validity of data interpretations could be established via various means (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014). To be more specific, the four sections of the survey are: "General information", "Difficulties in reading ESP materials", "Possible solutions", and "Personal information".

In terms of the first section titled "General information", the researcher introduces the aims of the study, appreciation for students' participation in the study, and confidential protections for their personal information. Moreover, the researcher also asks students questions regarding their demographics, self-assessment of their English level, and their opinions on reading technical texts.

With regard to the second section, which is "Difficulties in reading ESP materials", students are presented with 28 difficulties that

they may encounter it while reading ESP materials. The difficulties are divided into five smaller aspects namely ESP vocabulary, grammar, materials, lack of background knowledge, and lack of reading skills. Respondents are asked to rate the difficulties on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "Never true", and 5 being "Always true". Moreover, in each aspect, the researcher includes an open-ended question for students to suggest other difficulties that are not mentioned above.

In the section of "Possible solutions", there are 19 solutions, which are categorized according to the five aforementioned aspects, to assist students in solving the difficulties with reading comprehension. Respondents' task is to choose as many as possible the solutions that they think are necessary. Similar to the previous section, the participants could recommend other solutions by answering the open-ended questions in each aspect. Moreover, this section also includes two other open-ended questions asking students about the solutions that they are currently applying and the ones that they plan to adopt in the future.

The last section of the questionnaire is "Personal information", asking the survey takers' permission to provide the researchers with their personal information including name, phone number, and email address. This is an optional question and participants who are willing and available to take part in interviews with the researcher could fill in their personal information.

With the instruments as explained above, the researcher follows the procedure below for collecting data:

- Step 1: Constructing the data collection instrument
- Step 2: Administering the instruments

In order to process the data acquired from the questionnaire, the current study will use quantitative analysis strategies. In order to analyze the data collected from the survey, the researcher would follow the steps below:

Step 1: Utilizing SPSS to process the data

To begin, the data collected from the questionnaire would be duplicated in SPSS. Next, the researcher would calculate the mean score and standard deviation of each item's answers. While "meanisthe arithmeticaverage orthesum ofvalues inadataset dividedby thetotalnumber ofobservations, standard deviation are measures of spread that reveal how close each observed value is to the mean of the entire dataset " (Kaur, Stoltzfus, & Yellapu, 2018, p. 62). Finally, the mean scores of items in the same section that answers a specific research question would be compared and contrasted. Afterwards, the most significant items in each section, as determined by the mean score, would be introduced and addressed in further depth.

Step 2: Analyzing the data from open-ended questions

The open-ended questions in the survey provide information about other difficulties and solutions that the participants suggested. In order to address these questions, the researcher read all of the responses and highlighted the most prominent and popular ideas among the participants' responses. Afterwards, the researchers would provide interpretations for the patterns found in the responses.

4. Findings & Discussion

4.1. Difficulties with ESP vocabulary

It could be seen from the table that Item 1, 2, and 5 were the difficulties that most students experienced while reading ESP materials with a mean of 3.62, 3.62, and 3.60 respectively. To be more specific, approximately half of the students usually find it difficult to understand and memorize the meaning of technical terms, and nearly 40% of the learners attributed the difficulties that they faced in understanding specialized texts to their lack of general vocabulary.

In addition, Item 6 in the questionnaire was an open-ended question which asked students to name other difficulties with ESP

vocabulary that they experienced, apart from ones listed above. Four students claimed that they could not find reliable sources to look up meanings of technical terms, which took up much time in undergraduates' studying time. Moreover, it was reported by three learners that the number of terminology in reading materials was excessive while one student asserted that the amount of technical terms provided in ESP courses was not enough.

Table 1: Difficulties with ESP Vocabulary

Item No.	Difficulties with ESP vocabulary	N	Mean	Std.D
1	I find it difficult to understand the meaning of technical terms in reading texts.	185	3.62	0.674
2	I find it difficult to memorize technical terms.	185	3.62	0.772
3	When a word has many meanings, I do not know which meaning is used in the specialized text.	185	3.47	0.885
4	I read word by word so I cannot understand exactly what the writer wants to say in the specialized text.	185	3.06	1.017
5	My lack of general vocabulary causes me difficulties in understanding specialized texts.	185	3.60	0.957

4.2. Difficulties with Grammar

According to the mean of Item 9 and 10 (3.21 and 3.38 respectively), it can be inferred that long and complex sentences are ones that were the most troublesome for students. Specifically, about 86% of students claimed that they at least sometimes found it difficult to find the main ideas of complex sentences (Item 9) while roughly 81% of participants have difficulties in understanding long sentences at least every now and then (Item 10).

Several learners also mentioned other problems that they faced in terms of grammar (Item 11 - open-ended question). For the most part, undergraduates listed difficulties that they had with specific grammar points namely compound sentence, reduced relative clauses, tenses, conjunctions, independent and dependent clauses.

Table 2: Difficulties with Grammar

Item No.	Difficulties with Grammar	N	Mean	Std.D
7	I do not remember all the grammatical structures that I have learnt and this makes it difficult to understand the content of specialized texts.	185	2.89	0.914
8	I do not understand a sentence's meaning in the specialized text if it is a new grammatical structure.	185	3.11	0.944
9	Long sentences are difficult for me to understand.	185	3.21	0.873
10	It is difficult for me to find the main ideas of complex sentences.	185	3.38	0.920

4.3. Difficulties with Materials

In terms of the difficulties that students had with ESP reading materials, it was notable that more than half of the participants (96 learners) sometimes struggled to understand the materials because they lacked knowledge about the structures of specialized texts (Item 12). Two other reasons that many students attributed to their difficulties in understanding ESP materials were their lack of interest in the texts' content (Item 15) and the inauthentic nature of the materials (Item 16). Specifically, only about 22% of undergraduates stated that they never or rarely had those problems.

The open-ended question revealed that six students listed specialized terminologies as another contributing factor to the difficulties that they faced when reading ESP materials. Another problem was the lack of reliable sources to find suitable reading texts, which was reported by two undergraduates.

Table 3: Difficulties with Materials

Item No.	Difficulties with Materials	N	Mean	Std.D
12	I do not know how a specialized text is organized and this makes it difficult for me to understand its content.	185	3.24	0.799
13	I do not know how a paragraph is organized and this makes it difficult for me to understand its content.	185	2.93	0.944
14	The illustrations of a specialized text (pictures, graphs, diagrams, etc.) are complicated to understand.	185	2.85	0.970
15	I have difficulties in understanding specialized texts because their contents are not interesting to me.	185	3.20	0.896
16	I have difficulties in understanding specialized texts because they are inauthentic.	185	3.17	0.914

4.4. Difficulties related to Lack of Background Knowledge

The figures for Item 18 and 19 were quite similar with nearly half of the participants (43.2%) usually found it hard to understand the content of unfamiliar specialized topics and the content of a text with a limited background knowledge about it. Furthermore, roughly 37% of students sometimes encounter these problems, followed by about 13% of learners who always face these challenges. Lastly, only 6.5% of the participants never or rarely had the above-mentioned difficulties.

Several undergraduates suggested other challenges that they faced in terms of background knowledge. Two learners asserted that specialized knowledge was too complex in nature and enormous in amount for them to understand and remember the knowledge. Another participant confessed that he did not have a habit of reading ESP materials regularly, resulting in his lack of background knowledge.

Table 4: Difficulties Related to Lack of Background Knowledge

Item No.	Difficulties related to Lack of Background Knowledge	N	Mean	Std.D
18	I find it difficult to understand the content of unfamiliar specialized topics.	185	3.63	0.825
19	It is difficult for me to understand the content of a text with limited background knowledge about it.	185	3.62	0.820

4.5. Difficulties due to Lack of Reading Skills

A glance at the table showed that answering comprehension questions of specialized texts (Item 27) caused the most trouble for students with the mean at 3.33. Nearly half the number of participants admitted that they sometimes encountered this problem while approximately 30% of them usually experienced it. Many learners also found it difficult to apply the scanning and skimming strategies while reading specialized texts. Between the two, the latter (Item 29) was more troublesome to undergraduates with approximately 43% of participants struggling to apply it on a regular basis. Similarly, it was reported that 65 learners (roughly 35%) usually or always had difficulties in applying the scanning strategy (Item 28).

The open-ended question (Item 32) revealed that two students tended to feel bored after reading specialized texts for a period of time due to their great lengths. Furthermore, another learner proposed the difficulties that he faced while attempting to summarize the main

ideas of reading materials. He attributed this problem to the fact that main ideas are scattered across reading paragraphs, not only in the first and last sentences.

Table 5: Difficulties due to Lack of Reading Skills

Item No.	Difficulties due to Lack of Reading Skills	N	Mean	Std.D
21	I find it difficult to distinguish main ideas from supporting ideas in a specialized text.	185	3.01	0.857
22	I find it difficult to summarize the main ideas of a specialized text.	185	3.20	0.806
23	I find it difficult to recognize what the writer wants to imply in a specialized text.	185	3.04	0.786
24	I find it difficult to decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	185	3.23	0.837
25	I find it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases from context.	185	3.24	0.883
26	When reading specialized texts, I translate every word into my native language.	185	3.14	0.988
27	I find it difficult to answer comprehension questions of a specialized text.	185	3.33	0.850
28	I find it difficult to apply the scanning strategy in specialized texts.	185	3.19	0.888
29	I find it difficult to apply the skimming strategy in specialized texts.	185	3.29	0.978
30	I do not know how to use illustrations (tables, figures, & pictures) to better understand specialized texts.	185	2.94	0.998
31	My English teacher does not teach reading strategies (skimming, scanning, etc.) in classes.	185	2.96	1.052

4.6. Solutions to difficulties with ESP vocabulary

Nearly all of the respondents (93%) admitted that they should increase their vocabulary knowledge (Item 1) to better understand ESP reading materials. Regarding teacher's responsibilities, the majority of the participants (116 learners) believed that their teachers should introduce and carefully explain new technical words (Item 2) while 76 undergraduates would like ESP teachers to give students more activities to help them remember vocabulary more easily (Item 3).

When asked to suggest other solutions, a survey taker recommendedthat having study groups was an effective method to learn specialized terms. Another participant believed that he could familiarize himself with new terminologies after reading about them several times in ESP texts.

Table 6: Solutions to Difficulties with ESP Vocabulary

Item No.	Solutions to difficulties with ESP vocabulary	N	Percent of cases
1	I should increase my vocabulary knowledge.	172	93.0%
2	The teacher should introduce and carefully explain new technical words.	116	62.7%
3	The teacher should give students more activities to help them remember vocabulary more easily.	76	41.1%

4.7. Solutions to difficulties with Grammar

More than three quarters of the students (146 learners) acknowledged that they should improve their grammatical knowledge (Item 5). Furthermore, 114 undergraduates would like grammatical exercises to be more varied in form (Item 6), which was followed by the figure for Item 7 with more than half of the participants (97 respondents) recommending that teachers should carefully explain grammatical structures in specialized texts (Item 7).

In terms of the open-ended question, one student believed that study groups could act as a contributing factor in solving the difficulties that learners faced with regard to grammar.

Table 7: Solutions to Difficulties with Grammar

Item No.	Solutions to difficulties with Grammar	N	Percent of cases
5	I should improve my grammatical knowledge.	146	78.9%
6	Grammatical exercises should be more varied in form.	114	61.6%
7	The teacher should carefully explain grammatical structures in specialized texts.	97	52.4%

4.8. Solutions to difficulties with Materials

The majority of undergraduates (80.5%) would like to read ESP texts that were more related to their future jobs (Item 9). Item 12 and 10 were ticked by nearly half of the participants with 91 respondents suggesting that the teacher should use authentic materials for reading lessons (Item 12) while shorter reading texts (Item 10) was the solution of choice for 83 survey takers.

Moreover, regarding the open-ended question, a respondent believed that he should frequently practice reading ESP materials. Another survey taker advised teachers to provide students with specialized texts that were relevant to and widely used in the fields that they majored in.

Table 8: Solutions to Difficulties with Materials

Item No.	Solutions to difficulties with Materials	N	Percent of cases
9	Reading texts should be more related to my future job.	149	80.5%
10	Reading texts should be shorter.	83	44.9%
11	Reading texts should have a limited number of new words.	50	27.0%
12	The teacher should use authentic materials for reading lessons.	91	49.2%
13	The teacher should let students choose materials that students like for reading lessons.	70	37.8%

4.9. Solutions to difficulties related to Lack of Background Knowledge

The solution that most of the learners (86.5%) ticked was that they should read specialized texts more often (Item 15) to broaden their background knowledge. Standing in second place was Item 16. It was suggested by 112 undergraduates (60.5%) that teachers should provide students with more background knowledge related to the topics that students were working on. Lastly, nearly half of the participants (89 respondents) would like teachers to help them activate their prior knowledge relating to specialized texts before asking them to read the materials (Item 17).

Table 9: Solutions to Difficulties Related to Lack of Background Knowledge

Item No.	Solutions to difficulties related to Lack of Background Knowledge	N	Percent of cases
15	I should read specialized texts more often.	160	86.5%
16	The teacher should provide students with more background knowledge related to the topics that students are working on.	112	60.5%
17	The teacher should help students activate their prior knowledge relating to specialized texts before asking students to read them.	89	48.1%

4.10. Solutions to difficulties due to Lack of Reading Skills

With regard to teacher's responsibilities, 133 students (71.9%) would like to be taught reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, identifying key words, and so on (Item 19). Furthermore, teachers should guide students to choose suitable reading strategies for each specialized text (Item 20); this solution was considered to be effective by 127 learners (68.6%).

There were several other resolutions recommended by the survey takers. Specifically, two undergraduates stated that they should practice reading skills more regularly. Similarly, another participant claimed that it would be beneficial for him were he to spend more time on self-study.

Table 10: Solutions to Difficulties due to Lack of Reading Skills

Item No.	Solutions to difficulties due to Lack of Reading Skills	N	Percent of cases
19	The teacher should teach students some reading strategies such as skimming, scanning, identifying key words and so on.	133	71.9%
20	The teacher should guide students to choose suitable reading strategies for each specialized text.	127	68.6%

5. Discussion

5.1. ESP vocabulary

With regard to the problems that students experienced which hindered their comprehension of ESP reading materials, it could be observed in the data that the majority of learners struggled to understand and memorize the meaning of technical terms. These findings are quite in line with those of the studies conducted by Ha (2011), Nguyen and Hoang (2018), Hazmani (2019), Nguyen and Kim (2021).

According to Ha (2011) and Hazmani (2019), there were several reasons for the difficulties with ESP vocabulary that students encountered. The causes could be divided into internal and external ones. Specifically, the internal cause was learners' lack in ESP vocabulary; meanwhile, the external cause was that teachers provided undergraduates with insufficient practice for specialized terms.

There were several solutions that survey takers of the current study considered as necessary to overcome the difficulties that they faced with ESP vocabulary. Most students admitted that they should increase their vocabulary knowledge; at the same time, they would like teachers to introduce and carefully explain new technical words. These findings were backed up by Ha (2011), Nguyen and Hoang (2018), and Hazmani (2019).

5.2. Grammar

In terms of the challenges that undergraduates faced regarding grammar, the majority of participants claimed that they had difficulties in understanding and finding the main ideas of long and complex sentences. These findings of the current study are consistent with those of Ha's research in 2011.

With reference to Ha (2011), one reason why learners experienced challenges in terms of grammar while reading ESP texts was because teachers did not provide them with sufficient practice of grammar. Another cause that Hazmani (2019) mentioned was that specialized reading materials were full of new and complicated grammar structures.

In order to solve the difficulties that students faced, the majority of participants admitted that they should improve their grammatical knowledge, which resembles the finding of Nguyen and Hoang's research in 2018.

5.3. Materials

The problem that most students experience when it comes to materials has to do with the organization of specialized texts. Since learners did not know how a specialized text is organized, this made it difficult for them to understand its content. Regarding the organization of ESP reading materials, the findings of the current study could be supported by those of Ha (2011) and Hazmani (2019).

In terms of solutions, the one that attracted the most support from students was that reading texts should be more related to their future jobs. This was similar to the findings of Ha (2011) and Hazmani (2019) with nearly all of the respondents choosing this as an effective solution.

5.4. Background Knowledge

In terms of the difficulties that students encountered with background knowledge, the majority of them found it difficult to

understand the content of unfamiliar specialized topics and of a text with limited background knowledge about it. These findings could be jointly supported by Ha (2011), Nguyen and Hoang (2018), and Hazmani (2019).

In terms of the solutions, most of the respondents claimed that they should read specialized texts more often, which was supported by Nguyen and Hoang (2018). Another effective resolution as regarded by more than half of the survey takers was for ESP teachers to provide students with more background knowledge related to the topics that they were working on. Similarly, this finding could be backed up by Ha (2011) since three fourths of the students agreed with it.

5.5. Reading skills

According to the data collected from students, the most difficult reading skill was answering comprehension questions of a specialized text, which was similar to the findings of Ha (2011) and Hazmani (2019). With regard to vocabulary, most undergraduates stated that they translated every word into their native language while reading specialized texts, which could be supported by the finding of Abeeleh et al. in 2021.

Regarding the solutions to the difficulties that students encountered with reading skills, most of the learners agreed that ESP teachers should teach them reading strategies (such as skimming, scanning, identifying key words and so on) and then guide them to choose suitable strategies for each specialized text.

6. Conclusion and Implications

In terms of vocabulary, the majority of learners found it difficult to understand and memorize the meanings of technical terms in reading texts. Grammar was another onerous component since long and complex sentences generally made it hard for most of the undergraduates to comprehend ESP texts. In addition, participants'lack

of knowledge about the organization of ESP reading materials and their disinterest in the content of the texts were heavy burdens to their reading comprehension. Background knowledge was another crucial element in aiding reading comprehension. However, many respondents had difficulties in understanding specialized texts when they had limited background knowledge and were unfamiliar with the topics of the texts. Lastly, survey takers' lack of reading skills also negatively affected their comprehension.

To overcome the challenges, several solutions were suggested. The majority of the learners would like to improve their vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Furthermore, most undergraduates agreed that they should read specialized texts more often to broaden their background knowledge while reading texts should be more related to their future jobs. In terms of reading skills, most participants wanted ESP teachers to teach them some reading strategies and then guide them to choose suitable ones for each specialized text.

Based on the findings, there are several implications that could be drawn out. For students, they should increase and improve their vocabulary and grammar knowledge. This could make it easier for them to guess meanings of new words using contexts and interpret the meanings of long and complex sentences. Moreover, students should read specialized texts more often to broaden their background knowledge, improve reading speed, and encourage reading habits.

There are also pedagogical implications for ESP teachers. First, it is advisable that teachers introduce and explain vocabulary and grammatical points carefully so that learners could understand them clearly regardless of their English level and cognitive ability. Moreover, teachers should provide students with much background knowledge, which could be carried out in various ways such as assigning learners to read specialized texts for homework and recommending insightful videos and podcasts whose content is related

to students' majors. Finally, teachers should teach and guide students to choose suitable reading strategies for each specialized text, which could assist learners in answering reading comprehension questions and reading more efficiently.

In addition, the researcher would like to suggest implications for the Faculty of English for Specific Purposes at FTU. The faculty should choose and design textbooks in which grammatical exercises are varied in form and reading texts are related to students' future job. When learners are intrigued in the course book and aware of the importance of reading relevant specialized texts, their motivation for learning is likely to improve.

At first, the researcher planned to not only distribute the survey to Business-majored students but also interview ESP teachers at FTU. However, owing to time constraintsand lack of permission from ESP teachers, the researcher could only carry out quantitative research on FTU students. Therefore, it is advisable that further studies conduct qualitative research using other instruments such as interviews and observations to gain deeper insights into students and teachers' opinion.

Moreover, due to a lack of time and resources, the study was carried out on Business-majored students who enrolled in programs offered by the Faculty of ESP at FTU during the 2021-2022 school year. Because of the small sample size, generalizations based on current findings to broader contexts, such as Vietnamese EFL tertiary students, are debatable.

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