

# Insights From Difficulties Encountered Among Students Whose Major is Translation and & Interpreting in English

Truong Thi Mai Hanh

Van Lang University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

\*Corresponding author. Email: hanh.ttm@vlu.edu.vn

## ABSTRACT

One area that remains problematic among students whose major is Translation and Interpreting in English is the ability to understand and deal with basic and necessary concepts in the field of banking and finance in English. This article reports initial findings from a case study done with the students taking an English for Banking and Finance course in a university. The paper initially provides different views of difficulties in learning and proceeds with describing the present investigation setting. Based on qualitative inquiry, self-reports, and interviews, data are collected, and themes are drawn. Moreover, the article concludes with useful insights on the students' strategies to address their own problems and implications for possible techniques in helping students address these issues.

**Keywords:** *English for Banking and Finance, Learning Strategies, Teaching Techniques*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In times of economic integration, English for Banking and Finance has become an indispensable means of communication in the local and multinational banks and financial institutions in Vietnam. Given the reality, English for Banking and Finance has particularly been focused and designed in the university curriculum in recent years in order to meet the requirements of the globalized labor force market. It has also been a compulsory course or an optional course in the curriculum of students whose major is Translation and Interpreting in English in many universities in Vietnam. However, the implementation of the course of English for Banking and Finance at the university level in Vietnam has revealed some difficulties in the teaching and learning process, which hinders the course's goals [1].

Therefore, in response to this reality, this present article is situated in terms of examining difficulties in learning English for Banking and Finance and strategies adopted to deal with these problems from learners who major in Translation and Interpreting. This research attempts at examining the factors that contribute to learner's difficulties in accomplishing reading and writing tasks in the hope it can help

educators develop a critical ethos in facilitating a more meaningful teaching and learning process.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The article is grounded on two related concepts in English language teaching: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Business Purposes (EBP).

Regarding ESP, Hutchinson and Waters [2] considered ESP as a language learning approach based on learners' needs and suggested ESP courses should be designed to meet learners' needs. In other words, ESP is an English course in which the textbooks and materials are adjusted to learners' desires and purposes. Learners of English are also defined as emotional beings and effective factors in the learning process.

Dudley-Evans and St John [3] suggested the three following characteristics (1) ESP meets specific purposes of the learners; (2) ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves; (3) ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of

grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse, and genre.

Dudley-Evans and St John [4] also divided English for Business Purposes (EBP) into English for General Business Purposes (EGBP) and English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP). EGBP is designed for pre-experience learners or those at the very early stages of their careers. EGBP courses are naturally similar to general EFL courses with the material set in business contexts. Most units contain work on the traditional four skills plus specific grammar and vocabulary development. Typical business carrier content topics include organizational charts, marketing, branding, advertisements, and product developments. In other words, in EGBP courses, English is taught through business settings rather than English for specific business purposes. In contrast, ESBP is for job-experienced learners who bring business knowledge and skills to the language-learning situation. ESBP courses are likely to be intensive and for small groups.

The article is also based on several empirical investigations on the difficulties in teaching ESP. These difficulties are commonly divided into two groups: (1) difficulties related to students; (2) difficulties related to other factors.

### *Difficulties Related to Students*

#### *Students' demands and motivations of ESP*

Maruyama [5] implied that students did not need to know technical words because they were not common, even rarely used in their daily lives. Suzani et al. [6] suggested that students are not ready for ESP courses because they do not find ESP important for their future job. Nga Nguyen [7] also had similar findings when indicated that students lack their motivation in learning ESP due to their awareness that ESP will not be used in their local workplace. These similar situations mentioned above have a negative impact on the learning motivation of individual students in the particular and learning environment of class in general.

#### *Lack of vocabulary*

Maruyama [5] gave a list of 60 technical words in a vocabulary work to 112 majors in electrical engineering in Japan. The result was that none of the students knew 1/3 of the words, a few knew some words of them, and all knew only one word of them. Nga Nguyen [7] also mentioned the majority of students (78%) find vocabulary extremely problematic in reading ESP texts. Moreover, Mai Pham and Hoa Nguyen [8] concluded in the survey results that 59.94% of Vietnamese students have difficulty in vocabulary when learning ESP.

#### *Dependence on dictionary/lack of skills in using a dictionary*

According to Maruyama [5], many students heavily depend on a dictionary when encountering ESP texts due to their lack of ESP terms. Lack of skills in using a dictionary is also a problem, leading to inefficiency in the learning process. Mai Pham and Hoa Nguyen [8] also gave similar statistics (53.87% of students), which show that dependence on the dictionary causes difficulties in teaching ESP.

#### *Differences between English and students' mother tongue*

As far as Maruyama's concerned [5], Japanese has no relationship with English, and the Japanese writing system is entirely different from English. This makes Japanese students face many difficulties in learning English, especially for the ESP terms. Mai Pham and Hoa Nguyen [8] quoted the figure 70.44% of respondents, who say that they have difficulties in learning ESP is due to the big difference between Vietnamese and English involving parts of speech, pronunciation, word usage, and grammar.

#### *English proficiency*

Both Nga Nguyen [7] and Mai Pham and Hoa Nguyen [8] conclude that difference in students' proficiency in the same university and among different universities and different areas throughout Vietnam has a negative impact on learning ESP. Commonly, students in foreign language universities or foreign language departments of universities have higher proficiency than other departments or other universities. It is also very typical that students from small towns have lower foreign language proficiency than those from big cities due to their English acquisition frequency.

#### *Difficulties Related to other factors.*

##### *Textbooks/reference materials*

Maruyama [5] suggested that the ESP materials, which are at too high a level compared to students' proficiency, made students feel bored to learn. Besides, students cannot expand their understanding because of limited knowledge of the textbook. Nga Nguyen [7] also indicated that textbooks in English for Banking and Finance are authentic documents from Britain or America in which the banking and financial systems are different from Vietnamese's systems, so students are much unlikely to compare or associate these two banking and financial systems.

##### *Classes with too large student number*

According to Maruyama [5], most students must take at least two years to learn English in universities, so student number of a class is up to 70-90. This has a

significant impact on ESP teaching efficiency, especially when there is a difference in students' proficiency. Mai Pham and Hoa Nguyen [8] also released the number of students in ESP classes in Vietnam universities is 40 or more, which results in inefficiency in learning.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Context of the Investigation**

The study was conducted on students majoring in Translation and Interpreting in English in a state university in Ho Chi Minh City. As part of the 4-year regular education curriculum, the English for Banking and Finance course is an intermediate-level elective course. The course, which is primarily taught via the English for Business Purposes approach, aims to improve communication skills in which reading and writing activities are mainly focused. The course particularly has some banking and financial closely related writing activities. Reading activities relating to banking and finance contexts are also implemented in order to train students in enhancing reading ability. In addition, group presentations are considered a criterion to assess the learners' competence.

#### **3.2 Research Design and Method**

Due to the nature of the problem, a case study approach was deemed appropriate for the investigation. Grounded on a qualitative/ interpretative design, the investigation used interviews with participants and reflection papers provided in the duration of the course.

##### **3.2.1. Data Gathering and Analysis**

In terms of data gathering, on the first day of the course, an open-ended survey was conducted to make a preliminary assessment of the students' motive and expectations in learning English for Banking and Finance. On a piece of paper, the participants were asked to answer the two following questions:

- (1) Why did you choose this course?
- (2) What outcomes are expected after the course?

Moreover, after a group presentation based on reading, summarizing and interpreting some reference documents assigned by the researcher, as well as a writing assignment in the duration of the course, the students are required to cover the two following questions:

- (1) What were your difficulties when reading/writing the assignments?
- (2) How did you address these difficulties?

In addition, interviews with selected students (group leaders) were conducted.

In terms of analysis, the data were culled and organized into themes. In analyzing the drawing out the themes, a close reading of reflection papers was done to identify recurring key words, phrases, and sentences. From the initial set of these recurring patterns of language, they were clustered into themes in which they were further classified through close reading and validation by two inter-raters. In keeping with an interpretative view of research, the respondents were tapped to determine the reliability of these recurring themes in the data.

The analysis was made on the two sets of questions in which the initial set of questions was aimed to assess the students' needs and motivation and the other set was targeted to get the data of difficulties the students encountered when reading/writing the assignments and strategies they adopted to deal with these problems.

##### **3.2.2. Participants**

40 students enrolled in the course were tapped to participate in the investigation. With age ranging from 20-21, the participants were majoring in Translation and Interpreting in English in the 4-year regular education curriculum offered by the Faculty of Linguistics and Literature at the university. Similar to other classes taking the course, the class is said to be homogenous in terms of their language ability. The participants are supposed to have completed the courses of Language skills courses, Advanced grammar, and Business English. While all students participated in the reflection and initial survey provision, six group leaders took part in the interview.

### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The succeeding sections elucidate students' problems in taking English for Banking and Finance course.

#### **4.1 Problems related to students' demands and motives**

In this theme, most of the students' answers for their choice of the course was that "*the course is in the list of the courses which the students are supposed to register online.*" Some of the answers were "*I have finished the Business English course and am going to take Business Translation course. I hope the course is useful for further learning.*" In addition, several students chose the course since they were in "*a group of friends that have worked together in other previous courses*". Unsurprisingly, none of the students'

selection was due to their needs to meet further job requirements.

In terms of the students' perspective outcomes, the terms such as *"basic words and expressions in Banking and Finance"* *"basic and necessary concepts in Banking and Finance fields"* were recurring terms. The students also expected to obtain *"basic knowledge in Banking and Finance."*

#### **4.2 Problems related to students' difficulties in reading the assignments and their strategies to address these problems**

##### **4.2.1. Lack of vocabulary:**

The data reveals that students encountered terminology problems in the fields of Banking and Finance, and it took them much time and energy to look up these terms in paper-based dictionaries or online dictionaries.

*"It took me lots of time to look up a term in a dictionary while there are many new terms to understand. I had to take note of the related meaning of the terms to put in the list of vocabulary so that I can memorize and explain them to the class in case other students ask me after the presentation."*

*"It is sometimes confusing that some English terms have an equivalent meaning in Vietnamese, but they refer to different things in Banking and Finance. "share", "stock" or "equity" is an example. There are also some synonyms in English but one equivalence in Vietnamese and vice versa. But the very thing that makes me more confused is that these terms are not interchangeable."*

##### **4.2.2. Dependence on the dictionary:**

The group leaders' interview results indicate the students used both paper-based dictionaries and online dictionaries. However, online dictionaries are found much more preferred because it's faster, more convenient and it doesn't cost any money while it is very expensive, not to mention impossible to get a paper-based dictionary in Banking and Finance available on the market.

Due to the lack of terms in Banking and Finance mentioned, the students were much dependent on the dictionary, particularly the bilingual dictionary. It seems that the students need Vietnamese equivalences in order to memorize them better. In other words, Vietnamese equivalences for English terms are always expected. This is what the students have always asked the researcher to provide in the course duration.

The interview results with the group leaders also show that the students spent much more time using

online dictionaries than paper-based dictionaries because online dictionaries are much more useful in helping students understand the concepts in Banking and Finance and distinguish the difference between the terms.

##### **4.2.3. Lack of specialized knowledge in Banking and Finance**

The students mentioned other obstacles are their shortage of specialized knowledge in Banking and Finance.

*"I was responsible for presenting the banking operations including "the clearing system". It was not much difficult to have the meaning of the term. However, I had to search the documents from different resources to understand and explain the system to the class."*

The facts about banking and financial systems from the textbooks and the students downloaded online are mainly about American and British banking systems, which are different from the Vietnamese banking system, so students found confused identifying different types of banks or financial institutions their operations.

#### **4.3 Problems related to students' difficulties in writing assignments and their strategies to address these problems**

The data gathered indicate that the students were tasked to write memos or financial reports, which require them not only linguistic competence but also specialized knowledge. For example, the students were supposed to write an analyst's report for a morning briefing with the manager. They did the task by carefully looking at the report sample and searching for more samples from the internet to study.

*"but I am not a financial analyst",* said a student.

It seemed that English competence was not the obstacle the students had to overcome in this situation. It was specialized knowledge that hindered their learning.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

In light of the findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Problems in terms of vocabulary continue to be an obstacle for learners in performing different reading tasks. However, getting an equivalence in Vietnamese for an English term seems to be not the utmost task. It is the insight into the notions and the concept in Banking and Finance that helps learners most.

2. Difficulties related to writing skills are apparently requirements of learners' specialized knowledge underlying writing tasks rather than learners' linguistic competence. Learners are required to have some basic knowledge of a specific position if they wish to write a certain report or business document.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Based on the insights gained from this investigation, it can be said a central aspect of ineffective teaching English for Banking and Finance is constant improvement through feedback between learners and teachers. To do so, teachers need to be made aware of the types of feedback given to students as this may help students make progress in their learning process. Take an example, the feedback given to students in reading tasks may be an extensive explanation of specialized notions or concepts or provision of supplementary reading texts.

Second, writing tasks need to be made simpler in learners' perspective- potential employees rather than that of learners-real employees in the setting of banking and finance. Although writing tasks are cluttered with the curricular programs' content, they should be adjusted for the "real engagement" of learners. This will make writing tasks fulfilling and meaningful for learners to perform, which may improve writing skills instead of having monotonous and unfamiliar tasks, which is likely to lead to mechanical imitation.

Lastly, much has been said about practice, and very little is known about how students actually go about polishing their skills in preparation for the real potential workplace. It is therefore imperative for investigators to seek ways on how students engage in meaningful practice outside tutored settings to provide ideas in making these opportunities as ways in strengthening not only the learners' repertoire but also install a greater sense of accomplishment which may

eventually lead to confidence in the potential real workplace.

## **REFERENCES**

- [1] Van, Hoang, The current situation and issues of the teaching of English in Vietnam, 2006, pp 10-15.
- [2] Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A, English for Specific Purposes: A learning-centred approach, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp 9-11.
- [3] Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, Research perspectives on English for academic purposes: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp 41-50.
- [4] Dudley-Evans, T., & St John, M.J, Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp 55-59.
- [5] Maruyama, H, Difficulties in Teaching Technical English in Japan. *Revista de Lenguas para Fines Especificos*, 3, 1996.
- [6] Suzani, S. M., Yarmohammadi, L., & Yamini, M, A critical review of the current situation of teaching ESP in the Iranian higher education institutions. *The Iranian EFL Journal*, 2011, 7(6), pp 179-204.
- [7] Nga Nguyen, An investigation into the difficulties of learning reading English for ESP of students of Finance and Banking on Hui Nghe An Campus, 2011, pp 7-12.
- [8] Mai, Pham and Hoa, Nguyen, Difficulties in Teaching English for Specific Purposes: Empirical Study at Vietnam Universities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, 2016, pp 57-59. doi:10.5539/hes.v6n2p154 .