



EFL STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN UNDERSTANDING BUSINESS ENGLISH TEXTS

**Nguyen Kim Ngan,
Nguyen Phuong Chiⁱ**

School of Foreign Languages,
University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH),
Vietnam

Abstract:

Students who learn business or economics subjects might read different business texts related to their majors. However, many English as a Foreign language (EFL) students are still struggling with their reading comprehension abilities. The objectives of the study are to identify students' perceptions of common difficulties when reading Business English texts and to explore their attitude towards a number of solutions. The participants were ninety-six Business English students who enrolled in a Business English Reading course at a public economics university in Ho Chi Minh City. A five-Likert questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were employed to collect the data for the study. The results show that EFL students often encountered difficulties in reading Business texts. The most prominent factors influencing Business English reading comprehension generally are Vocabulary, Timing, and Background Knowledge. To address those issues, Business English students proposed six solutions regarding lexical and grammatical knowledge enhancement, regular practice, metacognitive strategies, participation in business courses, and online dictionary use. These recommendations collectively aimed to empower students in mastering the skills of Business English reading comprehension.

Keywords: ELT department students, English speaking anxiety, teacher support, classmate support, self-efficacy

1. Introduction

In the globalization era, English has been accepted as an international language for many decades, so most sectors throughout the world tend to use English as one popular language in the workplace. Reading skills are seen as one of the most crucial skills in the business environment as it enables us to obtain a huge amount of information from various sources. In the educational field, reading is also one of the most common and

ⁱ Correspondence: email npckinhthe@ueh.edu.vn

compulsory activities of college students. They need to read various kinds of texts for different purposes such as dealing with their assignments and other academic demands. Hung and Ngan (2015) have acknowledged that lexical knowledge and productive skills involving speaking and writing skills could be enhanced by decent reading skills.

Business English reading for comprehension is a vital topic for university students. Students who learn business or economics subjects might read different business texts such as business letters, journals, and business articles related to their majors. However, many EFL students are still struggling to overcome their reading comprehension problems. Various possible problems have been assumed to be responsible for this unsatisfactory issue. Yousefi and Davoudi (2015) classified EFL learners' reading problems into four categories: a lack of vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, grammatical knowledge, and poor reading strategies. Furthermore, Allen and Widdowson (1978); Dreyer and Nel (2003) revealed that learners' difficulties with Business English texts were driven by the absence of essential reading strategies and the overwhelmingness of unfamiliar words. English-majored students at a public economics university in Ho Chi Minh City are not an exception. They have admitted that they often encounter such problems which deter them from being successful in comprehending business English texts. Regarding this reason, the research "*EFL students' perception towards common difficulties when reading Business English texts*" was conducted to investigate the problems in Business English reading for comprehension of the students enrolling in the Business English Reading course and explore their attitude towards a set of solutions. Through this research, the researchers hoped that students could realize their problems and find some feasible solutions to improve their reading comprehension skills. This will foster a better understanding of reading difficulties and help learners develop their reading skills.

In order to meet the objectives of the study, the researchers attempted to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the difficulties in reading comprehension of business English texts encountered by EFL students?;
- 2) What recommendations do students make to alleviate their reading problems and improve the quality of their reading comprehension to business English texts?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of Reading

Reading is a process where the reader interacts with text to construct meaning, and it requires mental activities to comprehend words' meaning and recognize relationships between words and ideas. Effective reading requires linguistic proficiency, processing of the messages contained in the text, psychomotor activities, a certain amount of inference, and the use of affective strategies (Rahman, 2007).

According to Sutari (2000), reading is the process of deciphering symbols or characters to determine the meaning of something written or printed. Moreover, Harris (1962) stated that reading entails experiencing, perceiving, obtaining meaning, learning,

and responding in several ways in addition to the meaningful interpretation of printed or written linguistic symbols. Besides, Grabe and Stoller (2002) defined reading as the process of interpreting meaning from written text and applying it to produce reliable information. Regarding the definition from Anderson et al. (1985), making sense of written materials through reading requires the cooperation of various related sources of knowledge. According to these definitions, it can be inferred that reading is an endeavor to get meaning and information from texts by comprehending, grasping, translating, and imparting meaning to the written form.

2.2. The Importance of Reading

As English is one of the most popular languages in the world, how to achieve satisfactory English proficiency receives a lot of attention. Therefore, the importance of reading skills can never be underestimated, especially for academic purposes. Reading can provide students with information that teachers cannot provide in the classroom. According to Jeremy (1998), reading is beneficial for the language learning process since it is required for a career, for education, or simply for enjoyment. As a result, students with low reading abilities often have poor academic performance. They may confront a variety of obstacles outside the academic environment due to reading deficiency (Mundhe, 2015).

2.3 English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Business English

Nickerson & Planken (2015) indicate any interaction, written or spoken which takes place in English for the purpose of business. The authors gave some examples of Business English as business meetings, business emails, or advertisements promoting products. From the definition, it can be seen that Business English belongs to ESP and it plays an important role in business communication among business people around the world.

2.3. Reading Strategies

Reading strategy refers to a specific technique that readers use to understand the content of a text. Various reading strategies tend to be collectively employed to assist readers better grasp the content. According to Uribe-Enciso (2015), reading strategies are conscious activities and they have been proven to enable readers to overcome reading challenges and improve reading comprehension. Reading strategies can assist students in acquiring, storing, and retrieving information from a reading material. Reading strategies are also considered as a means for readers to interact with written texts and increase text comprehension, according to Færch and Kasper (1983). Successful readers have a tendency to employ a variety of reading strategies to make sense of what they read. Readers do not employ comparable techniques; rather, they choose to employ strategies that are favorable to them. Moreover, they are quite versatile in how they use reading strategies; they switch from strategy to strategy and use different tactics with different sorts of texts (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). The key point here is that competent students can make wise decisions about which methods to use and when to employ them. However, there are still many students struggling to use reading strategies effectively, leading to many difficulties in the reading comprehension process.

2.4. Common Difficulties of EFL Students in Understanding General English Texts and ESP Texts

Business English reading for comprehension is a crucial topic for tertiary learners. Most EFL students have dealt with different types of English texts, however, many of them fail to effectively grasp such texts (Thao and Tham, 2018). As a result, difficulties with reading comprehension have long been a challenge in EFL learners.

It can be seen from previous studies that there are a number of reading comprehension problems that may be faced by EFL students. It was found that the causes of those difficulties in comprehending Business English texts were the lack of essential reading strategies and a large number of advanced words (Allen and Widdowson, 1978; Dreyer and Nel, 2003). Reading challenges, according to Rahman (2007), generally stem from insufficient vocabulary, structural complexity, poor reading skills, and demotivation while reading a long or hard text. Likewise, Davoudi and Yousefi (2015) identified many reading problems among EFL learners, including a lack of vocabulary and prior knowledge, grammatical structural issues, and poor reading methods. Furthermore, Qrgez and Ab Rashid (2017) discovered that EFL learners encountered a variety of reading challenges due to the presence of ambiguous words, unfamiliar terms, and insufficient time.

Khataee (2018) carried out a study to explore reading problems among Iranian EFL learners. The participants were sixty-three EFL learners from an Iranian institution. The participants initially took reading comprehension exams. Following that, a questionnaire concerning their issues with reading comprehension was given to them to complete. The findings demonstrated that good comprehension learners ran into issues like subject complexity and unfamiliar terminology. Additionally, the findings showed that students with poor understanding encountered problems including unfamiliar terminology and time insufficiency.

Besides, Thao and Tham (2018) conducted research on the difficulties of ESP reading comprehension faced by English-majored students in Vietnam. Three ESP teachers were invited to take part in a semi-structured interview, and eighty English majors were asked to complete a closed-ended questionnaire. The data indicated that students did not have much difficulty dealing with reading ESP materials. However, it was occasionally observed that two common challenges in ESP reading comprehension that students encountered were unknown words and prior knowledge of their subjects. That study also revealed that students' challenges with the text coverage, organizational structure, and grammar employed in ESP reading materials were not very problematic.

In a nutshell, there are many difficulties students often encounter when reading English business documents. The purpose of this research is to understand students' perceptions of difficulties in reading English business texts and discover solutions to reading English business documents.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants in this research consisted of 96 students (including 65 females and 31 males) at a public economics university in Ho Chi Minh City and were conveniently sampled in answering a questionnaire. Vietnamese is their native language and all of them have been taking the undergraduate program in English language with the major of Business English in which the Business English Reading course is included in their curriculum.

3.2. Research Instruments

To collect data, two instruments including a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were employed. The whole questionnaire consisted of four sections; each section represented a specific kind of information. The first section was of students' background information including gender and self-assessed reading proficiency. The second section included 27 five-point Likert-like scale items divided into six categories regarding the difficulties of business English reading comprehension. The third section included 17 five-point Likert-like scale items about common strategies utilized to overcome business reading difficulties. This questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese to ensure that participants could comprehend the questions. Regarding the semi-structured interview, which was conducted after the questionnaire had been completed. Four interview questions were used to collect EFL students' attitudes towards difficulties and some suggested solutions in reading business English materials. The researchers then interviewed ten students and divided them into two groups. The first group included five students with good English reading competence, and the other included five students with poor English reading competence.

3.3. Research Procedure

The procedure of data collection included three phases. In the first phase, the aim of the study was explained to all participants. They were informed that any information gathered would be utilized solely for the research aims. The students were given instructions on how to respond to the questionnaire items. The students then filled in all of the three parts of the questionnaire, which took them about twenty minutes. Of the one hundred questionnaires delivered to students, the researchers received ninety six valid responses. In the second phase, after the participants completed the questionnaire, ten volunteer participants were involved in a semi-structured interview and put into two groups. The semi-structured interview was conducted in Vietnamese to ensure the best interpretation throughout the interview. Each interview lasted about ten minutes. In the third phase, the researchers started analyzing all of the data gathered from the questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Data analysis from the questionnaire were performed with SPSS version 22.0. The responses obtained from the semi-structured interview were synthesized and analyzed separately. Finally, the researchers attempted to explore student's reading difficulties, and wrote the conclusion and recommendations.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed by SPSS version 22.0 to calculate frequencies, means, and standard deviation. Then, the researchers ran the SPSS for the internal reliability of the responses to the questionnaire and for the mean score of the participants' responses regarding the reading difficulties and common reading strategies used. The data received from the semi-structured interview were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The interview responses were coded and categorized to provide details about the problems and solutions in business English reading for comprehension. Table 1 below presents the reliability of all the items in the questionnaire.

Table 1: The Reliability of All the Items in the Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
.968	44

The reliability coefficient test was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire items. As shown in Table 1, the value of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.968 indicating adequate consistency of reliability. It indicates that all of the questionnaire items effectively measure what the study aimed to measure.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. Areas of Difficulties in Reading Business English Texts

As shown in Table 2 below, the overall mean score of EFL students' difficulties in Business English reading is 3.40. This result indicates that the students usually encounter difficulties when reading Business English materials. Among the seven areas of Business English reading difficulties, Vocabulary ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.832$) is considered the biggest factor hindering EFL students when reading Business English texts, followed by Timing ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.906$) and Background knowledge ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.880$). It is further observed from Table 2 that EFL students sometimes have difficulties with Strategy ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.910$). There is almost no difference between the Grammar area and the Motivation and Environment one ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.897$; $M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.877$; respectively) in Business English reading challenges. Notably, organizational structure and text coverage ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.913$) do not commonly interfere with students' difficulties in Business English reading for comprehension.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Areas of Difficulties in Reading Business English Texts

No.	Areas of Difficulties in Reading Business English Texts	N = 96	
		Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Vocabulary	3.70	0.832
2	Timing	3.60	0.906
3	Background knowledge	3.51	0.880
4	Strategies	3.40	0.910
5	Grammar	3.25	0.897
6	Motivation and environment	3.22	0.877
7	Organizational structure and Text coverage	3.12	0.913
Overall		3.40	

Regarding the qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interview, it is found that EFL learners have a rather high level of difficulty with reading comprehension. Among ten interviewees, five students mentioned that Vocabulary and Background knowledge were the origins of their reading difficulties; one of them said that he had problems due to timing; another student commented that she had problems with grammar knowledge; and two held that Organizational structure and Text coverage deterred them from comprehending Business English texts. The remaining student said that poor strategy use made her fail in Business English reading for comprehension.

4.1.1.1. Difficulties in the Area of Vocabulary

The results from Table 3 show that the vocabulary-related difficulties when reading Business English texts represent the highest mean score (M = 3.70). Most of the students are aware of the importance of knowing a sufficient amount of vocabulary and business terms while reading a Business English text, which was indicated by the two highest mean scores (M = 3.86, M = 3.83, respectively). Moreover, idioms and collocations (M = 3.71) seem to discourage EFL students from understanding the text thoroughly. In addition, when encountering unknown words or phrases (M = 3.51), the students usually cannot guess their meaning from the context, leading to reading comprehension problems.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Difficulties in Terms of Vocabulary

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
When I read business texts, I cannot guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	3.51	1.005
Reading a business text in English requires me to have a large amount of vocabulary.	3.86	0.925
Polysemy and homonymy make it hard for me to understand the meaning of the text correctly.	3.57	1.034
Many idioms and collocations in the text can be barriers for me to understand the text.	3.71	1.015
Unfamiliar business terms bring great challenges for me to understand the meaning of the text.	3.83	1.002
Total	3.70	

Regarding the information collected from the semi-structured interview, Vocabulary was mentioned as students' common source of reading problems. For example, one of the respondents noted:

“Although I seldom have problems comprehending business English texts, business idioms and collocations are my nightmares.”

4.1.1.2. Difficulties in the area of Timing

As seen in Table 4, Timing is the next most challenging area, with the second-highest total mean score ($M = 3.60$) after Vocabulary ($M = 3.70$). It reveals that students usually have to struggle with Business English reading texts because their “reading speed is slow”, “the texts are often long” ($M = 3.64$), so they “spend a lot of time looking up the meanings of the unknown words in the dictionary when reading business English texts” ($M = 3.57$).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Difficulties in Terms of Timing

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I spend a lot of time looking up the meanings of new words in the dictionary when reading business texts.	3.57	0.981
My reading speed is slow, but the texts are often long.	3.64	1.017
Total	3.60	

4.1.1.3. Difficulties in the Area of Background Knowledge

Table 5 indicates that Background knowledge is one of the most common problems faced by EFL students when reading Business English texts with the third-highest mean score ($M = 3.51$). Students self-reported that they frequently do not understand much about the content of the reading texts due to their lack of background knowledge of the topic of the reading texts ($M = 3.61$), and sometimes they do not know anything about the topic because the reading passage cultures are different from theirs ($M = 3.41$).

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Difficulties in Terms of Background Knowledge

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
The lack of business background knowledge makes me hard to understand the text fully.	3.61	1.050
The reading passage cultures are different from mine.	3.41	0.936
Total	3.51	

4.1.1.4. Difficulties in the Area of Strategies

The data in Table 6 shows that the respondents often have trouble in reading strategies as they translate every word into their native languages when reading business texts ($M=3.57$), and they fail to use strategies such as skimming and scanning to understand the texts ($M = 3.27$).

Information obtained from the semi-structured interview still indicates that students usually have difficulties in reading business texts because they do not know how to utilize reading strategies effectively. For example, one respondent said:

“For me, poor reading strategies make it hard for me to follow the flow of the text and sometimes get lost when reading.”

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics of Difficulties in Terms of Area of Strategies

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have difficulty understanding the materials because of poor strategy use.	3.53	1.025
Translating every word into my native language makes me fail to comprehend business texts.	3.57	1.044
I fail to use the skimming and scanning strategies to get ideas of the text.	3.27	1.156
I can not use a mind map to summarize what I read.	3.24	1.083
Total	3.40	

4.1.1.5. Difficulties in the Area of Grammar

In general, the mean score of the Grammar area of difficulties in reading Business English texts is not quite high ($M = 3.25$). As can be seen in Table 7, most of the respondents showed that complicated grammar structures hinder them from understanding business texts ($M = 3.45$). Specifically, they reported that complex tenses make the reading passage difficult to understand ($M = 3.34$). However, some grammar structures including linking words, passive voice, and relative clauses are not commonly encountered by students with mean scores of 3.22, 3.18, and 3.06, respectively.

The difficulty of grammar area in Business English reading comprehension is strengthened by one student’s answer obtained from the semi-structured interview:

“My challenge is grammar structures in the text. When there is an unfamiliar grammar structure, I usually cannot understand the meaning of the text.”

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of Difficulties in Terms of Grammar

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I do not understand the business texts because of some complicated grammar structures.	3.45	0.913
The reading passage is difficult when the tenses are so complex.	3.34	1.084
The usage of linking words in business texts is different from what I have learned.	3.22	1.116
Relative clauses make me fail to fully understand sentences.	3.06	1.094
Sentences written in passive voice make it hard for me to understand the text.	3.18	1.124
Total	3.25	

4.1.1.6. Difficulties in the Area of Motivation and Environment

There is almost no difference between the Motivation and Environment area and the Grammar one in Business English reading difficulties ($M = 3.22$, $M = 3.25$, orderly). The results from Table 8 show that students sometimes find business texts not attractive to

them (M = 3.21), but they still have a purpose when they read (M = 2.92). In another aspect of motivation and environment, it was discovered that participants self-reported that “when a text becomes difficult”, they sometimes want to stop reading it (M = 3.11). However, noisy environments are not suitable places for students to read Business English texts (M = 3.64).

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics of Difficulties in Terms of Motivation and Environment

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I find that business texts are not attractive to me.	3.21	1.114
I don't have a purpose when I read business texts.	2.92	1.176
When a text becomes difficult, I want to give up reading it.	3.11	1.178
I cannot read in a noisy environment.	3.64	1.087
Total	3.22	

4.1.1.7. Difficulties in the Areas of Organizational Structure and Text Coverage

As seen in Table 9, the respondents faced few difficulties in the area of Organizational structure and Text coverage with the lowest mean score of 3.12 among seven variables. It was noticed that students sometimes feel “the reading passage is difficult when the sentences are long” (M = 3.25). Furthermore, many participants admitted that they could not predict what they were going to read through the title of the text and could not understand the passage without understanding the context of the text (M = 3.17, M = 3.16, respectively). By contrast, they can sometimes “summarize the main idea of each paragraph” in certain texts (M = 2.99).

One respondent in the interview also mentioned that:

“I can translate all words in the passage, but I always have difficulty finding the main ideas of the paragraphs.”

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics of Difficulties
in Terms of Organizational Structure and Text Coverage

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I cannot predict what I am going to read through the title of the text.	3.17	1.111
The text is too complex to understand because of the organization of the paragraphs.	3.03	1.071
The reading passage is difficult when the sentences are long.	3.25	1.086
I cannot summarize the main idea of each paragraph.	2.99	1.119
I cannot understand the passage because I do not understand the context of the text.	3.16	1.089
Total	3.12	

4.1.2. Reading Strategies Used by EFL Students and Their Suggestions for Enhancing Business English Reading for Comprehension

4.1.2.1. Reading Strategies Used by EFL Students to Overcome Business Reading Difficulties

The results from Table 10 show that the mean score of reading strategies used by students is 3.53. Therefore, it was discovered that students used reading strategies frequently when reading business English texts ranging. They usually “identify a purpose in mind” when reading (M = 3.71) in order to predict and think about what they know to understand the reading content (M = 3.76). When reading, they always “take notes”, “read the texts carefully” and “re-read” if they do not understand any sentence (M = 3.80, M = 3.70, M = 3.84, in order). Moreover, most of the respondents self-reported “I use online dictionaries to understand the text” (M = 3.70), but they sometimes “guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases” (M = 3.51). The following items were agreed by the students: “I use contextual clues to help me understand the text better” (M = 3.65), “I read the title first and imagine what the passage might be about before reading the rest of the text” (M = 3.57), “I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading” (M = 3.54), “I try to read more business English text to know more business terms” (M = 3.47), “I skim the text quickly to get general ideas” (M = 3.44), “I scan the text for specific ideas” (M = 3.44). The other items in the questionnaire, albeit receiving no ‘strong disagreement or disagreement’, obtained mean scores of around 3.00 – 3.30, meaning these content items were not strongly supported by the respondents.

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics of Reading Strategies
Used by EFL Students in Reading Business English Texts

Items	Mean	S.D
I identify a purpose in mind when I read.	3.71	0.972
I take notes while reading to understand what I read.	3.80	0.947
I think about what I know to understand what I read.	3.76	0.926
I read the title first and imagine what the passage might be about before reading the rest of the text.	3.57	1.013
I read every sentence slowly and carefully to understand the text.	3.70	1.027
I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	3.51	1.026
I try to read more business English texts to know more business terms.	3.47	0.984
I skip unknown words when I read.	3.02	1.170
I use contextual clues to help me understand the text better.	3.65	0.917
I skim the text quickly to get general ideas.	3.44	1.103
I scan the text for specific ideas.	3.44	1.150
I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.	3.54	0.983
I translate word by word from English to Vietnamese to understand the text.	3.26	1.117
I re-read the sentence if I do not understand it.	3.84	0.988
I use online dictionaries to understand the text.	3.70	0.985
I paraphrase to better understand what I read.	3.30	1.125
I use a mind map to better understand and remember the content of the text.	3.25	1.076
Total	3.53	

4.1.2.2. Students' Suggestions to Enhance Business English Reading for Comprehension

After analyzing the transcripts obtained from the semi-structured interview, the researchers arrived at six solution themes that enhance Business English reading comprehension skills of EFL students. According to frequencies and percentages, these six solutions were arranged from the most commonly recommended (and hence, the most crucial) to the least recommended by the interviewees, as presented in Table 11.

As shown in Table 11, seven respondents (70%) suggested that improving vocabulary can be an effective approach to their reading problems. They believe that learning and knowing a wider range of English terms will help them read more fluently and accurately. For example, one of the respondents said:

"... I suggest investing time in reading many articles, books, and business documents in English in order to read better."

Additionally, one of them said:

"... We should read online business articles such as The New York Times and The Economist to learn more business terms."

It was observable in Table 11 that practicing reading regularly was mentioned by five students (50%) as a feasible solution for their reading difficulties. As one of the interviewees commented:

"..., and most importantly, I suggest practicing reading and analyzing texts regularly to improve reading skills."

Equally, in the words of another student:

"... creating a habit of regularly reading English articles or documents on economics, finance, and trade to accumulate economic knowledge and improve reading ability."

Table 11 indicates that three learners (30%) pointed out that improving grammatical knowledge could lead to solving their reading problems. For example, one of them mentioned:

"For me, it is beneficial to learn more grammatical units in order to read better in less time. If the time allotted in class is insufficient, we may also utilize the internet, websites, and resources to learn additional grammar."

Table 11 also shows the frequencies of two solutions for their reading comprehension namely "using appropriate reading strategies" and "attending business

courses held by the university” were equal, with two learners (20%) for each mentioned solution. For instance, one of the participants held:

“I think it is important to find out and use reading comprehension strategies that are appropriate for us.”

One respondent supporting “attending business courses held by the university” said:

“I recommend attending business English courses to better understand business context and terminology.”

As shown in Table 11, unlike other solutions, only one respondent (10%) reported that “using online dictionaries” could be a useful tool to improve reading comprehension.

“I think online dictionaries will be a useful tool for us because I understand the text better every time I use it.”

Table 11: Students’ Solutions to Alleviate
Business English Reading for Comprehension Problems

Solutions	Frequency	Percentage
Working more on vocabulary.	7	70%
Practicing reading regularly.	5	50%
Improving grammar.	3	30%
Using appropriate reading strategies.	2	20%
Attending business courses held by the university.	2	20%
Using online dictionaries.	1	10%

4.2. Discussion

Although Business English reading for comprehension is a crucial topic for tertiary learners, a large number of students still confront major problems when they read business texts. The results show that EFL students often encountered difficulties with a mean score of 3.40. The three biggest factors hindering students when reading business texts were Vocabulary, Timing, and Background knowledge. This finding is aligned with the results of the study conducted by Khataee (2018) who reported that students often had difficulties in dealing with business reading texts because of inadequate business vocabulary, a lack of time, and limited background knowledge. The current results are also advocated by Thao and Tham (2018), who discovered that their participants encountered two challenges including unknown words and background knowledge of their subjects. Additionally, in terms of difficulties in reading strategies, the study found that students sometimes did not use reading strategies well to read business texts. However, the latest research conducted by Mehdi and Mansoor (2013) does not support the finding, as it indicated that EFL students applied reading techniques well when

reading texts. It also found that students did not have much problem with text coverage and organizational structure, grammar, motivation, and environment when reading business materials. It may be because English-majored students had sufficient English knowledge to understand the general content and grammatical structures of business reading texts, those factors were not obstacles for them to comprehend the content of the reading texts. Besides, the results indicated that English-majored students generally reported using reading strategies frequently when reading business texts to alleviate their reading problems. This finding was consistent with Ha's (2022) study, which found that EFL students reported high-frequency use of different strategies to overcome their reading difficulties. Through the study, students suggested six solutions to improve their reading comprehension skills including broadening their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, reading more frequently, learning how to use appropriate strategies, attending more business courses, and using online dictionaries. The findings have discovered many strategies that EFL students often use to overcome their reading difficulties. When reading business English texts, students utilized various reading strategies from medium to high frequency, and none of the strategies were found to be used at a low frequency. Some of the most common strategies used were predicting, reading repetition, taking notes, using online dictionaries, and using background knowledge.

Regarding the second research question, there were many suggestions for how to address the reading issues, but the researchers came up with six solution themes to improve business English reading comprehension for EFL students. They involve improving vocabulary knowledge, regular practice, improving grammar knowledge, using appropriate reading strategies, attending business courses, and using online dictionaries. Firstly, vocabulary knowledge is essential for comprehending complicated reading materials such as textbooks, especially those containing technical terms (Carlisle, 2000; Qian, 2002). The participant pointed out that obtaining enough vocabulary, especially business terms, may help them a lot when reading business documents. The second solution is regular practice. The participants believe that maintaining a regular reading habit could improve their reading comprehension skills significantly as they can memorize new vocabulary and learn how to use new vocabulary simultaneously. The third suggestion is to improve grammar knowledge. Many students found that they translated and understood sentences more slowly when they did not understand the grammatical structure of the sentence. Therefore, improving grammar was thought to be a useful way to read English faster and avoid misunderstanding the author's meaning. Next, students suggested using appropriate reading strategies as they can help students access information that was not explicitly stated, infer meaning, make conclusions, and generalize information. Fifthly, attending business courses held by the university is seen as a beneficial way to enhance business reading skills. Business courses or business clubs often offer people specialized knowledge about business fields, so learners can simultaneously expand their knowledge and terminology related to business. Finally, looking up unknown words in online dictionaries is highly useful. The participants

recommended using online dictionaries to learn the definitions of difficult terms and to practice pronouncing them.

In a nutshell, the problems with vocabulary, timing, and background knowledge that students encountered when reading business English texts were the most frequent, and the issues with strategies, grammar, motivation and environment, organization structure and text coverage were the least serious issues. These findings may be explained by the fact that despite the students' English majors, they still encountered unfamiliar business terms, obstacles related to wasteful time spent reading texts, and a lack of background information. By contrast, it may be understandable that participants have a strong command of the English language to deal with any issues with grammar, reading strategies, motivation, environment, organizational structure, and text coverage.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

Reading can be seen as one of the most crucial skills for EFL students, and it is much more important to find out problems that they usually face and come up with feasible solutions to alleviate them. This study has shown that English-majored students usually struggled with Business English reading texts. The three most difficult areas were insufficient vocabulary knowledge, lack of timing, and inadequate background knowledge. However, students were found not to have much trouble with the organizational structure and the text coverage, and the grammatical structures of the texts. Besides, strategies usage, motivation and environment did not affect their reading process much. Fortunately, students could realize their reading problems and come up with some feasible solutions for those problems.

5.2. Recommendations and Limitations

This research can be used as a reference for both students and teachers to have general knowledge of business English reading difficulties as well as solutions for addressing them. These results suggest that students should be strongly motivated to be self-equipped with specialized business vocabulary and knowledge of business matters by searching for the meaning of new vocabulary in business documents and reading them regularly in order to be familiar with business words. Using online dictionaries and participating in business courses are good ideas for students who want to expand their knowledge in business fields. Regarding EFL teachers, they should apply the current findings to progress their teaching approach in the Business English Reading course. Specifically, it is suggested that teachers supply more business-related reading materials to students so that learners can learn and understand business concepts and terminology better. Also, teachers should apply interactive activities to trigger students' prior knowledge. Moreover, EFL teachers are recommended to teach the grammatical items in texts to solve reading comprehension problems.

This research paper exploits only problems in Business English reading for comprehension of English-majored students in one university. We believe that these

problems can still be further studied in the future to provide a more comprehensive picture of reading comprehension problems and their solutions. In this study, the researchers focused on students' perspectives. Future studies can be carried out to investigate teachers' perspectives towards EFL learners' reading comprehension problems to find realistic solutions.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Authors

Nguyen Kim Ngan is an undergraduate student at the School of Foreign Languages, UEH, Vietnam.

Nguyen Phuong Chi has been a lecturer of English at the School of Foreign Languages, UEH, Vietnam.

References

- Allen, J. & Widdowson, H. (1978). *Teaching the communicative use of English. English for Specific Purposes*. London: Longman.
- Anderson, R. C., Hiebert, E. H., Scott, J. A., & Wilkinson, I. A. G. (1985). *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. Washington, D. C.: National Institute of Education.
- Carlisle, J. F. (2000). Awareness of the structure and meaning of morphologically complex words: Impact on reading. *Reading and writing, 12*(3), 169-190
- Davoudi, M., & Yousefi, D. (2015). Comprehension Breakdown: A Review of Research on EFL Learners' Reading Difficulty and Problems. *International Journal of Language and Applied Linguistics, 1*, 58-72.
- Davoudi, M., & Yousefi, D. (2015). Comprehension Breakdown: A Review of Research on EFL Learners' Reading Difficulty and Problems. *All rights reserved, 58*(1), 22-31.
- Dreyer, C. & Nel, C. (2003). Teaching reading strategies and reading comprehension within a technology-enhanced learning environment. *System, 31*, 349-365.
- Færch, C. & Kasper, G. (1983). *Strategies in interlanguage communication*. Longman.
- Grabe, W. and Stoller, F. L. (2002). *Teaching and researching reading*. New York: Longman.
- Ha, H. T. L. (2022). Reading Strategies Employed by Hue University Non-English Major Students in Reading English Level 3 Texts. *Hue University Journal of Science: Social Sciences and Humanities, 131*(6), 111–126.
- Harmer, J. (2008). *How to teach English*. Oxford University Press.
- Harris, A. J., & Sipay, E. R. (1971). *Effective teaching of reading*. D. McKay Company.
- Hung, D. M., & Ngan, V. P. T. (2015). Investigating Reading Strategies Used by EFL Students at Dong Thap University. *Asian Journal of Educational Research, 3*(4), 10-20.

- Khataee, E. (2018). Reading failure among Iranian EFL learners: Study of underlying problems. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*, 6(3), 164-176.
- Mehdi, V.D., & Mansoor, T. (2013) A comparative analysis of reading strategies across ESP students of humanities and engineering. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 2(5), 63-78.
- Nickerson, C., & Planken, B. (2015). *Introducing Business English*. Routledge.
- Mundhe, G. B. (2015). Teaching Receptive and Productive Language Skills with the Help of Techniques. *Pune Research an International Journal in English*, 1(2), 1-6.
- Paris, S. C., Wasik, B. A., & Turner, J. C. (1991). The development of strategic readers. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 2, pp. 609–640). New York: Longman.
- Qian, D. D. (2002). Investigating the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and academic reading performance: An assessment perspective. *Language learning*, 52(3), 513-536.
- Qrquez, M., & Ab Rashid R. (2017). Reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners: the case of first and second-year students at Yarmouk University in Jordan. *Arab World English Journal*, 8(3), 285-298.
- Rahman, M.H. (2007). *An Evaluation of The Teaching of Reading Skills of English in Bangladesh*. Unpublished Thesis. Retrieved on October 1, 2023, from www.asian-efl-journal.com/Thesis/Thesis-Rahman.pdf
- Thao, T. Q., & Tham, D. M. (2018). The Difficulties in ESP Reading Comprehension Encountered by English-Majored Students. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 34(2), 151-161.
- Uribe-Enciso, O. (2015). Improving EFL students' performance in reading comprehension through explicit instruction in strategies. *Rastros Rostros*, 17(31), 37-52.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Authors will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions, and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of English Language Teaching shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflict of interests, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated on the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).