

Những khó khăn khi làm dạng bài nối tiêu đề trong bài đọc hiểu IELTS của sinh viên chuyên ngữ năm nhất tại Trường Đại học Quy Nhơn

Đoàn Thị Thanh Hiếu*, Đoàn Nguyễn Thị Lệ Hằng

Khoa Ngoại ngữ, Trường Đại học Quy Nhơn, Việt Nam

Ngày nhận bài: 16/05/2022; Ngày nhận đăng: 25/07/2022; Ngày xuất bản: 28/08/2022

TÓM TẮT

Nghiên cứu “Những khó khăn khi làm dạng bài nối tiêu đề trong bài đọc hiểu IELTS của sinh viên chuyên ngữ năm nhất tại trường Đại học Quy Nhơn” được thực hiện nhằm giúp sinh viên năm nhất nhận ra những vấn đề của họ khi làm dạng bài nối tiêu đề theo dạng thức IELTS. Đối tượng nghiên cứu bao gồm 249 sinh viên năm nhất thuộc sáu lớp Ngôn ngữ Anh, khóa 44 của khoa Ngoại ngữ tại trường Đại học Quy Nhơn. Bảng câu hỏi gồm 10 câu hỏi đóng và mở được sử dụng để thu thập dữ liệu cho nghiên cứu này. Kết quả cho thấy tất cả sinh viên chuyên ngữ năm nhất đều gặp một số khó khăn khi làm bài tập nối tiêu đề. Khó khăn phổ biến nhất là thiếu từ vựng. Một số khó khăn khác liên quan đến chủ đề, thiếu thời gian, bài đọc dài và tìm ý chính. Các tiêu đề tương tự nhau gây ra ít trở ngại nhất. Bài nghiên cứu cũng tìm ra nhiều yếu tố gây ra những khó khăn này.

Từ khóa: *Bài nối tiêu đề, IELTS, đọc hiểu, những khó khăn, chiến lược.*

*Tác giả liên hệ chính.

Email: doanthithanhhieus@gnu.edu.vn

Difficulties in doing Matching Headings task in IELTS Reading test of first-year English majors at Quy Nhon University

Doan Thi Thanh Hieu*, Doan Nguyen Thi Le Hang

Department of Foreign Languages, Quy Nhon University, Vietnam

Received: 16/05/2022; Accepted: 25/07/2022; Published: 28/08/2022

ABSTRACT

The research “Difficulties in doing Matching Headings task in IELTS Reading test of first-year English majors at Quy Nhon University” was carried out to help English freshmen realize their problems when answering Matching Headings questions in IELTS reading comprehension format. The subjects were 249 first-year English majors belonging to six classes of the course 44 of Foreign Languages Department at Quy Nhon University. The questionnaire which consists of ten close-ended and open-ended questions was utilized to collect the data. The findings suggest that the first-year English majors encounter lots of difficulties in doing Matching Headings task in IELTS Reading test. The most common one is related to lack of vocabulary. Others are related to topics, lack of time, lengthy passages, and finding main ideas. The last and least problematic one is similar headings. Another conclusion which can be drawn is that a variety of factors may contribute to those difficulties.

Keywords: *Matching headings IELTS, reading comprehension, difficulties, strategies.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, IELTS test has been regarded as the world’s leading test of English and is used in many crucial evaluations such as university entrance examinations or overseas study. Therefore, Vietnamese students, especially high-school students and university students long for obtaining an IELTS certificate, which enables them to enjoy favourable preferences over those who lack one. Among the four skills in IELTS exams, Reading is considered one of the most challenging ones. The variety of reading tasks, long passages and strange vocabulary stress students and make them confused, especially when the allotted time is

limited and controlled strictly. Among various tasks in reading comprehension test, Matching Headings task is believed to be a tricky one that is time-consuming and complicated. In addition, Matching Headings task can be considered one of the most popular exercises in IELTS reading test in general and in Reading One curriculum for English freshmen in particular. By recognizing their difficulties and needs in answering Matching Headings questions, English freshmen can recognise their own problems and make some suitable adjustments in their practice. As for teachers, there is no doubt that teachers do their best and exert a lot of time and effort to enhance their learners’ reading.

*Corresponding author.

Email: doanthithanhhieuhieu@qnu.edu.vn

Unfortunately, in most cases the final result of matching exercises is not as good as expected to be. That is why the majority of teachers find this task one of the most challenging to teach. The results of the present study yield fundamental insights that could contribute to more beneficial guidance for the teachers and course books designers. The findings can also be essential in terms of suggesting some possible solutions for the challenges that first-year students encounter in solving Matching Headings questions. They could also give some insights for English teachers to equip their students with the required knowledge, skills and strategies to do the task effectively, which might lay a firm foundation of effectively reading in the following semesters. Therefore, the current study aimed at answering the following question: What are the difficulties in doing Matching Headings task in IELTS reading test first-year English students at Quy Nhon University encounter?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Matching Headings task in IELTS Reading module

According to S. McCarter, J. Easton and J. Ash,¹ there are several task types in IELTS Reading test, such as multiple choice questions, gap-filling exercises, matching headings with paragraphs, short-answer questions, true/false/not given statements, the completion of sentences-summaries, diagrams, tables, flow charts, notes. Among them, Matching Headings questions are assumed to come up in almost all IELTS reading tests, from the lowest to higher bands. P. Bourne² and V. Jakeman and C. McDowell³ also confirm that it is “a common IELTS reading question type.” IELTS Reading task comprises of nearly 12 different question types, out of which, as the website ielstutorial.online¹⁷ and grade-online.com indicates most candidates find Matching headings one of the trickiest types of questions in the IELTS exam. According to E. V. Geyte,⁴ this task tests the ability to understand the organisation of texts and to find the main idea or topic of each paragraph or section of the text. This question type requires candidates to match

headings with their respective paragraphs or sections. There will always be a possibility, as it often happens, that there will be more headings than paragraphs. Test takers need to choose the best possible heading numbered in Roman numerals (i, ii, iii,..) and the correct paragraph identified by letters (A, B, C, D, ...). Headings are short sentences that summarize the information of a paragraph. Students will need to pick up the best heading which suits a paragraph. It is obvious that matching information task is a real test of paraphrasing skills as the information will be expressed in different ways in the statements and in the text. A large number of synonyms will be used and sentence structures often altered. Unless students have a good strategy for tackling this kind of task, they can easily waste a lot of time on it and meet considerable confusion over various options.

It is apparent that the IELTS reading test involves the application of specific reading strategies to solve different reading tasks the different types of questions. Therefore, students need to possess relevant techniques. In order to deal with Matching Headings exercises, students need to master such techniques as skimming, scanning and identifying main ideas. Talking about skimming, Nuttall⁵ stated that “By skimming, we mean glancing rapidly through a text to determine whether a research paper is relevant to our own work or in order to keep ourselves superficially informed about matters that are not of great importance to us”. When students want to find the main idea not the details, they often utilize skimming. They can read the title, sub-heading, the introduction and the conclusion to have an overview about the organization of the text. S. O’Connell, M. Margaret and S. Katy⁶ agree that one of the effective ways of skimming is to pay attention to the first sentence of each paragraph which often includes the main idea of each one. This strategy might assist students to “locate information more easily later on”.⁷ As for Matching Headings task, this skill helps students predict which paragraph suits which headings. Besides, scanning also plays a role in matching headings. According

to Brown,⁸ “Scanning is a quickly searching for some particular piece of information in a text, scanning exercises may ask students to look for name or dates, to find a definition of key concept, or to list a certain number of supporting details. The purpose of scanning is to extract specific information without reading through the whole text.” Scanning a text is a reading technique where students look for specific information rather than trying to find the gist. In order to succeed in scanning, students have to understand the structure of the material as well as understand what they read, so that they can spot the specific information. Scanning also allows students to find quickly the detailed information. Another technique is identifying main ideas, which can be considered the most crucial skill in matching headings. R. W. Zhang, & J. Hope,⁹ believe that students are expected to understand the main idea of each paragraph when tackling reading tasks like List of Headings, Matching - Finding Paragraphs, Multiple Choice - More Than Four Choices, and Summary. Obviously, finding the main idea of a paragraph or longer passage of text is an important reading skill to master, along with concepts like making an inference, finding the author's purpose, or understanding vocabulary words in context. A stated main idea is usually found at the beginning of a paragraph, but it could also be located in the middle or at the end of a paragraph. Sometimes, however, the answer is not in the topic sentence and the whole paragraph needs to be read more carefully.

2.2. Students' common problems in doing IELTS reading tasks

S. Chowdhury¹⁰ points out some popular difficulties students face when dealing with IELTS reading comprehension tasks. They are new words, grammar and punctuation, technical and sub-technical vocabulary, cultural difference, time management, lack of practice. The study findings of R. W. Zhang & J. Hope⁹ acknowledged the problems of the topic sentence identification and the vocabulary size, which indicates these two variables are also necessary for improving student performance. As for Matching Headings

task, the main reason why students find this task challenging is that these questions may involve more reading and analyzing than some of the other IELTS question types. Especially, this can be a problem for students who are struggling with vocabulary. A large number of websites such as ielstutorial.online,¹⁷ ielts-simon.com and ieltsadvantage.com¹⁸ have pointed out common problems students encounter when doing Matching Headings task. Firstly, there is too much information to get through and students do not have enough time to cover all the ideas of a long paragraph. In order to solve this problem, the ieltsadvantage.com¹⁸ advises students not to read every single word of the text but they should read the first one or two sentences and the last sentence of the paragraphs to get the main idea. Students also tend to try to match a word or words from the headings to a word in the text or just look at the first sentence of each paragraph without understanding the gist of the paragraph. In addition, time constraint might also obstruct matching heading. Students might spend too much time on one paragraph or heading; as a result, they are short of time for the other paragraphs. Moreover, the novice test-takers like first-year students find it very challenging to realize the fact that answers are not in the same order as the text. As grade-online.com states other cause that could lead to the difficulty in fulfilling the task is confusion over specific details in a paragraph with the main idea and synonyms or paraphrasing. In other words, students can be misled by headings that include only specific details rather than a general idea. In reality, there will be more headings than paragraphs, and these detailed headings are most likely included in order to confuse test-takers. Regarding notes and answers, the website ieltsmaterial.com claims that students sometimes carelessly write down the wrong roman numeral on the answer sheet (at least just up to 15, which is XV), which might lead to the low score of the test.

The current study contributes to the research in terms of offering valuable insights into the difficult aspects which first-year

students usually face with in this task. It also provides ways to help students to deal with Matching Headings questions in IELTS reading test effectively.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The participants were 249 first-year students chosen randomly from six General English classes of the cohort 44. At the time of doing the questionnaire, they were studying Reading 1 in the first term of the academic year 2021 - 2022. This was the very first time they officially practiced reading comprehension exercises in IELTS reading format in general and matching heading tasks in particular. The author chose first-year students to do the research due to several reasons. Firstly, the research has a strong correlation with Reading - a vital skill in English; therefore, participants who are the English majors must possess some fixed knowledge and skill about this language. Secondly, data was gathered at the first semester of the first year when they were at the beginning of learning Reading courses following Reading Module in IELTS format. At this time, they had unfixed methods in handling Matching Headings tasks, so the writer could take into account difficulties they encountered in completing the tasks. Moreover, carrying out the study would help not only lecturers to understand more about students' problems but also learners to perceive their weak points in doing this kind of exercise. Thus, teachers as well as students would have flexible and practical methods to surmount this challenging question type.

3.2. Research method and procedure

A questionnaire was used to gather the data and was given out to 249 freshmen. It includes two parts: personal information and general information. The first part aims to find out the background of students that is an important factor for later analysis. In this part, students give such information as years of English studying and their experience in IELTS exam. The second part focuses on the four main sections: students'

attitude and their practice towards matching headings questions, students' strategies in doing matching headings questions, the difficulties they face when doing matching headings questions and finally students' preference towards ways to learn matching headings task. This questionnaire contains ten closed-ended and open-ended questions in order to get accurate qualitative and quantitative data.

Firstly, the validity of the questionnaire was achieved by conducting a pilot study. Ten students were given the questionnaire to complete. After slight modifications, a total number of 249 questionnaires were distributed among General English-majored freshmen. During break time, students were asked to complete the questionnaire in fifteen minutes. Initially, the author directed students the way to complete it and then went around the class to answer any question from participants. After that, the data was collected and all the questionnaires were reported as valid. Eventually, the information was analyzed; the findings were discussed and supported by literature, and some recommendations were suggested.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section gives answers to the research questions mentioned above. In this part, four major issues reported by the respondents are listed and discussed preceded by a brief description of their own background information.

The first part of the questionnaire is designed to find out students' experience of studying English and their experience in IELTS test. Most of students involved (45.2%) studied English from 6 to 9 years while nearly one third (31.5%) of them got more than ten-year experience in learning English and nearly a quarter of them (23.3%) were acquainted with English for under 5 years. These data reveal the fact that the majority of students have studied English for a long time. Therefore, they are expected to master English well and to be able to cope with this challenging task. Surprisingly, one hundred percent of participants have never taken

part in IELTS exam. However, after approaching IELTS reading format in the first semester, 81% of students have an intention of attending IELTS exam once.

Students’ attitude and their practice towards Matching Headings questions

Mentioning the experience in practising Matching Headings exercises, the majority of students (157 students, 63.1%) asked used to do this kind of task when they were at high school and only 92 students (36.9%) have never done this one.

Figure 1 illustrates what the participants think about Matching Headings task. It can be clearly seen that most of them (68%) found doing matching headings exercises difficult and 7% considered it very difficult. Judging by the data, it is obvious that although over half of the respondents have practised matching headings before, they still think that this task is challenging. In spite of that, a quarter of the respondents (25%) reported that it is neither difficult nor easy. None of them considered this task easy.

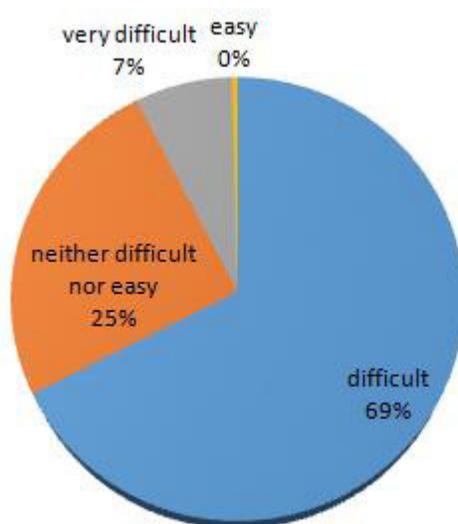


Figure 1. Students’ attitude towards Matching Headings task

When asked about frequency of practising Matching Headings task, most of the students, 46.6% and 44.6%, said that they seldom and sometimes practise this task, accounting for the highest percentage. Only 4.8% of the respondents usually do this exercise and 4% of them never practise this task. This bad habit might discourage them to do the task well and find it challenging and problematic. This is also emphasized by S. Chowdhury,¹⁰ who states that it goes without saying that practice not only familiarizes students with the task, but also assists in increasing their vocabulary, their knowledge of grammar and in general enhances their ability in attaining a higher grade. Unless students keep on practising in their own time, it is almost impossible for them to accomplish the task. Therefore, it is imperative to make

students realize the importance of practice in learning English.

Concerning students’ ways to improve their reading comprehension skill, when allowed to choose several different options, students came up with interesting answers. As revealed from Figure 2, watching online videos of guidance accounts for the highest rate (161 out of 249 students, 64.8%), followed by downloading books online and buying books from bookshops, taking up 62.8% and 41.2% separately. Taking extra classes in order to improve the skill of doing reading comprehension exercises contributed to 10.8%. In addition, about 6.4% students tried doing the task several times so as to make more progress. Interestingly, two students admitted, “I play English games and translate English words in games in order to learn vocabulary, grammar and structures.”

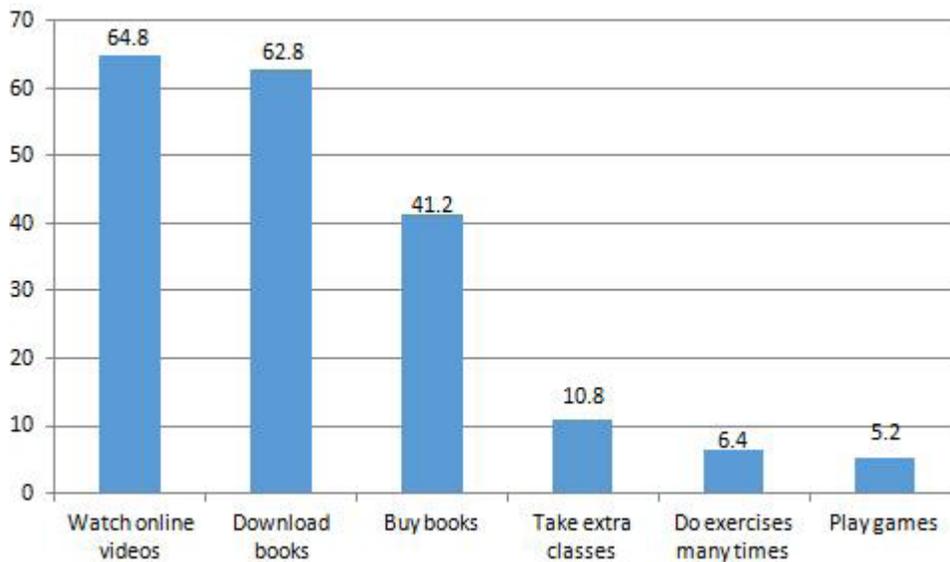


Figure 2. Students' ways to improve reading comprehension skill

Students' strategies in doing Matching Headings questions

According to collected data, over half of students doing the survey (61.3%) depended on the dictionary when spotting new words in the reading passages, which might be a hindrance in understanding the passage as a whole as well as keeping the reading flow. Meanwhile, only 25.4% and 13.3% of them made an effort to guess their meaning or skip it and continue reading, which is considered the correct way of reading comprehension.

As regards the procedure of doing Matching Headings task, most of informants (57.4%) affirmed that they always skimmed the text prior to reading the passage in the first place. The rest of the participants, 39.0% and 3.6%, said that they sometimes or never paid attention to skimming the passage at the beginning.

In this part, the writer will analyze the procedures students used to deal with the task. There are four options suggested: (1) Read all headings, then read the first paragraph and do one by one; (2) Read all paragraphs and choose headings for each; (3) Read one paragraph, read all headings and try matching to each headings; (4) Choose heading for the shortest paragraph. As can be seen in Table 1, the majority of the population stated that they always looked through all headings first, and then do each paragraph

one by one. Another method which was used by 21.7% of participants was the second option, which means they read all paragraphs and started choosing headings for each. The third and fourth options were not likely to be appreciated by first-year English majors. Only 19.3% of them chose to read one paragraph, then read all headings and try matching it to each heading and none of students selected the way of doing the shortest paragraph first.

Obviously, most of the students have mastered the appropriate procedure to deal with the exercise. V. Jakeman and C. McDowell¹¹ agree with that way by advising students to read through the lists of headings first to familiarize themselves with them. Then, they should read the first paragraph and select the heading that best fits this paragraph. After that, they continue this procedure with the rest paragraphs. S. McCarter, J. Easton and J. Ash¹ also add that they should write beside the paragraph the number of all those headings that might be suitable and make sure they fit the meaning of the whole paragraph and don't simply use some of the same words. When they do the same with other paragraphs, in each case they remember to read all the headings. It is essential for them to bear in mind that every paragraph will have a different heading and there will always be more headings than paragraphs. At the same time, they should be sure that they do not use that heading for other questions.

Table 1. Students' procedure of doing Matching Headings task

The procedure of doing Matching Headings task	Number of students	Percentage
Read all headings, read the first paragraph and do one by one	147	59.0
Read all paragraphs and choose headings for each	54	21.7
Read one paragraph, read all headings and try matching to each headings	48	19.3
Choose heading for the shortest paragraph	0	0

It can be said that the way to find the main idea is the most crucial one that every student endeavors to master, especially it is the chief skill in doing matching headings tasks. The writer surveyed some ways that are available to students. Over a half of respondents (50.2%) said that they found the topic sentence so that they

could get the main idea of the paragraph whereas nearly a third of them (30.9%) had to read the whole paragraph. The rest of the population (18.9%) only needed to glance at the first and the last sentences in order to catch the gist of the paragraph.

Table 2. Students' way of finding the main idea

How to find the main idea	Number of students	Percentage
Find the topic sentence	125	50.2
Read the whole paragraph	77	30.9
Read the first and the last sentence	47	18.9

The data in Table 3 reveal that students master an efficient way to deal with unsure answers. Nearly 80% of the students chose the way of taking note and coming back later. S. McCarter and J. Ash¹ state that students have a tendency to waste lots of time thinking about a

question that they cannot answer. This bad habit may result in a disaster. They need remember that while they are trying to figure out a difficult question they can answer two or three, or even more, easier ones. After that they can come back to those you have left blank afterward.

Table 3. Students' way of dealing with unsure answers

The way of dealing with unsure answers	Number of students	Percentage
Take note and come back later	198	79.5
Continue reading until find the correct answer	31	12.4
Guess and choose one answer at random	18	7.2
Skip it, do the other paragraph and choose the rest option	2	0.9

Major difficulties students encounter when addressing Matching Headings questions

According to the participants' responses, there are four basic difficulties shared by most of the participants doing Matching Headings exercises. As it is shown in Figure 3, the most frequent

difficulty is vocabulary followed by strange topics and lack of time, which randomly had the same proportion at 56.6%. The other two noticeable obstacles were lengthy texts and finding main ideas. In the following, those difficulties are presented and discussed separately.

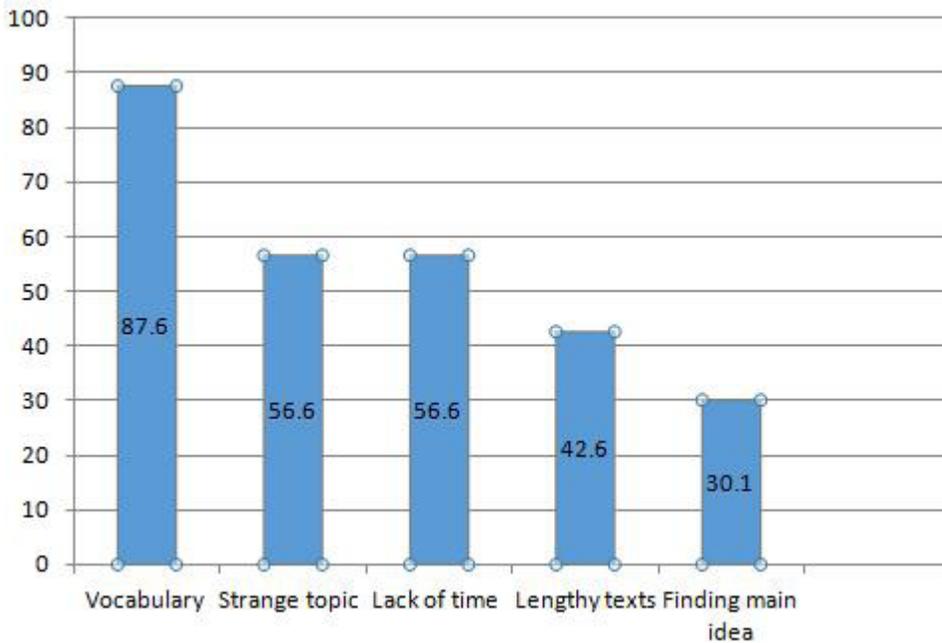


Figure 3. Students' difficulties in doing matching headings questions

Vocabulary

Based on students' responses, the data in Figure 3 indicates that a considerable number of them (218 students, 87.6%) are aware that vocabulary is their biggest weakness in doing Matching Headings task, yet they find achieving them quite difficult. As one of the respondents stated, the reason of this difficulty could be ascribed to the fact that her vocabulary of a topic was not wide enough to understand the passage, let alone choose correct headings. This finding goes in line with the results found by S. Chowdhury.¹⁰

This result and Nuttall's⁵ discovery are homogeneous. He states unless the readers possess sufficient vocabulary, it is tricky to understand the text. In foreign language reading, "this problem is basic and familiar." F. Yolanda¹² also emphasizes: "Vocabulary development refers to understanding words and their

meanings. It is undeniable that individuals with a wider vocabulary can interpret the meaning of reading passages faster and more thoroughly than individuals who must guess at the meanings of unfamiliar words based on context clue". Vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in all areas of content and is closely related to reading comprehension skills as well as reading achievement. Concerning the issue of new words, S. O'Connell, M. Margaret and S. Katy⁶ explain that if readers try to understand every single word of the text which is considered unsuitable to do Matching Headings exercises, they will slow down the reading speed and reduce the understanding of the text. Therefore, in this case, they should make a guess and continue reading. Even when they cannot guess what the word or phrase means, they should "ignore it and move on quickly".

Strange topics

The striking point from Figure 3 is that *strange topic* and *lack of time* are considered the biggest problems of the same proportion of respondents, 141 students, 56.6% for each. As for topic, R. Mazano¹⁴ also agrees that prior knowledge of the subject has an enormous influence on reading comprehension and he adds that students' knowledge of the content indicates their ability to absorb new information connected with the content. Students are most likely to encounter some unfamiliar topics in IELTS reading module such as environmental science, global politics or psychology. They might find these topics quite difficult to study because they are academics reading topics not everyday topics. Moreover, freshmen do not have experience or enough knowledge to understand these topics. As a result, strange topics might be a hindrance with those who lack background knowledge.

Lack of time

The other obstacle is lack of time, which is a nightmare for over a half of the students answering the questionnaire. This opinion goes in line with S. McCarter and J. Ash¹ Time is the biggest obstacle for the students because there is too much information to cover, so they have insufficient time to accomplish the test. This is understandable, but in the IELTS it is a disastrous. They need to bear in mind that while they are trying to figure out a difficult question they can answer two or three, or even more, easier ones. Then they can come back to those they have left blank afterwards. Also, S. Chowdhury¹⁰ suggested that if students do not practice frequently, time management in the examination is almost impossible. Besides, there is a fact that the students often look at word by word of the text, which quickly consume all their time before having an opportunity to complete the given exercise. Therefore, it is essential for them to keep an eye on the watch and spend every single second very carefully. Also, in order to tackle this, they need to divide their time in a proper way that they can finish your questions in time. In this type of question, the

students are expected to understand the general meaning of each paragraph, not individual words. If there are unfamiliar words, just skip them and continue reading. A good way to tackle this difficulty is to read the first one or two sentences and the last one of the paragraph and skim the rest of the paragraph. This activity is enough for them to catch the main idea of the paragraph. In the meantime, they don't need to spend too much time on one paragraph and headings. If they cannot find the correct heading for any paragraph, just skip it and come back with it after matching the other paragraphs. It is definitely much more straightforward and easier when there are few headings left.

Lengthy texts

Figure 3 indicates that about 43% of the participants consider lengthy texts as a dilemma. They said that they could not complete the test because the reading passage was too long. This fact might make students hard to understand and memorize the information. S. McCarter¹⁵ states that it is necessary for students to use some techniques to increase reading speed, that is, skimming and scanning. When students scan a text for a specific word, their eyes touch the other information lightly. Because the focus is on the scanning, the eye skims the text naturally and does not slow them down. From my point of view, the main reason for this is that students' reading speed is too slow and they do not apply suitable strategies while dealing with the passage. Slow reading speed, in turn, is caused by several other underlying factors. Firstly, students get used to reading words individually not by a group of words and think about the meaning of one word, which undoubtedly decrease the reading speed. Secondly, students usually pause in order to look up the meaning of a new word in the dictionary, which might interrupt the flow of thought and the main purpose of the questions. Last but not least, students often try to understand the whole passage, not just the main idea or gist of the question, which wastes them a lot of precious time.

Finding main ideas

Finding main ideas is headache for nearly a third (30.1%) of the surveyed first-year students. The website mpc.edu declares that finding the main idea is a key to understanding what you read. The main idea ties all of the sentences in the paragraph or article together. Once you identify the main idea, everything else in the reading should click into place. This opinion is also supported by P. Z. Ekorini¹⁶ who says that getting main idea matters because the main idea is considered a key of the text so unless the students get the key, they will find it more difficult to obtain the information from the whole text. In addition, the subjects of Ekorini's research declare that the problems they face when finding main ideas are low vocabulary mastery and sentence structure and length. This can also be applied to the participants of the first-year students in the current study.

Lack of strategies and similar headings are also included in difficulties in doing Matching Headings task by 42 and 31 participants. There are several tips in order to overcome this problem. First, students should match any headings that are very obvious and they are sure about. If there are similar headings, they should write them (2 - 3 headings) beside the paragraph and try to figure out the difference between them. They can ask themselves what the keywords are, how this changes the meaning or which one matches the paragraph best. If they still can't pick one, move on and come back to it later.

Besides, some respondents added their own problem such as "I am confused about Roman numerals". Realizing this issue, some online websites state that many test-takers lose points even when they find the correct answers. It's because they write down the heading titles in the answer sheet, instead of the number (i-x). The best advice in this case is familiarizing themselves with the Roman numeral system by practising frequently this task.

Students' preference towards ways of learning Matching Headings task

It is easy to realize that there is a disparity

among choices towards ways to learn Matching Headings task. At the top of the list, 72.4% of learners chose to focus on sub-skills first, and then apply them to matching headings exercises. "Learn to do matching headings exercises step by step" was considered as an efficient method of studying this task type by 60.3% of the informants. "Doing many Matching Headings exercises" was ranked third with 53% while over a half of students (34%) hoped to improve their skills through activities in class and a quarter (24%) of them paid more attention to learning theory of doing this task. In addition, the participants in this investigation also listed other ways to master Matching Headings exercises as follows:

+ "I usually practise translating several different texts in order to build up the ability to comprehend the texts and vocabulary."

+ "I think playing games is a good way to increase vocabulary. After playing games, I try to translate new words I meet, which helps me remember words easily and longer."

Overall, although there are numerous ways to learn Matching Headings task, *focus on sub-skills first, and then apply them to matching headings exercises* and *learn to do Matching Headings exercises step by step* were still by far the most popular methods due to two reasons. Firstly, this task type is created to evaluate a wide range of sub-skills such as skimming, guessing, and previewing. Therefore, to successfully accomplish Matching Headings Exercises, students must have a thorough grasp of essential these skills first. According to Sam McCarter¹⁵, use skimming and scanning skills to get the answer directly and save your time. Sharing this opinion with Simon, Francoise Grellet thinks that it is particularly useful when skimming and scanning are taught as a study skill. Secondly, it is undoubted that students have to go through lots of steps when carrying out Matching Headings exercises, beginning with skimming the headings and finishing with checking back the answer.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research results and discussions above, it can be concluded that in general, the majority of first-year English majors have several difficulties in doing Matching Headings task. Those problems are related to vocabulary, strange topics, lack of time, lengthy texts and finding main ideas. The underlying factors leading to these problems are their attitude and practice, strategies and relevant techniques.

In respect of suggested solutions to tackle these difficulties, it reveals that there are several ways to help English freshmen handle them.

(1) Students should be encouraged to enlarge their vocabulary and improve their background knowledge by paying attention to available things around them such as newspapers, magazines, films or songs. (2) To deal with time pressure, students should utilize appropriate techniques, strategies and regular practice in class and at home. (3) They should master an effective way to find the main idea for each paragraph, an indispensable skill in doing Matching Headings task.

Based on the above-mentioned conclusions, the researchers provide some recommendations for lecturers and students as follows.

For lecturers, it is very necessary for them to consider the needs and the challenges of learners to provide them with suitable reading materials. The biggest problem for every student is lack of vocabulary. To deal with this aspect, teachers can help students build up their vocabulary by a variety of interesting activities in class. In addition, teachers should have a thorough understanding about procedures, tips and strategies as well as students' standard to support them with appropriate tactics. This guidance not only assists them to improve their reading skills but also reduces reluctance in applying these tips. Also, teachers should ideally ask them to help each other by forming study groups where they can share their own weak points, practise together, use different self-access text books and learn from each other, The

main point is that the students should grow out of their dependency on coaching centers and have confidence that they themselves have the key to improve proficiency.

For students, to improve their result in Matching Headings task, students need to keep practising regularly. Regrettably, the collected data reveal a sad reality that students do not make a habit of practising this kind of task after class. It is a high time they kicked the bad habit and began to learn more from their practice. They can practise by their simple texts and their favourite genres such as online videos or downloaded books which are their favourite activities when looking for reference sources. By reading or watching what they prefer, they can absorb vocabulary or topics naturally and easily. Indeed, although many students are well aware of the strategies as well as procedures for dealing with Matching Headings exercises, they cannot expect a higher performance without frequent practice. They should concentrate more on learning necessary useful strategies and techniques and try applying them as much as possible so that they can increase their speed as well as get more correct answers. As regards their weaknesses, that is, vocabulary and strange topics, one of the effective ways is forming a habit of reading and especially finding the gist within each document. Reading anything in English anywhere and anytime, from books, stories, newspapers to leaflets or billboards and grasping their main messages may not only build up their vocabulary knowledge but also the method of solving matching headings task. Certainly, the issue of the appropriate strategies, new words and strange topics will no longer their nightmare when approaching Matching Headings exercises.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study investigates the challenges first-year English majors coped with while completing Matching Headings tasks. Therefore, there should be an in-depth investigation to be carried out on a larger number of English students and other courses to gather better

understanding of this task type. Besides, future researches can invest more on evaluation of the methods students utilize to do this kind of exercise and then offer effective ways to deal with it, including experienced experts' strategies. This issue is also worth investigation.

Appendix: Questionnaire

Difficulties encountered by first-year general English majors when doing Matching Headings task in IELTS reading test

Part 1: Personal information

How long have you been learning English?

- 3-5 years
- 6-9 years
- 10 years or over

Have you ever taken IELTS test?

- Yes
- No

Are you going to take part in IELTS exam?

- Yes
- No

Part 2: General information

Students' attitude and their practice towards Matching Headings questions

1. Have you done matching heading exercises before?

- Yes
- No

2. You find Matching Headings questions

- easy
- difficult
- very difficult
- neither difficult nor easy

3. How often do you practise doing Matching Headings task?

- usually
- sometimes
- seldom
- never

4. What do you do to improve your reading comprehension skill?

- Watch online videos
- Download books
- Buy books
- Take extra classes
- Other:

Students' strategies in doing Matching Headings questions

5. What do you do when you see new words in the passage?

- Look up the dictionary
- Try to guess the meaning
- Skip them and continue reading
- Other:

6. Put a tick next to the activities you do when matching headings with the paragraphs

- Read all headings, read the first paragraph and do one by one
- Read all paragraphs and choose headings for each
- Read one paragraph, read all headings and try matching to each heading
- Select one heading for the shortest paragraph
- Other:

7. To get the main idea of a paragraph, what do you do?

- Only read the first and last sentence
- Read the whole paragraph
- Find the topic sentence
- Other:

8. What do you do if you are unsure about the answer?

- Take note and come back later
- Guess and choose one answer at random
- Continue reading and try to find the correct answer
- Skip it and do the other paragraph
- Other:

Students' difficulties in doing Matching Headings questions

9. Put a tick next to the weaknesses or/and difficulties you have faced when doing Matching Headings questions

- Vocabulary
- Strange topics
- Lack of time
- Lengthy passages
- Finding main idea
- Lack of strategies
- Similar headings
- Other:

Students’ preference towards ways to learn Matching Headings task

10. What are your suggestions to overcome difficulties in doing Matching Headings task?

- Focus on sub-skills first, and then apply them to matching headings exercises
- Learn to do matching headings exercises step by step
- Do many matching headings exercises
- Through activities in class
- Learn theory about matching headings tasks
- Other:

Acknowledgement

This research is conducted within the framework of science and technology projects at institutional level of Quy Nhon University under the project code T2022.784.40.

REFERENCES

1. S. McCarter, J. Easton and J. Ash. *A book for IELTS*, Ford: IntelliGene, UK, 2003.
2. P. Bourne. *High Impact IELTS – Academic Module*, Pearson Longman, 2004.
3. V. Jakeman and C. McDowell. *Step up to IELTS*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
4. E. V. Geyte. *Reading for IELTS*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.
5. C. Nuttall. *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*, Heinemann International, 1982.

6. S. O’Connell, M. Margaret and S. Katy *Focus on skills for IELTS foundation*, Pearson Longman, 2007.
7. P. Cullen, A. French & V. Jakeman. *The official cambridge guide to IELTS for academic and general training*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2014.
8. J.D. Brown. *Using surveys in language program*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001.
9. R. W. Zhang & J. Hope. What factors most impact on Chinese students’ performance in the IELTS academic reading sub-test?, *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, **2021**, *11*, 955-966.
10. S. Chowdhury. Gaining proficiency in the reading module in IELTS: A study on the efforts of Bangladeshi students, *The Dhaka University Journal of Linguistics*, **2009**, *2*, 125-140.
11. V. Jakeman and C. McDowell. *Insights into IELTS*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
12. F. Yolanda. *Reading strategies for vocabulary development*, Tennessee: Learning Express, LLC, 2007.
13. T. Huckin & J. Coady. *Incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language*, Cambridge University Press, New York , 2007.
14. R. Mazano. *The importance of background knowledge*, ASCD, the United states of America, 2004.
15. S. McCarter. *Tips for IELTS*, Macmillan Education, Oxford, 2006.
16. P. Z. Ekorini. Analysis on students’ difficulties of finding main idea of a passage, *Journal Dharma Pendidikan Stkip PGRI Nganjuk*, **2020**, *15*, 72-82.
17. Matching Headings IELTS Reading tips: Major solutions to your aid, <<https://ielstutorials.online/blog/ielts-reading-matching-headings-tips>>, accessed 03/02/2022.
18. C. Pell. IELTS Reading Matching Headings tips and strategy, <<http://ieltsadvantage.com/2015/03/04/ielts-reading-matching-headings-tips-and-strategy>>, accessed 21/04/2016.