

CHECKING THE EFFICACY OF USING EXERCISES TO TEACH ESP VOCABULARY FOR ACCOUNTING MAJORS AT HAI PHONG UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT: Vocabulary plays a key role in language learning process and using exercises to teach vocabulary is considered an effective method to help students improve their lexical knowledge. The study was conducted to evaluate its effectiveness of accounting major students' vocabulary learning in ESP lessons. The research design used a mixed method to collect data from 52 students of the Faculty of Accounting and Finance at Hai Phong University. The result of the research showed that using exercises brought considerable improvements to the students' vocabulary retention and their perception of ESP learning.

Keywords: *Using exercises; ESP vocabulary learning; accounting major students*

KIỂM TRA TÍNH HIỆU QUẢ CỦA VIỆC SỬ DỤNG BÀI TẬP ĐỂ DẠY TỪ VỰNG TIẾNG ANH CHUYÊN NGÀNH CHO SINH VIÊN NGÀNH KẾ TOÁN TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC HẢI PHÒNG

TÓM TẮT: Từ vựng đóng vai trò quan trọng trong quá trình học ngôn ngữ và sử dụng bài tập để dạy từ vựng được coi là một phương pháp hiệu quả giúp học sinh cải thiện kiến thức về từ vựng. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện để đánh giá tính hiệu quả học từ vựng của sinh viên chuyên ngành kế toán trong các giờ học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành. Nghiên cứu đã sử dụng phương pháp hỗn hợp để thu thập dữ liệu từ 52 sinh viên khoa Kế toán – Tài chính, trường Đại học Hải Phòng. Kết quả của nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng sử dụng bài tập đã cải thiện đáng kể việc ghi nhớ từ vựng của sinh viên và nhận thức của họ với việc học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành.

Từ khóa: *Sử dụng bài tập; học từ vựng tiếng Anh chuyên ngành; sinh viên ngành kế toán*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, besides general English, English for specific purpose (ESP) increasingly becomes vital in professional fields in colleges and universities because ESP lays a firm foundation for students in future career. It provides academic knowledge for the students who are studying in various fields to develop other language skills. At Hai Phong University (HPU), there is a wide range of ESP subjects which focus on providing professional knowledge for students and familiarizing them with language skills in English. In ESP courses, students are instructed to develop comprehensive skills for specific majors, at the same time, they are concentrated on improving their ESP vocabulary knowledge

because Schmitt (2000) said that “lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language”. In reality, a lot of studies showed that ESP vocabulary learning played a vital role in supporting students to understand and communicate in their working environment effectively. However, most non-English majors at HPU confessed that they had difficulty in mastering ESP vocabulary. The students were confused with a large number of academic terms and complex issues of lexical knowledge. In particular, accounting undergraduates at HPU got into troubles with vocabulary retention as well as applying lexical knowledge to do exercises. Besides, the limitation of vocabulary practicing frequency was also a problem which affected the effectiveness of ESP vocabulary learning. Consequently, these other language skills could not fully completed as students’ expectation which gradually caused the stress for students in learning process and reduced the efficacy of ESP lessons.

In fact, there were a lot of studies about using exercises to teach vocabulary for students in the world (Fuente, 2006; Tsea and Jia, 2010; Hashemzadeh, 2012; Pertanika and Hum, 2016), however, the studies for ESP courses in Vietnam were not too many. Therefore, the author decided to conduct a study to check the efficacy of using exercises in teaching ESP vocabulary for accounting major students at Hai Phong University. There are two following questions used to clarify the main target of the study:

1. How is the efficacy of using exercises in improving students’ ESP

vocabulary retention at HPU?

2. What is students’ perception of using exercises to study ESP vocabulary of accounting majors at HPU?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Learning vocabulary for English for Specific Purpose (ESP)

There are numerous definitions about ESP given by different authors. For example, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) defined ESP that “ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning”. Robinson (1980) mentioned that an ESP course was purposeful and aimed at the successful performance of occupational or educational roles. Laufer (1997) defined, “vocabulary learning is at the heart of language learning and language use. Without vocabularies, speakers cannot convey the meaning and communicate with each other in a particular language.” According to Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) ESP was a particular kind of language which was used to cater for learners’ demand about a certain field. Robinson (1991) gave the definition about ESP that was “normally goal-directed and ESP courses develop from a needs analysis, which aims to specify as closely as possible what it is exactly that students have to go through the medium of English”. In general, ESP courses play a key role in higher education with the purpose of fulfilling the specific needs and sustainable competency of the learners. Besides, ESP courses are designed to meet various student’s needs in specific fields and partly enhance English language proficiency required for all professional disciplines.

These academic words and technical terms in ESP also have particular meanings which are unfamiliar to students comparing to general English. As a result, most of the students have troubles in memorizing the meaning of words and developing language skills. Thus, finding a useful method to deal with this trouble and engage students in learning foreign languages is a necessary requirement to teachers.

In fact, the role of vocabulary in courses was emphasized by a lot of scholars such as Wilkins (1972) said that “without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.” Steven Stahl (2005) also mentioned that “vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world.” Or Harley (1996) showed that vocabulary knowledge was “a disarmingly simple term for a complex multidimensional phenomenon”. Therefore, Nation (2004) claimed that a teacher should deal with unknown words by adopting principles that reflected the nature of vocabulary learning. Vocabulary teaching and learning should not be a random, ad hoc, process but should be guided by well supported principles.

In ESP courses, ESP vocabulary learning is quite different from general English because Hutchinson, and Waters (1987) said that ESP was “an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning”. Therefore, if teachers would like to help their learners to deal with unknown words, it would be better to spend more time on vocabulary learning strategies rather than spending

time on individual words (Nation, 1988). Moreover, to meet students’ various demand for different fields, applying an effective teaching method was considered as a significant factor because when students mastered vocabulary more, it allowed them to understand as well as deal with specific requirements during learning process better.

2.2 Applying exercises in ESP vocabulary teaching

Providing a useful method in teaching vocabulary can lay an firm foundation for learning process as well as making a wide range of words familiar to students is essential. Because Manzo and Thomas (2006) said that “word learning can improve the capacity to learn” and “a rich vocabulary increases comprehension and, therefore, most all learning”. In addition, if students knew which words were more important to learn than others, or which words were most useful to know as a precondition to learning others, the task in classes became more manageable (Cobb & Horst, 2004).

In EFL classroom, foreign language vocabulary is classified into four common types including high-frequency words, academic words, technical words, and low-frequency words (Nation, 2001). In ESP courses, academic words and technical words are more significant because they help clarify the content of the subject as well as provide the bridge for students to develop other skills. Moreover, memorizing academic terms and its meanings is considered as the significant points in ESP learning process, therefore, the methods which have a quick impact

on students' retention and make students recognize a word as something to be learned are more preferable.

In fact, a wide variety of strategies are given to support students in learning process, using exercises to teach vocabulary is one of the preferable methods by a lot of teachers. Because this method supports low-level students in clarifying these items which need to learn and focusing them on the content of lessons. In addition, through exercises about the cooperative negotiation of meaning and a focus on form in a real-world context, students may understand the relationship between a word's form, meaning and usage. In addition to developing strategies which students need outside the classroom students are also facilitated for the acquisition and retention of the word (Ellis, 2003; Newton, 2001).

The definition of using exercises as tasks to teach ESP vocabulary for students was derived from the basic idea that students learnt a language by performing tasks. This method focused on the use of authentic language and asked students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. Richards and Rodgers (2001) mentioned that this method was an approach which based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. While Iranmehr, Erfani & Davari (2011) showed that teaching through tasks was an activity which involved the use of language but in which the focus was on the outcome of the activity rather than on the language used to achieve that outcome. In reality, there are some common kinds of exercises including matching, filling in the blank, unscrambling letter, word formation, and so on. For example, matching is one

type of tasks in which students are required to match the words with the suitable definition of the word. Filling in the blank is the type which students are required to fill in the blank with the correct answer or they can choose the answer from the given word. Unscrambling letter is also a common type which students have to unscramble letters of synonyms of the underlined and bold word in the sentences. Crossword puzzle is a form of exercises which students are given hints in the form of meaning of the word and a few letters of the answer for each word to find out the answer.

Using exercises to teach vocabulary has been proved to bring countless benefits for students in a lot of studies. Firstly, it is efficient in engaging students in real language use in the classroom. Richards and Rodgers (2001) said that "tasks provide both the input and the output processing necessary for language acquisition", students can have more learning motivation. Secondly, exercise activities are usually rich in language, as well as all the skills including reading, writing, listening and speaking; students' mastering also creates more encouragement and interest in learning process. Secondly, Nunan (2004) showed that using exercises as the major tool in teaching process was regarded as an important factor in syllabus design, classroom teaching and learner assessment. Moreover, lexical units include not only vocabulary but also phrases, sentence frames, collocations and prefabricated routines. Therefore, if students' minds are focused on the task, rather than on the language they are using, they may learn more effectively (Hasan, 2014). Finally, using exercises aims at supporting students

to develop implicit knowledge of the language, therefore, the learners can bear in their mind the form and the use of the target language. Moreover, thanks to using exercises to teach students, teachers can partly reduce the large amount of work in class, they focus on supporting and creating the favorable conditions for language learning more. The role of students in class is enhanced which encourages them to take part in learning process actively. A number of studies were carried out to illustrate about the efficacy of using exercises in teaching foreign language, for example, the research of Thanh and Huan (2012) about the effects of task-based language learning on motivating non-English majors to acquire vocabulary. The researcher concluded that more motivation for vocabulary learning was created and their lexical achievement was also improved after the experiment under task-based instructions. Sarani and Sahebi (2012) also investigated the teaching of vocabulary in ESP courses within the paradigm of task-based language teaching, concentrating on Persian literature students. The results showed that ESP learners who were taught vocabulary through task-based language teaching outperformed those learners who were taught vocabulary through traditional approach. The scholar Vosoughi and Mehdipour (2013) conducted a study about the effect of recognition tasks and production tasks on incidental vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL learners. Obviously, using exercises to teach vocabulary had a great effect on students, thus the author decided to conduct the research about the effect of using exercises to students' vocabulary for accounting majors at HPU.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

To carry out this study, the author decided to use a mixed method including questionnaire surveys, observation and tests to collect data for the study. Firstly, as Richards and Lockhart (1994) said that questionnaire was an efficient approach for gathering information about effective dimensions of teaching and learning; such as beliefs, attitudes, motivation, and preferences; enables a teacher to collect a large amount of information quickly, thus the author used a small survey with some questionnaires. Secondly, using observation method is considered as a useful technique in psychology researches which has the main purpose to observe students' response to vocabulary learning and the time students complete the task. At the same time, this method also supports teachers in getting a snapshot of specific characteristics about students' response that questionnaire surveys are unable to do. In general, all of the tools helped answer the research questions to check the effect of using exercises on ESP vocabulary learning.

3.1 Research setting and participants

The study was carried out in 7 weeks, from August to October in 2020, at Hai Phong University. The participants were non-English majors of the Faculty of Accounting and Finance, the administration of accounting class 3, course 19. There were 52 students chosen to take part in the study including 8 males and 44 females at pre-intermediate English level, and completed General English courses. They were compulsory to complete English for accounting subject to accumulate credits for their course at HPU. English for accounting

is a specific subject which specializes in proving the students with the professional knowledge relating to the accounting industry. Thanks to studying this subject, the students have ability to master reading comprehension skill, remember professional terms and develop other language skills in practical situations. There are 6 units used in this subject with different topics including the introduction of accounting; financial statements and ratios; tax accounting; auditing; management accounting and investment. The number of words used in each unit is various and has relationship each other. Besides, the textbook's structure is designed to consolidate the retention of words through exercises such as listing, ordering and sorting, problem solving, true-false, filling in the gap, matching, finding the words basing on the given explanations and so on. The students were introduced vocabulary of each unit then practiced through different exercises. They were observed in three weeks; week 1, week 3 and week 6.

3.2 Data collection instrument and procedure

The procedures for checking the efficacy of using exercises in teaching ESP vocabulary for accounting majors at HPU are specialized in different time. In the first week, the author announced to the students about the purpose of study and discovered more about their learning situation. From the second to the seventh week, the students experienced different task activities, they were also given a weekly test after finishing each lesson to evaluate their result. Each test included twenty questions with ten questions used to fill in the bracket and ten questions for

putting the words into the correct form. The students did the test in 15 minutes at the end of the lessons, then the teacher collected the test to mark the level of completion. During learning process, the author carried out observing students' reaction to given tasks with an observation list including the average time which they needed to finish the required task and their perception to activities. The students were randomly observed with different exercises in four different weeks. In the final week, the students were given a survey to evaluate about their perception to ESP vocabulary learning. The questionnaire survey with seven questions was also delivered to the students including information about the background opinion, efficacy of using exercises in ESP vocabulary, students' perception in learning process.

3.3. Findings of the research

This study aimed at checking the effectiveness of using exercises in ESP vocabulary teaching for accounting majors at Hai Phong University. The weekly tests were used to evaluate the changes in students' test scores after finishing each lesson. The following bar chart illustrates the result of students' test scores over six tests.

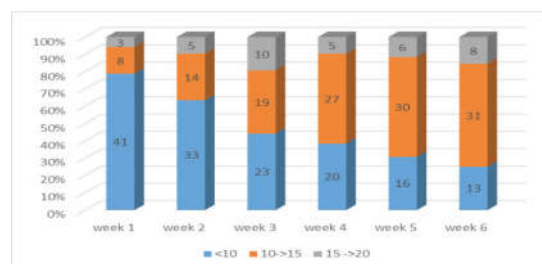


Chart 1. Students' test scores over six weeks

As we can see from the chart, students' test score has had the considerable change

over the period of six weeks. The number of students who got the correct answers, under 10 questions, had the quick drop from 41 to 13 in the final week. The number of students getting 10 to 15 correct questions increased significantly from 8 to 31 students and those doing correctly from 15 to 20 question also had a slight increase from 3 to 8 students. Obviously, student's achievement had an slight change when exercises were applied into teaching process. Besides, the results also presented that the students seemed to remember terms better when they had more opportunities to practice the words through exercises. The number of students who got the higher scores in tests had a stable increase over the time.

During the study, making observation to students' perception when using exercises was also done. The following table shows the observation's result.

Table 1. Observation result

Task	Number of students taking part in activity	Number of students completing a task before the required time	Number of students completing a task on time
<i>Activity 1-week 2</i>	44	5	17
<i>Activity 2-week 3</i>	47	8	24
<i>Activity 3-week 4</i>	48	9	28
<i>Activity 4-week 6</i>	50	9	33

From the observation table, the author found out that students were not at all interested in doing exercises, some students were reluctant to take part in these learning activities. In the first activity, there were eight students that did not take part in the activity, they only sat in their seat and pretended to do something when recognized teacher's observation. With the first activity, eight questions were given to students to complete and they had to do the task in 15 minutes. The result from the table showed that 17 students, accounting for nearly one-third of all students in the class, could complete exercises on time and surprisingly five students finished the task early. In the second week, the number of students who took part in the given activity had a slight increase to 47 students. With the similar time to do the required exercises, 24 students completed

the task on time and eight students could finish the task before the required time. In the third week, only four students did not concentrate on the given task including Duc Anh, Hieu, Phuong and Thuy Trang. In this week, nine students could implement the task before the required time while the number of students who finished the exercises on time also had a slight increase to 28 students, accounting for just over half of students in the class. In the final observation week, 33 students finished the task on time which nearly doubled the first observation. However, those who finished the exercises early remained unchanged. In general, almost all students who took part in doing the required exercises showed more confidence and interest in doing exercises comparing to the first week's observation. The students also showed the progress in completing the vocabulary

tasks in ESP lessons.

In addition, to help the author had a deep sight about students' perception toward using exercises to study ESP, a small survey was given to assess the effects of exercises in terms of interest expressed in the lesson as well as students' feeling to

using exercises in ESP vocabulary learning.

The following table will present the result of the survey, besides some acronyms in the table means that SSA= strongly agree; AA= agree; AD= disagree; SSD = strongly disagree.

Table 2. Survey about the effects of exercises on students' interest in the lesson

Content	SSA	AA	AD	SSD
(1) I tend to pay more attention to the lesson when the teacher gives different exercises to practice.	12	37	3	0
(2) I tend to interact with my classmates more when doing exercises.	18	33	1	0
(3) I tend to participate in class activities more confidently when the teacher gives different tasks.	17	32	3	0
(4) I tend to remember vocabulary better thanks to exposing to them frequently through different exercises.	9	37	5	0
(5) I find it easier to understand lessons thanks to remembering words better through task activities in lessons.	16	30	6	0
(6) Using exercises in English class activities to study vocabulary help me understand principles of word formation better.	15	32	3	2
(7) I am encouraged to study more and develop other skills thanks to doing exercise activities.	6	24	9	3

As we can see from the survey, most of the students agreed with the given statements. In particular, more than two-third of the students confessed that they paid more attention to the lessons when teachers gave different tasks to practice. While 12 students confessed their eagerness in ESP lessons but three students still disagreed with this idea. Relating to students' assessment to the interaction with my classmates when doing exercises, 33 students agreed and 18 others strongly agreed with the statement and only one student disagreed. Besides, students also

agreed that they participated in class activities more confidently when teachers gave out different exercises (32 students). Even one third of students strongly agreed with the idea and surprisingly three students disagreed with the statement. Remembering words better thanks to exposing to words frequently in different tasks was also approved by most of students, however, five students showed their disagreement. The opinion about understanding lessons better was also mostly approved while nearly one half student strongly agreed and there were still six disagreements with

the statement. Over a half of student said that they understood principles of using words better, 15 students strongly agreed with this statement, while there were 3 disagreements and 2 strong disagreements with the statement. Students also said that they were encouraged to study more and developed other skills when taking part in language lessons but there were still 3 disapprovals with this. In general, students showed a good perception to using exercises to ESP vocabulary learning.

3.4 Discussion

The findings of the study showed that using exercises to teach ESP vocabulary for accounting majors at HPU had positive effects on the ability to memorize vocabulary and enhanced students' perception to language learning. Over the period of six weeks, the students showed a positive improvement in lexical retention through the weekly tests. The students could remember ESP terms better and complete given tasks with more correct answers. At the same time, most of the students showed that they got better understanding about the lexical knowledge such as meaning, word formation, word order. Therefore, the students took part in lessons with more attention and interest, they also gradually improved their professional knowledge and skills in learning English language. The author also found out that the number of students spending less time to complete a task increased gradually which meant that their skills and lexical knowledge had considerable changes. In general, using exercises to drill the lexical knowledge brought to the positive changes to students' learning, therefore, teachers may consider applying this method in vocabulary teaching of ESP courses.

4. CONCLUSION

In general, vocabulary is considered as a basic factor in language learning process. In ESP courses, the role of vocabulary seems to be more important because the ESP courses aim at meeting different student's demand for their professional job. For accounting major students at HPU, because of the limitation in their English knowledge, especially vocabulary, students are prevented from getting a good achievement in learning process. Therefore, designing exercises to help students remember words better, have more interest and motivation is a necessary requirement. The result of the study showed that applying exercises in teaching vocabulary brought to positive changes for the students. The result of the study also proved the effectiveness of using exercises in improving students' lexical retention and developing other language skills. The students also showed that they had slight changes in the ability to complete an exercise, the results of exercises as well as students' perception to their learning. Hopefully, thanks to the improvements, students can partly change their English learning habits to get a better result in ESP lessons. At the same time, teachers can consider incorporating appropriate exercises in students learning process effectively.

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