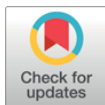


Improving reading skills and training: a study at the University of Khanh Hoa

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Abstract

ESP equips students with reading skills in order to succeed in their chosen fields. The use of translation activities to improve reading skills is an interesting approach. The current study provides insights by investigating students' needs and learning orientation. The planned experiment to assess the impact of translation activities on students' English reading skills provides empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the research methodology. By comparing the experimental and the control group, the authors can measure the success of the approach and identify areas for further refinement. Assessing student satisfaction and the benefits they perceive from the translation activities is essential for gauging the overall success of ESP classes. High levels of satisfaction indicate engagement and positive learning experience while students' perceptions of the benefits they gain can help promote the approach to other potential learners. The approach has implications for language learners at UKH and beyond.

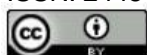
Keywords

reading skills; English for specific purposes; translation activities.

Aprimoramento das habilidades de leitura e formação: um estudo na Universidade de Khanh Hoa

Resumo

O ESP capacita os alunos com habilidades de leitura para que tenham sucesso em suas áreas de atuação. O uso de atividades de tradução para aprimorar as habilidades de leitura é uma abordagem interessante. O presente estudo fornece insights ao investigar as necessidades e a orientação de aprendizado dos alunos. O experimento planejado para avaliar o impacto das atividades de tradução nas habilidades de leitura em inglês dos alunos fornece evidências empíricas da eficácia da metodologia de pesquisa. Ao comparar o grupo experimental com o grupo de controle, os autores podem medir o sucesso da abordagem e identificar áreas que precisam ser aperfeiçoadas. Avaliar a satisfação dos alunos e os benefícios que eles percebem com as atividades de tradução é essencial para medir o sucesso geral das aulas de ESP. Altos níveis de satisfação indicam engajamento e experiência de aprendizado positiva, enquanto as percepções dos alunos sobre os benefícios que obtêm podem ajudar a promover a abordagem para outros alunos em potencial. A abordagem tem implicações para os alunos de idiomas do UKH e de outros países.



Palavras-chave

habilidades de leitura; inglês para fins específicos; atividades de tradução.

**Mejora de las competencias y la formación en lectura:
un estudio en la Universidad de Khanh Hoa****Resumen**

La ESP dota a los estudiantes de destrezas lectoras para tener éxito en los campos que elijan. El uso de actividades de traducción para mejorar las destrezas lectoras es un enfoque interesante. El presente estudio aporta información al investigar las necesidades y la orientación del aprendizaje de los estudiantes. El experimento planeado para evaluar el impacto de las actividades de traducción en las destrezas de lectura en inglés de los estudiantes proporciona pruebas empíricas de la eficacia de la metodología de investigación. Al comparar el grupo experimental y el de control, los autores pueden medir el éxito del planteamiento e identificar las áreas en las que se debe seguir perfeccionando. Evaluar la satisfacción de los estudiantes y los beneficios que perciben de las actividades de traducción es esencial para calibrar el éxito general de las clases de ESP. Los altos niveles de satisfacción indican compromiso y una experiencia de aprendizaje positiva, mientras que las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre los beneficios que obtienen pueden ayudar a promover el enfoque entre otros posibles alumnos. El enfoque tiene implicaciones para los estudiantes de idiomas en la UKH y fuera de ella.

Palabras clave

destrezas de lectura; inglés para fines específicos; actividades de traducción.

1 Introduction

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is taking place strongly in many countries around the world. This revolution will at a higher level accelerate the construction of “*the world is flat*” (Friedman, 2005), and again, to build that flat world must start from building a flat language which is English. Communication and the ability to read in English are therefore crucial and research on improving reading skills in ESP for students through translation activities is extremely urgent as literature shows (Mulyah; Aminatun, 2020; Nguyen, 2005; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2020; Toshpulatova, 2022). Understanding and proficiency in using ESP is an important factor for students to be able to find a job after graduation. In particular, ESP helps students apply the latest knowledge, technology and information in their field of study. In academia, English is the most popular language in the world and mastering ESP helps students have the ability to apply this important learning resource in their learning and research process. Translation activities not only help students master translation skills, but also provide ways to practice reading comprehension and interpreting skills in ESP, i.e. students

have the ability to accurately and flexibly understand and communicate the meaning of specialized texts. Ultimately, English reading skills for ESP through translation activities help students be confident and accurate in exchanging their information and ideas.

Recognizing the importance of ESP for students in universities and linguists around the world, researchers conducted research to meet the requirements (Ayachia, 2018; Marienko; Nosenko; Shyshkina, 2020). Along with this, designs and courses have been implemented on a large scale (Ai *et al.*, 2018; Asmali, 2018; Irshad; Anwar, 2018; Umar; Majeed, 2018; Wette, 2018; Yu; Liu, 2018). Subjects of ESP are studied in a variety of fields such as economics, information technology, medicine, philosophy, culture, arts, etc. and integrated into majors at universities, not separately taught as they were previously.

The diverse development of ESP has made it difficult for learners to acquire knowledge. Facing that situation, linguists must work and classify in a specific way to clarify its structure in order to apply it to teaching in the most effective way. Research has shown that the reasons for learners' difficulty in using ESP texts are lack of knowledge and reading strategies (Maniati; Haydari; Tazik, 2022; Roodbari *et al.*, 2022; Saidrasulova, 2023; Tamrin, 2023; Zairjanovich; Xalmurzayevna, 2022). In Vietnam, universities have paid greater attention to teaching and learning ESP and UKH is such a case. As an effort to overcome that situation, the authors conducted the research to understand the use of translation to teach reading comprehension to ESP students at UKH. To achieve the aim, surveys and interviews are employed to investigate the attitude of teachers and learners towards using translation activities to improve reading skills in ESP classes. The conceptual framework is based on the formula of Yamane Taro (1967) as follows:

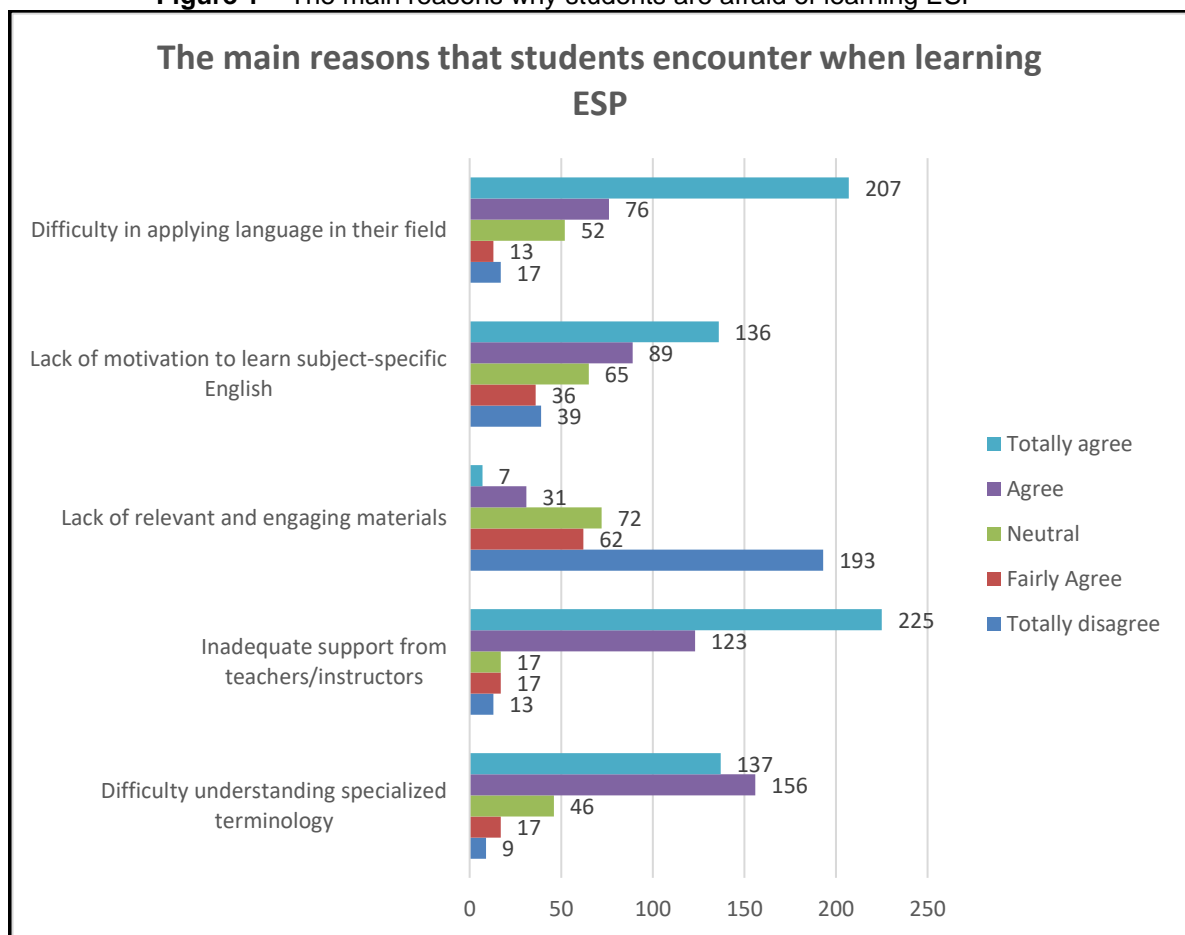
$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N \times e^2}$$

Where **n** represents the sample size, **N** represents the population, and **e** represents the sampling range error.

Usually the three most commonly used sampling range error are: ± 01 (1%), ± 0.05 (5%), ± 0.1 (10%), of which the most common is ± 0.05 .

Based on the above formula and the overall scale number of 3269 students of UKH, the minimum number of samples to be studied if the error $e = \pm 0.05$ will be 365 people. Initially, the authors conducted a pilot study including questionnaire items about the main reasons why students are afraid of learning ESP. The results obtained are as follows:

Figure 1 – The main reasons why students are afraid of learning ESP



Source: Authors (2023).

From the results, the majority of students are afraid to learn ESP. The main reasons were lack of background knowledge (98.9%), lack of reading strategy (77.5%) and weak specialized terms (72.1%). Moreover, according to literature, that students are afraid to learn ESP stems from poor reading skills, and translation activities are suggested to be a solution to the problem. Translation activities in English language teaching started from the Grammar Translation Method. This method is carried out in the form of using dialects to read and understand passages written in English. Through its development, the Grammar Translation Method has developed strongly and laid the foundation for foreign language teaching (Ahmadjonovna, 2022; Daud; Yasim; Munawir, 2022; Deng, 2023; Khamkaew, 2022; Pornwiriyaakit; Dandee, 2022). During the translation process, learners learn to understand new words and grammatical structures. The development of sound language, body language, and communicative language in teaching has made the Grammar Translation Method change since translation is a difficult activity for both learners but also for teachers. The same article, when translated, produces different results, which stems from vocabulary and understanding. Sticking to the translations makes the translated text technically forced. Others argue that translation is not only written but also verbal (House, 2006, 2014; Zohrevandi, 1994). All forms of research are aimed at improving learners' communication competencies (Akhmedova *et al.*, 2022; Ibragimjonovna, 2022; Mamajanova, 2022; Sabirjanovna, 2022; Tursunovich, 2023). Accordingly, the researchers have shown that improving translation for learners can be in a variety of ways and of course, each objective will have its own teaching method, and this one teaching method cannot be used for all objectives.

In recent years, translation has therefore been of special interest to administrators, teachers and scientists. The use of translation produces results in accordance with the dialect and domain that has been promoted. Translation tools and teaching methods have been clearly improved. It is this innovation that has created a huge amount of resources to make translation easier and easier. Thus, whether learning ESP is really easy or not depends on students' reading skills enhanced by translation activities, and UKH is such a case. The choice of UKH is attributed to the following reasons: (1) UKH has a well developed English training program; (2) Nha Trang as a metropolitan city provides students with a practical learning environment to improve their language skills; (3) UKH is famous for its generations of excellent lecturers in the field of

ESP; and (4) that the authors are currently heads of foreign language departments makes the research convenient.

1.1 Research questions

The research aims to evaluate the use of translation to improve reading skills in ESP classes. Specifically, the authors attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How does translation affect the improvement of reading skills among ESP students at UKH?

RQ2: What are the challenges that students face in improving reading skills through translation at UKH?

1.2 Theoretical basis

It can be seen that the study of how translation activities affects students' ability to read in ESP classes has been of interest to many researchers in many aspects, which helps better understand translation methods and technologies, and thereby enhances translation capabilities (Dew *et al.*, 2018; Li; Wang, M.; Wang, J., 2021; Lin *et al.*, 2021; Moorkens *et al.*, 2021; Lin *et al.*, 2021; Moorkens *et al.*, 2021). Conducting surveys to assess such situations has also been of great interest to educators. The studies show that mastering the principles and techniques of translation helps students enhance their ability to express themselves accurately and creatively in translating specialized English texts. The study of translation activities provides students with an insight into the specialized language of English. Researchers also agree that, when mastering professional contexts and terminology through translation, students are better able to read and interpret specialized literature and on the other hand they suggest that an increase in reading skills in various forms will help learners translate better (Faridah; Setyaningrum; Falakha, 2022; Imsa-Ard, 2022; Maruf; Anjely, 2020; Safitri; Marhaban; Erdiana, 2022). By understanding sentences, phrases and contexts translated from English into the target language, students can apply this knowledge to reading and comprehending specialized texts quickly and accurately.

In terms of reading comprehension in ESP classes, literature stresses the necessity of Linguistic Aspect Analysis in the process of reading ESP, which is started from specialized linguistic aspects (Adilbayeva *et al.*, 2022; Pahamzah; Syafrizal; Nurbaeti, 2022; Stevani; Tarigan, 2022, 2023; Rets *et al.*, 2022). Accordingly, the specialized language often contains many special terms, words and grammatical structures. Such analysis of specialized linguistic aspects helps readers understand the context, meaning of terms and words. Understanding the context of the text helps readers make connections between ideas, information, and components of the text. Analysis of the specialized linguistic aspects also helps readers understand the author's intent and purpose when writing the text. Sentence structure, word choice, and other linguistic elements can reveal an author's intentions, such as presenting information, persuading, conveying an opinion, or describing the process. Learning the structure and logic of the text helps make readers recognize the sentence relationships, grammatical links, semantics, and parts of the text that are organized to communicate. The recognition of grammatical, lexical and contextual structures helps to avoid misunderstandings or mistakes in the process of reading comprehension and thus effectively express the meaning of specialized texts.

In addition, there are also many studies focusing on assessing the role of the learning and research environment in improving reading skills in ESP classes, such as analyzing students' challenges and difficulties in improving reading skills through translation activities; suggesting methods and strategies to improve the effectiveness of translation in improving reading skills for ESP, etc. ESP is believed to a part of a certain field, including problems, facts, closely related works done in the English language. ESP is thus the teaching process in which the content and purpose of the course are fixed by the specific needs of a particular group of learners.

Obviously, ESP is different from General English (GE) (Arias-Contreras; Moore, 2022; Armea *et al.*, 2022; Dolba, 2022; Moradimokhles; Hwang, 2022; Rajprasit, 2023). According the authors, GE is a term for English used in ordinary situations. It is a common form of English and is widely used in everyday communication, writing and reading ordinary texts, and in non-technical or non-special situations. It is often used in everyday life, in exchanging information, communicating with others, engaging in casual conversations, and performing other common activities. Unlike ESP, GE does not focus

on the terminology or technical context of a particular field such as engineering, medicine, law, economics, or science. Instead, GE focuses on conveying meaning and communicating in common situations that people encounter on a daily basis. To learn ESP, learners must have a basic foundation in English. Learning ESP is to perform a professional skill set and perform specific job-related functions. While listening, reading, speaking and writing skills are equally emphasized in a GE class, in ESP skills are emphasized differently to meet the learner's needs and their future job requirements.

In terms of the role of translation in ESP classes, literature has given an overview of the reality that translation helps learners improve their English language learning by understanding common mistakes and difficulties in the translation process. Besides, finding causal factors helps learners evaluate the quality of the translation and improve their translation skills. The study of translation helps students apply their translation knowledge and skills to their field of study and work. Students can participate in translation projects, translate specialized documents, or work in their field of interest or any related field. It is clear that the study of translation activities and how to provide knowledge and skills about translation will help ESP students develop comprehensively.

So far, translation has existed many different definitions. The reason for the emergence of these different views stems from research prism (Denoncourt, 2022; Pižorn; Babuder, 2022; Razpotnik; Lesar; Peček, 2022; Warming, 2022). Translation is the production in the receiving language of natural equivalence closest to the source language message (which implies both meaning and style) (Farahsani; Harmanto; Nimashita, 2023; Ginting, 2022; Joseph, 2022; Mannahali; Azizah, 2022). Translation means rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the writer intended the text (Al-Awawdeh, 2022; Lahmar; Metouchi, 2022; Popova; Morhun, 2023; Purba; Setiasari, 2022). In other perspectives, translation is seen as re-codification (Canepari, 2022; Gábriš, 2022; Olteanu, 2022) to share perspectives in the same field. Translation is the process of converting meaning from one language to another.

2 Methodology

Before conducting the investigation, the authors conducted an initial survey (Phase 1) in October 2021 with 365 students to understand the situation as the basis for defining research objectives and suggesting solutions.

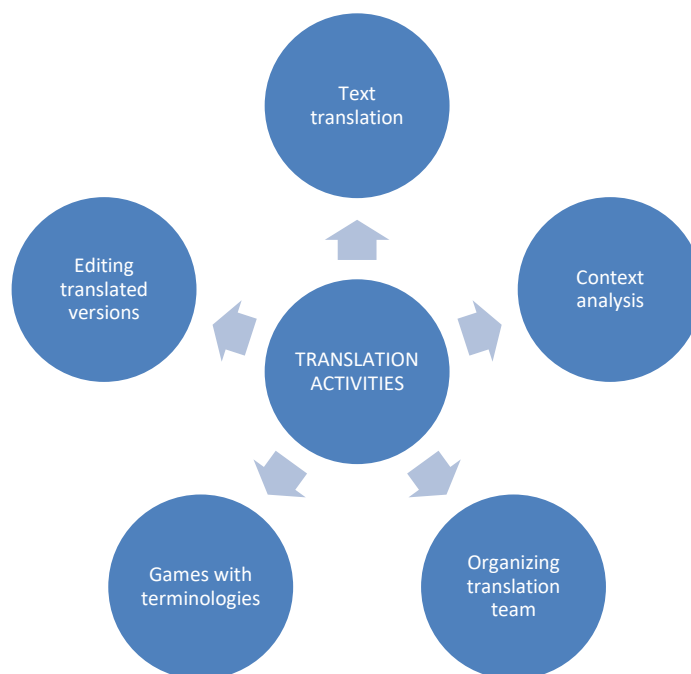
In Phase 2, translation activities designed in the syllabus were delivered to 365 students in ESP classes at UKH. Designing translation activities adhere to the required standards so as to achieve the expected the program learning outcomes. At UKH, ESP programmes are tailored to translation activities directly related to students' field of interest. Rubrics are aimed at enhancing both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Reading and translating specialized texts helps learners better understand contexts and terminologies in their field, thereby understand and eventually use ESP accurately and effectively. The practice of translating specialized texts helps learners develop their ability to grasp contexts and contents of texts, express meaning, and use correct terminologies of the field. Additionally, students are exposed to real-world communicative situations in which they work in groups, discuss and exchange ideas so as to develop communication and collaboration skills. Ultimately, the the use of translation activities help students improve reading skills and thus learn ESP effectively. Another survey was used to collect the data from the students to evaluate the effectiveness of translation activities on improving English reading skills. After all, a culminating survey was conducted in May 2023, which was the time when the authors completed the experiment, to understand challenges that students face in improving reading skills through translation activities.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Results

RQ1: During the experiment, the five translation activities below were used:

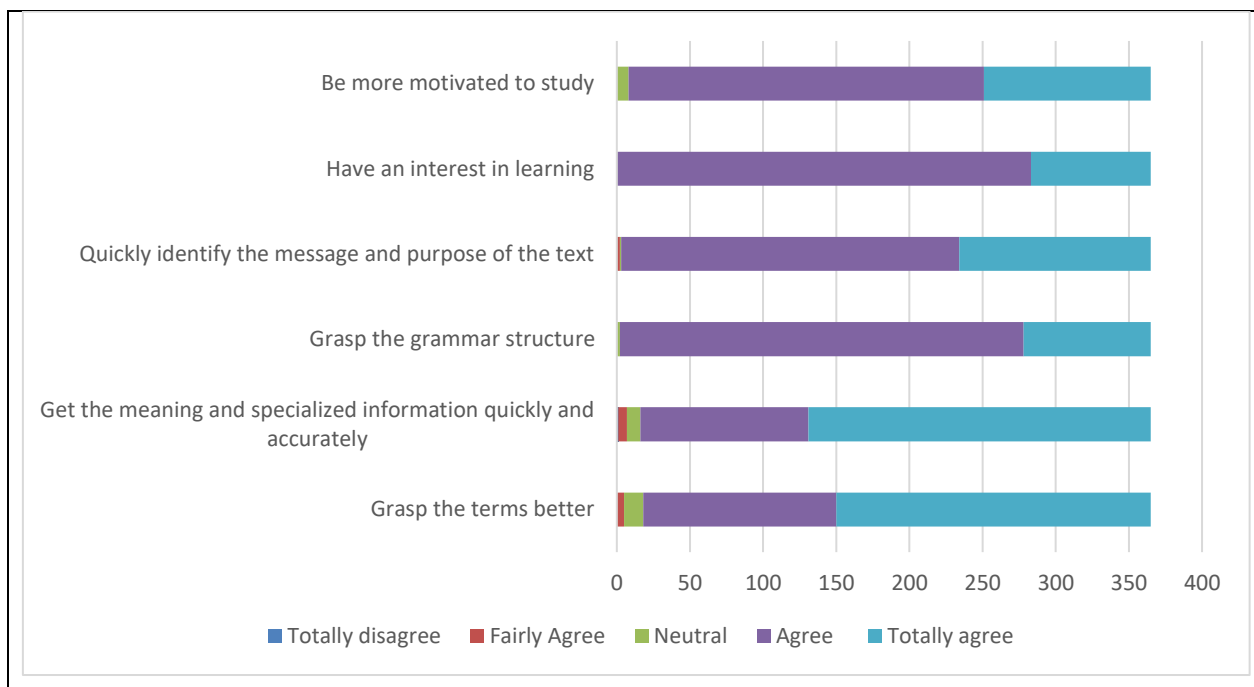
Figure 2 – The five translation activities



Source: Authors (2023).

The survey of the translation activities showed that 26.3% of students said that teachers use 'text translation' activities in the process of teaching ESP; 10.1% of students said that teachers use 'context analysis' in teaching ESP; 30.7% of students said that teachers use 'organizing translation team' in teaching ESP; 14.5% of students said that teachers use 'games with terminologies' in teaching ESP; 18.4% of students said that teachers use 'editing translated versions' in teaching ESP. The data showed that part of students agree on the use of the five translation activities in the teaching of ESP. This suggests that these activities have the potential to help students improve their reading skills and deepen their understanding of specialized language and terminology. The data also showed the effects of the translation activities as follows:

Figure 3 – The effects of the translation activities



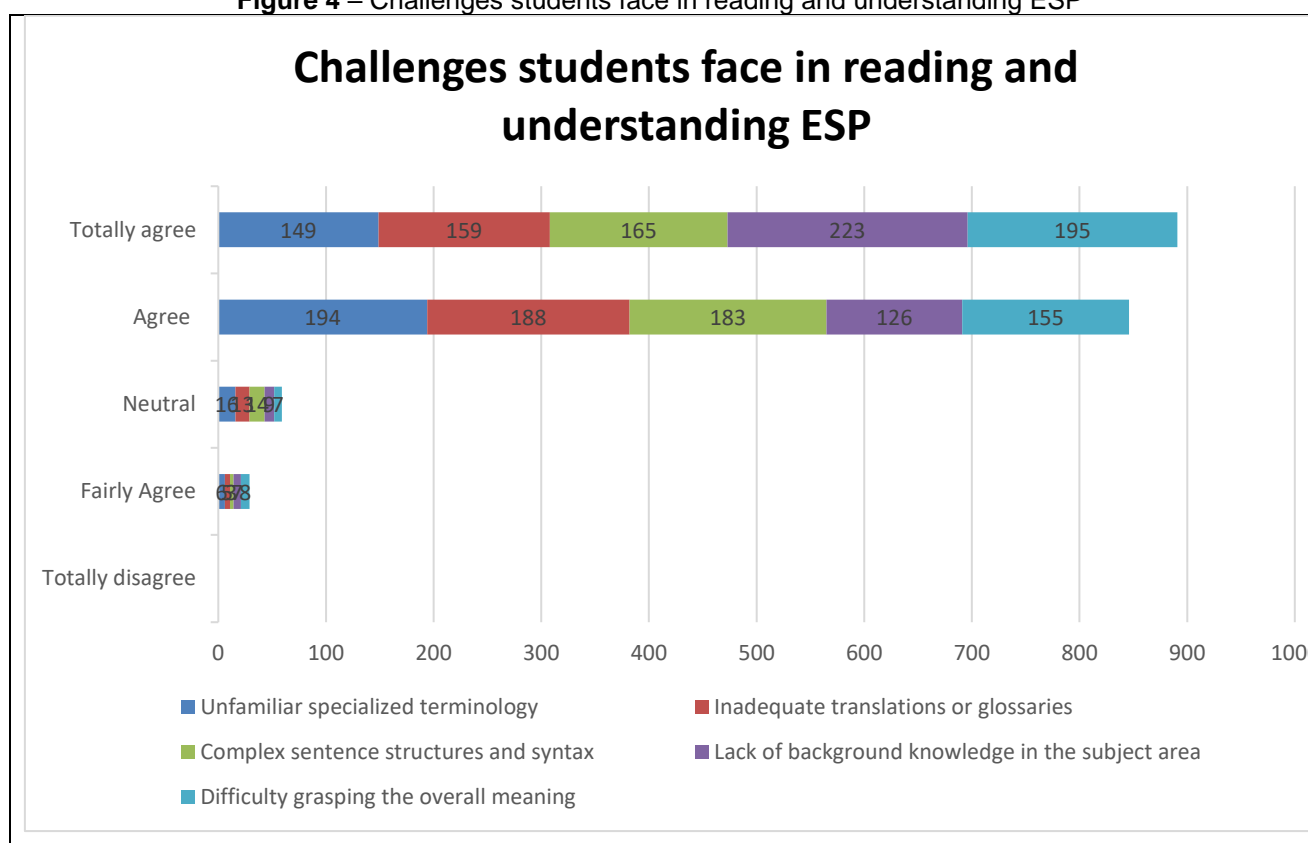
Source: Authors (2023).

Understanding the terms better, 1.4% agreed little, 3.6% were neutral, 36.2% agreed a lot, 58.9% strongly agreed; Understanding the meaning and specialized information quickly and accurately, 0.3% strongly disagreed, 1.6% agreed little, 2.5% neutral, 31.5% agreed much, 64.1% completely agreed; Understanding the grammatical structure, 0.5% are neutral, 75.6% agree a lot, 23.8% strongly agree; Quickly identify the message and purpose of the text, 0.5% agree little, 0.3% neutral, 63.3% agree much, 35.9% strongly agree; Having an interest in learning, 77.5% strongly agreed, 22.5% strongly agreed; More motivated, 2.2% were neutral, 66.6% strongly agreed, 31.2% strongly agreed. The data showed that a majority of students agree and completely agree that the translation activities in the ESP reading lesson help them grasp specialized terms, meanings and information, grammatical structures more effectively than in previous forms.

RQ2, what challenges do you face in reading and understanding ESP?, is answered and examined by the authors after conducting the experiment. The results were as follows: Difficulty accessing specialized terms and languages in English texts, agreeing with less than 06 students, neutral 16 students, agreeing with many 214 students, fully agreeing with 129 students; Difficulties in explaining the meaning and specialized information from English to Vietnamese have agreed with at least 05

students, neutral 13 students, agreed with many 193 students, fully agreed with 154 students; Difficulty in understanding sentence structure and English grammar in texts, agree less than 03 students, neutral 14 students, agree many 186 students, fully agree 162 students; The main objective, message and purpose of the ESP texts are not defined, agree at least 07 students, neutral 9 students, agree more than 125 students, fully agree 129 students; The difficulty in maintaining the accuracy and coherence of the specialized content agreed with less than 08 students, neutral 07 students, agreed with many 163 students, fully agreed with 187 students.

Figure 4 – Challenges students face in reading and understanding ESP



Source: Authors (2023).

The data showed that some students have difficulties in understanding and interpreting specialized terms and language, understanding English sentence structure and grammar, identifying the main idea and message of the text, and maintaining the accuracy and coherence of specialized content. This outlines strengths and weaknesses in improving reading skills for ESP through translation and provides a basis for developing solutions.

4 Discussions

The research shows the role of the lecturers in creatively designing translation activities to improve reading skills for ESP students. The effectiveness of the translation activities is reflected in the survey results, which demonstrates that students appreciate translation activities in ESP reading lessons.

During the experiment, the authors placed the learner at the center and promoted their autonomy. Like many previous research findings, the findings at UKH have also proven that translation activities have undisputed values if used appropriately and effectively.

The research also shows that, in order to improve reading skills for students, it is necessary to anticipate possible challenges. Specialized languages have many technical terms that are difficult to understand. Students need to master these terms to understand the specialized content. Sentence structure and grammar in specialized texts can be complex and confusing. Students need to have a solid knowledge of grammar and sentence structure to explain and understand the meaning of sentences in specialized contexts. Sometimes students may have difficulty understanding professional concepts and theories presented in the ESP text. This requires students to have the basic knowledge of their specialized field to be able to better understand and apply the professional content. Recognizing and anticipating these challenges helps students prepare appropriate psychology and learning methods. In addition, lecturers can also provide appropriate guidance and learning materials to help students overcome challenges and develop reading skills effectively.

It should be affirmed that not all translation activities used by lecturers for teaching ESP are suitable for all students. ESP learners may have different levels of English language proficiency. For those with a high level, using translation may not be necessary and they may want to focus on reading and understanding directly in English. Meanwhile, beginners to ESP can take advantage of translation to better understand specialized content and terminology. In general, every learner of ESP has different learning goals and needs. For learners who want to develop their reading skills and use ESP confidently, reading and comprehension directly in English is the most effective way.

However, for those who want to quickly grasp specialized content and terminology, using translation can be a useful aid.

5 Final considerations

It can be affirmed that English in general and ESP in particular is one of the important tools for human integration. Translation plays an important role in developing students' reading skills. The research has shown that translation helps students access ESP, enhance their understanding of the specialized language and terminology and furthermore develop communication and teamwork skills.

However, the application of translation activities is not suitable for all students. Each student has their own level of English language proficiency, learning goals and learning styles. Sometimes, the use of translation can make students dependent on translation and not develop the ability to read directly in English. At the same time, the use of specialized language and terminology can also be difficult for students. Therefore, teachers need to ask questions, survey, and listen to students' opinions to understand learning needs, especially challenges, for appropriate orientation. This helps students develop confidence and willingness to learn ESP. It is necessary to select appropriate translation activities to meet the diverse needs and learning abilities of learners. The study is useful to some extent, but its application needs to be deliberate and flexible enough. It is necessary to apply learner-centeredness with appropriate teaching methods for each subject to encourage students so that they are confident and willing to learn ESP.

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