

## *Original Paper*

# Challenges in ESP Vocabulary Acquisition: A Study of Vietnamese Non-English Majors

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### ***Abstract***

*This study investigates the challenges encountered by Vietnamese non-English major university students in their pursuit of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) vocabulary proficiency. Employing a survey-based research methodology, the study collects data from a representative sample of students, with a primary focus on identifying the key difficulties experienced during ESP vocabulary acquisition. The findings reveal significant obstacles in the process, including limited exposure to ESP terminology, difficulties in comprehending and retaining specialized terms, as well as a lack of practical application opportunities. These results emphasize the critical need for tailored teaching strategies and resources to enhance ESP vocabulary learning for non-English majors. Furthermore, the implications of this study extend to language teaching practices, highlighting the necessity for curriculum adjustments that better align with the specific requirements of these learners within the Vietnamese educational context.*

### ***Keywords***

*ESP vocabulary, non-English majors, vocabulary acquisition, Vietnamese students, language learning challenges*

## **1. Introduction**

In today's globalized world, proficiency in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) vocabulary holds immense significance, particularly for non-English major students in Vietnam. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by shedding light on the unique challenges they encounter when acquiring ESP vocabulary, a skill crucial for success in their respective academic and professional domains. ESP vocabulary, characterized by its technical and context-specific nature, sets itself apart from general English, presenting its own set of learning complexities.

The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on the challenges faced by Vietnamese

non-English major students in the acquisition of ESP vocabulary. While previous studies have examined language learning difficulties, few have delved deeply into the intricacies of ESP vocabulary acquisition in this context. This study strives to bridge this gap in the literature.

Furthermore, our research goes beyond the surface-level examination of challenges. It aims to identify the root causes and implications of these difficulties, providing a comprehensive understanding of the learning process. This depth of analysis sets our study apart from others that may only scratch the surface of the issues faced by non-English majors in ESP vocabulary acquisition.

The research objectives encompass the identification of key difficulties, the evaluation of current teaching methodologies, and the proposal of effective learning strategies. By exploring the underlying factors and their consequences, our study offers a nuanced perspective that contributes significantly to the field of language education.

Additionally, the study's implications extend to the Vietnamese educational context, where ESP vocabulary instruction for non-English majors is an emerging area. The need for tailored teaching strategies and locally-relevant studies is more pressing than ever, and our research aims to address this need.

In summary, the novelty of this study lies in its in-depth examination of ESP vocabulary acquisition challenges among Vietnamese non-English major students, its exploration of underlying factors, and its implications for language education within the Vietnamese context. The research objectives and methodology chosen for this study reflect our commitment to providing valuable insights and pragmatic recommendations that can reshape the teaching of ESP vocabulary, thereby improving language proficiency and aligning with the specific academic and career aspirations of non-English major students in Vietnam.

Furthermore, this introduction provides insight into the context of ESP in Vietnam, emphasizing its growing significance in the country's globalized economy. It underscores the critical necessity for non-English majors to acquire ESP vocabulary, bridging the divide between general English proficiency and the specialized demands of fields such as business, technology, and medicine.

## **2. Methodology**

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to comprehensively investigate the challenges associated with ESP vocabulary acquisition. The primary data collection tool consisted of a detailed questionnaire distributed to a sample of Vietnamese non-English major university students. This survey aimed to assess their experiences and difficulties in learning ESP vocabulary, covering aspects such as the frequency of exposure, challenges in retention, and difficulties in practical application.

In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a select group of participants. These interviews provided deeper insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of students regarding ESP vocabulary acquisition. The qualitative data obtained from these interviews

complemented the survey findings, offering a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced. The study also incorporated an analysis of the existing teaching materials and curriculum designs used in Vietnamese universities for ESP instruction. This analysis aided in identifying potential gaps and areas for improvement in the current educational approaches.

The data analysis process encompassed both statistical methods for analyzing the survey responses and thematic analysis for examining the qualitative interview data. The integration of these methodologies ensured a comprehensive analysis, providing a holistic view of the challenges and laying the foundation for informed recommendations to enhance ESP vocabulary teaching practices in Vietnam.

For the quantitative research design, we engaged 200 third-year non-English major students from various departments at the Trade Union University as participants. The data collection was meticulously executed through a structured questionnaire specifically adapted and validated for this study, ensuring its contextual relevance and accuracy. This questionnaire aimed to collect detailed insights into the students' experiences and challenges in learning ESP vocabulary.

Ethical considerations were of paramount importance throughout the data collection process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity and confidentiality were rigorously maintained throughout the study. The systematic approach to data collection was designed to facilitate participant understanding and engagement.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software, employing various descriptive statistical methods such as frequency analysis, mean scores, and standard deviation calculations. These methods were selected for their effectiveness in identifying patterns and trends within the data, thus providing a clear understanding of the various challenges faced by students in acquiring ESP vocabulary.

To ensure methodological rigor, careful attention was given to the survey's design, the determination of the sample size, and the selection of statistical methods for data analysis. This comprehensive approach aimed to enhance the reliability and validity of the study's findings.

The methodology section concludes by acknowledging potential limitations inherent in the study's design, including biases in self-reported data and the constraints of a quantitative approach. Despite these limitations, the study adhered to the highest ethical standards in educational research, ensuring the responsible and respectful treatment of participant information and data privacy. This methodological framework provided a solid basis for understanding the challenges associated with ESP vocabulary acquisition among non-English major students, offering valuable insights for future research and educational practices.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The findings of this study illuminate significant challenges in ESP vocabulary acquisition among Vietnamese non-English majors. The majority of survey respondents reported limited exposure to ESP terms, with many grappling with understanding and retaining these specialized terms. Additionally, the lack of practical application opportunities in their learning environment emerged as a key hindrance,

preventing the effective use of ESP vocabulary in real-world contexts.

Statistical analysis of the survey data quantitatively underscored these challenges, while thematic analysis of interview responses provided qualitative insights. Students expressed a desire for more interactive and context-driven learning methods, indicating that current teaching approaches may not adequately address their learning needs.

### *3.1 Presentation of key Findings*

This section presents the key findings from the survey conducted among non-English major students at Trade Union University, shedding light on the challenges they encounter in acquiring ESP vocabulary. These challenges encompass pronunciation difficulties, memorization challenges, grammatical complexities, and difficulties in contextualizing ESP vocabulary within their specific fields of study.

Beyond pronunciation, memorization, and grammar complexities, the survey results also indicated that students faced issues in applying ESP vocabulary in practical situations, highlighting a gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. Furthermore, the lack of adequate exposure to ESP vocabulary in authentic contexts was emphasized, underscoring the need for more immersive and applied learning experiences.

### *3.2 Comparison with Existing Literature*

The challenges identified in ESP vocabulary acquisition in this study align with existing literature. Previous research has also noted pronunciation difficulties, particularly in non-native English contexts. Similarly, the struggle with memorizing meanings and grappling with grammar complexities is consistent with studies indicating that learners often find ESP terms abstract and challenging to integrate into their language framework. However, this study goes beyond existing literature by emphasizing practical application challenges and the lack of exposure in authentic contexts, which are less frequently discussed in similar studies.

These findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of ESP vocabulary acquisition, particularly in the Vietnamese context, and suggest areas for further exploration and curriculum development in language education.

### *3.3 Discussion of Significance*

The findings of this study on ESP vocabulary learning among non-English majors in Vietnam hold significant implications as they reveal specific barriers impacting students' language competency and academic performance. The identified challenges in pronunciation, memorization, grammar complexities, and practical application underscore critical areas in ESP education that require attention. These findings emphasize the need for a more integrated approach to teaching ESP vocabulary, one that encompasses not only linguistic aspects but also practical application in specific professional contexts. Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving students' overall language competency and ensuring their academic success, particularly in a globalized academic and professional environment where specialized English proficiency is increasingly crucial.

It is essential to recognize their potential impact on curriculum design and teaching methodologies in

Vietnam. The challenges identified in ESP vocabulary acquisition indicate a gap between current educational practices and the specific needs of non-English majors. Enhancing language competency in these areas is not only essential for academic success but also for the future professional abilities of these students in a competitive global market.

This study thus calls for a reevaluation of teaching strategies, emphasizing more practical, context-driven approaches to ESP vocabulary learning. Aligning ESP education with real-world applications can significantly enhance both immediate academic performance and long-term professional prospects for Vietnamese non-English major students.

### *3.4 Potential Explanations*

The difficulties encountered by students in ESP vocabulary acquisition can be attributed to several factors. Educational practices in Vietnam often prioritize rote learning, which may not be effective for ESP vocabulary that requires contextual understanding. The curriculum design might not adequately integrate ESP vocabulary with practical applications, limiting students' opportunities to use and understand these terms in relevant situations. Additionally, the broader context of English language learning in Vietnam, which traditionally focuses more on general English rather than specialized vocabularies, may contribute to the challenges faced by non-English majors in mastering ESP terms.

These factors collectively highlight the need for pedagogical reforms that address the specific learning needs of students in ESP courses. Furthermore, the broader educational context in Vietnam may not adequately prepare students for the specific demands of ESP vocabulary. This includes limited exposure to English in everyday settings and insufficient emphasis on language use in specific professional or academic contexts. Such educational environments can hinder the development of necessary skills for effective ESP vocabulary acquisition.

To address these challenges, a more dynamic and contextual approach to English language teaching, focusing on real-life applications and interactive learning methods, could be beneficial. This approach would help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical language use, enhancing students' proficiency in ESP vocabulary.

### *3.5 Implications for Teaching and Learning*

The findings of this study suggest the need for innovative teaching methods and curriculum development in ESP courses. Strategies should include context-based learning, where vocabulary is taught through real-life scenarios and professional simulations. Additionally, integrating multimedia and technology can aid in improving pronunciation and understanding of complex terms. Collaborative learning methods, such as group projects and discussions, could also be beneficial for practical application of ESP vocabulary.

To further address the teaching and learning implications, a focus on personalized learning experiences and feedback mechanisms is crucial. Implementing differentiated instruction to cater to varied learning styles and levels of proficiency can make ESP vocabulary learning more effective. Additionally, regular assessments and feedback can help monitor progress and address individual challenges promptly. The

incorporation of cultural and contextual elements relevant to the students' fields of study in the teaching materials can also enhance their engagement and understanding. Emphasizing interactive and communicative activities will encourage practical use and deeper comprehension of ESP vocabulary.

The findings underscore the complexity of ESP vocabulary acquisition for Vietnamese non-English majors. The limited exposure and practical application opportunities suggest a gap in the current ESP teaching methodology. This aligns with existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of contextual and immersive learning experiences in vocabulary acquisition.

The study also highlights the potential benefits of curriculum adjustments and innovative teaching strategies, such as incorporating real-world scenarios and ESP-specific language tasks into the learning process. These approaches could enhance engagement and retention, making ESP vocabulary learning more effective and relevant for students.

Moreover, the research points to the need for a collaborative effort between language educators and subject matter experts to develop ESP materials that are both linguistically appropriate and contextually relevant. Such collaboration could lead to the creation of more effective ESP learning resources, tailored to the specific needs of Vietnamese non-English majors.

In conclusion, the results and discussion indicate that addressing the identified challenges requires a multifaceted approach, involving curriculum redesign, teaching methodology enhancements, and the development of targeted ESP learning materials.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research on ESP vocabulary acquisition among Vietnamese non-English majors at Trade Union University provides a comprehensive insight into the significant challenges these students face in their quest for English language proficiency. Through thorough examination and analysis, this study has unveiled a complex web of obstacles hindering their language learning journey, encompassing issues such as pronunciation difficulties, struggles with memorization, intricate grammatical nuances, and the application of ESP vocabulary in practical contexts. Moreover, this research contributes significantly to the existing literature by emphasizing the crucial aspects of practical application and contextual learning, which have been relatively understudied in previous investigations.

The implications derived from this study resonate strongly within the educational landscape, calling for a paradigm shift in teaching methodologies and curriculum development tailored to non-English major students. It underscores the urgent need for innovative pedagogical approaches that prioritize real-life applications and interactive learning experiences. Confronting these formidable challenges head-on is essential to enhance the language competency of students, equipping them with the skills needed to excel both academically and professionally.

However, it is important to acknowledge the inherent limitations of this study. The reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, and there is room for future research to delve deeper into

this critical domain. Subsequent studies could investigate the effectiveness of various teaching methodologies, track the long-term impact of improved ESP vocabulary acquisition, or conduct comparative analyses in diverse contexts, thus enriching the body of knowledge in this field.

Ultimately, this study serves as a clarion call for pedagogical reforms in the realm of English language education in Vietnam. It champions context-driven English language teaching, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical language application. As educators and policymakers embark on the path of educational reform, they must heed the insights gained from this research to better prepare Vietnamese non-English majors for a future enriched by English language proficiency and the opportunities it brings. In doing so, they will unlock the full potential of these students, facilitating their success in an increasingly interconnected global world.

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