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Research Article

Intrinsic Influences on Student Achievement in English for Specific Purposes (ESP): An Empirical Study in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a crucial role in the economic globalization in Vietnam, and how to maximize the ESP learning outcomes is a big question for educational institutions. As an answer to that question, factors affecting ESP academic performance have become a buzzword in various studies. The main objective of the paper is to evaluate the intrinsic elements that come from students themselves, including autonomy, learning strategy, motivation, attitude, English for communication, specialized vocabulary and specialized knowledge. The research was carried out at several universities majoring in economics and business in Hanoi, Vietnam. The indicators are categorized into two groups, namely Psychology–Cognition and Specialized Knowlege. The results revealed that the factor group of Specialized Knowledge has a bigger impact than Psychology–Cognition. The findings would be helpful for ESP researchers, decision-makers, curriculum developers, instructors and students.

Keywords: Academic achievement, internal factors, ESP teaching, specialized knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

English opens the door to the outer world, which helps generate career development opportunities, develop thinking and learning abilities. It is shown that although English is ranked after Chinese and Spanish in terms of the number of users worldwide, it is still considered the most popular language in the world. From a global perspective, there are nearly two billion people speaking English, and the official language of 45 countries is English. More than 70% of emails in the world are written or sent in English. 60% of radio programs in the world are broadcast in English. International conferences use English as the first common language, and it is also one of the official working languages of the United Nations.

Not only English for communication, but people also need to have specific English knowledge for each profession within the economy. Therefore, teaching and learning ESP increasingly demonstrates its important role.

For universities of economics and businesses in Vietnam, students who are good at English take an advantage in the field with numerous career opportunities. Graduates from these schools, in addition to specialized knowledge, are capable of using English in business correspondence, international conference and business meetings. Therefore, not only specialized subjects, but English is also a subject that universities of economics and businesses in Vietnam always focus on.

The study will provide a new perspective on how students' intrinsic factors impact on their learning outcome in ESP. Theoretical depth combined with quantitative research methods brings about fundamental and comprehensive results. One of the advantages of quantitative analysis is that it allows for changes in the perception of theoretical perspectives that can be modified and improved through practical quantitative evaluation activities, thereby promoting theoretical development. This is the novelty and theoretical contribution of the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Learning outcomes

2.1.1. Definition of learning outcomes

The term learning outcomes originates from outcomes-based education, a structured educational model that involves the clear and specific identification, declaration, and assessment of student learning (Andrich, 2002).

Allen and Friedman (2010) emphasize three essential aspects of learning outcomes include cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects to prepare learners for social work and professional life.

Learning outcomes are also defined as a formal statement of what students are expected to learn in a given course. Learning outcome statements should address the specific knowledge, practical skills, areas of professional development, attitudes, higher-order thinking skills, etc. that course implementers expect students to develop, learn, or master in a given course (Suskie, 2004).

Nguyen Thi Thu An et.al. (2016) has shown that students' learning outcomes reflect their learning and training process at university, and it also directly affects students' ability to find jobs, grasp business opportunities, promotion prospects, and postgraduate study in the future.

2.1.2. Learning outcomes and the stakeholders

Learning outcomes are important indicators of achievement in an academic course/program. Learning outcomes provide a clear idea of what a learner can achieve by taking a course/program. Regardless of the type of course, every course must be listed and written before the course begins to ensure that the course is well-designed. Based on the stated learning outcomes, the teaching environment, classroom activities, and assessment tools must be designed appropriately to conduct and complete the course successfully (Mahajan and Singh, 2017).

Jayanthi et al. (2014) argued that academic success of students affects their self-esteem, motivation and persistence; conversely, a failure in academic performance can lead to a reduction in the student's chances of pursuing a higher degree and increase the cost of education. For lecturers, student performance provides feedback that informs them of the appropriate strategies to be used in their teaching. Therefore, performance also helps course implementers avoid additional teaching by saving their time (Mahajan and Singh, 2017).

The assessment of student learning outcomes is important because it reflects the effectiveness of the institution (Hou, 2010) and is a benchmark for higher education institutions (Anderson et al., 2005). Indeed, this assessment reflects the essential elements for improving the quality of the university (Scott, 2011). Therefore, learning outcomes provide favorable conditions for measurement and help the measurement methods work effectively. The outputs help the accrediting body to evaluate whether the course/program meets the mission and goals of the institution where it is taught and to decide whether the desired goals of the institution have been achieved. Learning outcomes function as a type of evidence such as rubrics, charts and graphs of the overall learning objectives. (Mahajan and Singh, 2017).

2.2. English for Specific Purposes in economics majors

2.2.1. Teaching and learning ESP in economics majors

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) began in the 1960s when international students came to the UK to study a specific subject (Starfield, 2016). Over the years, the teaching of ESL has changed, with more branches of ESL appearing. Academic English focuses on students who want to learn English before entering a specific subject. English for Occupational Purposes (ESP) focuses on the language used for work purposes (Basturkmen, 2010).

Studies by Mc Closkey (1983) suggested that economic knowledge plays an important role in helping learners understand economic English texts more quickly. Economic language also uses rhetorical tools similar to other languages, so economic English often uses effective rhetorical tools to refer to the characteristics of new issues in the economic field.

Emphasizing the role of learning English for economic purposes, Robertson's (2009) study pointed out that in the current global era, English for Economics and Business Administration has become a pioneering common language, opening up opportunities for cooperation, recruitment and international business. English for Business aims to prepare students for the global market and the main language of communication is English, especially at a time when

the domestic job market is struggling to absorb the output of university graduates. Knowledge and skills, as well as language, are very important factors in determining the employability of students in the future.

2.2.2. Assessment of students' ESP learning outcomes

Since the beginning of the 21st century, when language testing and assessment began to develop, more attention has been paid to students' English language acquisition. At the same time, educators and researchers have made great efforts to explore various factors that are believed to influence students' success in learning this language and finding ways to help them succeed in learning this language has attracted much attention in previous studies (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012).

When it comes to English for Specific Purposes, Lavinia (2017) assessed the needs of learning English for tourism students at Constanta University and found that most students learn English for their future careers, so they pay great attention to the learning outcomes of the English for tourism course. The author believed that the assessment of learning outcomes of the English for tourism course should be based on the development of English skills to meet the needs of the labor market.

2.3. Intrinsic factors impacting on students' learning outcomes in ESP

2.3.1. Autonomy

Duff (2012) states that autonomy describes "the ability of people to make choices, exercise control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals, potentially leading to personal or social transformation". In other words, the ability to manage one's own learning is called autonomy (Benson, 2011). Autonomy is expressed in choosing goals for oneself and engaging in behavioral and intellectual learning processes to achieve those goals. Learning that originates from learners' self-generated behaviors, systematically focusing on achieving their learning goals is considered autonomy (Rahimi & Abedini, 2009; Ismail et al., 2023). Individual learning styles, proactively seeking help from peers or instructors, are also manifestations of autonomy (Fathi et al., 2021; Ismail et al., 2023). To strengthen academic knowledge, learners can improve their study habits, learning abilities, and apply learning methods by learning autonomously (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008).

The correlation between learner autonomy and English language performance is significantly positive (Hashemian and Soureshjani, 2011), learner autonomy and English proficiency have a strong, positive relationship (Myartawan et al., 2013). The components of self-directed learning, cognitive strategies and metacognition, are dominant predictors of students' reading comprehension and problem-solving abilities, respectively (Mohammadi and Ahangari, 2020).

2.3.2. Motivation and attitude

With a focus on clarifying the relationship between motivation, attitude and learning outcomes in English majors, Liu (2007) investigated the attitudes and motivation of Chinese university students in learning English and showed the correlation of both variables with students' English learning outcomes. Al-Mahrooqil (2012) found that lack of motivation in learning English can be considered a major factor leading to students' low English proficiency. Therefore, learners' motivation and attitude play an important role in improving learners' English proficiency, or second language learners must possess both motivation and attitude to achieve success in mastering a new language.

2.3.3. Learning strategy

Learners' learning strategies have long been discussed as an integral contributor to their language proficiency. As Cook (2016) stated, proficient and good second language users can acquire that language through different strategies. In other words, more proficient learners use a wider variety of language strategies and are more effective in implementing those strategies. Less proficient or less effective learners tend to exhibit limited knowledge of learning strategies.

2.3.4. Specialized knowledge and vocabulary

Nation (2008) defines specialized vocabulary as words that are "recognizably specific to a particular topic, field or discipline". It is also estimated that technical vocabulary probably ranges in size from around 1,000 to 5,000 depending on the particular field (Nation, 2008). Chung and Nation (2004) indicate that specialized vocabulary is part of a system of a subject knowledge. Specialized words are normally used within a particular subject area, which

means that people inside the industry would be expected to be knowledgeable enough to understand the technical vocabulary so that they can use them fluently (Coxhead, 2012).

3. METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research is used in data collection through questionnaire-based surveys. The answers and information in the survey (including some demographic information of the respondents such as: name, gender, date of birth, ethnicity, school) are completely confidential, serving only for research purposes.

The researcher used random sampling method to select the research sample. Then, by convenient sampling method, the author will select 445 representatives from several universities of economics and business, and from each university the researcher will randomly select students from a number of classes representing the university to participate in the survey.

The author used quantitative methods like EFA analysis, PLS-SEM model analysis to process data, and combine with qualitative methods to describe, explain, and analyze the results.

3.1. Analytical tools

a. Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 2 parts: part 1 is demographic questions, part 2 is questions about the factors that affect the English learning outcomes of students in universities of economics and business, which are factors related to lecturers, factors related to students and factors related to context. Except for the demographic questions, the remaining questions use a 5-level Likert scale from (1) to (5) of Rensis Likert (1932), equivalent to "completely disagree" to "completely agree".

b. Interview

Interviews were conducted from March 2022 to June 2022 at universities selected by the author, through the process of collecting opinions from education experts like head of Training and Management Department, head of Student Management Department, lecturers and students.

3.2. Assessing the reliability of the scale

According to Trochim (2020), it is necessary to eliminate variables with low Corrected Item – Total Correlation coefficients, with values < 0.3. After removing an observed variable, re-test Cronbach's Alpha to evaluate the reliability of the new scale. Do this until all questions in the scale have a total question-variable correlation coefficient ≥ 0.3 and ensure the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value of the entire scale, then stop removing variables.

With Cronbach's Alpha = 0.833, this scale is reliable and has good internal consistency.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1. General assessment of the intrinsic factors impacting on student's ESP learning outcomes

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of student factors affecting ESP learning outcomes

No.	Factor	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Autonomy		
TC1	I actively make a schedule for studying.	3.488	0.868
TC2	I prepare my lessons thoroughly before coming to class.	4.027	0.610
TC3	I actively read the course materials as instructed by the lecturer.	3.494	0.850
TC4	I easily absorb knowledge and complete course assignments.	3.485	0.873
TC5	I actively participate in speaking and discussing in class.	4.004	0.716
	Motivation		
ĐL1	I learn English to affirm my current value.	3.499	0.865
ĐL2	I decided to learn English to improve my English skills.	3.510	0.883
ĐL3	I see English as providing future career opportunities.	3.492	0.893

	Attitude		
TĐ1	I enjoy learning English for specific purposes and always try to improve my skills.	3.517	0.888
TĐ2	I am committed to overcoming all difficulties to complete my studies at school.	2.425	0.975
TĐ3	I concentrate all my energy on studying English.	3.964	0.656
TĐ4	Positive learning attitude and perseverance will help me achieve good results in English.	3.470	0.908
	Learning strategy		
CLHT1	I use English whenever possible.	3.488	0.844
CLHT2	I regularly evaluate my English level.	2.528	0.836
CLHT3	I watch TV shows/movies in English.	3.519	0.844
CLHT4	I review my English lessons regularly.	3.566	0.899
CLHT5	I figured out effective learning strategies for myself.	3.519	0.923
	Specialized vocabulary		
TVCN1	Technical vocabulary affects my ability to understand and use technical English.	3.440	0.921
TVCN2	Specialized vocabulary affects the ability to read and understand documents and take tests.	3.407	0.923
TVCN3	Specialized vocabulary affects the ability to communicate and discuss in a learning environment.	3.398	0.925
	English for communication		
TAGT1	English for communication helps economics students gain deeper understanding of specialized knowledge.	3.461	0.942
TAGT2	English communication skills affect students' ability to communicate and work in groups.	3.467	0.836
TAGT3	English communication skills of economics students affect career opportunities after graduation.	3.447	0.912
	Specialized knowledge		
KTCN1	Specialized knowledge helps me use specialized English learning materials easily.	3.418	0.934
KTCN2	Understanding technical terms and concepts helps me pick up technical English more quickly.	3.420	0.905
KTCN3	Solid specialized knowledge helps me feel confident when communicating in specialized English.	4.007	0.575

Students generally have a fairly high level of autonomy with an average value ranging from 3.485 to 4.027. Motivation has an average value from 3.492 to 3.510, showing that learning motivation is at an average level. The student's learning attitude factor is rated quite high with an average value from 3.470 to 3.964, reflecting the concentration and determination to learn English of the majority of students. Learning strategies have an average value ranging from 2.528 to 3.566; in which, the CLHT2 criterion is the lowest, reflecting the lack of diversity or effectiveness in the learning methods of some students. Specialized vocabulary with an average score from The average value of the indicators is all above 3.3, showing that the influence of specialized vocabulary is assessed quite positively. However, the weakness is that specialized vocabulary affects communication and discussion skills with TVCN3 rated the lowest, which can be a barrier to applying knowledge to real-life situations or group work activities. English for communication has a fairly even average score (3.447 - 3.467), showing that students' English communication skills are at an acceptable level. In terms of standard deviation, TAGT1 (0.942) has the highest standard deviation in this group, reflecting that students' opinions are quite scattered, and some students may not clearly feel the benefits of English for communication with specialized knowledge. Specialized knowledge has KTCN3 (4.007), this is the most prominent indicator, with the highest average value (over 4), showing that students are more confident in communicating in English when they have a solid foundation of specialized knowledge.

On average, the standard deviation in the students' intrinsic factor group is not too large (0.575 - 0.942), showing a high level of consensus in the assessment of the students participating in the survey.

4.2. Correlation Analysis

Table 2. Pearson correlation analysis results

		TLNT	KIENTHUC	GV	BOICANH	CONGNGHE	KQHT
TLNT	Pearson Correlation	1	.516**	.408**	.094*	.480**	.562**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.047	.000	.000
	N	445	445	445	445	445	445
KIENTHUC	Pearson Correlation	.516**	1	.336**	.095*	.498**	.589**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.046	.000	.000
	N	445	445	445	445	445	445

4.2.1. Correlation between independent variables and dependent variable

Psychology-Cognition (F_TLNT) and ESP learning outcomes (F_KQHT) (r = 0.562. Sig. = 0.000): The correlation coefficient of 0.562 shows a moderate positive relationship. with statistical significance. This shows that self-study ability (F_TLNT) has a positive influence on learning outcomes (F_KQHT).

Specialized knowledge (F_KIENTHUC) and ESP learning outcomes (F_KQHT) (r = 0.589. Sig. = 0.000): The correlation coefficient of 0.589 shows a relatively strong positive relationship between background knowledge (F_KIENTHUC) and learning outcomes (F_KQHT). This is the independent variable with the strongest correlation with F_KQHT, showing that specialized knowledge is an important factor determining learning outcomes.

4.2.2. Correlation between independent variables

The correlation coefficients between the independent variables are all below 0.7, with no serious signs of multicollinearity (Carsten et al., 2013).

To sum up, independent variables such as Psychology-Cognition (F_TLNT) and Specialized Knowledge (F_KIENTHUC) all have a positive and statistically significant relationship with ESP learning outcomes (F_KQHT). The variable Psychology-Cognition (r = 0.589) has a stronger influence than Specialized Knowledge (r = 0.562) on ESP learning outcomes.

4.3. Assessing the level of influence of intrinsic factors on ESP learning outcomes

4.3.1. Assessing the significance of the direct impact relationship

Testing the significance of Statistical hypothesis of the impact relationship

Whether the impact coefficient of a relationship (path coefficient) is statistically significant or not depends on its standard error obtained through the bootstrapping method on SMART PLS 4.

Table 3. Direct impact of relationships

	Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	P values	Results
KIEN THUC SV → KQHT	H1	0.297	0.296	0.035	8.527	0.000	Accept
TL-NT SV → KQHT	H2	0.213	0.213	0.038	5.605	0.000	Accept

The results in Table 3 show that the original weights are significant with the average bootstrapping weights because all weights are within the 95% confidence interval. Thus, the estimates in the model can be concluded to be reliable. In addition. the P values are all < 0.5. so all hypotheses are accepted.

To assess the level of impact between independent variables on the dependent variable which is the F_KQHT of the specialized English course of students, it is necessary to rely on the absolute value of the standardized impact coefficient. Based on the results in the table above, it can be seen that with larger absolute values of the standardized coefficient. the independent variable has a stronger impact.

The stronger impact on the English proficiency test scores of students in the economic university is the student's knowledge factor. The impact coefficient O=0.297 shows that this factor has a positive and strong impact. The T=8.527, P=0.000 indicators show that this impact is also completely statistically significant.

The weaker impact on the English proficiency test scores of students in the economic university is the Psychology-Cognition factor of students. The impact coefficient O=0.213 shows that this is a positive impact, and the impact level is average. The value T=5.605. P=0.000 reflects a very statistically significant impact.

4.4. Testing the difference

4.4.1. Testing the gender difference that affect students' ESP learning outcomes

To do this. the author conducted an Independent Sample T-Test with two groups of subjects. Male and Female.

Table 4. Average statistics on gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
F_KQHT	Male	189	3.3104	.67289	.04895
	Female	256	3.1979	.59692	.03731

The table above shows that the mean F_KQHT score of the Male group is 3.3104. higher than that of the Female group (3.1979). however. this difference is quite small (0.1125). The standard deviation of the Male group (0.67289) is larger than that of the Female group (0.59692), indicating that the dispersion of data in the Male group is slightly larger than that of the Female group. The standard error (Std. Error Mean) of the Male group (0.04895) is larger than that of the Female group (0.03731). This is because the Male group has a smaller sample size than the Female group.

Table 5. Testing the gender difference using Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
F_KQHT	Equal variances assumed	4.868	.028	1.861	443	.063	.11249	.06045	-.00631	.23128

	Equal variances not assumed			1.828	376.273	.068	.11249	.06154	-.00852	.23350

The Mean Difference is 0.11249. but the 95% confidence interval contains the value 0 ([-0.00852; 0.23350]), indicating that this difference may be due to chance alone. Therefore, the conclusion is that there is no significant difference between the means of the two groups based on the T-Test.

4.4.2. Testing regional difference in students' ESP learning outcomes

Table 6. Regional average statistics

	Rural. Urban	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
F_KQHT	Rural	139	3.2806	.61288	.05198
	Urban	306	3.2298	.64090	.03664

The mean score of the Rural group (3.2806) is slightly higher than that of the Urban group (3.2298). However, this difference is not large. Both groups have relatively similar standard deviations (Std. Deviation): around 0.61-0.64. This shows that the dispersion of data in the two groups is relatively even. The standard error of the Rural group (0.05198) is slightly larger than that of the Urban group (0.03664). because the Urban group has a larger sample size (N).

Table 7. Testing regional differences using Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
F_KQHT	Equal variances assumed	.156	.693	.784	443	.433	.05073	.06467	-.07638	.17784
	Equal variances not assumed			.798	278.101	.426	.05073	.06360	-.07447	.17592

The t-value indicates the difference between the means of the two groups relative to the standard error. A small t-value (t = 0.784) indicates that the difference between the means of the two groups is very small. With p-value = 0.433 > 0.05, there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Thus, there is no statistically significant difference in the means of the F_KQHT variable between the two groups of Rural and Urban.

The mean value of the Rural group is about 0.05073, higher than that of the Urban group, but this difference is not statistically significant.

The confidence interval [−0.07638; 0.17784] includes the value 0, indicating that the mean difference between the two groups can be negative, positive, or zero. This reinforces the conclusion that there is no significant difference.

5. CONCLUSION

In the paper, the researcher identifies and analyzes the students' intrinsic factors that influence their ESP learning outcomes.

The researcher has statistically described the factors affecting the learning outcomes of specialized English courses of students from universities of economics and business, including autonomy, attitude, motivation, learning strategy, specialized vocabulary, specialized knowledge and English for communication. The author has also tested the scale. and with Cronbach's Alpha = 0.833, this scale is reliable and has a good level of internal consistency.

The EFA results show that no observed variables were eliminated. However, from the initial independent factors. they were divided into 2 new independent factor groups, namely the Student Psychology-Cognition factor group and the Specialized Knowledge factor group.

The regression results show that the model is suitable, and the independent variables are all statistically significant in explaining the dependent variable. The independent variables are not strongly correlated with each other, ensuring the accuracy of the model. Correlation analysis shows that specialized knowledge is an important factor determining learning outcomes.

The results of the difference test show that there is no significant difference in learning outcomes among students of different genders and from different regions.

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