Adapting tasks for reading lessons in English for electricity to improve the English skill of the first-year students at Electricity Faculty, Sao Do University / Vũ Thị Lương

I.1. Rationale
- For students at Electricity Faculty, Sao Do University, ESP is a compulsory subject relating industrial fields.
- ESP teaching has encountered a number of problems.
- Adapting tasks and activities for practicing reading skill to improve the effectiveness of reading lessons is really the strong motivation.

I.2. The aim of the study
- To investigate and analyze the difficulties the first year students of Electricity Faculty may encounter when studying the reading lessons in English for Electricity.
- To adapt some reading tasks in English for Electricity for the first year students at electricity Faculty, Sao Do University.

I.3. Research questions
1. What difficulties may the first-year students of Electricity Faculty encounter when studying the reading lessons in English for Electricity?
2. What reading tasks are considered inappropriate for the first-year students of Electricity Faculty?
3. What reading tasks in English for Electricity should be adapted?

I.4. Scope of the study
This study is limited to the area of investigating and analyzing the difficulties the first year students of Electricity Faculty may encounter when studying the reading lessons in English for Electricity.

I.5. Organization of the study
Part I includes rationales, aims of the study, research questions and scope of the study.
PART II: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

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CHAPTER II: THE STUDY

II.1. SETTINGS
II.1.1. The syllabus

     The study is conducted at Electricity Faculty, Sao Do University. The overall curriculum of the University lasts for 4 years in which English is taught in the first year with 120 periods (45 minutes each) into two stages: GE and ESP. The second stage is 45 periods for ESP. The material
for this stage is *English for Electricity* designed by a group of teachers working in the Faculty of Tourism and Foreign language.

Most of units are authentic texts covering a wide range of topics related to Electricity such as: electric current, electric circuit, materials, electric motor, the effects of electric current … *English for Electricity* aims at providing students with a great deal of technical terms and developing students’ reading strategies and techniques, however, *English for Electricity* has shown for some problems.

**II.1.2. The teachers**

The Faculty of Tourism and Foreign Languages has 42 teachers, among them 19 teachers are English teachers. Only five of them are holding MA degree in English Methodology and five of them are working toward M.A degree in English. The rest holds a B.A in English language teaching.

**II.1.3. The students**

The first – year students at the Electricity Faculty aged from 18 to 20, mainly male students. Each class consists of about 40 to 60 students. *English for Electricity* is the compulsory subject that students have to study in the first year. They have had little electrical knowledge and their English levels are quite different.

**II.2. THE SUBJECTS**

The study was carried out with the participation of 100 students of Electricity Faculty and 8 English teachers of the Faculty of Tourism and foreign languages.

**II.3. THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURE**

The research method applied is the survey. The data collection instrument is questionnaire. The first questionnaire was designed for 100 Electricity Faculty’s students.

The questionnaire was given to students’ right after they had finished studying *English for Electricity* in hope of obtaining their fresh comment and opinions. The author came to different dormitory rooms to distribute the questionnaires for students to complete individually. After they finished, the author collected the questionnaires and got the data for analysis.

The questionnaire designed for English teachers consists of 6 questions. The questionnaire was completed in about 15 minutes.
CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

III.1. QUESTIONNAIRE DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

III.1.1. Students’ background of learning English and their purposes in learning ESP

In the questionnaire for students, three questions were designed to explore their background including their places of domicile, the number of years they have been learning English and their purposes of learning ESP. The first question is to find out the students’ place of living before entering University. Question 2 is designed to identify students’ time of learning English. From the results of the two questions, a conclusion can be drawn out that the first year students’ English levels at the Faculty of Electricity are varied because they come from different places, have different English learning conditions, and moreover, they have different time of learning English. Question 3 was asked about the students’ purposes of learning ESP course. To know students’ background and purposes of learning ESP is necessary for the study.

III.1.2. Evaluation of the difficulties in learning English for Electricity

The issues deal with the students and teachers’ evaluation of the difficulties the first year students of Electricity Faculty may encounter when studying the reading lessons in English for Electricity. 78% of the students thought that the texts in English for Electricity are long and number of new words is great. Similar to students’ views, many teachers (75%) supposed for the first items. The students also determined their lack of professional knowledge (86% of respondents). This comment also came from 62,5% of teachers. On the contrary, a quarter of those teachers and 20% of the students supposed that students’ problem in learning English for Electricity was General English limitation.

From the figure 4, 78% of the students complained for not being given frequent and sufficient practice of vocabulary and grammar, however, from the figure 5, only a teacher (accounting for 12,5%) supported for this item. The students seemed to expect their teachers to demonstrate the vocabulary and grammar with examples especially and spend more time for them to practice. The above evaluation of the difficulties should be considered in the process when adapting tasks in English for Electricity for the first year students of Electricity Faculty.
III.1.3. Evaluation of the difficulties of different units in the textbook.

A number of the students complained that many new words in a text came from unit 2 (50% of respondents), unit 3 and unit 6(78%), and unit 8(54%). They also found that the long text was in unit 7 (67% of the students), professional knowledge is the most difficult in unit 8 (accounting for 80%) and many difficult exercises were in unit 8 (76% of respondents). Interestingly, there are a few difficulties in some units (unit 1, unit 4, unit 5 and unit 10).

In terms of the difficulties of the units in *English for Electricity*, the teachers were also asked to evaluate five items. A high proportion of teachers (over 62, 5%) considered a full of new words text in unit 2, unit 3, unit 6 and unit 8. Most of teachers (87, 5%) agreed that professional knowledge and exercises are difficult in unit 8, and the text is long in unit 7. Half of the teachers found out the easy exercises in unit 6. Unit 1, 2, 4, 5,9,10 received the nearly same views of difficulties from the teachers as from their students.

III.1.4. Evaluation of reading skills

III.1.4.1. Students’ views of the difficulties of reading strategies

The ESP course mainly consists of reading texts therefore reading strategies are very important for students to learn English. The biggest students (36%) found that guessing new words basing on the context clues was the most difficult. 20% of the respondents stated that they had difficulties in both skimming for the main idea and scanning for specific information. Summarizing the text was difficult for 14% of the students, while 10% had trouble in answering the reading comprehension.

III.1.4.2. Teachers’ evaluation of the necessity of reading strategies.

According to the teachers, the basic techniques such as skimming, scanning and guessing were considered being necessary for reading text in the textbook (25% of the respondents). Summarizing the text and answering the reading comprehension questions were less necessary (12,5%) as the teachers considered that they were not very important in the reading lessons.

III.1.5. Teachers’ and students’ preferences for the reading activities

There are 13 activities listed in this question to ask both the teachers and the students. These respondents are expected to choose as many activities as they like to do in the reading lessons. The task a, c and d (Skimming/ scanning to answer comprehension questions, Matching descriptions with diagrams, pictures, Labeling a diagram using information from the text) account the highest percentage (75%) from the teachers and most of the students (90%) also found that
skimming/ scanning to answer comprehension questions was the most useful for them to improve their reading skill. Tasks dealing with text materials such as task f, h, j, l, m were also important in ESP these respondents’ opinion.

III.1.6. Reference materials for students

They are required to study well beyond the classroom. All of the students being asked this question read additional materials from different sources. The majority of students (80%) determined that they usually searched for reference materials over the internet. 67% read additional materials provided from their teachers. 33% of the students studied ESP in the library of the University. Only some of these students (4%) went out to look for English books on electrical field, but few books, not to say, no English books in the field are available in the bookshops in Haiduong.

III.1.7. Time of students’ studying outside the classroom.

Reading extensively outside the classroom can help students increase their vocabulary and knowledge of the subject matter. All of the teachers (100%) agreed that they usually gave their students a variety of exercises and tasks to improve their ESP reading. 75% of the teachers usually collected the extra reading texts from the internet, then they reorganized and designed the suitable tasks to their students’ level. Two teachers (25%) expected their students find out the information from ESP books in the library. Therefore, all of the students had to spend time on studying ESP at home. Luckily, 83% of the respondents took more than one hour to do their home work or prepare for the next lesson. One hour was necessary for 17% of the students to complete their teachers’ requirements.

III.1.8. Summary

From the above analysis we can to come the conclusion about the difficulties the first-year students of Electricity Faculty encountered when studying the reading lessons in English for Electricity. Most of the teachers and the students agreed that the students’ difficulties are their level in English, their background knowledge of the subject mater and their purposes of learning ESP. During evaluating the textbook, the teachers and the students also determined their preferences for the reading activities, their attitudes about references materials … This will be the basis for the author to adapt reading tasks for reading lessons in English for Electricity, and give some recommendations which will be presented in the next section.
III.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

III.2.1. Some adjustments of teaching and learning

The teaching and learning method of ESP plays a very important part in the success of ESP course. This section is aiming at providing teachers some suggestions for a more effective use of ESP materials.

- Promoting students with a variety of reading strategies: guide students how to use the reading techniques during the lessons
- Encouraging students to develop learning habits outside class: advice students what to read and how to read effectively, give tasks to do.

III.2.2. Adaptation of the reading tasks in English for Electricity

III.2.2.1. Simplifying

**Sample 1:** (Task 3.1- Unit 6: The effects of an electric current)

*Points needed adapting:*

The objective of the task is to name some instruments and tools and describe their function. The task seems to be confusing for the students. No suggestion of these instruments and tools make them difficult to describe. Illustrations are useful for students to understand the words’ meaning. The students can understand a word easily if they are given a picture of what is being described or referred to.

* Adapted version:

**Adapted task:**

1. Class time: 15 minutes
2. Preparation:
3. Task: Study the instruments and tools in the pictures and give the correct function of each component.
4. Type of activity: Individual or pair work.

**Sample 2:** (Task 2.2- Unit 7: Electronics in the home)

*Points needed adapting:*

One of the main objectives of this task is to find out the main ideas of the reading text: date, invention, and application of some electronic items and the development of electronics as well. However, the task in the textbook is difficult for students because there are no guidelines for
them to write. The students were not motivated and they wasted a lot of time thinking how to write down the development of some electronic items.

*Adapted version:

To help students easily understand the main information contained in the text, the task is simplified by asking them to fill in the table. This task will lead the students to consider the text globally first, then to find out the information it contains. The table will be easier to fill in if the students first read the text through to get a general idea, and then look for specific points in different places. It is also an exercise in note-taking that will oblige the students to note down the main points only and leave out unimportant details.

1. Class time: 20 minutes
2. Task: Read the text and fill in the gaps in the table.
3. Type of activity: Individual or pair work.

**III.2.2.2. Modifying**

**Sample:** (Task 3.1- Unit 8: DC motor)

*Points needed adapting:

The objective of the task is to evaluate students’ ability in using new words and structures learnt from the reading text to describe the components of a DC motor. The students are required to do this task individually. However, the reading text is very long; each student has to write their own sentences. In addition, the students have difficulty getting professional knowledge from the text. It takes them a lot of time doing the task, therefore the teacher does not have enough time to check all students’ answers during the lessons.

*Adapted version:

Adapted task:

1. Class time: 20 minutes
2. Task:
3. Type of activity: Pair works.

**III.2.2.3. Adding**

**Sample 1:** (Task 2.3- Unit 6: The effects of an electric current)

*Points needed adapting:

The task is to practice some new words and focus the main ideas of the text. The students read the text and complete the sentences. If they follow this order, they may find it mechanical and
boring to practice words they have just learnt because they only read and copy the words from the text. The task is too easy for them. So the task should be done as homework.

*Adapted version:

The small passages with the same contents as the text provided are helpful in reinforcing the key linguistic features - tenses, sentence structures, vocabulary - of the first text. The passages are aids to the required exercise in the task. Students will translate the passage into Vietnamese.

**Adapted task:**

1. Class time: 20 minutes
2. Task: Translate the passages into Vietnamese
3. Type of activity: Individual.

**Sample 2:** (Task 1.4 - Unit 2: Circuit elements)

*Points needed adapting:

Students have to answer the questions in the task individually. Doing this way, they can show how much they understand the reading text. However, it is difficult for students to imagine how these devices work in the system. That is the reason why the teacher should add a diagram of a basic electric circuit to practice speaking English with a specific situation.

*Adapted version:

1. Class time: 20 minutes
2. Task: Answer these questions and describe a following diagram of a basic electric circuit
3. Type of activity: Pair-works

**III.2.2.4. Deleting or Omitting**

**Sample:** (Task 1.1- Unit 3 Conductors, insulators and semiconductors)

*Points needed adapting:

The main point in this task is to improve vocabulary. The students have to give the meaning of all new words listed in the table and give examples with some of them. The meaning of words is very important for the students, but many of them find it difficult to remember the meaning only by checking up the dictionary, especially with the technical words. In addition, in pre-reading process, their teacher already explains or translates them in to Vietnamese. So this task needs replacing by another useful task as follow.

*Adapted version:
Adapted task:

1. Class time: 10 minutes
2. Task: Rewrite the sentences by replacing the words in bold with expressions from the text which have similar meaning
3. Type of activity: Individual.

PART III: CONCLUSION

This study provides an analysis of some difficulties the first year students of Electricity Faculty may encounter when studying the reading lessons in *English for Electricity*. The findings of the study show that when reading ESP, the students encountered a number of problems such as long and difficult reading texts, number of specialist vocabulary, limitation on professional knowledge, level of English and different purposes of learning ESP.

Although the study is the first attempt to look into adapting reading tasks under the guiding light of methodologists, the author does believe that the study results would provide basic knowledge and applications not only for the author but also for other teachers and learners of English.

In most research projects, limitations are inevitable. The study presented in this thesis is of no exception. The first, due to the limitation of the thesis, the study has not investigated and adapted the tasks of every unit of the textbook. The second, within the scope of the thesis, some other factors affecting reading skills such as teacher’s role, equipments, and class-size have not been investigated. These problems call for further research.