

SOLUTIONS FOR IMPROVING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG ECONOMICS STUDENTS AT ELECTRIC POWER UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the current situation of foreign language learning among economics students at Electric Power University, revealing that many students are still passive, lack practical environments, and do not have suitable learning methods. The paper analyzes and evaluates the reasons leading to these limitations, thereby proposing several solutions to improve foreign language learning, such as: strengthening extracurricular activities using foreign languages, organizing practical communication sessions, and building a positive learning environment that applies technology to foreign language learning. The collaboration between students, lecturers, and the university is a key factor in enhancing the effectiveness of foreign language learning. These improvements not only help students progress in language skills but also increase their integration capabilities in the global environment.

Keywords: Improvement, Foreign Language Learning, Students, Communication Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of increasing globalization and international economic integration, foreign languages play a pivotal role in expanding opportunities for communication, cooperation, and development for individuals and organizations. According to the DOL Dictionary, a foreign language is considered a language that is not one's native language or the main language used in a particular country or community. Learners of a foreign language use it as a means to communicate with speakers of that language for study, communication, work, or travel purposes. This paper focuses on English, an international language widely used in the fields of economics and commerce. Besides English, other foreign languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean are also increasingly important for economics students in the context of multilateral and regional cooperation. However, reality shows that foreign language learning among economics students at Electric Power University still faces many limitations. Some students encounter difficulties in maintaining learning motivation, choosing effective learning methods, and not fully utilizing available resources and support tools. These issues not only affect academic results but also reduce students' integration capabilities in the labor market later on. Therefore, the paper "*solutions for improving foreign language learning among economics students at Electric Power University*" will partly assist economics students in particular and non-English major students in other disciplines to improve their English learning methods to achieve higher efficiency.

2. EVALUATING THE CURRENT SITUATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG ECONOMICS STUDENTS AT ELECTRIC POWER UNIVERSITY

Foreign language learning is understood as a continuous cognitive and training process aimed at acquiring knowledge about the language (phonetics, vocabulary, grammar) and developing language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) to communicate effectively in real-life situations. Within the scope of this article, the author understands and uses the term "foreign language learning" as the process of perceiving, practicing, and training in English (as Electric Power University students primarily learn English).

Economics students encompass all undergraduate students majoring in economics. Accordingly, economics students within the scope of this research are defined as those currently studying at the Faculty of Business Administration and Tourism, including the following majors: Business Administration, Tourism and Travel Service Management, Hotel Management, Marketing, and E-commerce. This group shares the common characteristic of career orientation in a dynamic and competitive business environment, where proficient foreign language skills are increasingly becoming a significant competitive advantage. Improving the effectiveness of foreign language learning for economics students is not only a personal requirement but also a key factor in enhancing the quality of human resources for the country in the context of international integration. The foreign language learning of economics students at Electric Power University has also achieved encouraging results:

2.1. Advantages

Generally, all students entering the university have already studied English for 7 years in secondary school (from grades 6 to 12), so English is no longer unfamiliar to them. The Economics major at Electric Power University is one of the academic areas with a large number of students, playing a crucial role in training high-quality human resources for the fields of management, business, and services. In this research, we chose to survey students from the Faculty of Business Administration and Tourism, encompassing three main training programs: Business Administration, E-commerce, and Tourism and Travel Service Management. These disciplines are all highly applied and require the use of foreign languages, especially English, in various professional situations such as customer communication, business negotiation, operation of e-commerce systems, and organization and management of international tours. Therefore, foreign language proficiency has become one of the important criteria in training and evaluating the competence of Economics students, especially in the context of increasingly deep regional and global economic integration (Nguyễn Văn Tuấn, 2020; Trần Thị Hạnh, 2021)[6] [3].

Within the scope of this study, we conducted a survey of 205 randomly selected students currently enrolled in the Faculty of Business Administration and Tourism. After the collection and screening process, the total number of valid survey responses was 197. The survey questionnaire was designed to gather information regarding students' learning habits, perceptions, motivations, and factors influencing their foreign language learning, thereby reflecting the current state of foreign language learning in this major.

The survey results of the research team show (Appendix 1) that the research participants have diversity in gender, academic year, and foreign language proficiency, providing a fairly

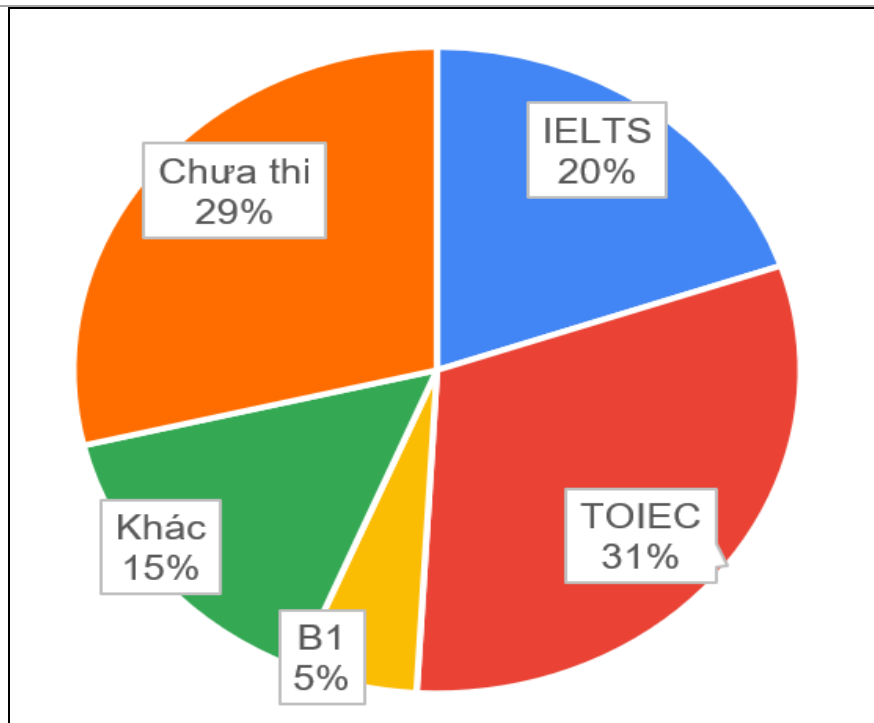
comprehensive overview of Economics students at Electric Power University. Regarding gender, the proportion of female students is significantly higher (63.5%), while male students account for only 35.3%. This aligns with the general characteristics of Economics and Tourism-related fields, which often attract more female students than male students due to the nature of the professions being inclined towards service, communication, and management.

In terms of academic year, third-year students account for the highest proportion in the surveyed group (26.3%), followed by fourth-year students at 24.6%. This indicates that the majority of participants are students who have already undergone and experienced foreign language learning at the university level, thus being able to provide more realistic and comprehensive assessments. The participation of second-year students and alumni (each group accounting for 19.8%) also contributes to enriching the research perspectives. However, the proportion of first-year students is relatively low (9.6%), possibly because they have not yet had much experience with foreign language learning in a university environment.

Regarding the number and type of foreign languages being studied, the majority of students are only studying one foreign language (78.4%), mainly English (94.0%), indicating that this remains the most popular and important language in the curriculum as well as career orientation. However, the proportion of students learning a second foreign language (21.6%), including Chinese (23.4%) and other foreign languages such as Japanese and Korean (4.8%), shows a growing trend among students to expand their foreign language skills to increase their competitiveness.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Education and Training, English remains the most popular and important foreign language in current university training programs in Vietnam, especially for economics, engineering, and service-related majors (MOET, 2019). Understanding the current situation of students' foreign language learning is an important step towards making appropriate adjustments in the curriculum, training methods, and career orientation.

The English proficiency of economics students is also confirmed by the number of students holding foreign language certificates. According to the research team's survey on the percentage of students with foreign language certificates (Figure 1), the rate is as high as 71%, which is a relatively high result, indicating that students recognize the necessity of having English proficiency even if it is not their major.



(Figure 1: Percentage of Surveyed Students with Foreign Language Certificates)

This also shows that the majority of economics students recognize the necessity of having fluent English proficiency to serve their future careers as the country is in a period of integration and development, in an era of striving forward. In particular, third and fourth-year students see the urgent need to learn English, unlike the indifference of first and second-year students. A survey of 205 students from the Faculty of Business Administration and Tourism shows that most students clearly recognize the important role of foreign language learning in the context of globalization and international integration. Many students actively practice the four foreign language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) by participating in online courses, using vocabulary learning applications, listening to English podcasts, and reading specialized books in English.

The graduation review results of Electric Power University students clearly demonstrate that the English learning outcomes of economics students at Electric Power University are among the highest across all faculties in terms of the proportion of students owing the B1 English language proficiency standard compared to the total number of students in the cohort. Specifically:

Table 2.2. Graduation Review Results for Intake D15, Electric Power University

| Faculty | Total Student s in Cohort | Graduate d Students | Total Previousl y Graduate d Students | Total Current Graduat ing Students | Total Yet Graduate d | Owing Not Graduatio n Standard (English B1) Number | Note Percentag e (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Automotive and Construction Engineering | 258 | 16 | 96 | 162 | 146 | 26 | 10.1 |
| Information Technology | 446 | 67 | 158 | 288 | 221 | 77 | 17.3 |
| Electronics and Telecommunicatio ns | 143 | 17 | 30 | 113 | 96 | 10 | 7.0 |
| Control and Automation Engineering | 331 | 21 | 99 | 232 | 211 | 39 | 11.8 |
| Accounting Finance | 426 | 5 | 341 | 85 | 79 | 9 | 2.11 |
| Electrical Engineering | 470 | 48 | 163 | 307 | 259 | 44 | 9.4 |
| New Energy | 131 | 17 | 38 | 93 | 76 | 20 | 15.3 |
| Industrial and Energy Management | 222 | 25 | 81 | 141 | 116 | 30 | 13.5 |
| Business Administration and Tourism | 410 | 4 | 230 | 180 | 176 | 37 | 9.0 |

Source: Statistics of graduating students of the D15 Engineer program, Phase 2, and previous cohorts, Training Department, Electric Power University

2.2. Limitations

Besides the achieved results, some limitations in foreign language learning, specifically English learning, among economics students at Electric Power University are also evident, as follows:

Firstly, the foreign language proficiency of students is uneven, and a portion of students still face difficulties in meeting the required English language output standard for graduation. According to the graduation statistics of the Faculty of Business Administration and Tourism, the D14 intake had 293 students, of which 16 students did not graduate due to not meeting the English language output standard (accounting for approximately 5.46%). In the D15 intake, with 410 students, the number of students owing the English language output standard increased to 37 students (accounting for approximately 7.32%). These figures indicate that the issue of foreign languages, especially basic English skills, remains a barrier for a portion of students, and this rate tends to increase in subsequent intakes.

Secondly, through surveys, many students admit to still having difficulties in memorizing vocabulary and grammar, as well as lacking confidence when communicating in a foreign language. Some students have not maintained a regular foreign language learning habit and lack a specific plan to improve their personal abilities.

Thirdly, foreign language learning support activities such as English clubs, workshops, and talks on English skills in learning and work are still limited in number and prevalence within the university. This affects students' opportunities to practice and develop practical communication skills outside of regular class hours.

In general, these limitations necessitate more practical solutions to support economics students in improving their foreign language proficiency to meet the demands of study and career in the context of international integration.

2.3. Reasons for the Limitations

The reasons for the above limitations also stem from the students themselves not clearly seeing that foreign language learning is decisive for graduating with a bachelor's degree and contributes to determining their future careers. Students are not interested in English classes, have not accessed modern learning tools, and lack proactivity in communicating and applying English in real work situations during internships or part-time jobs after school. Besides, there are also objective factors affecting students' English learning: Most students come from other provinces to study in Hanoi, so the cost of living and tuition fees are already significant contributions from their families, leading students to be busy with part-time jobs to earn extra living expenses. Therefore, taking extra classes or the cost of English proficiency certificate exams is also something that some students have to consider.

Based on the synthesis of survey results and the analysis of actual data, some main reasons for the limitations in foreign language learning among students of the Faculty of Business Administration and Tourism, Electric Power University, can be identified as follows:

Firstly, the self-study awareness of a portion of students regarding foreign languages is not yet high. Although many students recognize the important role of English for their future careers, maintaining a regular study habit and self-practicing foreign language skills daily is not yet truly common. Some students only study to cope with meeting the output standards, lacking long-term learning motivation.

Secondly, foreign language learning methods are not yet effective. Many students still lean towards theoretical learning, passively memorizing grammar and vocabulary without focusing on practicing practical communication skills. This leads to the situation where, despite achieving scores in exams, their ability to use the foreign language in practice is still weak.

Thirdly, the practical foreign language use environment is not rich. Extracurricular activities related to English, such as English clubs, seminars, and communication practice workshops, are not organized regularly or do not attract a large number of students. Therefore, the opportunities for students to practice and apply English in real-world environments are limited.

Fourthly, study pressure and unreasonable time allocation. Economics students often have to study many specialized subjects, carry out projects, and major assignments, which affects the time allocated to foreign language learning. Foreign languages are not always prioritized, especially in peak academic semesters.

Fifthly, some inadequacies in the curriculum and assessment of foreign language proficiency. Although the university has regulations on foreign language output standards, the connection between academic English, specialized English, and future work practices is still limited. This partly makes students feel that English learning lacks practical application, leading to reduced learning motivation.

From surveying and analyzing the current situation of foreign language learning among economics students at Electric Power University, it can be seen that, besides the noteworthy advantages in learning awareness and attitude, students still face many limitations in practical foreign language skills, learning proactivity, and the ability to meet English language output standards. The main reasons for this situation include: low self-study awareness, ineffective learning methods, limited English practice environment, high study pressure, and some inadequacies in the foreign language curriculum. In particular, the increasing proportion of students owing the English language output standard across different intakes highlights the urgent need for comprehensive and practical solutions to improve the foreign language proficiency of students in the future.

3. SOLUTIONS TO ENHANCE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR ECONOMICS STUDENTS AT ELECTRIC POWER UNIVERSITY

International economic integration and the expansion of multinational cooperation demand a workforce proficient in foreign languages to access new knowledge, exchange information, and work in multicultural environments. In particular, English is currently widely used in international communication for business and foreign affairs. The socio-economic development of the country requires deep integration, and access to modern science and technology or the research findings of developed countries also necessitates strong foreign language skills. Therefore, learning a foreign

language well, specifically English, is essential and urgent for every student. Based on this, the study proposes a comprehensive system of solutions, including: creating a practical foreign language use environment, enhancing learning proactivity, applying technology and foreign language learning resources, improving communication skills through practice, promoting competition activities, and the support of academic advisors. These solutions aim to sustainably improve foreign language learning, helping economics students not only meet academic requirements but also prepare well for their careers in the context of international integration, specifically as follows:

Firstly, **strengthening the practical foreign language learning environment.** This involves creating more opportunities for students to encounter and use English in real-world settings, such as organizing English clubs, extracurricular activities, and practical exchange or conversation sessions with international students.

Secondly, **enhancing proactivity and personal learning planning.** Students need to develop clear learning plans with short-term and long-term goals, combining self-study skills and self-discipline. In addition, the university should organize programs to guide students on self-study skills for foreign languages and effective time management methods through group activities.

Thirdly, **diversifying learning methods and tools.** Thanks to technological advancements, there are now many diverse learning methods. Applying technology in foreign language learning, such as using vocabulary learning applications (Anki, Quizlet), practicing listening with podcasts, learning English through movies, music, and songs, thereby developing listening and communication response skills. Moreover, strengthening theme-based foreign language learning activities, learning specialized vocabulary, and using authentic materials (articles, professional videos) also helps students memorize vocabulary and grammar quickly and accurately.

Fourthly, **promoting practical communication training programs.** This solution involves the university and teachers helping students improve the quality of their English learning by adding more practical communication sessions to the curriculum and inviting native speakers or teachers with international practical experience to teach. In class, developing soft skills courses in English such as presentation and debate will help students apply foreign languages in real-life situations.

Fifthly, **creating learning motivation and improving students' English proficiency.** The university can work through clubs and the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union to organize foreign language competitions such as "English Speaking Contest" and "English Essay Writing Contest" to create learning motivation, develop skills, and reward students with outstanding achievements in foreign language learning, thereby motivating other students to learn and improve their English proficiency. Additionally, providing support, advice, and guidance to students. The university and faculty need to build a team of foreign language academic advisors to help students answer questions and guide them on learning paths suitable for each individual; acting as a "bridge" to connect students with proficient English mentors to inspire and support them in their learning process.

For the synchronous implementation of these solutions to achieve optimal effectiveness, close coordination between the university, specialized faculties, lecturers, and the students themselves is required. Regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the implemented activities will allow for appropriate adjustments, ensuring that the process of improving foreign language proficiency achieves optimal results.

4. CONCLUSION

In the context of deep international integration, foreign language proficiency, especially English, has become an essential requirement for economics students. Through the study of the current situation of foreign language learning among students of the Faculty of Business Administration and Tourism, Electric Power University, the research has analyzed the influencing factors based on Dörnyei's (1994) theory of Language Learning Motivation, encompassing three scopes: the linguistic scope, the learner scope, and the learning environment scope. The survey results collected from 197 random students show that:

Firstly, students clearly recognize the role of foreign languages for their personal careers, but their ability to maintain motivation and discipline in learning is still limited.

Secondly, the biggest difficulties for students are memorizing vocabulary and grammar, and the lack of a regular foreign language practice environment.

Thirdly, the need to improve practical communication skills, learn to apply technology, and participate in English extracurricular activities are strongly proposed by students.

From the analysis and evaluation of the English learning outcomes of Electric Power University students, the study has proposed comprehensive solutions to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language learning for students, such as: strengthening the practical foreign language use environment, organizing experiential activities, applying technology in learning, and enhancing students' self-directed learning awareness. These solutions, if implemented synchronously and continuously, will contribute to improving the foreign language proficiency not only of economics students to better meet the demands of the labor market in the new era, the country's era of striving forward.

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