Student Perceptions On Reading English Economic Texts

Himaya Praptani Adys*
Universitas Negeri Makassar
*email: himaya.praptani@unm.ac.id

Abstract: This study investigates the perceptions of Development Economics students regarding their experiences reading English economic texts. The research examined attitudes, challenges, and strategies of 109 first-semester students (31 males, 78 females) enrolled in an English for Economics course. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected through a comprehensive perception survey and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Results reveal that students perceive economic texts as highly challenging primarily due to specialized terminology, complex sentence structures, and the dual difficulty of mastering both language and content simultaneously. While students acknowledge the importance of English economic texts for their professional development, they report moderate confidence in their reading abilities. The study provides practical implications for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction in economics programs and suggests approaches to enhance students' engagement with English economic texts.

Keywords: economics texts, reading perceptions, ESP, reading challenges

INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly interconnected global economic landscape, the ability to comprehend academic and professional texts in English has emerged as a fundamental requirement for economics students across the world. Yet for many who speak English as a second language, engaging with specialized economic literature presents considerable obstacles that may hinder both academic achievement and career advancement. Gaining insight into students' experiences with these challenges is essential for crafting effective teaching methods that support their educational journey.

The capacity to understand economic texts written in English is especially critical for those enrolled in Development Economics programs, where current research findings, theoretical frameworks, and practical examples are overwhelmingly published in English. Students in their first semester face a twofold challenge: they must simultaneously adjust to university-level economic content while processing this information through the filter of a non-native language. This research seeks to examine these students' perspectives on reading

economic texts in English, exploring their mindsets, difficulties, perceived coping techniques, and requirements.

Scholarly investigation has thoroughly examined reading comprehension within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. Research by Huang and van Naerssen (2019) revealed that students' perception of difficulty significantly affects their enthusiasm for engaging with texts in foreign languages. In a related vein, Martinez (2018) demonstrated that knowledge of field-specific terminology serves as a key indicator of successful reading comprehension in specialized academic disciplines. Within economics education specifically, Reichelt (2021) observed that economics students encounter distinctive obstacles when reading English texts due to the field's unique combination of conceptual theory, quantitative models, and practical applications.

Despite expanding research on EFL reading comprehension, a significant knowledge gap remains regarding the specific perspectives and obstacles encountered by Development Economics students when approaching specialized economic literature in English. Existing research typically either takes a broad view of academic English without considering discipline-specific nuances or examines reading approaches without sufficiently addressing student perspectives. As Koch and Terzić-Šupić (2021) pointed out, student perceptions considerably influence their approach to learning activities and, by extension, their educational outcomes.

My investigation aims to bridge this gap by shedding light on first-semester Development Economics students' views of English economic texts—identifying their perceived challenges, adaptive strategies, and desired support mechanisms. Understanding these perspectives can guide the creation of focused educational interventions designed to enhance students' interaction with English economic texts and, ultimately, their success in their chosen field of study.

METHOD
Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, primarily utilizing a cross-sectional survey design supplemented with open-ended questions to capture both quantitative and qualitative aspects of student perceptions. This design was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives on reading English economic texts, capturing both measurable attitudes and nuanced personal experiences.

Participants

The participants included 109 first-semester Development Economics students (31 males, 78 females) enrolled in an English for Economics course at Universitas Negeri Makassar. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 20 years (M = 19.2, SD = 0.7). Based on university placement tests, their English proficiency levels ranged from low to intermediate, with 68% at the low-intermediate level. All participants were non-native English speakers taking their first university-level course in English for Specific Purposes.

Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) developed specifically for this study, informed by previous research on reading perceptions and ESP learning. The questionnaire consisted of three main components designed to capture comprehensive insights into students' experiences. A demographic section collected essential information on age, gender, prior English learning experience, and self-assessed English proficiency to provide context for the responses. The core of the questionnaire featured a perceptions scale containing 25 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), which was organized across five critical dimensions: attitudes toward English economic texts (5 items), perceived challenges (7 items), strategy

awareness and use (5 items), perceived support needs (4 items), and confidence in reading ability (4 items). To complement the quantitative data and allow for more nuanced personal insights, the questionnaire concluded with four open-ended questions that explored students' personal experiences with economic texts, specific challenges they encountered in their reading process, strategies they found particularly successful, and suggestions they had for improving their ability to engage with English economic literature. This mixed-method approach allowed for both statistical analysis of trends and thematic analysis of individual experiences.

Data Collection

Data gathering took place one and a half months into the initial semester, providing adequate time for students to become familiar with English economic literature in their coursework. Research assistants supervised the distribution and completion of the questionnaire during scheduled class periods, ensuring a controlled environment for data collection. Prior to participation, students received a thorough explanation regarding the study's objectives and were given firm assurances about the confidential treatment of their individual responses. The process of completing the comprehensive questionnaire required approximately half an hour of the participants' time, balancing the need for detailed information with respect for the students' academic schedules. This timing allowed students to reflect meaningfully on their early experiences with specialized economic texts while the challenges and strategies remained fresh in their minds.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the Likert-scale items were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) were calculated to determine students' perceptions across the five dimensions. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences in perceptions.

Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach. The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Two researchers independently coded the responses to ensure coding reliability, with an inter-rater agreement of 92%.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis of students' perceptions toward reading English economic texts revealed complex attitudes across multiple dimensions.

Perception Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Attitudes toward English economic texts	4.12	0.68	Positive
Perceived challenges	3.87	0.74	High
Strategy awareness and use	2.95	0.81	Moderate
Perceived support needs	4.23	0.62	High
Confidence in reading ability	2.64	0.92	Moderate

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Perception Dimensions (N=109)

According to Table 1, which presents descriptive statistics for 109 participants, students showed distinctly positive attitudes toward English economic texts (M = 4.12, SD = 0.68), recognizing their significance for academic and professional growth. Simultaneously, they reported considerable challenges (M = 3.87, SD = 0.74) and substantial support requirements (M = 4.23, SD = 0.62), while expressing only moderate confidence in their reading capabilities (M = 2.64, SD = 0.92).

When examining specific obstacles, specialized vocabulary emerged as the most significant barrier when engaging with English economic texts. Technical terminology (M = 4.35, SD = 0.71) ranked as the most challenging aspect, with complex sentence structures (M = 4.02, SD = 0.83) and abstract economic concepts (M = 3.94, SD = 0.78) following closely. Qualitative responses reinforced these findings, with one student commenting: *"Saya menghabiskan begitu banyak waktu mencari arti istilah-istilah ekonomi sehingga saya kehilangan gagasan utama dalam teks tersebut."* ("I spend so much time looking up economic terms that I lose track of the main ideas in the text"). Another noted: *"Bahkan ketika saya memahami semua kata secara individual, cara kata-kata tersebut digunakan dalam teks ekonomi terasa berbeda, dan saya kesulitan untuk menangkap makna sebenarnya."*("Even when I understand all the words individually, the way they are used in economics texts seems different, and I struggle to grasp the real meaning").

Regarding strategy awareness and implementation, students demonstrated moderate levels (M = 2.95, SD = 0.81), indicating limited strategic approaches. Qualitative data showed most students relied on fundamental strategies rather than sophisticated reading techniques. Commonly reported strategies included dictionary use (87% of respondents), translation to first language (79%), re-reading difficult passages (68%), seeking peer assistance (42%), and creating vocabulary lists (39%). More advanced strategies like predicting content, analyzing text structure, or making inference connections were mentioned by fewer than 25% of respondents. Gender analysis revealed female students reported significantly higher use of support strategies such as note-taking and collaborative learning (M = 3.18, SD = 0.77) compared to male students (M = 2.86, SD = 0.84), t(107) = 2.43, p = 0.017, though no significant gender differences appeared in overall perception dimensions.

Students expressed strong preferences for specific support types, with highest-rated needs including specialized economics vocabulary instruction (M = 4.48, SD = 0.59), guided reading activities with step-by-step comprehension support (M = 4.32, SD = 0.66), text simplification or adaptation for different proficiency levels (M = 4.18, SD = 0.71), and integration of visual supports such as diagrams and graphs (M = 4.05, SD = 0.78). In open-ended responses, students frequently expressed desire for more structured scaffolding, with one noting: *"Saya berharap kita mendapatkan lebih banyak latihan terbimbing dengan teks-teks ekonomi sebelum diharapkan untuk membacanya sendiri tanpa bantuan."*("I wish we had more guided practice with economic texts before being expected to read them independently").

Discussion

The findings of this study align with several key aspects of previous research while offering new insights into the specific challenges faced by economics students. The prominence of vocabulary-related difficulties confirms Martinez's (2018) research emphasizing the critical role of discipline-specific terminology in reading comprehension. The challenge with specialized vocabulary was further complicated by students' unfamiliarity with economic concepts themselves, supporting Koch and Terzić-Šupić's (2021) assertion that content knowledge significantly influences reading comprehension in specialized fields.
The moderate levels of strategy awareness and use corroborate Huang and van Naerssen's (2019) findings regarding the limited strategy repertoire of many EFL learners when facing specialized texts. Most students relied on basic approaches rather than employing more sophisticated reading strategies that could enhance their comprehension of complex economic content.

The study's findings have several important implications for English for Economics instruction. First, the contrast between high perceived importance of English economic texts and only moderate confidence levels suggests students recognize these materials' value but require additional support to engage with them effectively. This supports the case for dedicated

instruction in reading specialized texts rather than expecting incidental learning to occur naturally.

Second, the prominence of vocabulary-related challenges points to the need for systematic economics terminology instruction integrated with reading activities. As suggested by Martinez (2018), pre-teaching key terminology before reading activities and providing opportunities for repeated encounters with specialized vocabulary could substantially enhance comprehension.

Third, the limited strategy awareness reported by students highlights the importance of explicit strategy instruction. Teaching students to employ more sophisticated approaches such as analyzing text structure, identifying discourse markers, and recognizing patterns in economic texts could significantly improve their reading effectiveness.

Finally, the gender differences observed in support strategy use suggest that instructors should promote a diverse range of reading approaches and create opportunities for collaborative learning that can benefit all students. The findings echo Reichelt's (2021) recommendation for disciplinary literacy approaches that integrate language and content learning to provide the structured scaffolding students clearly desire.

CONCLUSION

This study illuminates how first-semester Development Economics students perceive English economic texts, revealing that while they recognize these texts' importance, they face significant challenges with specialized vocabulary, complex syntax, and simultaneous processing of unfamiliar language and content. The findings emphasize the need for specialized pedagogical approaches addressing both linguistic and conceptual challenges, with students' moderate strategy awareness suggesting that explicit instruction could substantially enhance their reading experiences. Gender differences in strategy use further highlight the value of promoting diverse approaches to reading comprehension.

For educators in ESP and economics, these findings highlight the essential role of collaboration between language specialists and content experts in creating customized teaching resources and methods. In particular, ESP instructors should incorporate targeted vocabulary exercises, structured reading activities, and workshops focused on strategic learning to overcome linguistic and conceptual obstacles. Such approaches can better equip students to handle the complex demands of economic texts with confidence. Although the study has limitations, such as its focus on one institution and reliance on self-reported data, it provides a groundwork for further exploration, including research with objective measures of comprehension or longitudinal studies on evolving student perceptions. By actively addressing students' challenges and viewpoints, instructors can cultivate a more inclusive and impactful learning environment, enabling students to develop the skills required to excel in the demanding reading tasks of economics.

REFERENCES

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Huang, L., & van Naerssen, M. (2019). Reading strategies and reading comprehension: A study of Chinese EFL learners. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 42(3), 548-568. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12282

Koch, J., & Terzić-Šupić, Z. (2021). Student perception as a predictor of academic performance in ESP courses. *ESP Today*, 9(1), 123-145. https://doi.org/10.18485/esptoday.2021.9.1.7

Martinez, R. (2018). Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in ESP contexts: An investigation of discipline-specific academic reading. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 34, 58-73. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2018.03.005

Reichelt, M. (2021). A disciplinary literacy approach to economics education: Integrating content and language instruction. *System*, 97, 102432. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102432