FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

USING AUTHENTIC READING TEXTS TO IMPROVE VOCABULARY FOR THIRD-YEAR STUDENTS OF INFOMATION SCIENCE AT UNIVERSITIES IN HA NOI

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ABSTRACT: The paper investigates or researches learning vocabulary through using extra authentic reading texts. Based on the data of analysis and evaluation from the observation and interview method, the results show that using extra reading texts is one of the best effective ways to increase students' vocabulary. It also suggests that the extra reading texts combined the course-book improves students' motivation or knowledge level and should be chosen and modified carefully to play an important role of teaching and learning vocabulary not only for third year students of Information science but also other students at universities in Ha Noi.

KEY WORDS: authentic reading texts; developing vocabulary; teaching and learning vocabulary; information science; English for Specific Purpose.

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1. Introduction

English for Specific Purpose (ESP) has been considered an important field in Vietnam. To meet the demand of the real economic-social life, ESP is used in the curriculum of Vietnamese universities or colleges, and universities in Ha Noi is not an exception. At universities in Ha Noi, ESP courses are used in different discipline areas such as Economics, Construction Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Foreign languages and Tourism, and Information Technology. However, teaching and learning ESP in Viet Nam in general and at universities in Ha Noi in particular has still been far from satisfaction. Being an ESP teacher, the author realizes a number of problems that the ESP teachers and students at universities encounter in teaching and learning ESP in everyday situations. Therefore, the researcher thinks that developing vocabulary of students is very essential.

Like the other students at national universities in Vietnam, the third -year students of information science at universities in Ha Noi have to learn: New - Headway (Elementary and Pre- Intermediate) [Liz & John Soars, 2000] within the first - two years. The last - two years, they must study ESP with course- book *Basic English for Computing* [Glendinning & McEwan, 2002] which seems to be considered as difficult; especially items are not easy for students to remember. To help students consolidate the vocabulary knowledge, the researcher would like to carry out an innovation to improve vocabulary of students "reading is the only way, the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammar, and the only way we become good spellers" [Krashen, 1993: 443]. The researcher will try to investigate on using authentic reading texts to help the third - year students of information science improve their vocabulary as well as their reading ability.

2. Literature review

The early experiment of Wesche and Paribakht [2000], they conducted to the comparison of different conditions, which affected vocabulary learning, were *Reading Only* and *Reading Plus*. In order to understand deeper, the differences, the authors conducted the two conditions separately: the first was *Reading Only* [1999]; the second was *Reading Plus* [2000]. The results pointed out that both the conditions played a significant role in vocabulary gains, but the latter condition led to vocabulary acquisition superior. Obviously, word - learning outcomes were differential from the two conditions.

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The findings demonstrated that the aim in the *Reading Only* treatment was at text comprehension, so learners only focused on task-related words and ignored most of the others, without finding specific word meaning for target words. Sometimes, learners might still infer the meaning from the context to answer comprehension questions without having to deal with specific lexical items. Hence, many other words would be lost once they served their immediate text comprehension purpose. It was manifest evidence that in the former condition learner's retention of most of the target words they learned remained at the recognition level. In contrasts, vocabulary attainment in the latter condition covered a range of aspects of word knowledge.

In short, differences between learner responses under the two conditions could help to explain the superior effectiveness of the latter condition in the number of target words retained and the greater depth of word knowledge than the former experiment.

The strength of the study is that the finding provides insight into the advantages of using text-based vocabulary exercises together with a reading text in the previous experiment. The study also supports a point of vocabulary acquisition as an elaborative and iterative process. Nevertheless, there are some limitations. Firstly, the reading text is rather short, so many important words are not being learnt by subjects. Secondly, instructional period in the Reading Plus treatment is perhaps limited.

Pigada and Schmitt [2006] investigated a case study of a 27-year old learner of French to explore whether extensive reading program lasted one month could improve lexical knowledge. There were 133 target words (70 nouns and 63 verbs) which examined on meaning, spelling, and grammatical behavior. The results indicated that substantial learning of the target words happened during the extensive reading treatment, but the spelling was the most effective, even a few exposures. Another result was that the words that appeared twenty or more times were there a good chance of all three words knowledge facets being strengthened.

The strength of this investigation is that allows us to examine in more detail the process of vocabulary learning. The results also comment the effects of text frequency, but the author is interested in acquisition of word meaning, spelling and grammatical aspects.

The limitation of a case study is impossible to make claims for statistical generalizations. Most participants of previous studies are L2, but a case study is only one French participant. Thus, it is unpopular and takes a lot of time to investigate. Despite the longer reading treatment than previous studies, only a small part of the scheme of the graded readers is covered. Therefore, a higher number of target words; a number of other participants and a greater number of readers should be tested to ascertain more clearly about vocabulary acquisition.

A study by Subekti and Lawson [2007] aimed at the effects of strategies on vocabulary acquisition of Indonesian students through reading. The participants were 25 higher level English proficiency from a university in Australia. They were males and females aged from 28 to 40 years. According to Subekti and Lawson, the number of target words was 30; approximately half of words were not similarly for learners. The subjects were asked to take part two kinds of test: *Word Recognition Test* and *Meaning Translation Test*. After reading, the author immediately gave the subjects the two kinds of test above. After one week and after a four-week delay, the subjects did the same two tests. The findings demonstrated that the aim of the *Word Recognition Test* was at examining the memory of target words, so learners only focused on frequency of words and without paying to the word meaning of target words in the *Meaning Translation Test*. The data also supported the findings of Pigada and Schmitt that more frequency words were more possible studied. The author showed additionally that the rate of frequency words could be prevented from decay.

The strength of this study is that the author indicated the value of strategies use. In addition, the study suggests that the types of test have an influence on reading, because all the participants have good result in IELTS test before taking part in this study. Conversely, there are some limitations. Firstly, the number of treatment words is quiet small. Secondly, most participants of this study, like

the study of Pigada and Schmitt, are L2. Moreover, there is no pay attention to intervention when conducts the study. The suggestions from the findings are that knowledge decay should be paid more attention in the future study.

The recent study by Yali [2010] investigated on the important part of vocabulary learning through reading as well as the efficiency of the incidental learning and intention al learning instruction through two kinds of groups: the control group (46 students) and the experimental group (47 students). Firstly, both groups were required to read the text "Going Home" and answered the questions below. Secondly, the control group had to read another text and answer the questions (called incidental learning) while the experimental group had to do some explicit vocabulary exercises related the reading "Going Home" (called intentional learning). 26 target items were chosen to participate in this treatment process. The results indicated that although the students attained significantly in vocabulary knowledge in both instructional treatment, the intentional learning instruction or reading plus vocabulary exercises led to the acquisition with greater words. The data also suggested that the combination of the two instructions gained better retention and greater new words.

Once again, Yali confirmed the findings of Wesche and Paribakht that the role of reading in vocabulary acquisition, especially reading plus text-based vocabulary exercises. Nevertheless, there are some limitations of the study. The number of target words is relatively small, only 26 items tested. In addition, most target words are verbs; there are no other aspects of words. Thus, the results suggest that larger number of target words should be tested.

Unlike the studies mentioned above, Shang, Briody and Lin [2006] examined the importance of strategies use on extensive reading. The participants in this study were 11 students from various fields of study. They were three level English proficiency such as "sophomores," "juniors," and "senior." The author also gave some basic assumptions about the vocabulary gains from extensive reading. Firstly, the author assumed that extensive reading had the major source of vocabulary acquisition in L2 through the following criteria: "reading comprehension" assumption, "vocabulary recognition" assumption, "listening comprehension" assumption, and "reading speed" assumption. Secondly, the author compared vocabulary gains from extensive reading and skill –based through experiments with different purposed, different participants and different tasks, but the same procedures. As a result, the scores of the three experiments, of course, were not similar. Thirdly, the author compared vocabulary gains from motivation in L2 through extensive reading.

Sum up, the data supported some previous studies that acquiring vocabulary from reading was a cumulative process, the results from repeat exposures to the same procedures. Based on these findings, the author also claimed that extensive reading was able to the best way of the words development. Nevertheless, the weaknesses of this study, of course, are few participants.

Another investigation by Chen [2011], the study aimed at the effects of words knowledge through comprehensive reading. 8 grade three EFL students took part in the investigation. To clear that frequency matter, the author focused on comparing two kinds of test in teaching new words such as *Vocabulary Level Test* and *Reading Comprehension Test*. The result stated that all the subjects could learn more frequency words than less frequency words. However, it appeared that stronger subjects were more ability of words than weaker subjects were. In other words, weaker learners read only the implement of words knowledge and enrich information from other resources.

The strength of this investigation is that tests are scanned by computer so as to identify the appropriate of the text's vocabulary. The results also comment the effects of words knowledge more powerful than comprehensive reading, but the author is interested in acquisition of words knowledge by using dictionary, increasing student's motivation or explaining some meaning of words before reading. The results of this study have many limitations. Most subjects of study are Taiwan participants. Their teacher through the same strategies on reading comprehension examines them.

Thus, it is unpopular and takes a lot of time to examine. Moreover, the weakness of the study are also the few participants and without comparing the teachers' strategies when teaching reading lesson.

While Cheng concentrated on the improvement of comprehensive reading with words knowledge, Asgari and Mustapha [2011] gave some teaching methods of leaning vocabulary and activity - based tasks. 10 Malaysian students (4 males and 6 females) took part in this study. The result gave some kinds of methods on vocabulary knowledge could be learnt by learners. However, students learnt significantly more new words from pushed –out put technique than they did from either input or activity - based techniques. The author suggested that giving students the using context - tasks for new words was more than developing controlled readings or writing words for them. The author also claimed that learning or teaching second language was to need to have more attention of learns' attitudes or teachers' methods. It was clear that without refusing the role of efficient strategies for vocabulary acquisition, so that the study declared that firth approaches were considered as one of the best methods for learning vocabulary knowledge through reading. It was specific evidence that Asgari and Mustapha continued to support the former views and the findings of Subekti and Lawson that there was a significant acquisition in vocabulary learning. However, the weaknesses of the study are also the same with previous researchers. For example, there are few participants.

As reported by Luchini and Serati [2010], they also investigated the use of effective vocabulary acquisition in L2. The study consisted of five teachers and one classroom of 25 students who were taught by one of the five teachers. There were five English proficiency levels of participants which were "elementary", "low-intermediate", "intermediate', 'upper-intermediate", and "advanced". The findings showed that Argentinian students were willing and had positive attitudes when taking part in English class. Most of them recognized that the use of vocabulary was important and effective on learning reading. Students at different English levels showed the different tendencies to vocabulary acquisition in class activities.

The strength of the study is that the participants are from various levels and different fields of study. However, there are some limitations of this study. Firstly, the study is only concerned about attitudes of language learners, teacher's attitudes and perceptions are not mentioned. Secondly, the number of participants is only 25 students that are not enough to generalize the conclusion.

As analyzed the findings of above studies, we find that almost of them state that vocabulary development through reading is more gains than previous investigations, especially; it is more effective for reading plus text-based activities. The one of the most outstanding points is that they highly appraise the role of the frequency occurrence words and texts. However, all these investigations only conducted the relatively short reading texts, the number of target words appeared infrequent enough to be tested. Therefore, it should be examined the larger number of target items with the reading plus text-based vocabulary exercises. Furthermore, knowledge decay and retention should be also taken more consideration in the future study. In Vietnamese context, of course, there are still not many studies investigating this issue. Review what have been done about the learning vocabulary through reading is very important, however, applying the methods and findings to Vietnamese context need much time to prepare and find out the appropriate methods.

Sum up, we review the findings of some researches as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each study. In the following part, we would like to summary the research methods used in each articles and find the strengths and weaknesses of each research methods in order to choose the suitable methods for our future research.

An undeniable fact is that vocabulary is one of the most important aspects in foreign language learning and teaching process. One of the most striking examples, Harmer (1993:153) remarkably emphasized the importance of vocabulary: ''If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh". Therefore, vocabulary has been

paid more attention to by the teachers and researchers who have been finding out the best ways to implement vocabulary teaching and learning more effectively.

At universities in Ha Noi, English is one of the compulsory subjects during university schedule. The first - two year, students are asked to learn Basic English through New - Headway (Elementary and Pre- Intermediate) [Liz & John Soars, 2000]. As designed in the third - year program, students are going to study ESP with the course - book *Basic English for Computing* [Glendinning & McEwan, 2002]. This book has twenty - five units and themed under twenty – five different subject areas such as Networks, Output and Input devices, Storage devices, The Graphical user Interface... They have to study the course - book in two semesters a year, each semester includes fifteen weeks, and they study four periods of English per week. It means that the students must study twelve units within fifteen weeks.

To sum up, English subject is not only taught from the first - year students but also ESP program for the third-year students. As English plays a very important role in this course, much attention is paid to the English language teaching and learning process. Hence, their purpose of English is to become competent at their own fields in third year and to obtain English that is very necessary for their work after graduating or in the future.

Being a teacher with four years of experience, the researcher realizes actually that English is learned in a passive way; students get structures and vocabulary from teachers and then practice by doing relevant exercises, so they have to deal with many difficulties in learning English including four skills.

As a specialized English teacher, the researcher is teaching the third – year students who are at the age of 20 to 22, "for adults, learning to speak a new language is in many cases far from being satisfactory simply because they feel they need to cope with many different aspects at one time and that seems to be impossible in real conversation" [Betsabe', 2007:86]. However, there is a fact that students are facing many troubles in learning ESP, especially for students of Information Science. Information Science is a new - born major in Vietnam and is taught at a few universities. Students of Information Science, who are trained to be information engineers, need English for a variety of communicative situations of their jobs. For this reason, they have to have a good knowledge of Informatics terms, particularly the vocabulary of their Information filed (of their work).

3. Methodology and data

3.1. Research question

(1) What are the difficulties students often met with when processing reading lessons in course - book?; (2) What are the third-year students of information science attitudes toward learning vocabulary by using authentic reading materials?; (3) To what extent do introducing authentic reading materials combined with the coursebook improve vocabulary for the third-year students of information science?; (4) To what extent do the authentic reading materials play in enhancing students' motivation?

3.2. The participants

The participants in the innovation are 310 (303 males and 7 females) third-year students of Information science at universities in Ha Noi such as Ha Noi Metropolitan University, Ha Noi University of Science and Technology and FPT University. The students are from various areas of country, mostly from the Northern provinces and cities (Ha Noi, Nam Dinh, Ha Nam, Thai Binh, Ninh Binh…). Before entering these universities in Ha Noi, the students have studied the subjects of English for seven years in Secondary and High school. From the results above, however, the researcher asks students why their English proficiency level is not good although they have learnt it for a long time. Many of them say that they do not have any attention to learn English. Some of them say that although it is quite important, they only focus on the main subjects such as Mathematic, Chemist, Literary, and Physics that are examined in the entrance examinations. Based on the results

of my teaching experience and process, it remarkably emphasizes that the students of information science are not good at English language usage, especially vocabulary.

3.3. Research procedure

According to the students' scheduled, they have to study the subject of English 60 periods in the first semester of the third-year program with 12 units of the course-book *Basic English for Computing* [Glendinning & McEwan, 2002]. To carry out the innovation, the students only learn three periods every unit per week instead of four periods as assigned in the timetable. The researcher, of course, is going to glance cursorily at some the unnecessary parts of every unit in the course - book in order to assign the (a) last period for the extra authentic reading texts. Therefore, the rest of the period, the students are going to study an authentic reading text with different text – based tasks that are supplied by the researcher. However, the research span is only five weeks because of limited time, so the learners sometimes deal with at least four authentic reading texts during the treatment process, apart from a week of introduction of innovation.

As Bryndal [2009] suggests that if teachers choose the topics or genres are not familiar to the students, many students have many difficulties in reading. Therefore, all authentic reading texts, which are carefully chosen or modified for the experimental students, based on the topics of each unit in the course - book after being learnt by the students with the target at being suitable for students' knowledge and consolidating the amount of knowledge which the students have just studied in the course - book. The reading texts are from different sources, maybe, online or offline. Each reading text is conducted according to three stages as follows: Pre-reading, While-reading and Post-reading. Each of stage is designed to create opportunities to sort out the problems that students might encounter. Hence, in order to facilitate the reading process, a reading text is designed a variety of text - based activities, especially vocabulary exercises because if a reading text contains a few unknown lexical items, which makes a lot of students feel enjoyable and wants to engage in the reading activities.

Week 1: The researcher introduced the process of innovation to 310 third year students of Information science.

Week 2: The researcher would like to bring (make) students the comfortable and pleasurable atmosphere by giving the first authentic reading text: *Configuration* (*retrieved from the book: InfoTech English for Computer Users:* Santiago & Remacha Esteras*, 2001*).

Week 3: Students received to the second authentic reading text: *Type and Click* (*retrieved from the book: InfoTech English for Computer Users:* Santiago & Remacha Esteras*, 2001*).

Week 4: This week, students were going to study the third authentic reading text: *Kinds of printers* (*retrieved from the book: InfoTech English for Computer Users:* Santiago & Remacha Esteras*, 2001*).

Week 5: This week of innovation process, students were required to read the fourth authentic reading text: *The Graphical User Interface* (*retrieved from the book: InfoTech English for Computer Users:* Santiago & Remacha Esteras, 2001).

3.4. Data collection instrument

The method chose to collect data for the research was classroom observation and interviews. In this research, the author decides to use class observation in here because it is considered as one of the suitable approaches to collect data in large scale "collect information from the large scale, the observation was more efficient than other approaches" [Brown, 2000: 29]. As Patton [1990: 203] also emphasizes that observation is "attractive as they afford the research the opportunity to gather live data from live situations". During five weeks of innovation implementation, the author observes and makes notes related to the topic using an open - ended observation sheets.

The researcher not only uses class observation but also carries out this research by using the interviews. Observation classroom does not allow the author to understand the students' views about

using authentic reading texts to improve vocabulary. The students are interviewed individually with the same questions after class observation to seek their ideas. The purpose of interviews is to understand students' attitudes and opinions towards the course - book and extra authentic reading texts combined with the course book as well.

The interviews include eight questions, which are divided into two main parts. The first part consists of two questions to find information about the contents and levels of the reading texts in the course - book. The second part is six questions to be focused on the opinions of students about the extra authentic reading texts. The interviews are designed in Vietnamese, the mother tongue of the information so that students could understand the questions more thoroughly. In analyzing the interviews, the author translates the students' interviews into English.

5. Data analysis and evaluation

5.1. Data analysis

5.1.1. Results from the class observation

Students' reaction and responses were observed carefully during five weeks. The researcher found that most students who took part in this research had positive attitudes toward using authentic materials texts combined course - book to develop their vocabulary. 281 out of students (accounting for 90,65%) seemed to be more eager to join in the reading lessons. They felt that authentic reading texts made reading lessons more enjoyable and memorable.

In analyzing observation data, the use of pre- reading activities helped students' comprehension easily. Pre-reading activities not only assisted students to feel easier but also provided them with the chances to enhance their other vocabulary than before. Nevertheless, the findings of the observation classroom showed that 103 students (accounting for 33,23%) still had lack of confidence and took part negatively in the reading process.

The findings also showed that the traditional method of vocabulary teaching and learning asked students to memorize words; however, it was nearly impossible to teach every single word in the reading lessons. Instead of encouraging memorization, the researcher had to provide students with some other vocabulary learning strategies, such as using context clues, consulting a references source, and analyzing word parts. Moreover, 103 students (accounting for 33,23%) had many difficulties in understanding the new words. There is no ambit on vocabulary of authentic reading texts, so students might have to deal with their vocabulary by using language tools, such as dictionary or learning strategies.

5.1.2. Results from the students' interview

The researcher started by analyzing the interview data by asking students about reading lessons of the course - book. Most students raised some reasons for their point. Firstly, the contents of reading lessons of course - book were not exploited effectively. Therefore, they did not or absolutely did not perceive the reading lessons effective with contents. Secondly, they said that the levels of course – book, particularly the reading lessons, was very difficult. This led to the situation that most students felt bored. From their point, if the teacher knew how to combine well each content of readings lessons, the situation would become much more improved. The students also emphasized that if the reading lessons were used without changing the teaching strategies, it would be boring. Moreover, the students revealed that it was very free for them to attend the class with reading lessons when teacher used most of the time giving lessons and forgot to ask the students for their participation in the lessons. Obviously, this may decrease the interaction between the teacher and students, and among the students themselves.

From the findings, the students responded positively when asked about the extra materials and their selection process. All interviewees said that authentic reading texts were helpful and effective in reaching the objectives of vocabulary enhancement. Moreover, much vocabulary of authentic reading materials related to meaning of word and those are easy to understand or memorize. Furthermore, the

researcher asked the interviewees to explicate how authentic reading texts combined with the course - book helps them improve their vocabulary. Most interviewees said that authentic materials texts not only had a tendency to expand their vocabulary size in the course - book, but also provided the meaning and use of words.

In analyzing the interviews data, 281 students (accounting for 90,65%) agreed that materials reading texts were relevant and 29 students (accounting for 9,35%) had no answer. After three lessons, 254 out of students (accounting 81,94%) said that the design of the authentic reading materials was tasks that best motivate spirit and helped them had better gain the vocabulary when reading. Based on the results of interview, 203 students (accounting for 65,48%) stated that vocabulary of authentic reading texts was the main concern when they comprehend the reading. They preferred to understand the meaning of all words in the text before reading. The findings showed that these students improved their reading rate and were pleasant reading experiences. Other students believed that vocabulary of authentic reading texts improved their English abilities and enabled them to accurately information from the articles.

5.2. Evaluation

By analyzing the interviews and observation classroom, a number of assumptions can be made. Firstly, most students claimed that the authentic reading texts were necessary and helped them better understanding the specific vocabulary items as well as gathered the general vocabulary knowledge. Secondly, they were motivated through using the authentic reading texts. Thus, it was recommended that the authentic readings materials should be chosen and modified carefully in order to fit with students' knowledge levels.

Clearly, there were a number of limitations that needed to be acknowledged during the implementation of innovation. Firstly, the innovation was carried out in a short time, only five weeks. This period was not enough to realize much change and effectiveness of the innovation process. Secondly, the researcher in this innovation played role as both implementer and change agent, other teachers of universities did not involve in the innovation. Moreover, there was not the comparison between the effects of two genders, the researcher only mentioned to students in his class in common. Nobody managed or judged the innovation process. Therefore, the results of the innovation might be inaccurate or under/overestimated. Finally, it was the first time the researcher has ever carried research, so he had many difficulties during innovation process. Lack of interview experience, for example, meant that the researcher was not able to prompt students to provide answers that are more detailed.

6. Conclusion

In view of the innovation findings, it is stated that using authentic reading texts is one effective way to increase students' vocabulary. The findings also show that the extra reading texts combined the course-book has positive effect on students' attitudes. They encourage students willing to join in the reading lessons and improve their vocabulary.

In conclusion, the aims of the innovations have been achieved and it is hoped that the innovation would make a significant contribution to better the current situation of teaching and learning vocabulary not only in Information science but also in other fields at universities in Ha Noi.

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Sử dụng tài liệu đọc bổ trợ nhằm nâng cao vốn từ vựng cho sinh viên năm thứ ba chuyên ngành công nghệ thông tin tại một số trường đại học ở Hà Nội

Tóm tắt: Bài báo nghiên cứu về việc nâng cao vốn từ vựng thông qua việc sử dụng các tài liệu đọc bổ trợ. Dựa trên cơ sở ngữ liệu thu được từ việc phân tích và đánh giá bằng phương pháp quan sát và phỏng vấn, kết quả nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng việc sử dụng các tài liệu đọc bổ trợ là một trong những phương thức tốt nhất để nâng cao vốn từ vựng cho sinh viên. Ngoài ra, việc kết hợp tài liệu bổ trợ với tài liệu chính cũng sẽ nâng cao động lực cho sinh viên cũng như trình độ của họ. Việc lựa chọn các tài liệu này một cách có chọn lọc và điều chỉnh hợp lý sẽ giữ vai trò quan trọng trong việc dạy và học từ vựng không chỉ đối với sinh viên năm thứ ba chuyên ngành công nghệ thông tin mà còn đối với các sinh viên chuyên ngành khác tại các trường đại học ở Hà Nội.

Từ khóa: tài liệu đọc bổ trợ; nâng cao vốn từ vựng; dạy và học từ vựng; công nghệ thông tin; tiếng Anh chuyên ngành.