

Reconceptualizing ESP Reading Comprehension In Economics Education: A Sociolinguistic And Construction–Integration Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the cognitive and emotional factors influencing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) reading comprehension within a sociolinguistic context among first-year economics students. In modern higher education, reading in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts is frequently undervalued, despite its essential contribution to developing professional discourse competence and productive language abilities. The study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative questionnaire data with qualitative pedagogical observations to investigate students' reading habits, preferences, and comprehension difficulties.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), reading comprehension, sociolinguistic approach, cognitive aspects, motivation in language acquisition, professional discourse, economics students.

INTRODUCTION

Nunan regards English as a professional language, and proficiency in it expands employment prospects (Nunan, 2018). Professor J. Jalolov asserted that reading serves as a conduit for acquiring information across various domains, including science and technology, national affairs, culture, history, and literature, which are identified as primary areas (Jalolov, 2012). E. Kargina characterized reading as a method for improving oral communication skills in non-philological colleges. She outlined three strategies for augmenting pupils' speaking abilities through the enhancement of reading comprehension.[6]

1 Enhancing verbal communication with textual resources

2 Delivering the instructive aspect of discourse to establish a foundation for reading

3. To render oral discourse useful, a deliberate selection of textual materials is essential—primarily those carrying personally significant information for pupils, which may

vary for each individual. S. Matesivich considers that reading in a foreign language is more motivating than spoken communication. M. Gulyamova, in her research, also emphasizes the significance of reading abilities in relation to other productive skills, namely writing and speaking. Throughout our experimental period, we saw that economics students exhibited low motivation for reading, although demonstrated a strong eagerness to engage in speaking and writing. Consequently, our objective was to enhance their reading skills by incorporating activities related to speech and writing. Currently, ESP students acquire language skills for several objectives, including obtaining international or national certifications, studying abroad, securing lucrative employment, and advancing in their careers. All the aforementioned factors compel them to acquire a foreign language for specific needs. The intent is the primary component of reading comprehension. Professional knowledge can be augmented by the reading of materials in both one's own language and foreign languages. The more one reads, the more knowledgeable, skillful, and

competent one becomes as an expert. Reading is essential for improving productive skills, and children should be encouraged to read extensively across several subjects. This talent is increasingly essential for non-philological university students due to its significance in several domains of life. Currently, young specialists in our country are expected to possess professional expertise and proficiency in an additional foreign language to enhance commercial, economic, political, and educational collaboration. Prior to addressing the primary themes of our work, we must delineate English for Specific Purposes (ESP) according to scholarly perspectives and research findings. English for Specific Purposes refers to the instruction and acquisition of English as a second language aimed at achieving proficiency in a particular domain (Brian & Starfield, 2013).[3] English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is designed to train students within their specific domains while considering the fundamental components of the foreign language to facilitate improved learning for diverse objectives. Hutchinson and Waters et al. (1987) proposed three branches of English for Specific Purposes (ESP):

English for Science and Technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE), English for Social Studies (ESS) (p. 203). They defined “ESP as a methodology for language instruction wherein all decisions regarding content and methodology are predicated on the learner’s purpose for acquiring the language” (p. 25). Our research focuses on the reading comprehension skills of EBE branch students through a sociolinguistic lens. Texts incorporate sociolinguistic elements essential for effective communication, which learners will utilize in many contexts. [18] Reading is a vital ability for ESP students to meet their future professional requirements. The primary resource for reading is text, which adheres to specific selection criteria. Inter Jing L., Sing M., Li L., et al. (2005, p. 19) advocate for utilizing authentic materials from the internet, foreign periodicals, and newspapers as sources of information pertaining to nations, cultures, and other aspects related to the language. In that context, our strategy is crucial for efficient communication inside their domain for further meetings and conferences. V. Cazac asserted that authentic reading materials are useful in enhancing linguistic competence, linguistic knowledge, and intercultural communication (Cazac, 2023).[4] Cazac’s concept is also linked to Krashen’s intelligible input theory, since both researchers underscore the significance of text difficulty. The reading input hypothesis has five components that are crucial for enhanced comprehension

of the text. The author stated that improving reading comprehension skills can be achieved through explanations, various vocabulary activities, or the use of diverse images, photographs, CT scans, infographics, translations into the first language, or by providing definitions. (Ingrid Carolina García-Ostbye, Antonio Martínez-Sáez, 2023.70). Every reader seeks to acquire information for subsequent utilization in various contexts. A primary component of reading is the purpose; the fundamental question is why we need to read this book. Every skill is founded on certain methodological, pedagogic, and psychological objectives, enabling us to read and process information through the use of our cognitive abilities. In ESP reading, psychological aspects are equally crucial for enhanced comprehension. Currently, the education system necessitates that educators and methodologists develop innovative and effective teaching strategies by studying global standards in foreign language instruction. Students desire educators to incorporate novel approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques into their classrooms. It is challenging for teachers to capture students’ attention and motivate them during lessons using conventional methods. Auditory hours have decreased, resulting in insufficient time for reading, which subsequently leads to new challenges in their productive skills. The reading component of ESP lessons will be eliminated due to factors such as time constraints, student demotivation, and psychological issues. Reading can be engaging when students recognize it as essential for their development; its value is contingent upon its necessity. This study is based on Kintsch’s building–Integration (CI) Theory of Reading Comprehension, which views reading as an active process of meaning building rather than mere passive decoding. [7] The CI model posits that comprehension transpires in two interconnected phases: construction, wherein textual propositions are formed and processed in working memory, and integration, during which these propositions are linked to prior knowledge to create a cohesive situation model. This paradigm offers a comprehensive elucidation of the cognitive obstacles encountered in ESP reading by first-year economics students, specifically highlighting memory-related limitations (45%), attention issues (25%), and motivational shortcomings (40%). The results indicate that inadequate working memory processing and insufficient activation of prior knowledge may impede the development of stable mental representations of professional discourse. Consequently, incorporating cognitively scaffolded and sociolinguistically significant reading tasks may improve comprehension and promote

effective skill transfer. Comprehension can be assessed through reading tasks and exercises. The efficacy of exercises can be assessed by students' engagement and understanding. Most study emphasizes the importance of the pre-reading and creative stages in enhancing reading skills. We believe that the pre-stage and creative stages are crucial for enhancing text comprehension and capturing attention. At the outset of the class, we should initiate an engaging, motivational, and captivating prelude to maintain students' interest on the topic. The creativity stage will be engaging for students as they can create something based on the facts they have understood from the text. They are enthusiastic about engaging in role-plays, discussions, and resolving various problems. Creative endeavors can be integrated with analytical exercises to enhance problem-solving abilities in various contexts. During the observation of lessons for students in the economics faculty, we noted that their proficiency levels varied, and they favored collaborative work in pairs or small groups to enhance comprehension and share information and experience. Their input skills are inferior to their output abilities, since they choose speaking and writing while lacking proficiency in these areas. We aim to enhance their productive capabilities by improving their reading abilities based on our observations. Reading input is a crucial component of productive skills and serves as our primary receptive skill from early childhood. Children find it engaging to listen to stories from their mother, and it is an enjoyable activity; nonetheless, throughout the years, this pastime is increasingly being supplanted by gadgets and other diversions. Our research focused on enhancing reading comprehension through a sociolinguistic approach, which is intricately linked to the context of various circumstances. Currently, our educational framework emphasizes task-oriented reading activities over text-oriented and purpose-oriented reading. They read texts to complete activities related to the content, although purpose-driven and text-driven reading are more effective for improving comprehension. Nonetheless, assignments must be confined to facilitate the assessment of their comprehension. According to Radislav (2005; 21), typical teaching methods in coursebooks predominantly emphasize task-driven activities, leading students to read solely for task completion, resulting in a rapid forgetfulness of the text's substance.[16] Text selection should be based on specific criteria: readability, suitability, usability, resourcefulness, and authenticity. According to students' opinions, reading is not as vital as other abilities;

yet, reading is a prerequisite for completing listening, speaking, and writing tasks, as it is necessary to read and absorb all materials in full to accomplish these tasks accurately. The ESP student prefers to engage in speaking over other skills; reading lacks appeal, and writing has challenges due to insufficient reading practice, which adversely affects both speaking and writing abilities in general and in specific contexts. We resolved to enhance reading input for ESP students to improve their oral and writing communication skills. In non-philological disciplines, students' reading should be conducted independently outside of class or collaboratively in groups, as this approach can enhance their comprehension skills effectively. Collaborative reading may be beneficial for joint efforts, while integrated reading materials could also be effective, particularly given the mixed-level composition of the students, as these reading methods may enhance their engagement and motivation.

METHODOLOGIES

In this section, we employed qualitative and quantitative methodologies to elucidate the essence of reading regularly, types of text, psychological difficulties for enhanced comprehension. Self-assessment questionnaire utilized for identifying preferences and effectiveness. This questionnaire involved students from the Faculty of Economics at three universities (National University of Uzbekistan, Gulistan State University, Karshi State University), who completed the assigned tasks with enthusiasm, as the reading exercises were tedious and unproductive in enhancing their language proficiency and professional skills; insufficient input was a primary concern for them. According to the gathered facts, data we may deduce that reading activities ought to be engaging, original, and facilitate communication and collaboration among peers and international participants in future meetings and conferences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of our self-assessment questionnaire indicate a shift in students' choices regarding reading skill, psychological factors, texts and methods.

Do you engage in regular reading and compose texts or books?

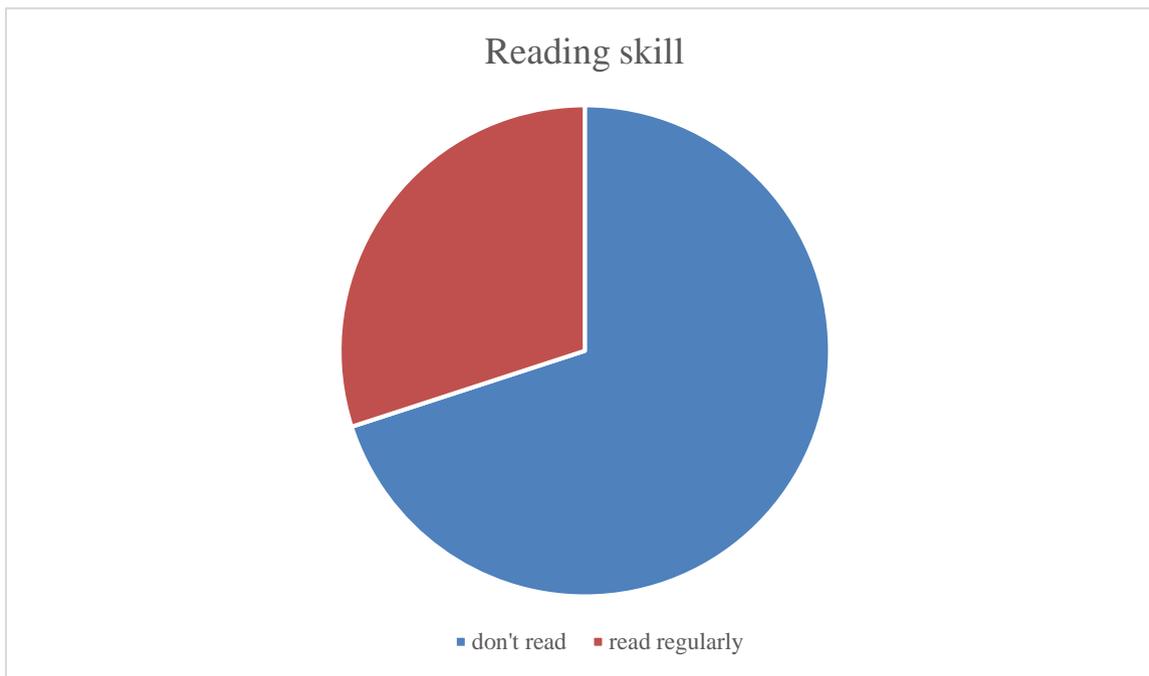


Figure 1. Results of reading skill development of economics students.

In our study, students' preferences for reading comprehension activities were identified using a self-assessment questionnaire comprising 10 questions. Seventy percent of students indicated a disinterest in reading in both their native and foreign languages, while thirty percent expressed a desire to read daily to acquire diverse knowledge. In our inquiries, we posed concerns

regarding time and determined that reading frequency also influences reading comprehension, as it must be a constant process for language learners in both languages. Language skills, akin to technological gadgets, should be continually re-innovated and enhanced with contemporary functionalities (methods, techniques). ESP students are enthusiastic about completing reading assignments that are interconnected with productive abilities.

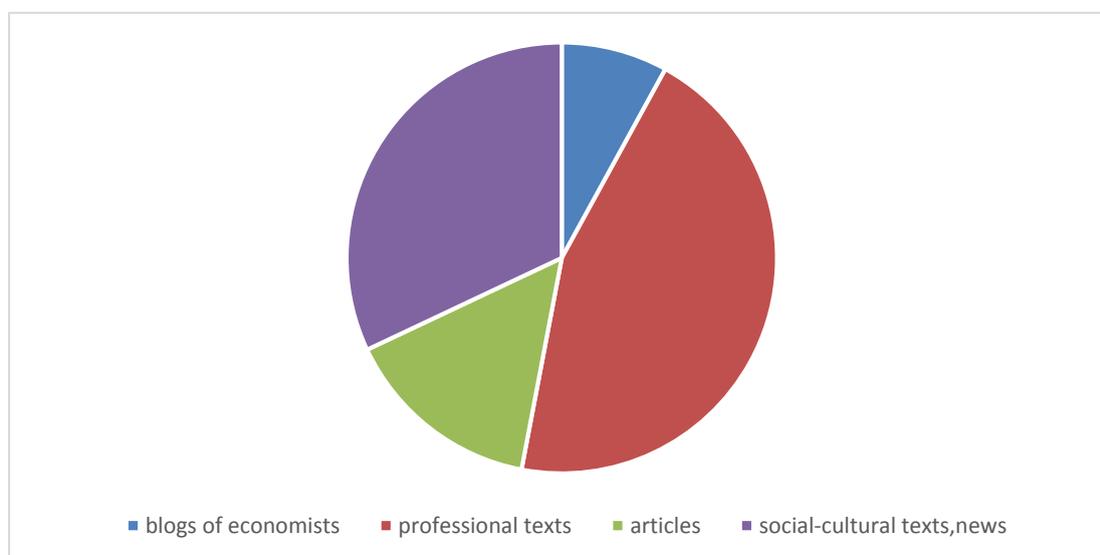


Figure 3. Textual preferences of economics students.

Students consider level of the text as a main difficulties, level of the text ,next lack of vocabulary and demotivation selected as basic difficulties. In questionnaire students answered that not only linguistic barriers prevent them fully comprehending the text but also psychological challenges also outnumbered. The quantitative results indicate that a significant percentage of students encounter internal learning limitations. Specifically, 40% of the participants attributed their academic difficulties to

insufficient motivation. Furthermore, 15% reported problems associated with sustained attention, whereas 35% indicated memory-related challenges and 10% other factors as major obstacles. The distribution of responses demonstrates that cognitive factors (attention and memory) and affective components (motivation) constitute interconnected determinants of students’ learning effectiveness. After reading they should work on exercises which help them to activate comprehended information.

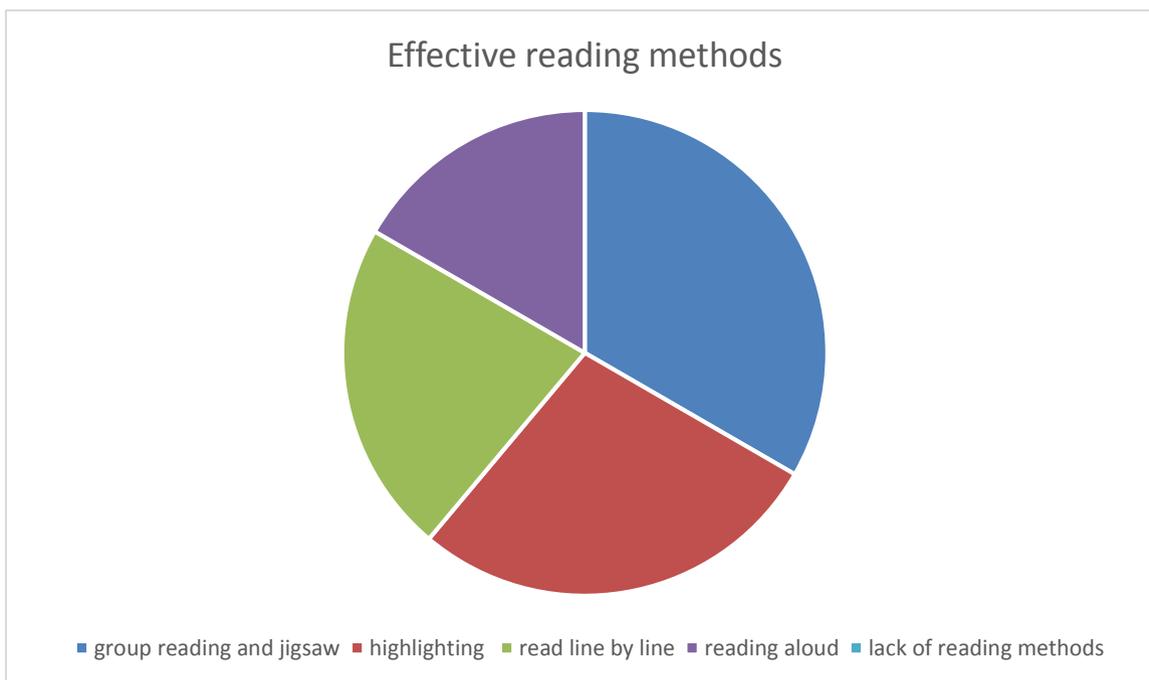


Figure 4. Result of psychological challenges in understanding text.

Do economics students have effective reading methods for reading text?

The questionnaire findings reveal a heterogeneous distribution of reading strategies among first-year economics students. Approximately 30% of respondents reported using collaborative approaches, such as group and jigsaw reading, indicating a preference for socially mediated comprehension processes. An additional 25% employed visual annotation techniques, including color-coded highlighting, suggesting emerging metacognitive awareness in organizing textual information. However, 20% of students indicated that they read line by line

without applying any structured method, reflecting a predominantly surface-level processing approach. Furthermore, 15% reported reading aloud as their primary strategy, which may support short-term attention but does not inherently promote deeper inferential comprehension. Notably, 10% acknowledged lacking awareness of effective reading strategies and experiencing difficulty understanding texts. Overall, the data suggest that while a proportion of students engage in interactive and cognitively supportive strategies, a substantial segment remains reliant on minimally strategic reading practices, underscoring the need for explicit instruction in discourse-oriented ESP reading methods.

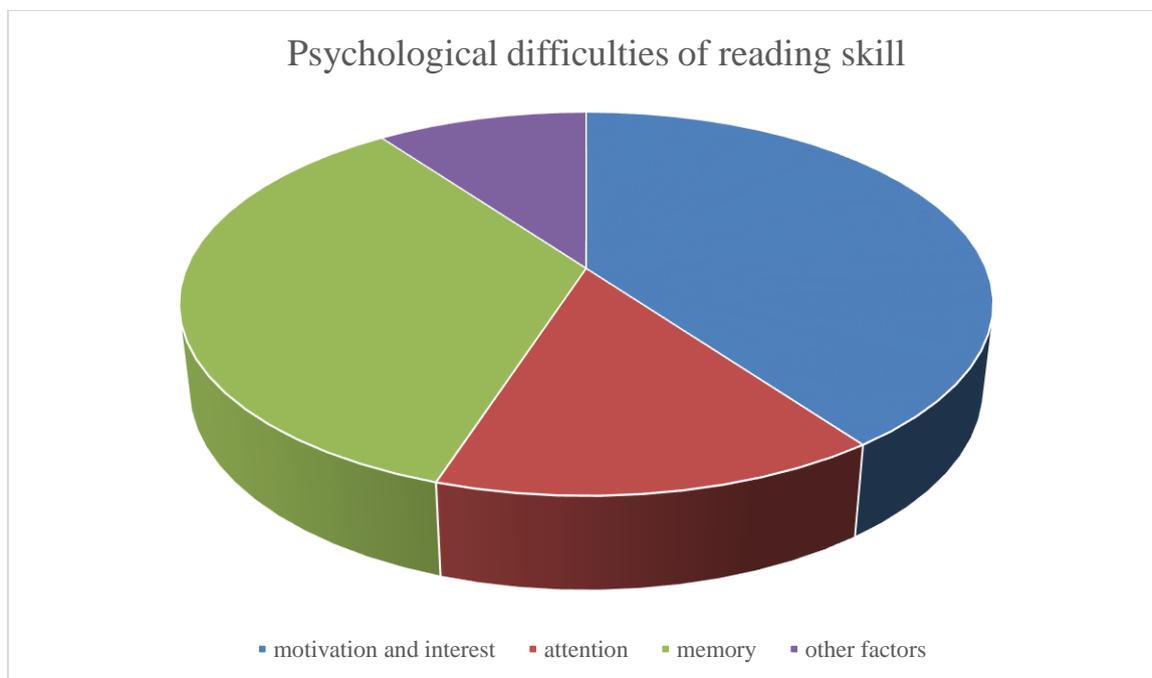


Figure 5. Result of commonly used methods in reading process by students.

The findings of the present study align with recent research emphasizing the multidimensional nature of ESP reading comprehension in higher education contexts. A significant percentage of students (70%) indicate irregular reading habits, mirroring a global trend observed in post-pandemic higher education, where digital fragmentation and diminished sustained attention have adversely affected deep reading practices (Delgado et al., 2018; Baron, 2021).[6] Current academic research emphasizes that proficiency in academic reading necessitates continuous interaction with genuine disciplinary texts instead of superficial, task-oriented exposure (Grabe & Stoller, 2020). The psychological obstacles identified in this study—motivation (40%), memory (35%), and attention (15%)—align with contemporary cognitive second language acquisition studies that underscore the importance of working memory and cognitive load in the advancement of academic literacy. For example, McNamara and Magliano (2021) argue that comprehension breakdown often occurs at the integration stage of processing when learners fail to connect textual propositions with prior knowledge.[14] Similarly, Sweller et al. (2019) demonstrate that excessive intrinsic cognitive load in domain-specific texts may impair schema construction, particularly among novice learners.[17] These theoretical insights support the interpretation that memory-related difficulties reported by economics

students may stem from insufficient scaffolding during proposition integration. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, recent studies stress the importance of genre awareness and discourse socialization in ESP contexts. Hyland (2019) contends that academic literacy involves mastering the rhetorical and interpersonal features of disciplinary discourse, including stance, engagement, and hedging. The present findings—particularly the uneven distribution of reading strategies—suggest that many students have not yet internalized institutional discourse conventions characteristic of economic texts. Moreover, collaborative strategies such as jigsaw reading (30%) reflect current trends in socially mediated learning environments. Contemporary socio-cognitive research (Lantolf & Thorne, 2018; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020) demonstrates that interaction enhances deeper processing and metacognitive regulation. Students who engaged in collaborative reading likely benefited from shared inferencing and negotiated meaning-making, consistent with Vygotskian sociocultural theory as revisited in recent applied linguistics scholarship. Recent CEFR Companion Volume updates (Council of Europe, 2020) further reinforce the need to develop mediation and discourse reconstruction skills in tertiary education.[5] The limited use of structured reading strategies observed in this study indicates that many learners remain at a primarily decoding-oriented stage rather than engaging in discursive transformation. This gap echoes findings by Biber et al. (2021), who highlight that

disciplinary reading requires explicit instruction in genre conventions and stance management.[2]Taken together, recent empirical and theoretical developments confirm that ESP reading competence is not merely a function of vocabulary acquisition but a socio-cognitive process integrating working memory efficiency, pragmatic awareness, genre knowledge, and disciplinary enculturation. The present study contributes to this evolving body of research by providing quantitative evidence that cognitive and affective determinants must be addressed through sociolinguistically grounded instructional design.

CONCLUSION

The present study has demonstrated that ESP reading comprehension among first-year economics students is influenced by a complex interaction of cognitive, affective, and sociolinguistic factors. The findings indicate that irregular reading habits and limited strategic awareness hinder the development of deeper discourse-level comprehension. Psychological determinants, particularly motivation, memory, and attention, were shown to significantly affect students' ability to construct coherent situation models during reading. Overall, the results suggest that integrating cognitively scaffolded, strategy-based, and sociolinguistically informed reading tasks can enhance not only comprehension but also professional discourse competence. Therefore, ESP pedagogy in economics programs should prioritize purposeful, authentic, and interaction-driven reading practices to foster sustainable academic and professional communication skills.

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