IMPROVING READING SKILLS USING ON-LINE NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

ZLEPŠOVANIE ČITATEĽSKÝCH ZRUČNOSTÍ
PROSTREDNÍCTVOM ON-LINE NOVÍN A ČASOPISOV

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Abstract
One of the basic skills Business English students need to develop is understanding the news. Reading business texts enables the learner to improve reading skills and to learn essential vocabulary. Additionally, it allows him/her to keep up with national or international economic developments. The paper is part of the Project KEGA carried out at the Faculty of Applied Languages of the University of Economics in Bratislava. It aims to demonstrate challenging, individual work of an experimental group of students of the Faculty of National Economy using LMS Moodle over one semester. Via a quantitative analysis a corpus of business texts from English-language newspapers and magazines will be built. A qualitative analysis will reveal the readers' preference in chosen topics.

Keywords: text, reading skills, business vocabulary, technology.

Abstrakt
Jednou zo základných zručností, ktorú si študenti v rámci obchodnej angličtiny potrebujú rozvíjať, je porozumenie správ. Čítanie odborných textov umožňuje čitateľovi zlepšovať svoje čitateľské zručnosti a osvojiť si potrebnú slovnú zásobu. Okrem toho mu umožňuje držať krok s ekonomickým rozvojom na národnej a medzinárodnej úrovni. Príspevok je súčasťou projektu KEGA realizovaného na Fakulte aplikovaných jazykov Ekonomickej univerzity v Bratislave. Jeho cieľom je ukázať podnetnú individuálnu prácu študentov experimentálnej skupiny Národohospodárskej fakulty s využitím LMS Moodle počas jedného semestra. Pomocou kvantitatívnej analýzy sa zostaví korpus odborných textov z novín a časopisov v anglickom jazyku. Kvalitatívna analýza odhalí preferenciu čitateľov pri výbere tém.

Kľúčové slová: text, čitateľské zručnosti, odborná slovná zásoba, technológie.

Introduction

Six faculties of the University of Economics in Bratislava offer courses in Business English. First-year university students, who studied English as a first foreign language at secondary schools have acquired either a B1 or B2 language levels (CEFR), are mixed together and attend courses in Business English for advanced students. In seminars, *Market Leader Business English Course Book Upper Intermediate* (Cotton, Falvey, Kent, 2011) is used. The textbook presents twelve units and a typical unit consists of the following sections: Starting up, Vocabulary, Reading, Listening, Language review, Skills, and a Case study. Reading sections include interesting and relevant texts from *The Financial Times*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *The Telegraph*, *The Sunday Times*, *CBS*, and *The Corporate Knights*.

Most students put in a great deal of effort to pass written examinations. In order to help them attain an advanced level, as the syllabus states, the Department of English Language of the Faculty of Applied Languages launched the Project KEGA last year. So far, 301 students have participated in it. The summer term of 2018 was aimed at improving reading skills by working with authentic texts from prestigious newspapers and magazines. *The Guardian*, *Forbes*, *Newsweek*, and *The Economic Times* have online versions that are the same editions as the

printed copies available at the newsstand. The project also aims to show how learning in higher education can be enhanced by reading anytime and anywhere with the use of LMS Moodle.

Developing reading skills in a classroom

Many students of the University of Economics in Bratislava are partially employed by large multinational corporations or work in industries whose language is English. Apart from digesting large quantities of reading materials in English, they must read periodicals or newspapers so as to keep up with changes in their industry (Donna, 2000). They must have a rich business or specialized vocabulary to communicate successfully in English with their colleagues or managers.

Language learners acquire vocabulary through practice. There is a plethora of ELT materials for enlarging vocabulary and developing skills. Forsyth's (1996) resource book is focused on advanced-level listening and speaking skills. The pack offers a wide variety of topics through authentic reading and listening materials. By going through the reading tasks, vocabulary areas, and speaking tasks readers practise predicting text context, reading for details and overall gist, finding specific information, scanning for facts, answering closed and open-ended questions, and the like.

When developing business skills, Donna's (2000) suggestions can be followed. She deals with these skills: talking to clients, telephoning, dealing with visitors, talking to colleagues, reporting to foreign managers, participating at meetings, negotiating, note-taking, giving presentations, writing e-mails, report-writing, and understanding the news.

Taylor (2006) provides tips for improving Business English which are included in sections on networking, socialising, presentations, telephoning, negotiations, writing e-mails, meetings, reading business texts, listening, business vocabulary, and grammar.

In order to improve students' reading skills and prepare them for working with business texts individually, the following steps were practised in seminars. Having set a time limit, students were asked to skim an article for gist. When time was up, they were asked to summarize the text as far as possible. When they came up with a few ideas, we improvised some simple comprehension questions on the article which we thought they would be able to answer without difficulty. After inviting questions about vocabulary and allowing students another five minutes for reading, we continued with a few more detail questions. This is a realistic approach given that students will have limited time in real life and given the fact that the tasks reflect the real-life situations (i.e. reading through an article quickly, and checking a few words in a dictionary).

Using newspapers and magazines as learning tools

If the learners want to keep their English up to date and practise their reading skills, they should read a British or an American newspaper occasionally. Newspapers use modern vocabulary and expressions aimed at native speakers. According to Taylor (2006), readers should start by choosing one of the more serious papers such as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post* or *The Sarasota Herald-Tribune*. Tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun* are filled with idioms, slang and national pop culture references which often make them more difficult to understand. Learners should also try one of these papers later.

Joyce (2003) believes that newspapers are a useful tool in the ELT classroom for improving reading skills. She encourages students to read newspapers outside the classroom because ongoing reading can help them discuss ideas more fluently as well as read and understand a whole variety of texts.

In Budden's (2008) view, learners should read the news. The four main media sources – TV, the Internet, newspaper/magazines and radio – give them opportunities to consider their advantages, to talk about the news and express their own opinions.

We believe individual work can also be quite ambitious. According to Nimritta (2016), Learning Management System (LMS) Moodle is an intuitive and supportive environment for the independent nature of learning in higher education. She states there is no population more technologically skilful than post-secondary students – the virtual landscape of LMS Moodle is one they are familiar with and can navigate through easily. Online learning platforms like LMS Moodle are ideal for students in higher education.

Research methodology

The research aims to show the work of an experimental group of students from the Faculty of National Economy participating in the Project KEGA. During the summer semester of 2018, nineteen first-year students attended a second course in Business English for advanced students. Apart from dealing with four units in *Market Leader* (Cotton, Falvey, Kent, 2011), namely *Job satisfaction*, *Risk*, *Management styles*, and *Team building*, the students were asked to choose an English-language newspaper or magazine to suit their tastes, and to read articles and topics of their particular interest. Finally, for their individual work the four major sources were chosen.

The Guardian – a British daily newspaper including latest news, breaking news and current affairs coverage from across the UK and the World, and subsections with subjects such as business, environment, technology, sport, arts, media, and lifestyle.

Forbes – an American business magazine featuring original articles on finance, industry, investing and marketing topics as well as reporting on related subjects such as technology, communications, science, politics, and law.

Newsweek – an American premier news magazine bringing high-quality journalism to readers around the globe. It provides the latest news, in-depth analysis and ideas about international issues, technology, business, culture, and politics.

The Economic Times – an English-language Indian daily newspaper. It is the world's second-most widely read English-language business newspaper and its main content is focused on the Indian economy, international finance, share prices, price of commodities as well as other matters related to finance.

On the basis of the above presented information, both quantitative and qualitative analyses will be carried out. The main aim of a quantitative analysis is to gather all texts and build a large corpus of the whole experimental group. Subsequently, a qualitative analysis identifies the topics the readers were interested in most.

Research findings and discussion

From the following research findings it is evident that the participants took this challenging task seriously. Each student was supposed to read 12 texts in order to be able to summarise them, get the main idea, and to investigate them for idioms. They worked individually, read different articles, and found lots of idioms. It can be seen that the experimental group worked with a 137,678-word corpus. Two out of nineteen students did not join the project; one of them had serious problems with English and the other was pursuing a sports career. However, there were also two other students who did not pass a standardised written examination and subsequently they did not compete this task.

The research has shown that the participants read articles from the following sources and categories: *The Guardian* – News, Opinion, Sport, Culture, and Lifestyle; *Forbes*: Billionaires, Innovation, Leadership, Money, Consumer, Industry, and Lifestyle; *Newsweek*: U.S., World, Business, Tech & Science, Culture, Sports, Health, and Opinion; *The Economic Times*: Markets, News, Industry, RISE, Politics, Wealth, MF, Tech, Jobs, Opinion, NRI, Slideshows, Panache, More, and ET Now. Of course, some categories are further subdivided.

The qualitative analysis has revealed the readers' preferences in topics. From the whole corpus, the most frequently read ones were about: management, leaders and leadership

(12x), Brexit (9x), jobs 6x, trade wars (6x), tariffs (6x), banks (6x), money (5x), Bitcoin cryptocurrency (6x), Uber (4x) and Lyft (2x) transportation companies, etc.

Although the participants were recommended to read articles closely connected with the above mentioned topics in *Market Leader*, only three articles about teams, two about insurance, and two about risk were read.

The following tables show some of the chosen participants, the headlines and word counts (W. count) of their articles.

Table 1 Student 1 (The Guardian)

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	Is this the beginning of the end for cash? Readers on the rise of digitised payments	979
T2	Hawk or dove? Bitcoin is forcing central banks to take sides	901
T3	GKN rejects Melrose's new hostile £8bn bid	689
T4	Finland is the happiest country in the world, says UN report	884
T5	Spotify poised to be a $25bn company on eve of IPO	631
T6	The Brexit economy: light at the end of the tunnel?	616
T7	Construction industry frozen by 'beast from the east'	368
T8	Deutsche Bank ousts British CEO after two-week boardroom battle	548
T9	Car insurance prices fall for first time since 2014 amid whiplash crackdown	418
T10	Business running out of patience on Brexit, warn City organisations	678
T11	Tesco and Carrefour alliance sounds like a tough gig for suppliers	729
T12	Water company *boss*es' bonuses have damaged trust, says watchdog	388
---	**Total:**	**7,829**

As the research shows, topics such as Brexit, cryptocurrencies and blockchain are too big to ignore.

Table 2 Student 2 (The Guardian)

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	UK unemployment rises at fastest rate in almost five years	660
T2	Slovakian journalist investigating claims of tax fraud linked to ruling party shot dead	587
T3	Google bans bitcoin adverts in cryptocurrency crackdown	456
T4	Facebook bans Britain First and its leaders	656
T5	Self-driving Uber kills Arizona woman in first fatal crash involving pedestrian	987
T6	How economies could insure themselves against the bad times	933
T7	Workers at risk as robots set to replace 66m jobs, warns OECD	517
T8	UK labour productivity increases at fastest rate since financial crisis	531
T9	Tesla halts Model 3 production as firm scrambles to improve automation	381
T10	Bank of England 'dangerously ill-equipped' for next recession, says IPPR	589

No.	Headline	W. count
T11	Mike Ashley reignites row over Sports Direct's working practices	482
T12	Nasa mission to map Mars interior will launch this weekend	846
---	**Total:**	**7,625**

Table 3 Student 3 (The Guardian/BR Business Review)

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	Comcast challenges Murdoch with £22bn bid for Sky	922
T2	The Guardian's five top cities for business startups outside of the M25 (*BR Business Review*)	889
T3	Brexit: carmakers step up warnings on impact of uncertainty	631
T4	Journalists are risking all to expose the Italian mafia. They must be protected	820
T5	Inflation dips to 2.7% as impact of Brexit vote starts to fade	669
T6	'Beast from the east' cost UK supermarkets £22m	418
T7	Oligarchs hide billions in shell companies. Here's how we stop them	943
T8	China and US exchange further threats over trade as markets slump	919
T9	Robot managers: the future of work or a step too far?	850
T10	'Being cash-free puts us at risk of attack': Swedes turn against cashlessness	934
T11	EU says it is ready to wage trade war with US	586
T12	The battle for Sky: what next for Murdoch, Comcast and Disney?	665
---	**Total:**	**9,246**

This student chose *BR Business Review* first and later he switched to *The Guardian*. Both Student 2 (T2) and Student 3 (T4) were also interested in the murder of the Slovak journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová.

Table 4 Student 4 (Forbes)

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	How To Spot Fake Gold And Avoid Fraud	805
T2	3 Surprising Outcomes Of Higher Oil Prices	573
T3	Environmental Innovation Will Transform Business As Usual	790
T4	Europe's Recurring Financial Crisis Has Not, Repeat, Not Ended	884
T5	Company Vision And Values: Do They Still Matter?	847
T6	Money 101 For Millennials: Seven Tips For Improving Your Financial Literacy	635
T7	3 Steps To Ensure A Remarkably Fast Recovery From Bankruptcy	649
T8	Make Your Meetings Productive: Ask These 5 Questions	408
T9	Margin of Safety: How to Avoid Disaster and Find Success at Work	677
T10	Hearst's Troy Young Reflects on Five Years of Digital Transformation	1,165
T11	How To Easily Save More For College	770
T12	5 Bitcoin-Powered Dividend Growers To Buy Now	1,203
---	**Total:**	**9,406**

It can be seen that T3 was chosen from the category Industry (Energy), and texts T5 and T8 from Leadership.

Table 5 Student 5 (Forbes)

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	The U.S. Trade War Just Went Global	1,130
T2	Lessons From Sochi: How South Korea Managed To Keep Its Olympics Costs So Low	854
T3	Will Electric Cars Rule The World In Time To Make A Difference?	802
T4	Germany's Planned Coal Exit Hits A Wall	603
T5	Did Uber Just Ruin Self-Driving Cars For The Rest Of Us?	1,191
T6	The Cities Creating The Most White-Collar Jobs, 2018	1,393
T7	AI Robots Can Paint Soccer Pitches But Won't Replace Groundsmen	681
T8	Why Zinedine Zidane's Stunning Departure From Real Madrid Actually Makes Sense	513
T9	Index Ventures Expects A $2 Billion Windfall From Early Bets On Fintech	932
T10	SkinNinja: This $4.5 Million App Spots Allergens And Cancer-Causing Ingredients In Your Skincare	964
T11	The Real Reason F1's Top Teams Are Threatening To Quit	2,132
T12	The world's 100 Highest-Paid Athletes 2018: Behind The Numbers	1,152
---	**Total:**	**12,347**

In this case, texts T3 and T4 were also chosen from the same subcategory – Energy. As the student follows a sporting career he also chose texts T8 and T11 from the subcategory – SportsMoney.

Table 6 Student 6 (Forbes/The Economic Times (ET), Bloomberg (BB))

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	Love Is 'No Battlefield' With The Blockchain, But Is It A Perfect Match?	1,574
T2	Five ways to get honest feedback from your team (*ET*)	419
T3	Ten Reasons To Accept A Job Offer, But Keep Your Job Search Going	683
T4	The Battery Will Kill Fossil Fuels – It's Only a Matter of Time (*BB*)	769
T5	The Next Grave Threat: Cybersecurity	1,479
T6	Answer These 5 Questions Before Buying Your First Home	1,149
T7	How To Be The Boss Everyone Wants To Work For	1,259
T8	Three Tips To Help You Take Risks And Push Boundaries For Greater Client Success	1,003
T9	How A Cleaning Lady Inspired Awesome Leadership	889
T10	Adapting Your Workforce To Intelligent Automation	604
T11	11 Annoying Habits Of Salespeople That Damage The Experience For Prospects	926
T12	5 Financial Myths That Are Totally False	690
---	**Total:**	**11,444**

This student was interested in Jobs (T2) and Leadership (T3, T7, T9 and T11).

Table 7 Student 7 (The Economic Times (ET)/Bleu Bloom (B.b.)/Forbes)

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	Positive feedback from managers, open culture can keep IT employees motivated: Study (*ET*)	440
T2	Five leaders and their unique leadership mantras (*ET*)	459
T3	Porsche could build flying taxis, says sales chief (*ET*)	238
T4	6 Jobs That Probably Won't Be Around in 10 Years (*B.b.*)	389
T5	How To Identify And Speak To Your Customer Personas	946
T7	For Now, Stock Market Is Overreacting To China	921
T8	The Key Skills You Need To Improve Your Relationships	1,021
---	**Total:**	**4,414**

Regarding the jobs, two texts are listed – T1, but T4 was chosen from the website *Bleu Bloom*. T8 discusses Leadership. T2 is focused on leaders and represents the category Slideshows and its subcategory – Management & Leaders.

Table 8 Student 8 (Newsweek)

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	Queen's Young Love Revealed in Royal Letter	468
T2	Homeless and Hungry: Survey Finds Disneyland Workers Are Massively Underpaid	521
T3	iPhone X Release: The Human Cost of Apple's Most expensive iPhone Ever	1108
T4	Trump Admin Doubles China Tariff Proposal, Demands $60 Billion for Chinese Tech Goods	281
T5	Win-Dixie Parent Company Southeastern Grocery to File Bankruptcy, Close 94 Stores	317
T6	Majority of Uber and Lyft Drivers Make Less Than Minimum Wage, Study Finds	454
T7	The World's Richest Person Just Got a Lot Richer: Amazon Founder Jeff Bezos on Track To Be World's First Trillionaire	572
T8	How Much Money Do You Need to Be Happy? Scientists Calculated the Income Needed for a Joyful Life	520
T9	PM May: UK to Detail Post-Brexit Relationship With European Union	471
T10	Grocery Store Banned Employees from Speaking Spanish, Feds Say	272
T11	Google's Diversity Policy Alarms Defenders of Free Speech	665
T12	What to Know About Investing in the Internet of Things	922
---	**Total:**	**6,571**

This is one of the most varied collection of texts since it represents different categories: T1 – Culture, T2 and T6 – U.S., T5, T7, T10 and T12 – Business, T4 and T9 – World, T3 and T8 – Tech & Science, and T11 – Opinion.

Table 9 Student 9 (Newsweek)

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	Toys 'R' Us May Be Going Out of business, 10 to 15 Percent of All Toy Sales Could Disappear Forever With It	337
T2	Bitcoin Price Predictions: Experts Support Billionaire Investor Tim Draper's '$250,000 by 2022' Forecast	387
T3	Futuristic U.S. Columbia Nuclear Sub Fleet Will Cost $100 Billion	469
T4	Germany Posts €18 bn Budget Surplus as Economy Grows	442
T5	Study Suggests Oil Factors Hugely Into Foreign Wars	635
T6	Eurozone Officially Enters Deflation for First Time	697
T7	European Women Paid 36% Less Than Men for Doing Similar Jobs	413
T8	Trump's Moscow Missile Threat Hits Russia's Ruble, On Track for Worst Week in Two Decades	401
T9	After Facebook Scandal, France Is Testing Its Own Encrypted Messenger App	464
T10	Tax Day Post Office Extended Hours: Places Open Late for April 17 Postmark Deadline	321
T11	Jared Kushner Keeps Getting Into Legal Trouble: A Guide to Investigations Facing Trump's Top Adviser	594
T12	Millennials Should Receive 'Citizen's Inheritance' at Age 25 to Reduce Baby Boomer Wealth Gap, Report Says	881
---	**Total:**	**6,041**

The interest of this participant was in Business – T1, T2, T4, T6 and T7; U.S. – T3, T10 and T11; and World – T5, T9 and T12.

Table 10 Student 10 (The Economic Times)

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	Here is a step-by-step guide to buy bitcoin in India	509
T2	India Inc to invest $1 billion, create 5,000 new jobs in Canada	547
T3	Google expansion plans helping to turn NYC into tech hub	701
T4	Global consumer goods companies push for localisation to fight domestic competition	714
T5	Building a business: Is the motivation for women and men entrepreneurs the same?	703
T6	Why start-ups should be a CMO's new best friend (brand equity blogs	748
T7	Cambridge Analytica scam fallout: Can #DeleteFacebook lead to #DeleteEcommerce? Tecch	658
T8	Flipkart-Amazon combine may face close scrutiny for competition aspects	378
T9	Syria "most serious threat" to int'l peace, security: Guterres	640
T10	The challenge of turning ideas into reality: Reimagining enterprise innovation	628
T11	Understanding Instagram algorithm and what it means for your brand	773
T12	Building something? Here's how to get those priorities right	664
	Total:	**7,663**

The following texts are discussed in: Finance – T1, Foreign Trade – T2, Corporate Trends – T4, Tech – T7, and Entrepreneurship – T5.

Table 11 Student 11 (The Economic Times)

No.	Headline	W. count
T1	Committed to investing $5 billion in Maharashtra: Foxconn	665
T2	Trai chief rejects Vittorio Colao's criticism of India's regulatory regime	590
T3	Darjeeling tea belt heads towards a rough terrain	332
T4	Weak macro indicators expose India to trade war risks: DBS	310
T5	Will government borrowing change global outlook on India?	525
T6	LTCG tax, other budget proposals to kick in from Sunday	547
T7	Spices export record 20% rise in volumes for nine months	313
T8	Finance ministry to check readiness of PSBs on bad loan frauds	413
T9	Surge in import of precious stones adds to trade deficit	231
T10	States get 'wallet' for timely GeM payments	358
	Total:	**4,284**

The texts of the last participant's corpus are discussed in the categories or subcategories: Finance – T1, T4 and T9; Policy – T2, T5, T8 and 10; Agriculture – T3, India Business – T6, and Foreign Trade – T7.

Table 12 Summary

Newspaper/magazine/(Ss)	Number of texts	Word count
Forbes (8)	84	71,306
The Guardian (5)	48	31,320
Newsweek (3)	34	19,502
The Economic Times (4)	27	14,272
BR Business Review (1)	1	889
Bleu Bloom (1)	1	389
Total:	**195**	**Total: 137,678**

Conclusion

As it can be seen, *Forbes* was the most popular among readers. The most frequently searched categories for the articles were: Leadership, Money, Industry, and Innovation. However, the participants working with this paper read the most difficult texts. All in all, it is believed that reading newspapers and working with articles was an inspiring way of learning English as it can learners develop not only reading skills but also writing, grammar, vocabulary, and speaking skills.

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