USING ONLINE NEWSPAPERS TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' READING SKILLS: AN ACTION RESEARCH AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	14/3/2022	The action research was conducted to test the ideas that using online newspapers written in English enhances students reading skills and cultivates their positive attitude towards extensive reading (ER). The participants were 42 second-year students at School of Foreign Languages – Thai Nguyen University (SFL-TNU). Reading materials were selected from a local online newspaper in English. Then, 16 readings tasks were designed with the adaption from academic reading tasks. The study was conducted in 10 weeks. A pre-test and a post–test were used before and after the application of the ER program. Besides, a questionnaire was administered to students before and after the project, and an observation checklist was administered to teachers participated in the project. The results showed a significant improvement in students' reading skills, and students' positive attitudes towards ER. Besides, in order to create a habit of reading extensively with an online newspaper written in English for students, there seems to be a need of consideration of time and a variety of local online newspapers written in English for students to choose.
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SỬ DỤNG BÁO MẠNG ĐỂ NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG ĐỌC CHO SINH VIÊN: MỘT NGHIÊN CỨU HÀNH ĐỘNG TẠI ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	14/3/2022	Nghiên cứu hành động này được thực hiện để áp dụng việc sử dụng báo mạng viết bằng tiếng Anh để cải thiện kỹ năng đọc của sinh viên và trau dồi thái độ học tập tích cực của sinh viên đối với việc đọc các nguồn tài liệu mở rộng (ER). Đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu là 42 sinh viên năm thứ hai tại Trường Ngoại ngữ - Đại học Thái Nguyên (SFL-TNU). Tài liệu đọc được chọn lọc từ một tờ báo điện tử trong nước viết bằng tiếng Anh. Sau đó, 16 bài tập được thiết kế dựa theo tài liệu thiết kế các bài tập đọc chính thống. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện trong 10 tuần. Một bài kiểm tra trước khi áp dụng và một bài kiểm tra sau khi áp dụng chương trình đọc các nguồn tài liệu mở được dùng để thu thập số liệu. Bên cạnh đó, một bảng câu hỏi đã được cung cấp cho sinh viên trước và sau khi tiến hành dự án và một bảng câu hỏi quan sát được cung cấp cho giảng viên tham gia nghiên cứu. Kết quả cho thấy có sự cải thiện đáng kể trong kỹ năng đọc của sinh viên và thái độ tích cực của sinh viên đối với việc đọc các nguồn tài liệu mở rộng. Bên cạnh đó, để tạo thói quen đọc nhiều các báo điện tử viết bằng tiếng Anh cho sinh viên cần có sự cân nhắc về thời gian và đa dạng hóa các loại báo mạng trong nước viết bằng tiếng Anh để sinh viên có thể lựa chọn.
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TỪ KHÓA		
Kỹ năng đọc		
Đọc hiểu		
Đọc các nguồn tài liệu mở rộng		
Báo mạng		
Thái độ		

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1. Introduction

Today with the advent of the Internet, learners have chances to read and get information from all fields by reading newspapers online. They develop learners' knowledge and enhance their language skills. Online newspapers play a predominant role in English language learning, and develop the natural outgrowth of critical thinking. Besides, learners have a variety of choices for online English newspapers.

With up-to-date information in every field, online English newspapers are a rich source for English language teachers to teach reading [1], [2]. In comparison to printed English newspapers, online English newspapers are more accessible.

According to [3], [4] and [5], since online English newspapers promote the learners' language skills enormously, the researcher believe that online English newspapers can help improve second-year students' reading skills and help to cultivate their positive attitude towards extensive reading (ER) which is the basis to create a reading habit outside the class.

With the above aims, the study tried to answer for the following questions:

- To what extent can online English newspapers help to improve students' reading skills?

- What are students' attitudes towards the ER program with online newspapers written in English?

1.1. Reading

Reading is an important skill in the language learning process and many researchers have defined it in different ways.

Harmer defines that "reading is an exercise dominated by the eyes and the brain. The eyes receive message and the brain then has to work out the significance of the message" [6, p.190]. Reading thereby is considered as a "receptive skill" whose aim is to extract a message from the written text [6]-[8].

Other researchers tend to have a deeper look into reading. They realize that reading is a complex process with the involvement of various elements. Smith points out that:

Access to visual information is a necessary part of reading, but not sufficient … Knowledge of the relevant language is essential for reading, but you can't expect to find it on the printed page. Rather it is information that you must have already, behind the eyeball. It can be distinguished … by being called non-visual information of prior knowledge [9, p.73].

Anderson shares the same view and he considers 'non-visual information' as the reader's background knowledge and experience. In other words, reading is not a passive process [10, p.1]. Reading is an 'interactive' process between a reader and a text, which leads to automaticity. In this process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text as he or she tries to elicit the meaning and various kinds of knowledge being used: linguistic or systemic knowledge (through bottom-up processing) as well as schematic knowledge (through top-down processing). These factors have been summarized and synthesized by [11, p.3-4] as the interpretive framing which consists of four following types of framing:

- Extratextual framing – using information outside the text, your background knowledge and experience to understand the text.

- Intratextual framing – making use of cues from the text, such as headings and subheadings and referential words such as "this" and "that" to understand the text.

- Intertextual framing – making connections with other texts you are reading to help understand the text.

- Circumtextual framing – using information from the cover of the book, title, abstract, references, etc. to understand the text.

1.2. Reading skills

Woolley considers reading skills as the means to "gain meaning from text by constructing a text-based model while at the same time they draw upon and use their own background

knowledge to construct a situation model of the understandings related to the text passage" [12, pp. 33-34].

Different researchers have proposed different types of reading skills. Davis (1994 cited in [13, p.367]) suggests nine skills of reading comprehension namely: word meanings, word meaning in context, follow passage organization, main thought, answer specific text-based questions, text-based questions with paraphrase, draw inferences about the content, literary devices, and author purpose.

Similarly, Harmer mentions a number of reading skills, such as: predicting, guessing word meaning, reading for specific information, reading for general comprehension, scanning, skimming, inferring form texts, interpreting texts, surveying text organization, and critically evaluating texts [6].

1.3. Attitude

According to [14], attitude is a 'multidimensional' factor which predisposes a person's selection of behaviors towards something. Similarly, Dornyei state that attitudes determine a person's emotion and response to a person, a thing or an activity. Moreover, they divide attitudes into two types: positive (favorable) and negative (unfavorable) [3]. In language education, attitudes play an important role. Fakeye states that learner's attitude is one of the most important factors affect on leaning a language [15]. Dornyei confirms that students with more favorable attitudes toward the second language and its speakers are likely to be more successful in the language learning than others [3].

1.4. Online English newspapers

Online English newspapers as well as printed ones are authentic materials because they are '…real-life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes' [16, p.45]. According to [17], newspapers are "ephemeral texts, that is, they are intended only for the day they are delivering the news" [17, p.13]. Compared to printed versions and other materials, online English newspapers are more updated, more visually stimulating and more creative. Sanderson and Reah have summarized some prominent features of online English newspapers as follows [2], [17]:

Firstly, they include a system of interrelated lexical, phraseological and grammatical means serving the purpose of informing, instructing and entertaining the reader. Because of these diverse purposes, online newspapers involve a wide range of styles.

Secondly, online newspapers have both general educational and cultural values. They keep us informed about what is happening in the world, thereby, extending our knowledge and deepening our understanding.

Thirdly, online newspapers use language naturally and cover many things which are not included in textbooks but popular in the real life. By reading online newspapers, students will know how to use language naturally and widen their vocabulary about all fields.

Therefore, in a foreign language classroom, online English newspapers as well as printed ones are a rich source of reading materials with many positive effects.

1.5. Extensive reading (ER)

Hafiz and Tudor consider ER as "the reading of large amounts of material in the second language over time for personal pleasure or interest, and without the addition of productive tasks or follow up language work" [4, p.4]. Besides, Davis provides a detailed description or ER in the context of ELT classroom [18, p.329]. According to [18], an ER program in an ELT course is compared to an additional class-library idea where students are provided with a large number of books as well as a time and encouragement to read them.

Hedge states that ER enables students to achieve independency by reading the material they want in consideration to content, level of difficulty, and length and they are promoted to learn how to increase their reading speed through which, by sure, they learn how to locate certain information to help them reach the main and basic ideas [19].

Nuttall also emphasizes that because ER offers a large amount of reading materials, it occurs mainly out-of-class [20].

- *Benefits of ER*

Ellis states that "successful instructed that language learning requires extensive second language input" and the effectiveness of ER to develop students' language competence has been demonstrated by many studies [21, p.217]. In terms of the knowledge and skills, students can get comprehensible input, improve their vocabulary and grammar. In regard to the qualities of a learner, ER increases students' motivation and confidence in reading, develop their autonomy by instilling them the love for reading. Therefore, Nuttall proposed that ER should be considered as 'standard practice' in second language learning [20].

Firstly, ER provides comprehensive input for students. According to [22], input hypothesis, comprehensibility is one of the most importance factors in deciding students' interest.

Secondly, vocabulary and grammar are developed by reading extensively. Reading different topics will supply students with different banks of lexical and syntactic form. Moreover, ER builds automaticity of words recognition from the words meanings in the context and its phonological representation, which enhances students' vocabulary knowledge.

Thirdly, ER constructs the fluency of reading which plays an importance role in the efficiency of reading. With the aim to get the meaning, students will ignore difficult words and try to guess the meaning of key words from the context with the support of their knowledge about the language and topic.

Fourth, ER helps students to develop their general language efficiency. Waring states that students get the comfort from the 'experience with the language [5]. The more it has to enter their comfort zone and the greater chance there is for it to become available for production'.

Moreover, ER promotes learners' positive attitude towards reading. It fosters their confidence and motivation to read. Bell agrees that "ER is the only way in which learners can get access to language at their own comfort zone, read something they want to read at the pace they feel comfortable with…" [23].

2. Research methods

This study used action research. A pre-test and a post-test were used to increase the validity of the results. Besides, a questionnaire was delivered to students before and after the project, and an observation checklist was administered to teachers. In this study, the author followed Krashen's model of action research [24]. The action research was conducted with 42 second-year students at SFL-TNU. The study focused on the use of online English newspapers to improve their reading skills. Twenty-eight articles were used to design twenty-six reading tasks. Due to the socio-cultural background knowledge, a local online English newspaper in Vietnam was exploited.

3. Findings and discussions

3.1. Results of the tests

The quantitative method was applied for the tests. The results of the pre-test and post-test were collected and analysed with SPSS. The results were described in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. *Results of the pre-test*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	4	11	26.2	26.2	27.5
	5	7	16.7	16.7	42.5
	6	12	28.6	28.6	72,5
	7	8	19.0	19.0	90.0
	8	4	9.5	9.5	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

According to table 1, the percentage of students with low score was 26.2% and that of students with good one was 9.5%.

Table 2. *Results of the post-test*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
	5	6	27.5	27.5	27.5
	6	12	15.0	15.0	42.5
Valid	7	10	30.0	30.0	65.0
	8	10	17.5	17.5	90.0
	9	4	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	100.0	

As can be seen from table 2, there were no students getting mark 4. The percentage of students with good result was 24%. Clearly, the table showed a significant change in the results.

Table 3. *Results of two tests*

		Pre-test	Post-test
N	Valid	42	42
	Missing	0	0
Mean		5.68	6.90
Median		6.00	7.00
Std. Derivation		1.328	1.215
Minimum		4	5
Maximum		8	9

Table 3 presents the statistics of the tests based on mean, median, standard, derivation, the lowest and highest scores. As can be seen, there was an increase in the mean scores of two tests from 5.68 to 6.9. The median of the post-test was one point higher than the pre-test. The standard derivation of the pre-test and post-test are 1.328 and 1.215 respectively. Similarly, there was a rise in the highest scores of the two tests.

3.2. Results of students' questionnaires and teachers' observation sheets

Results of questionnaires

Table 4. *Results of questionnaire for students*

(Unit: %)

Statements	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
1. The ER program with online English newspapers has many interesting topics.	70	8	2	1	1
2. The ER program with online English newspapers improved my reading skills.	75	15	5	3	2
3. The reading tasks were comprehensible.	73	15	7	5	0
4. The ER program broadened my sociocultural knowledge.	70	15	8	5	2
5. My background knowledge facilitated me in completing reading tasks.	68	12	10	5	5
6. After the ER program, I will continue to read these online English newspapers.	48	25	7	10	10
7. If I had been given a choice, I would not have participated in this ER program.	2	2	8	15	73

Table 4 illustrates students' attitudes towards the reading program with online newspapers written in English in terms of affective, cognitive and behavioral components. As can be seen, most of the students had positive attitudes towards the ER program. 70% of the students agreed that reading topics were interesting. This implied their interest in doing reading tasks. Besides, students made their evaluation of the ER program in relation to the comprehensibility of the

input, the role of socio-cultural knowledge and the efficiency of the program. Relating to the input, the majority of the students (87.5%) thought that the reading materials were comprehensible with 87.5% agree and strongly agree. Considering background knowledge, 67.5% students realized that their reading process was facilitated by their socio-cultural knowledge. Furthermore, 70% of the students admitted that their background knowledge was, in turn, widened by reading extensively. In terms of the efficiency of the reading program, up to 75% students remarked that they had made a significant improvement. This means that most of the students were highly aware of the benefit of ER. The last two questions showed students' willingness and future action. 72.5% students confirmed that they were willing to participate in the ER program. Although students were willing to take part in the program and realized its benefits, only 47.5% strongly determined to continue to read this online English newspaper. This seemed to be understandable when first year students did not have much time for a new ER program.

3.3. Results of teachers' observation sheets

Teachers' observation sheets were adapted from [25]. Each sheet has two complete statements, two incomplete ones and one question. The observers choose the response and answer which are designed according to Likert scale from 1 (not really or low) to 5 (very much so or high). These statements and questions focus on other teachers' comments on the appropriateness of the ER program and their observation of students' reaction to reading tasks given to them. Besides, observers were asked to give more details about students' behaviors.

Table 5. *Results of teachers' observation sheets*

(Unit: %)

Statements	Not really/ Low	Low	Not really /High	High	Very much so/ high
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1. The reading materials are interesting for students.	0	0	16	6	78
2. The reading materials are appropriate for students.	0	0	0	6	94
3. The level of students' concentration on reading materials is…	0	3	3	6	88
4. The level of students' interest in reading …	0	3	6	28	63
5. How well do students complete the reading tasks?	0	3	6.5	6.5	84

As can be seen from table 5, teachers observed that students had positive attitudes. With regard to topics, 78.1% topics were considered as very interesting. Encouragingly, 93.7% observation sheets confirmed the appropriateness of the reading materials. In other words, the criterion of the comprehensible input was assured. Relating the level of students' concentration of reading materials, there were 65.6% students with high concentration. And the percentage of students expressing high interest in reading tasks is 62.5%, There was a significant difference between what the teachers thought about reading topics and students' ideas. Observers elaborated that what might be considered interesting by both the task designer and observers (Question 1) could be considered "not interesting" (Question 4) by students. For other questions, 84.3% lessons were took part in effectively by the students. These lessons belonged to the final phase of the reading program. This reflected the improvement of students' reading skills. Observers added that when students were used to practicing reading skills, they could finish given reading tasks more quickly. This means that their reading speech was improved.

4. Conclusion

Reading skills play an important role in helping readers to understand reading materials and boost their reading speech. The study found out the answers to the two research questions that using online English newspapers improves students' reading skills, and it cultivates their positive attitudes towards ER. There was a significant improvement in students' reading skills and most of them had a positive attitude towards the applied ER program. Their attitudes were confirmed by

teachers' observations. Significantly, the study has contributed to the exploitation of a new source of teaching and learning reading skills. In order to create a habit of reading extensively, students need to have 'optimal conditions'. This explains the findings that although most of students were aware of the comprehensibility of the reading material, the support of the background knowledge together with the expansion of their socio-cultural knowledge, the percentage of students deciding to continue to read the online newspaper after the application of the ER program was not high, therefore, students mat need more time and choice to read extensively.

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