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## **THE IMPACTS OF ONLINE NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES ON ENGLISH MAJORS' WRITING SKILLS**

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### **Abstract**

*Writing plays an important role not only in academics but also in life. Investigating the impact of reading online newspapers and magazines on writing skills is essential at a rural university in the Mekong Delta, South of Vietnam. This research experiment, conducted over eight weeks, involved ten English majors from this institution's Faculty of Foreign Languages. The findings showed that all participants agreed that their writing skills improved when they applied this mode. However, they encountered several difficulties with English vocabulary and grammar, finding suitable newspapers for their level, and selecting ideas for their essays.*

**Keywords:** *English majors, online newspapers and magazines, writing skills.*

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## **NHỮNG ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA ĐỌC BÁO VÀ TẠP CHÍ TRỰC TUYẾN LÊN KỸ NĂNG VIẾT CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH**

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### **Tóm tắt**

*Kỹ năng viết đóng vai trò quan trọng trong môi trường học thuật lẫn trong cuộc sống. Tìm hiểu những ảnh hưởng của việc đọc báo và tạp chí trực tuyến lên kỹ năng viết của sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh là rất cần thiết tại một trường đại học thuộc vùng sâu Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long, miền Nam Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu được thực nghiệm trong 8 tuần với 10 sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh thuộc Khoa Ngoại ngữ, tại trường đại học này. Kết quả cho thấy tất cả sinh viên tham gia đều nhận thấy kỹ năng viết có cải thiện. Tuy nhiên, sinh viên cũng gặp nhiều khó khăn về từ vựng, ngữ pháp tiếng Anh, tìm báo phù hợp với trình độ, và chọn ý để đưa vào bài viết.*

**Từ khóa:** *Báo và tạp chí trực tuyến, kỹ năng viết, sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh.*

## **1. Introduction**

Writing is a productive skill for those who learn languages, particularly English as a foreign language (EFL); however, many English majors struggle to master this skill (Anjani, 2025). Up to now, researchers and educators have explored many solutions to help EFL students enhance their writing skills, namely content (Politton & Hadiyanti, 2019), school online newspapers (Le & Le, 2018) and newspaper-based activities (Amelia & Muthim, 2021; Eldydamouny, 2022), mind maps (Ngo & Tran, 2021), reading habits (Nguyen, 2022), ChatGPT (Nguyen, 2024; Tseng & Lin, 2024; Anjani, 2025; Sultan et al., 2025), and so on. In the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, some studies explored English majors' difficulties in learning writing, including grammar, vocabulary, basic knowledge (Wa, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023), arranging ideas, time constraints, the teacher, and L1 (Wa, 2021). It can be seen that limited studies were conducted related to using online newspapers and magazines to enhance writing skills for English majors, especially in the Mekong Delta.

Moreover, Dong Thap University is a rural one in the Mekong Delta, South of Vietnam, and students in the Foreign Languages Faculty have a weak background in English and are from other regions in Vietnam (Le, 2019). In the academic year 2022, four English skills, including reading, listening, speaking, and writing, were integrated into one subject – language skill subject. This made it difficult for those students to learning writing skills because teachers did not seem to have enough time to teach all four skills and just focused on the skills in which the teachers were strong, such as speaking or listening. It is noticed that only Do (2014) researched improving English majors' writing essays at Dong Thap University. Hence, exploring English major students' difficulties and applying reading online newspapers and magazines to foster their writing abilities is essential for the contemporary setting at Dong Thap University.

## **2. Theoretical overview and research history**

### **2.1. Writing and English majors' difficulties in writing skills at the tertiary level**

Writing plays a crucial role in learning English as a foreign language since it brings opportunities to English majors to practice and improve their writing proficiency. In addition, mastering this skill will help learners communicate with others effectively in academic situations and daily life (Anjani, 2025). Moreover, Aldossary (2024) indicates that linguistic components consisting of vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and language skills affect students' writing ability in English. Zhan et al. (2021) and Alnasser (2022) emphasized the importance of writing in teaching and learning language, and the above factors may promote writing ability development. Shafiee et al. (2020) mentioned arrangement, suitable language usage, and concrete and appropriate words, which help students express their exact ideas. Similarly, Talayhan (2023) emphasized that content is the essence of writing, serving to convey ideas, thoughts, and messages to the readers in a referring, valuable, and helpful manner; meanwhile, content organization pertains to the coherence and cohesion, which guides the audiences via the text clearly and logically.

Prior research has been conducted to investigate English major students' challenges and difficulties in learning and practicing writing in diverse contexts. For instance, Do (2014) found that Dong Thap University English major students' writing skills were not good, particularly in the usage of language and the content of essays. Elahi's (2020) findings showed that English majors had writing problems, including generating ideas, organizing ideas logically, vocabulary, sentence structures, and writing techniques. Wa (2021) conducted a study with 50 second-year English majors and found that they had difficulties in seven elements: vocabulary, grammar, background knowledge, arranging ideas, time management,

teacher, and Vietnamese. Among them, the allotted time is the biggest challenge for those students. In the same vein, Nguyen et al. (2023) surveyed 45 first-year students, and the findings showed that they met obstacles such as vocabulary, grammar, and prior knowledge. Fareed et al. (2016) added one more difficulty for students, which was their writing anxiety.

## **2.2. Impacts of reading online newspapers and magazines on writing skills**

Much research has concerned using English newspapers and magazines for English major students to enhance their writing ability. In six weeks, Amelia and Muthim (2021) conducted an experimental study with 85 Indonesian-speaking students in the English Department. The results indicated that there was no difference between the control group and the experimental group. It means that reading newspapers did not improve students' writing skills. Meanwhile, Lancouchova (2006) and Tafida and Dalhatu (2014) found that newspapers were perfect teaching documents (Safitri & Al-Hafizh, 2013). In addition, Tinambunan and Sinaga (2018) conducted experimental research on 56 students and found that newspapers and magazines helped students practice writing skills effectively. The common point of these studies is that they were conducted in the writing course and the classroom. Regarding digital newspapers, Krajka (2000) indicated the benefits of electronic papers, such as the ability to search them quickly and freely, unlike ancient ones (cited in Le & Le, 2018). Le and Le (2018) explored school online English newspapers to foster English majors' writing skills for 12 weeks at Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam. The findings showed that this approach helped participants enhance their writing skills and motivations.

However, applying newspapers and magazines in print or digital form in writing courses has had some challenges. For instance, Krajka (2000, cited in Le & Le, 2018) claimed that reading on a computer screen might tire people's eyes; audiences might be distracted by advertisements; without the teacher's control and support, students might not read them. Barkova (2011) claimed that students had difficulties with doing a double-take of headlines and problems with partners when analyzing newspapers, new meanings, buzzwords, and specialized or professional language. Furthermore, Le and Le (2018) found that some students were still shy about submitting their writing products to the board.

It can be seen that these studies were conducted by teachers to explore utilizing printed or digital newspapers and magazines in the writing courses in the classroom. The gap in this field is that they did not apply these modes as a learner autonomy tool outside of the classroom. According to Le (2019), many English-major students at Dong Thap University faced problems when learning writing skills autonomously. Furthermore, she emphasized the importance of learner autonomy outside of the classes as a mode of lifelong learning. Hence, the current study was carried out to fill this gap.

## **2.3. Conceptual framework**

This study was driven by two necessary components in the present educational situation about writing skills in a rural university in the Mekong Delta. First, English majors were struggling with English writing skills. Second, utilizing reading online English newspapers and magazines has created opportunities to enhance English-major students' writing skills in the local context. In this framework, the impacts of reading e-papers are expected to help students improve their writing ability and serve as an autonomous learning instrument outside the classroom without the teacher's instructions.

In brief, writing is considered a tool to assess language learners' proficiency, although challenging. Many studies have been conducted to find solutions to improve English majors' writing abilities, and one of them is using e-papers. However, most research focused on integrating newspapers and magazines into writing courses and classrooms. Hence, this study

explored online newspapers and magazines as a learner-autonomous tool for English major students at Dong Thap University, affecting their writing skills. This research was conducted by two English primary third-year students who were instructed by their supervisor.

### **3. Data and research methods**

Qualitative research was designed to investigate participants' perceptions and practices of reading online newspapers and magazines, and whether this impacts their writing. Ten informants took part in this research voluntarily for 8 weeks. Two third-year students, co-researchers, instructed and observed them. In more details, the main student researcher sent articles and magazines' links to participants to support them in reading, supervising these ten second-year students' progress of reading in general and observing 5 of 10 deeply in particular, reminding them of the ways to read articles and applying information or other things on their writing, asking them to write reflective journals every week, and designing some questions for the coming up interview. Meanwhile, the student co-researcher instructed 10 students about the modes of reading e-papers to foster their writing skills, supporting the main researcher in providing more links to articles with diverse topics for informants, observing the other 5 students in progress, reminding students to write reflective journals, and discussing some interview questions with the co-researcher. The participants were suggested to read *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *E.vnexpress*, *Vietnamnews*, and *Newsweek*. These steps were discussed as well as helped by their supervisor.

#### ***Research questions***

1. Which difficulties do English majors encounter while practicing writing skills by reading online newspapers and magazines at Dong Thap University?
2. How does reading online newspapers and magazines impact English majors' writing skills?

#### ***Participants***

Ten sophomores in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Dong Thap University (2024-2025 academic year) voluntarily joined this study for 8 weeks. There are six females and four males from the Teacher Language Education major. It should be noticed that they have not taken part in any experiments of reading digital papers before.

#### ***Data collection and analysis***

A set of 8 deep questions was designed to interview 10 participants after they used reading e-papers for 8 weeks. These questions were based on the above conceptual framework and were designed about difficulties, frequency, platforms, topics, note-taking while reading, self-assessment, kinds of essays applied to what to read, and their suggestions for further research. Their responses were recorded separately and coded like S1, S2, S3, and so on. Data was analyzed to answer two research questions.

### **4. Results and discussion**

#### **4.1. Results**

##### ***Difficulties in reading online newspapers and magazines to apply in writing***

When asked "Which difficulties did you have while reading online newspapers and magazines to apply in writing?", 8 of 10 students answered that they lacked vocabulary. One of them encountered many complicated English words and terminology, so she took the time to look them up in the dictionary. Similarly, 8 of 10 respondents said that the structures of texts were too complex for them to understand. 5 of 10 did not know any e-papers appropriate for their level to read. Finally, 3 of 10 did not understand the context of the articles.

### ***The impacts of reading online newspapers and magazines on writing abilities***

For reading frequency, only one practiced reading e-papers often, while five students said that they sometimes read them. The rest answered that they rarely read digital papers. In addition, three read newspapers on websites and cell phone applications. Four used websites to read newspapers, while the rest of the participants read newspapers on mobile phone applications.

Regarding the content of e-articles, half of the participants read entertainment topics. Four read economy, business, and news terms; three culture and life issues. Two chose topics related to science and technology; two read sports news. One searched the animal world; one surfed nature and environment news; another chose art to read. Additionally, when asked whether they took notes while reading, three often noted information they needed. Six sometimes picked up necessary information. Only one rarely took notes on the content of the issues.

After 8 weeks, 10 participants self-assessed their writing skills via their reflective journals. Eight answered that their vocabulary was more enlarged. In their reflections, they wrote that they could use a range of vocabulary, diverse words in different topics, and collocations they learned from the articles in eight weeks, compared to before. Besides, six said they could improve their grammar and complex structures as they learned from the texts in the news. Before participating in this mode, they often wrote their writing assignments with simple sentences and a few structures. But now, they could understand the usages of many grammar points and other structures more deeply. Moreover, five could organize ideas logically. They said that they had not known how to arrange ideas to write a paragraph or an essay before. However, after reading and analyzing some articles, they could put their ideas in order, and the teacher appreciated their effort during the writing time later in the classroom. Only one responded that she could write her essays creatively based on ideas and writing styles in newspapers and magazines. This student read articles gradually every week and took notes carefully on what she thought she needed in her writing. These were reported in detail in her reflections.

Additionally, when asked what kinds of essays they had applied the content from online newspapers and magazines they had read, four could use what they read in problem and solution essays. Five utilized information on e-papers on opinion essays. One participant applied some content to analysis essays. Two could not apply anything because they did not choose data or information from digital papers and put it in their essays. One important point was that they all agreed that reading e-newspapers and e-magazines helped them write essays more effectively.

In terms of expectations for further research, informants gave a number of suggestions. Eight needed to provide writing assignments to practice. Seven were asked to instruct them on analyzing the news or articles to select ideas or vocabulary, and then use them in their essays. Six suggested that the student–researchers should have been given a list of appropriate news or articles in newspapers and magazines at the beginning of the experiment or each week, instead of the names of online papers, so that they could practice writing more easily. One participant said that digital papers that were suitable for his level should have been provided. Another hoped that newspapers or magazines would have diverse topics. Five wished to be supported in the modes to learn vocabulary effectively.

### **4.2. Discussion**

The findings of the interview answer two research questions. For the first question, most students had problems with vocabulary and grammar when reading online newspapers and magazines. This echoed previous research on writing skills (e.g., Barkova, 2011; Do, 2014;

Elahi, 2020; Wa, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023). Furthermore, some met difficulties in searching for suitable digital papers for their background level, and some articles were too complex for them to comprehend. This showed their skills in seeking learning materials; prior knowledge was weak.

For the second research question, all participants positively perceived the benefits of reading e-papers on their writing skills. These results were the same as those of Tinambunan and Sinaga (2018) and Le and Le (2018). For instance, they enriched their source of vocabulary and achieved a range of grammar and structures. One of them could create new ideas in the essays. Besides, they could apply the information from newspapers and magazines on diverse topics and forms of essays, namely problem and solution, opinion, and analysis. Yet, it had different results from Amelia and Muthim's (2021) findings. It means that Amelia and Muthim (2021) found no difference between the control group and experimental group in improving their writing skills, while the findings of this study showed the development of the participants in writing ability. However, they had some problems while reading electronic newspapers and magazines for 8 weeks. Therefore, they shared their expectations in the above results. This showed that they lacked searching and selecting appropriate materials on the Internet, analyzing them to choose ideas and words they needed to apply in their writing assignments. This point was the same as Do's (2014) study. It also meant that these participants did not have enough learner autonomy skills in learning English like Le's (2019) research.

Although reading online newspapers and magazines brought merits to participants in writing skills, limitations in this field still existed. For example, students' reading frequency was low because half rarely read e-papers. This indicated that they were not working hard in practicing writing skills. In addition, a few of them took notes on what they read often, which showed that they did not follow the co-researchers' instructions every week. Two did not know how to apply the news content in their writing. Accordingly, what they suggested and expected from the researchers indicated that they lacked learning and learner autonomy skills. They waited for others' support instead of learning independently. It means that they have not been in the learning process yet and have not found sources of materials to serve their learning effectively.

The limitations of this study include only a few participants. Moreover, the co-authors did not check or mark the informants' writing products each week. After that, the co-researchers could observe whether their writing results improved. Furthermore, they invited second-year students instead of other-year students to participate in this experiment.

## **5. Conclusion and implications**

The present study is the first step in investigating the impact of reading online newspapers and magazines on English majors' writing ability at Dong Thap University. The results showed that all students agreed that their writing skills were enhanced via reading e-papers. However, they encountered difficulties in the reading process, such as learning new, complex words or terminology, and analyzing the articles to select ideas for their essays. This study also provides insight into the literature review in this field, especially in the local context.

In the future, this research should be developed with larger samples of first-year students, sophomores, juniors, and seniors from many majors in the Foreign Languages Faculty at Dong Thap University. The authors should make a clear plan for each week and ask others to mark the informants' essays to check their progress in writing skills. Finally, both teachers and students should be trained in some skills of finding and reading appropriate online newspapers and magazines, and learner-autonomous skills.

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