A STUDY ON METHODS TO IMPROVE ENGLISH NEWSPAPER READING SKILL FOR SECOND-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORS AT HUNG YEN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND ENGINEERING

Nguyen Thi Anh Tuyet[1]
Email: tuyetnamdo@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0007-3003-0656

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Abstract: *This study investigates effective methods for enhancing English newspaper reading comprehension among second-year English majors at Hung Yen University of Technology and Education. In the Vietnamese EFL context, students often struggle with journalistic texts because of limited lexical resources, unfamiliar rhetorical structures, and insufficient exposure to authentic materials. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research used a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to identify key obstacles and assess the effectiveness of targeted instructional interventions. The results indicate that systematically implementing pre-reading tasks, vocabulary support, and post-reading analytical discussions markedly enhanced students' reading comprehension, engagement, and critical thinking. This study underscores the pedagogical value of incorporating authentic materials and adopting learner-centered approaches to cultivate reading autonomy and cross-cultural awareness. The findings offer practical recommendations for educators and curriculum developers seeking to refine reading syllabi and encourage sustainable reading practices.*

Keywords: *authentic materials, newspaper reading, reading comprehension, reading strategies*

I. Introduction

Reading is widely recognized as a pivotal skill in second-language acquisition, especially for English majors who must develop advanced comprehension and analytical skills. However, in Vietnamese higher education, students often struggle to process authentic English texts, which frequently feature complex lexical items, culture-specific allusions, and distinct journalistic conventions. Consequently, enhancing reading proficiency is not merely a linguistic objective but a fundamental prerequisite for academic achievement and effective professional communication in international settings.

Engaging with English newspapers as a primary source of authentic linguistic input helps bridge the gap between theoretical classroom knowledge and practical language use. This exposure gives learners access to contemporary issues, a range of textual genres, and

[1] Hung Yen University of Technology and Engineering, Hưng Yen, Vietnam

diverse linguistic registers, enriching both their language competence and cross-cultural understanding. Furthermore, regular interaction with newspaper content promotes learner autonomy and intrinsic motivation, encouraging students to explore beyond prescribed textbooks and interact independently with real-world materials.

This study therefore aims to examine effective pedagogical methods to enhance English newspaper reading skills among second-year English majors at Hung Yen University of Technology and Engineering (HYUTE). It specifically seeks to identify the prevalent challenges students face when interpreting English news articles and to evaluate the efficacy of specific instructional interventions designed to improve their reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and overall engagement.

Research questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. What is the current proficiency level in reading English newspapers among second-year English majors at HYUTE?

2. What specific challenges impede these students' comprehension of English newspaper articles?

3. Which instructional methods are perceived as effective and should be implemented to enhance students' English newspaper reading skills?

II. Literature review

2.1. Definition of reading and newspaper reading

Reading is universally acknowledged as a fundamental receptive skill in both language acquisition and academic development. Grabe and Stoller (2011) characterize reading as a sophisticated cognitive process that involves recognizing written symbols, decoding linguistic forms, and actively constructing meaning through an interplay between the text and the reader's pre-existing knowledge. Echoing this interactive perspective, Nuttall (1996) defines reading as "the transfer of meaning from mind to mind," underscoring the reader's agency in interpreting, rather than passively absorbing, information. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading is indispensable for vocabulary growth, grammatical awareness, and cultivating critical thinking (Alderson, 2000).

As a specialized form of reading, English newspaper reading provides learners with authentic, contemporary materials that mirror genuine language use. Harmer (2007) contends that exposure to newspaper texts allows students to encounter a diverse array of linguistic forms, genres, and discourse patterns, thereby simultaneously bolstering language competence and cultural literacy. Unlike textbook passages, newspaper articles require readers to navigate complex syntactic structures, idiomatic expressions, and varied stylistic conventions (Day & Bamford, 2002). Consequently, engaging with English newspapers not only augments general reading comprehension but also refines learners' capacity to interpret, evaluate, and respond to current global issues in English.

In summary, reading in general, and reading English newspapers specifically, is an interactive process that demands cognitive engagement, linguistic knowledge, and cultural insight.

Integrating English newspaper reading into EFL instruction thus offers a powerful pedagogical strategy for advancing both linguistic proficiency and real-world communicative competence.

2.2. The importance of reading and English newspaper reading

Reading plays a pivotal role in foreign language acquisition, serving as both a primary source of comprehensible input and a vehicle for developing higher-order cognitive skills. Anderson (2008) argues that reading goes beyond word recognition; it is an interactive process in which readers actively construct meaning by drawing on their linguistic resources, cognitive strategies, and prior experiences. Grabe and Stoller (2011) further affirm that reading substantially contributes to vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and discourse awareness-core components underpinning academic achievement and lifelong learning in EFL settings.

In language education, English newspaper reading occupies a distinct niche, bridging the divide between academic instruction and authentic communication. Wallace (1992) emphasizes that authentic texts, such as newspapers, immerse learners in natural language use, contemporary social issues, and diverse registers, thereby enhancing both linguistic skills and cross-cultural understanding. Harmer (2007) also observes that working with newspapers fosters learner autonomy, cultivating readers who can infer meaning, identify potential biases, and critique information effectively.

Furthermore, Day and Bamford (2002) highlight that extensive reading, particularly through newspaper materials, boosts learner motivation through variety and immediacy. The real-world relevance of news content stimulates curiosity and engagement, which are critical affective factors in successful reading development. Brown (2007) adds that sustained exposure helps learners internalize authentic language patterns and pragmatic conventions, elements often absent from standardized textbook exercises.

In essence, English newspaper reading serves multifaceted pedagogical aims: it enriches linguistic input, sharpens comprehension abilities, promotes autonomous learning, and deepens cultural awareness. Systematic integration of this approach into EFL curricula can make reading instruction more meaningful, communicative, and contextually relevant.

2.3. Techniques for effective English newspaper reading

Cultivating effective techniques for English newspaper reading is paramount for language learners, as it enhances not only comprehension but also cultural and contextual awareness. Nuttall (1996) asserts that proficient reading requires the ability to extract meaning from a text rapidly and accurately, which demands active engagement and the strategic use of specific methods. Applied to newspaper texts, these strategies help learners navigate the intricate architecture of journalistic writing, which often blends informative, persuasive, and narrative modes.

A fundamental technique is skimming and scanning, which help readers identify central ideas and locate specific details efficiently (Grellet, 2010). Skimming helps readers grasp the article's overarching theme or tone, while scanning enables targeted retrieval of specific information, such as names

or statistics. Another critical strategy is prediction, whereby readers anticipate content and lexical items based on headlines, subheadings, and contextual cues (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). This process activates schematic knowledge and sustains reading fluency.

Central to this process is acquiring versatile text-processing skills tailored to news materials (Nguyen et al., 2024). Specifically, learners need to master scanning to quickly locate key details and skimming to grasp the main story without getting bogged down by unfamiliar vocabulary. Mastering these techniques enables readers to navigate complex authentic articles more quickly, accurately, and with greater comprehension.

Moreover, critical reading is indispensable in newspapers because it helps readers assess the author's stance, detect potential bias, and distinguish factual reporting from opinion (Wallace, 1992). This competency is especially vital for English majors, who are expected to analyze and debate diverse perspectives in academic and professional forums. Finally, vocabulary development through contextual inference (Nation, 2009) constitutes another essential technique. Given the extensive lexical range in newspapers, deducing meaning from context reduces overreliance on dictionaries, fostering reading fluency and learner autonomy.

In summary, effective English newspaper reading requires integrating cognitive, linguistic, and critical strategies. When teachers teach and students practice these techniques systematically, they can significantly improve students' comprehension, analytical skills, and engagement with authentic English resources.

2.4. Criteria for selecting English newspaper materials

Selecting appropriate newspaper materials is a critical pedagogical consideration, as text quality and suitability directly affect learner motivation and comprehension outcomes. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), an effective reading text should be authentic, level-appropriate, and pedagogically purposeful. These criteria are especially pertinent when designing reading activities for English majors, where objectives extend beyond linguistic gains to include the fostering of critical awareness and cultural literacy.

Authenticity stands as the foremost criterion. Gilmore (2007) argues that authentic texts-those produced for native-speaking audiences-expose learners to genuine language, including idiomatic expressions, discourse markers, and natural syntactic structures. Newspaper articles inherently provide these authentic contexts and reflect current socio-cultural and political realities. However, Guariento and Morley (2001) caution that authenticity must be balanced with comprehensibility; overly complex texts can frustrate learners rather than help them.

The second criterion involves linguistic and cognitive appropriateness. Hedge (2000) maintains that a text's lexical density, syntactic complexity, and conceptual demand must match learners' proficiency level. For intermediate-level English majors, newspaper texts should use largely familiar grammatical structures and include a manageable proportion of unfamiliar vocabulary-ideally 5% to 10% of the total word

count-to support comprehension and incremental vocabulary acquisition (Nation, 2001).

The final criterion is relevance and pedagogical utility. Selected texts should address themes that resonate with students' interests, academic specializations, or pertinent global issues (Day & Bamford, 1998). Engaging, topical content motivates students to read critically and articulate their viewpoints, creating a vital connection between classroom learning and real-world discourse.

In conclusion, an ideal text for English newspaper reading should synergize authenticity, appropriate linguistic challenge, and meaningful relevance. This alignment supports not only language development but also students' cultural and analytical competencies.

III. Research methodology

3.1. The study context

This study was conducted at the Faculty of Foreign Languages (FFL), HYUTE, where English is a major and medium of instruction. For English majors, mastering reading-particularly newspaper reading-is vital for linguistic competence and critical thinking. Although reading courses are offered in the first two years, materials are often textbook-based and lack authentic, real-world exposure. Despite their availability online, student engagement with English newspapers remains limited, hindering their ability to comprehend and analyze journalistic texts. This research examines the current state of newspaper-reading skills among 46 second-year English majors at FFL-HYUTE, identifies their challenges, and proposes ways to improve.

3.2. Participants

The study involved 46 second-year English majors from FFL-HYUTE, My Hao campus. Averaging 20 years old, the cohort included both genders from various Vietnamese provinces. All participants had completed at least three semesters of English training and were enrolled in reading courses, making them suitable for this research because of their proficiency and academic experience. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained for all data collection.

3.3. Research methods

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data came from a structured questionnaire addressing the three research questions: current skills, difficulties, and improvement methods. Qualitative insights came from follow-up interviews with 15 participants, providing a deeper understanding of reading behaviors and challenges. This triangulation enhanced the validity and depth of the findings.

3.4. Research instruments

The study used two primary instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire, containing closed and open-ended questions, was distributed in print to 46 participants. The researcher then interviewed 15 students to gain richer qualitative perspectives. The researcher maintained neutrality during interviews to ensure reliable data. Combining these instruments provided comprehensive evidence for analysis.

IV. Findings and discussion

4.1. Findings

4.1.1. Participants' perceptions toward reading English newspapers

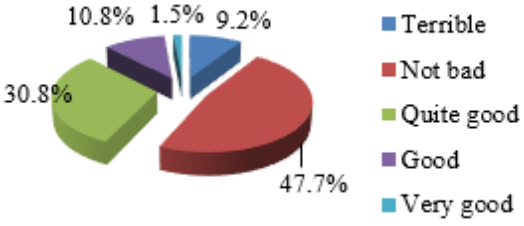


Figure 1. Students' current reading level

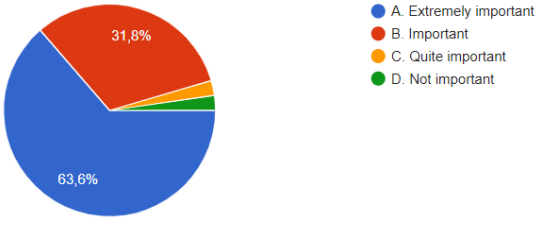


Figure 2. The importance of English newspaper reading skill

Figure 1 shows students' self-assessed English reading proficiency, while Figure 2 reflects their perceptions of the importance of reading English newspapers.

As indicated in Figure 1, nearly half of the respondents (47.7%) rated their reading level as "Not bad," followed by 30.8% who considered it "Quite good." A minority reported high proficiency, with only 10.8% selecting "Good" and a mere 1.5% "Very good." Conversely, 9.2% described their ability as "Terrible." These results suggest that while most students possess moderate reading competence, few have attained advanced proficiency. This underscores a significant need for improvement, particularly in expanding vocabulary, refining comprehension strategies, and increasing exposure to authentic materials like newspapers.

Regarding Figure 2, a substantial majority of students (63.6%) perceived reading English newspapers as "Extremely important," and 31.8% deemed it "Important." Only a negligible fraction viewed it as less significant. This strong consensus indicates that students recognize the value of reading newspapers for vocabulary acquisition, staying informed on current affairs, and enhancing reading fluency and cultural awareness.

Interview data corroborate these findings, revealing that despite recognizing the importance of newspaper reading, students often lack consistent practice and effective strategies. Many participants reported reading mostly shortened or simplified articles, often relying on online summaries or translations instead of original texts. Cited challenges included limited vocabulary, difficulties with cultural references, and insufficient instructional guidance.

Some interviewees noted that the infrequent inclusion of newspaper reading in classroom activities diminished their motivation for independent practice. In contrast, those who regularly read English news reported marked improvements in comprehension and vocabulary. These insights underscore the need for instructors to systematically integrate newspaper reading into the curriculum, supported by scaffolding techniques to build student confidence and competence with authentic texts.

Overall, the findings point to a discernible gap between students' acknowledged importance of newspaper reading and their actual proficiency levels. This discrepancy highlights the necessity for structured pedagogical support, strategic guidance, and increased opportunities to engage with authentic English newspaper content in formal instruction.

4.1.2. Learners' problems of English newspaper reading

This section examines the specific difficulties that impede students' comprehension of English newspapers, moving beyond general attitudes to identify the underlying linguistic, cognitive, and motivational barriers. Understanding these obstacles is crucial for developing targeted pedagogical interventions and selecting appropriate instructional materials. The following figures and tables show how difficult this skill is perceived to be and the main factors contributing to students' struggles, informing strategies to improve reading proficiency in authentic contexts.

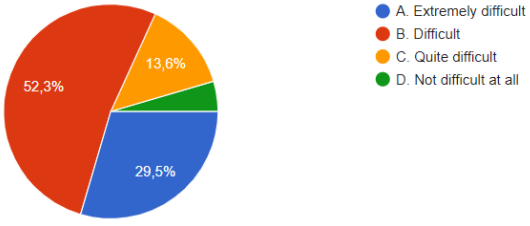


Figure 3. Perceived difficulty of English newspaper reading

Table 1. Students' difficulties in learning reading skills

No	Difficulties	Percentage of agreement
1	Poor vocabulary	93.5%
2	Lack of grammar	72.6%
3	Difficult topics	90.1%
4	unfamiliar writing styles	64.1%
5	Length of reading materials	59.7%
6	Lack of authentic newspaper source	11.2%

Table 2. Rate of the reasons why students have problems with English newspaper reading

No	Reasons	Percentage of agreement
1	Limited vocabulary	78%
2	Lack of background knowledge	65%
3	Difficult sentence structures	60%
4	Low motivation	70%
5	Inadequate reading strategies	55%
6	Unfamiliar topics	50%
7	Limited time for practice	45%

The findings from Figure 3, Table 1, and Table 2 show that many students face multiple difficulties when reading English newspapers. As shown in Figure 3, more than half of the participants (52.3%) regarded reading English newspapers as *difficult*, while 29.5% found it *extremely difficult*. Only a small portion of respondents (13.6%) rated the skill as *quite difficult*, and merely 4.6% reported that it was *not difficult at all*. This result shows that students generally perceive English newspaper reading as a challenging task.

Table 1 further indicates that students' most common problems are limited *vocabulary* (93.5%) and *difficult topics* (90.1%). These findings align with Grabe and Stoller (2013), who emphasized that limited lexical knowledge significantly hinders reading comprehension and fluency. Additionally, 72.6% of respondents reported *insufficient grammar knowledge*, which limits their ability to understand the complex sentence structures often found in newspaper articles. Another major challenge is *poor comprehension skills* (64.1%), indicating

that many learners struggle to grasp main ideas or infer implied meanings in authentic reading materials. Furthermore, over half of the participants (59.7%) said the *length of reading materials* was overwhelming, while 11.2% cited a *lack of authentic newspaper sources* as a contributing factor.

Complementing these results, Table 2 identifies the main reasons for these difficulties. Most learners (78%) attributed their problems to *limited vocabulary*, followed by *low motivation* (70%) and a *lack of background knowledge* (65%). These factors suggest that both linguistic and psychological elements play crucial roles in reading performance. Additionally, 60% of students cited *difficult sentence structures*, while others pointed to *inadequate reading strategies* (55%), *unfamiliar topics* (50%), and *limited practice time* (45%) as further obstacles.

Qualitative data from interviews corroborate these findings, showing that challenges extend beyond linguistic knowledge to include strategic and motivational factors. Many interviewees reported feeling discouraged by the linguistic complexity of newspapers and rarely used strategies such as skimming or contextual inference, which led to frustration. A lack of personal relevance in article topics further diminished motivation. Conversely, students who received explicit teacher guidance or engaged in collaborative reading reported higher levels of engagement and comprehension.

In summary, challenges in English newspaper reading are multifaceted, stemming from limited vocabulary and grammar, a lack of strategic competence, and low motivation. This underscores the necessity for a holistic instructional approach that integrates explicit vocabulary and strategy instruction with motivational support and increased exposure to authentic, engaging texts.

4.1.3. Suggestions to improve students' English newspaper reading skills

Based on the research findings, several pedagogical recommendations are proposed to enhance students' proficiency and engagement in reading English newspapers. Educators should use pre-reading tasks to activate prior knowledge, integrate systematic vocabulary support to support comprehension, and use post-reading discussions to foster analytical thinking. Furthermore, using authentic, learner-centered materials aligned with student interests and real-world contexts can promote reading autonomy, cultural awareness, and sustained motivation to engage with English newspapers inside and beyond the classroom.

4.1.3.1 Incorporate pre-reading activities

Teachers should design engaging warm-up tasks that prepare students for reading and spark curiosity about the topic. For example, before reading a Guardian article about environmental protection, students can look at the headline and pictures, predict what the article might discuss, or share what they know about global warming. Short discussions or brainstorming sessions can activate their background knowledge and make the reading more meaningful. In my classroom, I often divide students into small groups to generate possible vocabulary or headlines related to the topic, which helps them become more mentally ready and motivated to explore the article.

4.1.3.2. Provide vocabulary scaffolding

Introducing key vocabulary, collocations, and idiomatic expressions before reading can reduce students' anxiety and improve comprehension. For instance, when working with an article on economic issues, the teacher can pre-teach phrases such as economic downturn, cost of living crisis, or job market recovery. Students may then complete matching or fill-in-the-blank exercises using these words before reading. In my class, I also encourage learners to keep a "newspaper vocabulary journal" where they record new words and examples from real articles. This practice helps them gradually expand their lexical range and read more fluently and confidently.

4.1.3.3. Encourage post-reading discussions

After reading, teachers should create opportunities for learners to discuss and reflect on the text to strengthen comprehension and critical thinking. For example, students can work in small groups to summarize the main ideas, identify the writer's attitude, or debate a controversial point raised in the article. In my classroom, I often ask students to compare the English article with a Vietnamese version of the same news to highlight cultural and linguistic differences. Such discussions not only deepen understanding but also train students to express opinions logically and respond to global issues from a broader perspective.

4.1.3.4. Use authentic and learner-centered materials

Selecting authentic, up-to-date newspaper articles that align with students' interests and proficiency levels can greatly enhance engagement. For example, technology-related news from *BBC Learning English* or entertainment articles from *News in Levels* are accessible and relevant for second-year English majors. Teachers can allow students to choose which article they prefer to read or present, fostering learner autonomy. In my class, students often choose topics such as education, social trends, or lifestyle-areas they can easily relate to. This learner-centered approach not only motivates them to read regularly but also helps cultivate a sustainable habit of engaging with authentic English materials.

4.2. Discussion

The findings indicate that although most second-year English majors at Hung Yen University of Technology and Engineering recognize the importance of improving their English newspaper reading skills, not all know how to practice effectively. Many students believe that simply reading headlines or using translation tools can help them improve, while only a few apply systematic strategies such as skimming, scanning, or summarizing. Some participants shared that they occasionally read simplified online news sources like News in Levels or Breaking News English but rarely engage with authentic newspapers such as The Guardian or BBC News due to limited vocabulary and lack of confidence.

In addition, several students reported that they learn best through interactive and technology-assisted methods. For instance, using mobile apps or digital platforms to read short news updates, listen to news podcasts, or watch related video reports helps them practice anytime and anywhere. This flexible approach saves time and increases exposure to authentic English. However, despite these resources, many learners still struggle

because of low motivation and a lack of structured classroom guidance. Therefore, teachers should integrate guided newspaper-reading activities, strategy instruction, and digital tools into lessons to make reading practice more systematic, engaging, and effective.

V. Conclusion

Reading English newspapers is an essential skill for English major students because it improves language proficiency while enhancing cultural understanding, critical thinking, and awareness of global issues. This study examined the current state of English newspaper reading among second-year students at Hung Yen University of Technology and Engineering and proposed ways to improve it. The findings indicate that while students recognize the importance of reading newspapers, many still struggle because of limited vocabulary, low motivation, and a lack of systematic reading strategies. Most students rely on simplified or translated materials rather than authentic English sources, which limits their development of higher-level reading competence.

After analyzing these findings, the researcher can offer several suggestions for improvement, such as incorporating pre-reading activities, vocabulary scaffolding, post-reading discussions, and authentic, learner-centered materials. However, the actual improvement depends largely on students' willingness to practice regularly and apply the suggested strategies independently. At this stage, learning is primarily self-study and self-discipline. Teachers can guide and motivate, but learners must build reading habits themselves. Reading English newspapers is not only a useful classroom activity but also a lifelong learning skill that prepares students to use English effectively in their academic, professional, and personal lives. Therefore, future studies should continue exploring practical ways to foster learners' autonomy and sustained motivation to read authentic English texts.

Reading English newspapers is an essential skill for foreign language students who must use English to communicate and complete current and future jobs.

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NGHIÊN CỨU CÁC PHƯƠNG PHÁP NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG ĐỌC BÁO TIẾNG ANH CHO SINH VIÊN NĂM THỨ HAI CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC CÔNG NGHỆ KỸ THUẬT HƯNG YÊN

Nguyễn Thị Ánh Tuyết[1]

Tóm tắt:*Nghiên cứu này điều tra các phương pháp hiệu quả nhằm nâng cao khả năng đọc hiểu báo chí tiếng Anh cho sinh viên chuyên ngành tiếng Anh năm thứ hai tại Trường Đại học Công nghệ Kỹ thuật Hưng Yên. Trong bối cảnh dạy và học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ tại Việt Nam, sinh viên thường gặp phải những thách thức với văn bản báo chí, chủ yếu do vốn từ vựng hạn chế, cấu trúc lập luận xa lạ và việc tiếp xúc với tài liệu thực chưa đủ. Sử dụng phương pháp tiếp cận hỗn hợp, nghiên cứu này đã sử dụng bảng câu hỏi và phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc để chẩn đoán các trở ngại phổ biến và đánh giá hiệu quả của các can thiệp giảng dạy có mục tiêu. Kết quả cho thấy việc triển khai có hệ thống các hoạt động trước khi đọc, hỗ trợ từ vựng và thảo luận phân tích sau khi đọc đã cải thiện đáng kể khả năng đọc hiểu, sự tham gia và tư duy phản biện của sinh viên. Nghiên cứu này nhấn mạnh giá trị sư phạm của việc kết hợp các tài liệu xác thực và áp dụng các phương pháp lấy người học làm trung tâm nhằm phát triển tính tự chủ trong đọc hiểu và nhận thức đa văn hóa. Những phát hiện này đưa ra các khuyến nghị thực tiễn cho các nhà giáo dục và phát triển chương trình giảng dạy nhằm cải thiện đề cương môn đọc và khuyến khích thói quen đọc bền vững.*

Từ khóa: *tài liệu xác thực, đọc báo tiếng Anh, đọc hiểu, chiến lược đọc*

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[1] Trường Đại học Công nghệ Kỹ thuật Hưng Yên, Hưng Yên, Việt Nam