

UNDERGRADUATE EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF ACADEMIC READING IN READING CLASSES AT UNIVERSITAS ISLAM MALANG

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Abstract: This study explores the perceptions of undergraduate EFL students regarding academic reading in reading classes at Universitas Islam Malang. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research employed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews involving fourth-semester English Education students. The findings reveal that students generally perceive academic reading positively, recognizing its significance in enhancing vocabulary, grammar, critical thinking, and overall academic achievement. Students utilize a range of strategies, such as rereading, contextual guessing, and goal-setting, to overcome comprehension challenges. However, post-reading strategies such as summarizing and reflective engagement remain underused. These findings underscore the importance of improving academic reading instruction through strategy training and student-centered pedagogy. The study contributes to a better understanding of learners' needs and highlights the critical role of perception in shaping academic reading engagement in EFL contexts.

Keywords: academic reading, student perception, reading strategies, EFL, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental academic skill essential for student success in higher education, especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Academic reading goes beyond decoding words; it involves comprehension, critical thinking, and the application of effective reading strategies. According to Grabe and Stoller (2013), academic reading encompasses the ability to integrate prior knowledge, analyze text structure, and evaluate arguments. However, EFL learners often face challenges in understanding academic texts due to linguistic limitations, unfamiliar vocabulary, and inadequate background knowledge (OECD, 2020).

In Indonesia, reading literacy remains a significant issue. A 2021 survey by the Ministry of Education and Culture revealed that over 60% of university students struggle with reading academic texts. This is particularly concerning in English Language Education programs where students are expected to master and eventually teach academic content. Understanding students' perceptions of academic reading is critical because perception influences motivation,

engagement, and performance. A student's positive or negative perception may impact their strategy use, persistence, and emotional response to reading tasks.

Furthermore, as education shifts increasingly toward blended and digital formats, academic reading has taken on a new urgency. Students are expected to comprehend online journals, e-books, and research databases, which require not only traditional reading skills but also digital literacy and critical evaluation abilities. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring the perceptions of fourth-semester English Education students at Universitas Islam Malang to identify how they perceive academic reading and what strategies they use to engage with it in both traditional and digital learning environments.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative descriptive design to explore student perceptions. The participants were 33 fourth-semester students from the English Education Department at Universitas Islam Malang. Data were collected through a questionnaire (adapted from Romauli et al., 2024) and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items measuring perceptions before, during, and after reading. Three students with varying questionnaire scores were selected for in-depth interviews to represent high, medium, and low scorers.

The questionnaire used a Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) to assess students' self-reported strategies and attitudes toward academic reading. The interview included ten open-ended questions exploring participants' understanding of academic reading, strategies used, motivation, and emotional responses.

Data were analyzed using the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Themes were generated inductively to capture recurring patterns in students' responses. Triangulation of data sources enhanced the credibility of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The majority of students viewed academic reading as important and beneficial. They acknowledged its role in developing vocabulary, grammar, and critical thinking skills. Students emphasized that academic reading was essential for understanding complex subjects, preparing assignments, and succeeding in exams. One student stated, "Academic reading helps me understand concepts and form my own opinions."

Some students reported initial difficulty engaging with academic texts due to lack of familiarity. However, repeated exposure and classroom guidance improved their confidence and comprehension. This supports the idea that perception is dynamic and shaped by experience (Gregory, 1970). In summary, while the data indicate a generally positive perception and active engagement during reading, there remains a need to improve post-reading activities and self-monitoring strategies among the students.

Students reported using strategies such as rereading difficult sections, predicting vocabulary, using dictionaries, taking notes, and dividing reading tasks into manageable sessions. These approaches are consistent with effective reading practices described by Grabe and Stoller (2013). However, few students reported using strategies like summarizing or retelling, which are essential for reinforcing comprehension.

Participant 1 mentioned: "When I feel bored, I change the environment or listen to music, then go back to reading with a fresh mind." Participant 2 described how goal-setting helped them manage long articles: "I divide the text into sections and read each with a clear objective."

Despite employing these strategies, students acknowledged challenges in sustaining attention and resolving ambiguities. Some relied heavily on translation tools, which sometimes disrupted reading flow. This highlights the importance of teaching integrated reading strategies that combine cognitive and metacognitive components.

Motivation emerged as a key theme in determining reading behavior. Students reported being more motivated when texts were aligned with their interests or relevant to their future careers. One student said, "I enjoy reading when I can connect it to real-life examples or my future job."

Group discussions, peer support, and varied reading materials also enhanced engagement. Students appreciated when instructors provided context or guided them through complex passages. These findings align with Krashen's (1982) theory that a low affective filter promotes language acquisition.

In contrast, demotivating factors included text difficulty, time constraints, and unclear learning objectives. Some students expressed frustration with assignments that lacked immediate relevance, leading to surface-level reading.

In conclusion, while the overall perception of academic reading among students is generally positive, there are clear variations in engagement levels, strategy use, and emotional responses. These variations suggest that academic reading instruction should not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, it should include strategy training, emotional support, and reflective activities to ensure all students—not only the highly motivated—can benefit from academic reading experiences.

While most students demonstrated awareness of basic reading strategies, the use of post-reading strategies such as summarizing, synthesizing, and reflecting was limited. The questionnaire item "I retell or summarize the content of the text" received one of the lowest scores, indicating a need for instructional emphasis on these skills.

Students also struggled with vocabulary and sentence complexity, particularly in journal articles. This affected their ability to identify main ideas and evaluate arguments. As Participant 3 noted, "Sometimes I don't understand what the author is trying to say, even after rereading."

Furthermore, many students lacked confidence in their academic reading skills. They reported relying on teacher explanations and felt uncertain about independently analyzing texts. This reflects a dependency mindset that may hinder academic growth and critical thinking.

The findings suggest several instructional strategies to support academic reading development. First, educators should explicitly teach pre-, during-, and post-reading strategies. Modeling how to summarize, question, and evaluate texts can help students internalize these practices.

Second, incorporating diverse and relatable materials can increase motivation. Instructors should provide texts that are challenging yet accessible, with scaffolding such as glossaries or guided questions. Technology can also support reading through tools like annotation apps or vocabulary builders.

Third, creating a supportive classroom environment that encourages risk-taking and collaboration can reduce anxiety. Study groups, peer feedback, and reflective journals may foster metacognitive awareness and autonomous learning.

Finally, curriculum developers should integrate academic reading training into broader English instruction, recognizing its foundational role in academic success.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study found that undergraduate EFL students at Universitas Islam Malang generally perceive academic reading positively and employ various strategies to support their comprehension. According to this study, students have a good understanding of academic reading, which includes reading materials such as journals, research articles, and textbooks. They recognize the important role of academic reading in supporting learning and knowledge development in their field of study. However, there is limited use of post-reading strategies, which are crucial for critical engagement and deeper learning. Motivation plays a key role in shaping students' reading behavior, influenced by personal relevance, support systems, and instructional approaches.

The study emphasizes the importance of tailored instruction that addresses both cognitive and affective aspects of academic reading. Teachers should not only teach reading strategies but also cultivate positive attitudes and learning autonomy. By doing so, institutions can better prepare students for academic and professional challenges in an increasingly complex literacy landscape.

Future research should explore interventions aimed at enhancing post-reading strategy use, particularly in digital learning environments. Longitudinal studies can also track how

perceptions and skills evolve over time. As academic reading remains a cornerstone of university education, understanding and supporting students' perceptions is vital for educational success.

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