

METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES AMONG ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY AT A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill for English Department students because they are required to engage with various academic texts throughout their studies. However, many students still encounter difficulties in understanding complex texts, identifying key information, and evaluating the credibility of sources. One factor that may influence students' reading performance is the use of metacognitive reading strategies. While previous studies have primarily focused on the relationship between metacognitive awareness and reading achievement, limited research has explored how English Department students employ these strategies in actual academic reading contexts. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the metacognitive reading strategies used by English Department students at a private university and examine how these strategies support their reading comprehension. This research employed a qualitative case study design involving 30 English Department students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and students' reading reflection journals. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed four major themes: planning before reading, monitoring comprehension during reading, using support strategies, and evaluating information credibility. The participants reported that these strategies helped them understand academic texts more effectively, identify important information, and overcome comprehension difficulties. Among the identified strategies, monitoring comprehension and evaluating source credibility were the most frequently used. The study concludes that metacognitive reading strategies play a significant role in supporting students' academic reading experiences. These findings suggest that explicit instruction on metacognitive reading strategies should be integrated into academic reading courses to enhance students' reading competence and independent learning skills.

Keywords: academic reading, English department students, metacognitive reading strategies, private university, qualitative case study.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading plays a central role in higher education because university students are expected to engage with a wide range of academic texts to support their learning activities. Academic reading enables students to acquire knowledge, develop critical thinking skills, and participate in scholarly discussions. For students

in English language education programs, reading is particularly important because English functions both as the object of learning and as the medium through which academic knowledge is accessed. Consequently, the ability to comprehend academic texts effectively becomes a fundamental requirement for academic success.

Despite its importance, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students experience difficulties when reading academic materials. These difficulties often include limited vocabulary knowledge, unfamiliar grammatical structures, complex academic discourse, and challenges in identifying important information within texts. Such problems may negatively affect students' academic performance and reduce their confidence when engaging with English-language materials. Academic reading therefore requires more than linguistic competence; it also demands strategic and self-regulated reading behaviors that help learners understand, monitor, and evaluate their comprehension processes.

The concept of metacognition has received considerable attention in educational research because it explains how learners regulate their own thinking and learning processes. Flavell (1979) defined metacognition as individuals' knowledge and control of their cognitive activities, including planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning processes. In reading contexts, metacognition enables learners to become active readers who consciously employ strategies to improve comprehension and overcome reading difficulties. According to Flavell's framework, successful learners are able to monitor their understanding, recognize comprehension problems, and apply appropriate strategies to achieve learning goals.

Metacognitive reading strategies refer to deliberate actions that readers use to facilitate comprehension and regulate reading processes. Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) categorized these strategies into three dimensions: Global Reading Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Support Reading Strategies. Global Reading Strategies involve planning and setting purposes before reading. Problem-Solving Strategies include monitoring comprehension, rereading difficult sections, and adjusting reading speed. Support Reading Strategies involve activities such as note-taking, highlighting important information, summarizing texts, and using reference materials to support understanding. These strategies allow readers to interact actively with texts and improve comprehension outcomes.

Previous studies have consistently reported positive relationships between metacognitive awareness and reading performance. Research conducted among university students revealed that learners who frequently employ metacognitive reading strategies tend to demonstrate stronger reading comprehension and greater academic achievement. Yüksel and Yüksel (2012) found that university students showed substantial awareness of academic reading strategies, particularly strategies related to problem-solving and comprehension monitoring. Their findings suggested that metacognitive awareness contributes significantly to successful academic reading because students actively regulate their understanding while engaging with academic texts.

Similarly, studies involving EFL learners have shown that metacognitive awareness positively influences reading comprehension performance. Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) reported that proficient readers tend to employ metacognitive strategies more frequently than less proficient readers. Students who actively monitor comprehension, identify important information, and evaluate textual content are generally more successful in understanding academic materials. Furthermore, metacognitive strategies encourage learner autonomy because students become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses during reading activities.

Recent research has continued to emphasize the importance of metacognitive reading strategies in higher education. Soeharto et al. (2024) reported that university students frequently employed metacognitive reading strategies when reading academic materials and that these strategies contributed positively to reading awareness and comprehension. Their study utilized the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI), which has become one of the most widely used instruments for measuring students' awareness of reading strategies. The MARSI framework highlights the importance of strategic reading behaviors in supporting academic literacy development among university students.

In addition to supporting reading comprehension, metacognitive strategies have been associated with critical thinking and self-regulated learning. Rivas et al. (2022) argued that metacognition helps learners become autonomous individuals by increasing awareness of their cognitive processes and enabling them to regulate learning effectively. Through planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning activities, students become more capable of adapting to academic challenges and improving their learning outcomes. These findings suggest that metacognitive awareness extends beyond reading performance and contributes to broader educational development.

Although previous studies have demonstrated the importance of metacognitive reading strategies, most investigations have employed quantitative approaches focusing on statistical relationships between strategy use and academic achievement. Such studies provide valuable evidence regarding the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies but often offer limited understanding of how students actually employ these strategies during reading activities. Moreover, relatively few studies have explored the experiences of English Department students in private university contexts, particularly in Indonesia. Understanding students' experiences is important because educational settings, learning environments, and academic demands may influence how metacognitive strategies are applied in practice.

The growing reliance on digital information sources also creates new challenges for university students. Students are increasingly required to evaluate the credibility of websites, online journals, and digital resources while completing academic tasks. Consequently, examining students' metacognitive reading practices in authentic academic contexts becomes increasingly relevant for understanding how they manage comprehension and evaluate information quality during reading activities.

Based on the gaps identified in previous studies, this study aims to explore the metacognitive reading strategies employed by English Department students at a private university and to understand

how these strategies support their reading comprehension and academic learning experiences. The study is expected to contribute to the literature on metacognitive reading by providing contextualized insights into students' strategic reading behaviors and offering pedagogical recommendations for improving academic reading instruction in higher education

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the metacognitive reading strategies used by English Department students during academic reading activities. A case study approach was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to investigate a phenomenon within its real-life context and gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors (Yin, 2018). Rather than measuring the frequency of strategy use through numerical data, this study sought to understand how students applied metacognitive reading strategies while engaging with academic texts and how these strategies supported their reading comprehension.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were 30 students enrolled in the English Education Department at a private university in Indonesia. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they met specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. First, they had completed at least one academic reading course. Second, they regularly engaged with English academic texts as part of their coursework. Third, they were willing to participate in interviews and classroom observations. The participants consisted of students from the third and fifth semesters, with ages ranging from 19 to 22 years old. These students were considered suitable participants because they had sufficient experience reading academic materials in English and could provide meaningful insights into the strategies they employed during reading activities.

Research Setting

This study was conducted at a private university located in Indonesia. The English Education Department was selected as the research setting because students in this program are required to read various academic texts throughout their studies, including journal articles, textbooks, research reports, and instructional materials. Academic reading is an essential component of the curriculum, making the setting relevant for investigating students' metacognitive reading practices. The university provides access to both printed and digital academic resources, allowing students to engage with diverse reading materials.

Consequently, students frequently encounter situations that require them to employ metacognitive strategies to understand, monitor, and evaluate information obtained from various sources.

Research Instrument

Three instruments were employed to collect data: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals.

1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection instrument. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), semi-structured interviews provide flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences while allowing researchers to explore predetermined topics. The interview protocol consisted of questions related to students' reading habits, planning activities before reading, monitoring strategies during reading, and evaluation processes after reading.

2. Classroom Observation

Classroom observations were conducted to identify students' actual reading behaviors during academic reading activities. Observation enabled the researcher to compare students' reported strategies with their actual practices. Field notes were used to record students' actions, interactions, and responses while reading academic materials during classroom sessions.

3. Reflective Journals

Participants were also asked to maintain reflective journals for four weeks. In these journals, students described their reading experiences, challenges encountered, and strategies employed while reading academic texts. Reflective journals provided additional evidence regarding students' metacognitive awareness and allowed the researcher to triangulate findings obtained from interviews and observations.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over a six-week period during the second semester of the academic year. The process consisted of three stages. The first stage involved classroom observations. The researcher observed several academic reading classes to identify students' reading behaviors and gain familiarity with the learning context. Observation notes were recorded systematically after each session. The second stage involved collecting reflective journals. Students were instructed to document their reading experiences weekly and describe the strategies they used before, during, and after reading academic texts. The journals were submitted electronically at the end of each week. The third stage involved conducting semi-structured interviews. Based on information gathered from observations and

journals, the researcher interviewed all participants individually. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis. To ensure ethical compliance, participants received information regarding the purpose of the study and signed informed consent forms before participating. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical approach was selected because it provides a systematic procedure for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The first stage involved familiarization with the data. The researcher repeatedly read interview transcripts, observation notes, and reflective journals to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. The second stage involved generating initial codes. Relevant statements related to reading strategies were highlighted and assigned descriptive labels representing specific behaviors and experiences. The third stage involved searching for themes by grouping similar codes into broader categories. Codes reflecting similar strategic behaviors were combined to form preliminary themes. The fourth stage involved reviewing themes. The researcher examined the coherence and consistency of each theme and compared them across different data sources to ensure credibility. The fifth stage involved defining and naming themes. Each theme was clearly described and supported by representative excerpts from participants' responses.

The final stage involved producing the report. The identified themes were interpreted in relation to metacognitive theory and previous studies to explain how students employed metacognitive reading strategies during academic reading activities. To enhance trustworthiness, data triangulation was employed through the use of multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and reflective journals. Member checking was also conducted by asking participants to review interview summaries and confirm the accuracy of interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interview transcripts, classroom observations, and reflective journals revealed four major themes regarding the use of metacognitive reading strategies among English Department students: (1) planning before reading, (2) monitoring comprehension during reading, (3) using support strategies to facilitate understanding, and (4) evaluating information credibility. These themes represent the participants' metacognitive awareness and illustrate how they regulate their reading processes when engaging with academic texts.

Planning Before Reading

One of the most frequently reported metacognitive practices was planning before reading. Most participants indicated that they rarely started reading immediately without first examining the text. Instead, they engaged in preliminary activities such as reading the title, scanning headings and subheadings, reviewing abstracts, and identifying keywords. These activities helped them establish reading purposes and activate prior knowledge related to the topic.

A participant explained:

“Before reading journal articles, I usually read the title, abstract, and conclusion first. It helps me understand what the article is about and decide which sections I need to focus on.”

Another participant stated:

“I try to predict the content from the title and headings. When I already know the topic, it becomes easier to understand the text.”

Classroom observations confirmed these findings. During reading activities, students frequently spent several minutes previewing academic texts before engaging in detailed reading. Many students highlighted section headings and discussed possible content with their peers prior to reading. These findings demonstrate that participants employed planning strategies as an initial step in managing academic reading tasks. According to Flavell (1979), planning is a crucial component of metacognitive regulation because it allows learners to establish goals and select appropriate approaches before engaging in cognitive activities. The findings support previous studies indicating that strategic readers often activate background knowledge and establish reading objectives before reading complex texts (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002).

The prevalence of planning strategies among participants suggests that they recognized academic reading as a purposeful activity rather than a passive process. This finding aligns with self-regulated learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of goal setting and strategic preparation in successful learning outcomes. By previewing texts and identifying relevant information beforehand, students appeared to reduce cognitive load and facilitate subsequent comprehension processes.

Monitoring Comprehension During Reading

The second and most dominant theme involved monitoring comprehension while reading. Participants consistently reported checking their understanding throughout the reading process. When encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, or confusing concepts, students employed various monitoring strategies to maintain comprehension.

Many participants described rereading difficult sections multiple times until they achieved understanding. Others adjusted their reading speed according to the complexity of the material. Some students paused periodically to summarize information mentally and verify whether they understood the main ideas.

One participant commented:

“If I don't understand a paragraph, I read it again slowly. Sometimes I need to read it three or four times before I understand the meaning.”

Another participant explained:

“When the text is difficult, I stop and ask myself whether I really understand it. If not, I go back to the previous paragraph.”

Reflective journals revealed similar patterns. Students frequently mentioned evaluating their comprehension while reading and making adjustments when difficulties occurred. These behaviors indicate active monitoring of cognitive processes, which is a central characteristic of metacognitive awareness.

The prominence of monitoring strategies is consistent with Flavell's (1979) theory, which identifies monitoring as a fundamental mechanism through which learners regulate cognition. Effective readers continuously evaluate their understanding and make strategic adjustments when comprehension problems arise. The present findings also support research by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), who reported that successful readers engage in frequent comprehension monitoring and employ corrective actions when necessary.

From a pedagogical perspective, the dominance of monitoring strategies suggests that students perceive comprehension difficulties as manageable challenges rather than insurmountable obstacles. This perspective may contribute to persistence and resilience during academic reading activities. The findings therefore reinforce the importance of teaching students how to monitor comprehension effectively and recognize signals indicating misunderstanding.

Using Support Strategies to Facilitate Understanding

The third theme concerned the use of support strategies. Participants reported employing various external aids to facilitate comprehension, including note-taking, highlighting important information, underlining unfamiliar concepts, using dictionaries, translating difficult sections, and creating summaries after reading.

Among these strategies, note-taking and highlighting emerged as the most commonly used practices. Students explained that these activities helped them identify key information and organize ideas more effectively.

One participant stated:

“I always highlight important information because it helps me review the article later.”

Another participant reported:

“Taking notes helps me remember important concepts and understand the relationship between ideas.”

Observational data confirmed extensive use of highlighting and note-taking during reading sessions. Students frequently annotated printed articles and inserted comments in digital documents while reading.

These findings correspond with the support reading strategies identified by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002). Such strategies provide cognitive scaffolding that assists readers in processing, organizing, and retaining information. Support strategies may be particularly important for EFL learners because they compensate for linguistic limitations and facilitate deeper engagement with academic texts.

Interestingly, several participants also reported using digital translation tools when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary. While some researchers have expressed concerns regarding excessive dependence on translation technologies, participants perceived these tools as valuable resources for maintaining reading flow and reducing frustration. This finding reflects the evolving nature of academic reading in digital learning environments, where technological resources increasingly become part of students’ strategic reading practices.

The findings further suggest that support strategies function not merely as supplementary activities but as integral components of students’ metacognitive regulation processes. Through note-taking, highlighting, and summarizing, students actively transformed textual information into more manageable and meaningful forms.

Evaluating Information Credibility

The final theme involved evaluating the credibility and reliability of information sources. Participants demonstrated awareness of the importance of critically assessing academic information, particularly when accessing online resources. Students reported examining authors’ credentials, publication sources, journal reputations, citation counts, and publication dates before accepting information as trustworthy.

One participant explained:

“I usually check whether the article is published in a reputable journal before using it for assignments.”

Another participant noted:

“If information comes from a website, I compare it with journal articles to make sure it is accurate.”

Reflective journals revealed that many students considered credibility evaluation an essential component of academic reading. Participants recognized that not all online information possesses equal quality and reliability.

This finding is particularly significant because credibility evaluation has received less attention in traditional metacognitive reading research. While previous studies often focus on comprehension and summarization, contemporary digital learning environments require students to evaluate information critically. The ability to assess source credibility can therefore be viewed as an extension of metacognitive regulation within digital literacy contexts.

The findings support recent scholarship emphasizing the importance of critical digital literacy in higher education. University students are increasingly exposed to large volumes of information from diverse sources, making credibility evaluation a necessary academic skill. By actively verifying information and comparing sources, participants demonstrated advanced metacognitive behaviors that extend beyond basic comprehension processes.

Discussion

The findings indicate that metacognitive reading among English Department students involves a dynamic process of planning, monitoring, supporting comprehension, and evaluating information. These strategies collectively enable students to regulate their reading experiences and navigate the challenges associated with academic texts.

The dominance of monitoring comprehension suggests that students view understanding as an ongoing process requiring continuous evaluation and adjustment. This finding reinforces the central role of metacognitive regulation proposed by Flavell (1979) and supports previous research demonstrating that successful readers actively monitor their cognitive activities (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2012).

The findings also contribute to the growing literature on academic literacy by highlighting the importance of credibility evaluation in contemporary reading practices. Unlike many earlier studies that concentrated primarily on traditional reading comprehension, this research demonstrates that students increasingly integrate source evaluation into their metacognitive reading processes. Such findings suggest that metacognitive reading frameworks may need to be expanded to accommodate the demands of digital information environments.

Furthermore, the study provides contextualized evidence from a private university setting, an area that has received relatively limited attention in previous research. The findings indicate that English Department students actively employ metacognitive reading strategies despite facing challenges associated with reading academic texts in a foreign language. This suggests that strategic reading behaviors can serve as valuable resources for supporting academic success among EFL learners. Therefore, the findings demonstrate that metacognitive reading strategies are not isolated techniques but interconnected

processes that enable students to become active, reflective, and independent readers. By planning, monitoring, supporting comprehension, and evaluating information, students are able to engage more effectively with academic texts and develop stronger academic literacy skills.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the metacognitive reading strategies employed by English Department students at a private university and examined how these strategies supported their academic reading experiences. The findings revealed that students actively employed various metacognitive strategies before, during, and after reading academic texts. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: planning before reading, monitoring comprehension during reading, using support strategies, and evaluating information credibility. These strategies enabled students to regulate their reading processes, overcome comprehension difficulties, identify important information, and critically assess academic sources.

Among the identified themes, monitoring comprehension emerged as the most prominent metacognitive practice. Students frequently reread difficult passages, adjusted reading speed, and continuously evaluated their understanding while reading. In addition, support strategies such as note-taking, highlighting, and summarizing were found to facilitate information retention and comprehension. The findings also demonstrated that students increasingly considered credibility evaluation an essential component of academic reading, particularly when accessing digital information sources. This suggests that metacognitive reading in contemporary higher education extends beyond comprehension and includes critical evaluation of information quality.

The study contributes to the literature by providing contextualized evidence regarding the metacognitive reading practices of English Department students in a private university setting. Unlike many previous studies that primarily relied on quantitative approaches, the present research offers a deeper understanding of how students experience and apply metacognitive strategies in authentic academic contexts. The findings support metacognitive theory and reinforce the importance of self-regulated learning in academic literacy development.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that instructors should explicitly integrate metacognitive strategy instruction into academic reading courses. Activities that encourage planning, self-monitoring, reflection, summarization, and source evaluation may help students become more effective and independent readers. Such instructional practices can contribute to improved academic performance and greater learner autonomy.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single private university and involved only thirty participants, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Future studies may involve larger and more diverse participant groups, compare students across institutions, or examine the impact of metacognitive strategy instruction through longitudinal research designs. Further investigation may also explore the relationship between

metacognitive reading strategies, digital literacy, and academic achievement in different educational settings.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical considerations and participant confidentiality. However, the data may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with appropriate permission.

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