Exploring Academic Reading Strategies Among EFL University Students: A Study at Tadulako University

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the reading strategies employed by seventh-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University. This study employs a qualitative descriptive design aimed at exploring and analyzing the strategies used by students to comprehend academic texts. The data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 21 students. The questionnaire includes statements rated on a Likert scale (from 1 = Never to 5 = Always). The findings reveal that while students frequently use strategies such as skimming, scanning, rereading, and using dictionaries to enhance comprehension, other strategies like summarizing, note-taking, and connecting ideas with prior knowledge are used. Moreover, many students rely on translation into their first language and assistance from friends, indicating ongoing challenges in processing academic texts in English. The study provides valuable insights for educators aiming to improve students reading comprehension on academic text.
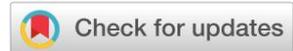
1. Introduction

Academic reading is a fundamental skill for university students. It plays a central role in helping students understand theoretical knowledge, develop critical thinking, and complete academic tasks such as writing essays, participating in discussions, and conducting research. For students in programs that require regular engagement with academic texts-such as those in teacher education and language programs-academic reading becomes even more essential (Aswad et al., 2019; Ko et al., 2025; Rahma & Widyastuti, 2023). Students are expected not only to read but also to analyze, interpret, and apply the ideas they encounter in texts.

However, academic texts are often complex. They may include unfamiliar vocabulary, dense sentence structures, abstract concepts, and discipline-specific language (Yaumi et al., 2023; Amalia et al., 2022; Mahdori et al., 2025). These features make academic reading challenging, particularly for students who study in a second or foreign language. This challenge is especially relevant for students in the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University, where English is used both as the object of study and as the language of instruction in many courses.

In the seventh semester, students face higher academic demands. They are expected to read and understand scholarly articles, research reports, and theoretical literature. These texts are important for final coursework, seminar presentations, and preparing for their undergraduate thesis. At this stage, students must move beyond surface reading and engage with texts more critically and independently. To do this effectively, they need to use appropriate reading strategies-techniques or methods that help them understand, remember, and apply the content of academic materials.

Reading strategies are tools that students use to help them make sense of what they read. These strategies include guessing the meaning of new words, summarizing information, taking notes, using dictionaries, skimming for main ideas, and asking questions about the text (Al-Obaydi et al., 2022; Sachiya et al., 2025; Suheri et al., 2025). Some strategies are used while reading, while others help students prepare before reading or reflect afterward. Research shows that students who use reading strategies effectively are more likely to understand academic texts and perform well in their studies.

Despite the importance of reading strategies, many students do not use them consistently or effectively. Some may rely too much on translating every word, which can slow down reading and lead to confusion. Others may not know how to approach a difficult text, especially if they are not taught how to use reading strategies in class. In Indonesia, limited

research has been conducted on how university students-particularly those in English Education programs-use reading strategies to deal with academic texts. There is a need to understand the actual strategies students use, how often they use them, and how helpful they find them in supporting their academic reading.

Academic reading is different from everyday reading. It involves understanding complex ideas, identifying the main arguments, evaluating the credibility of information, and connecting different sources. Grabe & Stoller, (2011) describe academic reading as a purposeful and interactive process. It requires the reader to actively engage with the text, not just to get general information, but to build new knowledge.

Reading is very important for students, especially for university students in academic settings. Students read for many reasons; to prepare for exams, to write papers, to review literature, or to join classroom discussions. Each purpose needs a different way of reading. For example, reading a textbook to get the main idea is different from reading a journal article to understand a research method. Good readers know how to change their reading strategies depending on their goal and how difficult the text is.

For students learning in a foreign language, such as Indonesian students reading English academic texts, reading can be more difficult. They not only need to understand the ideas but also deal with the English language. Vocabulary is one of the biggest challenges. According to Nation (2001), students who don't know many English words often struggle to understand the text. Too many unknown words can break their understanding.

Grammar and sentence structure are also important. Academic texts often use long and formal sentences, which can confuse readers. That's why foreign language or second language readers need strategies, such as guessing word meaning from context, breaking down long sentences, and using signal words like however or therefore to see how ideas are connected.

To improve reading, students can use different strategies. Some of the most helpful that becomes the focus of the current study are:

Skimming	Quickly reading to find the main idea of each paragraph
Scanning	Looking through the text to find specific information
Rereading	Reading again to better understand difficult parts
Using a dictionary	Checking unknown words to help understand the text
Summarizing	Writing the main points in your own words
Note-taking	Writing down key ideas while reading

These strategies help students understand texts more deeply and remember more information. For example, a study by Mufarika (2022) in SMA Negeri 7 Kediri showed that students' reading scores improved from 62.14 to 81.28 after using skimming and scanning. Another study by Hidayat and Silitonga (2023) showed that students who used these strategies improved from 17% to 77% scoring above 70 at SMP Negeri 16 Tanjungpinang.

Rereading is also useful, especially for difficult texts. This strategy helps students understand better. Using a dictionary may seem old-fashioned, but it still helps a lot, especially when students find unfamiliar words. According to Alharabi (2016), dictionary helps readers increase their vocabulary and read better, both online and on paper.

Summarizing helps students focus on the main points and remember them. Silitonga (2022) found that this strategy helped students understand and recall more. Note-taking also supports learning by helping students organize ideas and focus while reading. Mokhtari & Reichard (2002) stated that students who take notes remember better and understand texts more clearly.

Many previous studies show that students who use reading strategies understand texts better. For example, Li (2013) found that students who used metacognitive strategies (thinking about how they read) did better in reading tests. Zhang (2018) found that students who made notes, used dictionaries well, and summarized texts remembered information better. Yang (2010), who studied Chinese university students, found that summarizing and paraphrasing (restating in your own words) helped a lot. Students also used their background knowledge to connect new ideas to what they already knew. But Yang also stated that many students needed help and training to use these strategies well. In Indonesia, Sukyadi and Mardiani (2011) found that many students use dictionaries and translation tools. These tools are helpful, but if students depend on them too much, they may not fully understand the text or connect ideas across paragraphs.

Even though there are many studies about reading strategies in general, not many focus on Indonesian university students especially those in English Education programs. Also, most research has been done in big universities. There is not much research in regional universities like in Tadulako University. Since the learning environment, student backgrounds, and English exposure can be different, it's important to study how students in these areas read and learn. By knowing which strategies students use and how well they work, lecturers can help better understand academic reading text.

2. Methodology

This study involved twenty-one seventh-semester undergraduate students from Tadulako University, Indonesia. All participants were majoring in English and had prior experience reading academic texts in English. The sample consisted of sixteen female and five male students. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and none of the students had received formal instruction or training in reading strategies before completing the questionnaire.

A self-report questionnaire was used to examine how often students used different reading strategies. The questionnaire included 10 items, with each item describing a specific strategy (such as skimming to find the main idea, scanning for specific information, taking notes, underlining key points, using a dictionary for unfamiliar words, summarizing the content, asking oneself questions, discussing the text with classmates, rereading difficult sections, and using more than one strategy at the same time). Students responded using a five-point Likert scale, indicating how often they used each strategy, ranging from Never to Always. The questionnaire was given during a class session using Google Forms. All 21 students who attended the class completed the survey anonymously. Their responses were automatically recorded in a spreadsheet.

The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For each item, the number and percentage of students choosing each answer option were calculated. Bar charts were created to show the percentage of students who selected each response for every reading strategy. Because the sample size was small and the study was exploratory, no advanced statistical tests were used. The purpose of the analysis was to find out which reading strategies were used most often and which were used the least by the students.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Findings

Figure 1 presents the students' answers to Question 1, which asked about their use of the skimming strategy. Nearly half of the students (47.6%) said they sometimes used skimming to find the main ideas in a text. About 28.6% said they rarely used this strategy. Only a few students reported using skimming often (19%) or always (4.8%). These results suggest that skimming was not a commonly used strategy among most students.
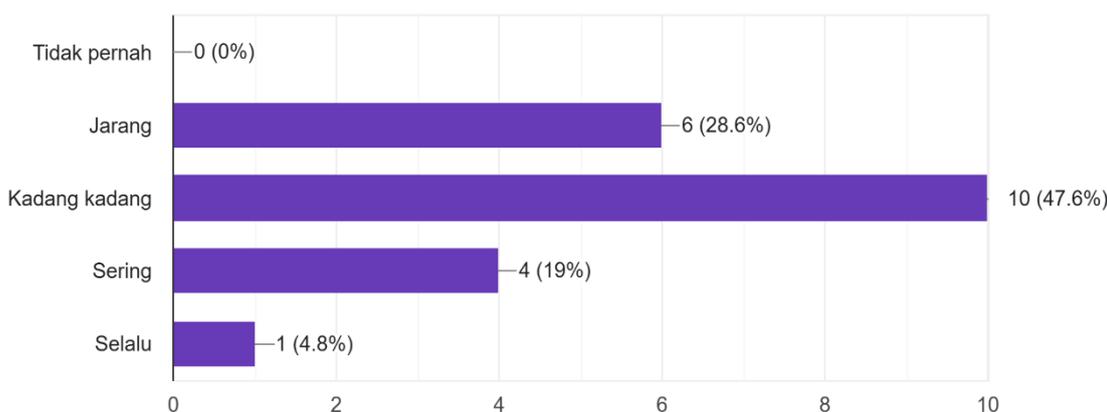

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of student responses for Question 1 (skimming strategy). N = 21

This result may suggest that many students are not fully aware of how useful skimming can be, or they may not feel confident using the strategy. Skimming helps readers quickly understand general information of the text such as the main idea of a text before reading it in more detail. This can be very helpful, especially when reading long and complex academic

texts. Since most students in this study did not use skimming very often, it would be helpful if the lecturers introduced this strategy in class.

The following figure (figure 2) shows the students' answers to Question 2 about using the scanning strategy to find specific information. More than half of the students (52.4%) said they often used scanning, and 4.8% said they always used it. Only 19% said they rarely used this strategy, while 23.8% said sometimes. This means that scanning was one of the most commonly used strategies, with 57% of students using it frequently (often or always).
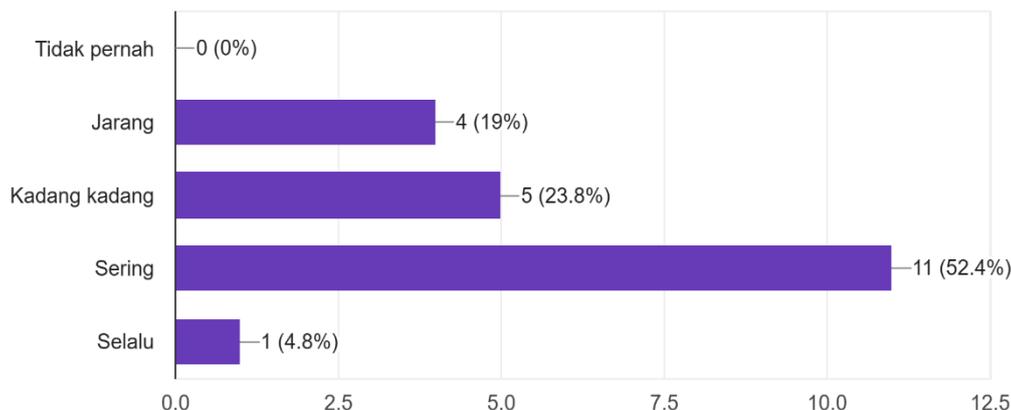

Figure 2. Frequency distribution of student responses for Question 2 (scanning strategy). N = 21

This result suggests that many students are comfortable using scanning when reading academic texts. Scanning helps readers quickly find specific information in the text without reading the entire text. It is a useful skill for tasks like answering questions, finding definitions, or looking for dates and names. Since most students in this study already use scanning often, teachers can build on this strength by helping them improve how and when they use it for different reading purposes.

The following figure (figure 3) shows the students' responses to Question 5 about using a dictionary when they find difficult words. A total of 61.9% of students said they often (33.3%) or always (28.6%) use a dictionary. In contrast, 28.6% said rarely and 9.5% said sometimes. None of the students chose never. This means that using a dictionary is a very common strategy to help students understand academic texts.
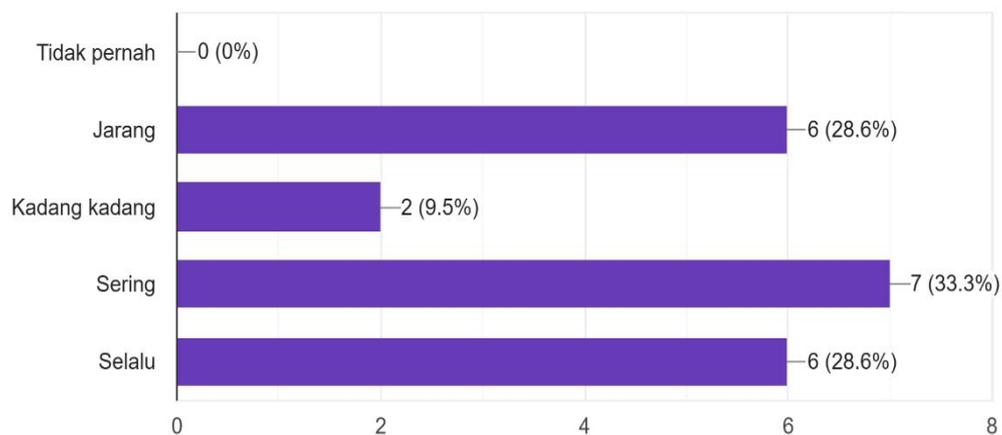

Figure 3. Frequency distribution of student responses for Question 5 (dictionary use). N = 21

These results suggest that students rely more on strategies like using dictionaries and summarizing, while note-taking is used less regularly. Lecturers might want to help students build stronger habits in note-taking, since it can support better understanding and memory when reading academic texts.

The following figure (figure 4) displays the results for Question 8 about discussing texts with classmates. A majority of students (52.4%) said they often discuss academic texts with peers, and 4.8% said they always do. Only 19% reported rarely and 23.8% sometimes. Peer discussion therefore appears to be a popular strategy for comprehension. Self-questioning (Question 7, not shown) was also common: 38.1% said they often ask themselves questions about the text, and 19% said always; 28.6% chose sometimes and 19% rarely.

Similarly, many students also said they often summarize what they read. Although the results for Question 6 are not shown in the figure, 61.9% of students said they often or always summarize the content of a text. This shows that summarizing is another popular strategy. However, the use of note-taking (Question 3, also not shown) was not as strong. While 38.1% of students said they sometimes took notes, only 23.8% said often and 14.3% said always. Still, no one chose never, which means all students used note-taking at least occasionally.
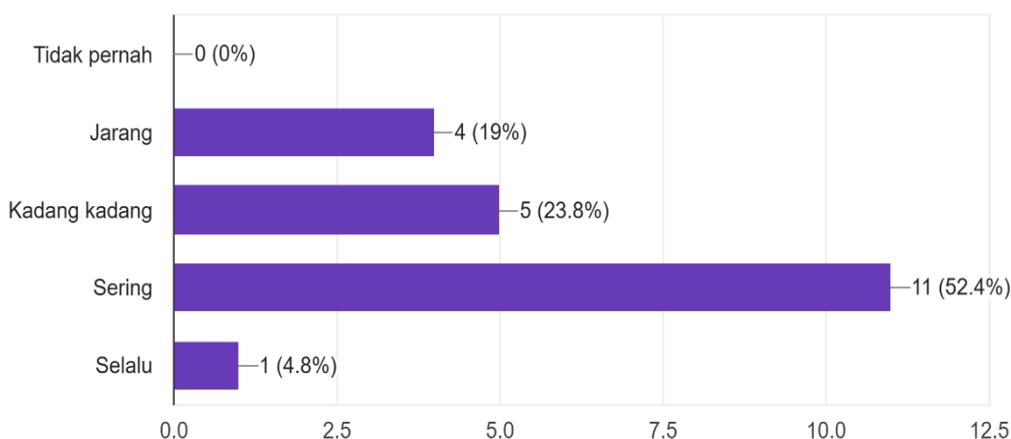

Figure 4. Frequency distribution of student responses for Question 8 (discussion with classmates). N = 21

Overall, both peer discussion and self-questioning are strategies that students seem to use regularly. This finding suggests that they are actively trying to understand and engage with academic texts. Teachers can continue to encourage these strategies in class by creating more opportunities for group discussions and modeling how to ask useful questions while reading.

Finally, Figure 5 show responses for Question 9 (rereading difficult parts) and Question 10 not shown (using multiple strategies simultaneously). For Q9, 42.9% of students always reread difficult sections, and 38.1% often do so; 14.3% sometimes and 9.5% rarely. Thus 81% of students often or always reread, making it the single most frequently reported strategy. For Q10, 38.1% of students often and 19% always use multiple strategies at once (57% combined), with 38.1% sometimes and 4.8% rarely. This indicates that many students consciously combine strategies when reading.
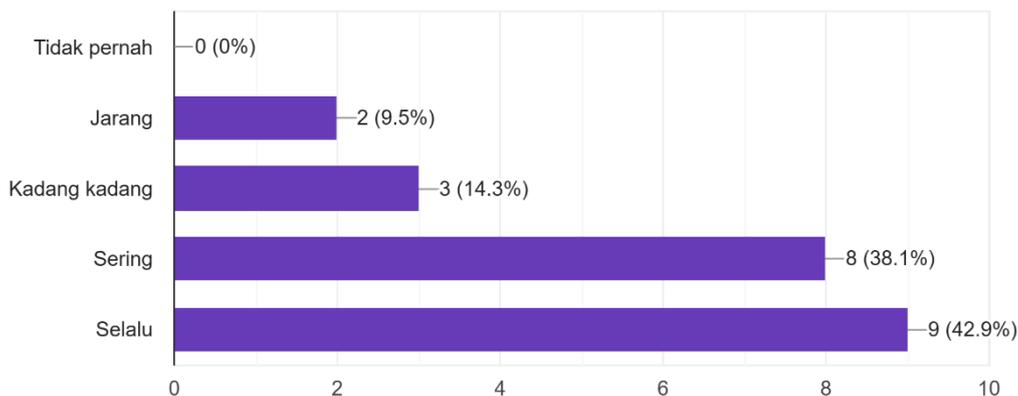

Figure 5. Frequency distribution of student responses for Question 9 (rereading). N = 21

The findings suggest that rereading and combining strategies are important habits for many students when reading academic texts. These behaviors show active and flexible reading, which can help students deal with complex content more effectively. Teachers can support these habits by encouraging students to pause, reflect, and mix strategies based on the demands of each reading task.

3.2 Discussion

The results indicate that these EFL students at Tadulako University most frequently used problem-solving and support strategies. In particular, rereading difficult text (Q9) was the top strategy: 81% of students reported doing it often or always. Similarly, dictionary use (Q5) and summarizing (Q6) were cited as often or always by over 60% of students. Scanning for information (Q2) was also used frequently by 57%. In contrast, a classic global strategy like skimming (Q1) was relatively uncommon, with most students using it only sometimes or rarely.

These findings largely align with previous research by Annury et al. (2019) found that Indonesian EFL learners predominantly use problem-solving strategies, followed by global and support strategies. Our students' high rates of rereading and self-questioning reflect that emphasis on problem-solving, and their frequent dictionary use fits under support strategies. One difference is that Annury et al. reported support strategies as least frequent, whereas here dictionary use was relatively high (over 60%). Overall, the students' frequent metacognitive strategy use is encouraging. Rastegar et al. (2017) observed that greater use of metacognitive reading strategies correlates with higher comprehension scores, and Yulita and Napitupulu (2023) concluded that employing metacognitive strategies improves reading comprehension and learner engagement. In our context, many students already engage in metacognitive behaviors (such as monitoring understanding and using multiple approaches), which are likely to benefit their comprehension. In fact, Muhid et al. (2020) reported that metacognitive strategy instruction produced a large positive effect on students' reading comprehension scores, suggesting that instruction can yield substantial gains.

An interesting pattern is the emphasis on finding details over grasping the gist. The students' high use of scanning compared to low use of skimming might reflect their focus on retrieving specific information (perhaps driven by exam or assignment formats). While scanning efficiently locates keywords, skimming builds an overall understanding of the text. Learners with limited vocabulary or lower confidence may underuse skimming because it requires inferring meaning from context. Nevertheless, skimming is known to aid reading speed and overall comprehension, and students might benefit from more practice in this technique. The popularity of peer discussion suggests that collaborative learning is already part of these students' practice. Instructors could leverage this by designing structured group reading activities, such as think-pair-share or jigsaw tasks, turning an informal strategy (Q8) into a formal instructional tool. Peer dialogue can also make metacognitive processes explicit, as students articulate their comprehension strategies to each other.

Overall, the findings imply a need for balanced strategy instruction. Teachers should validate strategies that students already find helpful (like rereading and dictionary use) while guiding them in effective use. They should also model underused strategies (for example, demonstrating skimming or structured note-taking) and encourage students to reflect on their strategy choices. Such pedagogical steps align with Indonesian educational goals of higher-order thinking and learner autonomy, as they make strategy use explicit and teach students to self-regulate their reading.

From a pedagogical perspective, the relatively low frequency of some strategies highlights areas for emphasis. The limited use of skimming and structured note-taking suggests these global and organizational techniques are not yet habitual. Instructors could incorporate explicit skimming exercises or guided annotation activities to build these skills. Conversely, the high use of rereading and dictionary use shows students are aware of some effective approaches, but teachers might ensure these do not become crutches by also teaching contextual inference skills. By combining discussion of texts with strategy instruction, educators can foster deeper engagement. For example, think-aloud modeling by the teacher can demonstrate when and how to apply different strategies during reading, and follow-up questions can prompt students to self-monitor their understanding.

This study focuses on seventh-semester students in the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University. These students are in a key academic phase, where they are expected to read academic texts independently and use them as sources for research and writing. The main aim of this study is to explore the reading strategies that these students use when reading academic texts and how they perceive the effectiveness of these strategies. The results are expected to help educators understand students' reading behaviors and improve the teaching of academic reading in the program.

This study has limitations due to its small, single-group sample. Future research could examine strategy use in larger or more diverse populations, or explore how self-reported strategy use relates to actual comprehension

performance. Nonetheless, the findings provide valuable insight into these students' reading behaviors and suggest that targeted strategy training could support their academic reading proficiency.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the reading comprehension strategies used by Indonesian university students. The findings indicate that these students rely heavily on certain metacognitive and support strategies: for example, most reported frequently scanning for information, rereading difficult passages, consulting a dictionary, summarizing text, self-questioning, and discussing texts with peers. In contrast, a traditional global strategy like skimming was used less often. These results suggest that while the students have developed some effective habits, they may benefit from practice with a broader range of strategies.

Pedagogically, instructors should explicitly teach and model a variety of reading strategies. For instance, teachers could include guided skimming exercises, structured previewing of text, and systematic note-taking activities in their instruction, complementing the strategies students already use. Such targeted strategy training aligns with Indonesian educational goals and has the potential to improve students' autonomy and comprehension outcomes. By focusing on both the strategies students naturally use and those they underutilize, educators can design interventions that strengthen overall reading comprehension ability and academic performance.

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