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THE READING SKILLS OF EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS
(Case study: The reading skills of the students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Universitas Al-Ghifari)

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi keterampilan membaca teks berbahasa Inggris mahasiswa yang belajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) di Universitas Al-Ghifari, dengan fokus pada tantangan yang mereka hadapi, strategi yang digunakan, dan hubungan antara kemampuan membaca dan kinerja akademis. Mengingat pentingnya keterampilan membaca untuk keberhasilan akademik, penelitian ini bertujuan memberikan wawasan mendalam melalui pendekatan campuran yang mencakup data kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Data kuantitatif diperoleh dari laporan diri siswa mengenai kemampuan dan tantangan, sementara wawancara kualitatif menawarkan perspektif pribadi tentang pengalaman membaca mereka. Hasil penelitian diharapkan dapat memberikan informasi berharga bagi pendidik untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca dan kinerja akademik mahasiswa yang belajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing.

Kata kunci: **keterampilan membaca, EFL, kinerja akademik, tantangan, strategi belajar**

Abstract

This study explores the reading skills of English texts of students learning English as a foreign language at Al-Ghifari University, focusing on the challenges they face, the strategies they use, and the relationship between reading skills and academic performance. Given the importance of reading skills for academic success, this study aims to provide in-depth insights through a mixed approach that includes quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were obtained from students' self-reports of their abilities and challenges, while qualitative interviews offered personal perspectives on their reading experiences. The results of the study are expected to provide valuable information for educators to improve the reading skills and academic performance of students learning English as a foreign language.

Key words: Reading Skills, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Academic Performance, Student Challenges, Learning Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill for academic success, particularly for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as they must investigate complex texts in a language that is not their mother tongue. This article explore the reading skills of EFL university students, with a focus on several key aspects: their proficiency levels, the common difficulties they encounter, and the effective strategies they employ to enhance their reading abilities. By examining proficiency levels, the article aims to highlight the varying degrees of competence among students, which can significantly impact their academic performance and engagement with course materials. Furthermore, it addresses the common challenges faced by these learners, such as limited vocabulary, difficulties with idiomatic expressions, and issues related to motivation, all of which can hinder their comprehension and overall reading

experience. In addition to identifying these obstacles, the article explores the strategies that students find effective in overcoming their reading difficulties, such as skimming, scanning, and collaborative learning techniques. By synthesizing these elements, the article seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the reading landscape for EFL students, ultimately offering insights that can inform instructional practices and support systems to foster improved reading skills and academic outcomes in higher education settings.

In today's globalized world, proficiency in English has become increasingly important, particularly in academic settings where English serves as a medium of instruction. For university students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading skills are essential not only for understanding course materials but also for engaging with a wealth of knowledge that extends beyond their immediate curriculum. Effective reading enables students to access information critically and enhances their overall academic performance.

However, many EFL students face significant challenges in developing their reading skills. These challenges may stem from a limited vocabulary, unfamiliarity with idiomatic expressions, and varying levels of motivation and engagement with reading tasks. Understanding these barriers is crucial for educators aiming to support their students effectively.

The present study aims to investigate the reading skills of Al-Ghifari university students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL), focusing on their proficiency levels, the difficulties they encounter, and the strategies they employ to improve their reading abilities. By employing a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of reading skills among EFL learners. The findings will not

only contribute to the existing literature but also offer practical recommendations for enhancing reading instruction in EFL contexts.

The development of reading skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students has been the focus of numerous studies, highlighting various factors that influence reading proficiency and comprehension. This literature review synthesizes key findings from previous research, emphasizing the cognitive processes involved in reading, common challenges faced by EFL learners, and effective strategies for improvement.

Cognitive Processes in Reading

Reading is a complex cognitive activity that encompasses various processes, including decoding written text, comprehending meaning, and integrating new information with prior knowledge. According to Grabe (2009), several critical components are involved in effective reading, such as word recognition, syntactic processing, and the construction of meaning, all of which are vital for understanding and interpreting texts. However, for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, these essential processes can be significantly hindered by language barriers, resulting in challenges related to comprehension and retention of information. Alderson (2000) further emphasizes that reading proficiency extends beyond mere fluency; it also involves the ability to engage with texts in a critical and analytical manner. This means that EFL learners must not only be able to read quickly but also interpret, evaluate, and synthesize information effectively. The interplay of these factors highlights the multifaceted nature of reading skills and underscores the unique challenges faced by EFL learners, who must navigate both linguistic and cognitive demands when engaging with academic texts. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of these processes is crucial for developing effective instructional strategies that can enhance

reading proficiency among EFL students, enabling them to become more competent and confident readers in their second language.

Challenges Faced by EFL Students

Research consistently highlights several specific challenges that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students encounter when it comes to reading, with limited vocabulary being one of the most common issues. This limitation can significantly impede comprehension, as students often find themselves unable to fully understand texts due to the presence of unfamiliar words. Zhang (2010) underscores this point by demonstrating a strong correlation between inadequate vocabulary knowledge and poor reading comprehension among EFL learners, indicating that a robust vocabulary is essential for effective reading. Furthermore, many EFL students also struggle with idiomatic expressions and cultural references that are prevalent in English texts, which can further complicate their understanding. Such expressions often carry meanings that are not immediately apparent and require a deeper cultural context to interpret correctly. Hirvela (2004) points out that these linguistic and cultural nuances can create additional barriers for EFL students, making it challenging for them to grasp the intended meanings of texts. Together, these challenges—limited vocabulary and difficulties with idiomatic expressions—underscore the complexities of reading in a second language and highlight the necessity for targeted instructional strategies that can help EFL learners build their vocabulary and enhance their overall reading comprehension skills. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering greater academic success and confidence in reading among EFL students.

Motivation is a crucial factor in the development of reading skills, particularly among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Research by Dörnyei (2001) highlights that a lack of intrinsic motivation can significantly contribute to disengagement from reading tasks, which in turn exacerbates difficulties in acquiring essential reading skills. When students are not motivated to engage with reading materials, they are less likely to practice and develop their abilities, leading to a cycle of avoidance that further diminishes their confidence and proficiency. This lack of motivation often stems from negative experiences with reading in English, such as encountering challenging texts or feeling overwhelmed by the demands of academic reading. These experiences can create a perception that reading is a burdensome task rather than an enjoyable or enriching activity. As a result, students may develop a reluctance to engage with English texts, which perpetuates their struggles and contributes to underachievement. Understanding the role of motivation is vital for educators seeking to implement effective strategies that foster a positive attitude toward reading and encourage EFL learners to engage more fully with texts, ultimately enhancing their reading development and academic success.

Strategies for Improving Reading Skills

Despite the significant challenges they face, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students actively employ a variety of strategies to enhance their reading skills. Research conducted by Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) categorizes these strategies into two main types: cognitive and metacognitive. Cognitive strategies, which encompass techniques such as skimming, scanning, and summarizing, enable students to process information more efficiently and focus on key ideas within texts. In contrast, metacognitive strategies involve higher-order thinking skills, including planning their reading approach, monitoring their comprehension as they read, and evaluating their understanding after completing the text. A study by Chen (2012) further supports the effectiveness of these strategies, finding that students who actively

utilized both cognitive and metacognitive techniques demonstrated significantly higher levels of reading comprehension and overall academic success. This evidence suggests that equipping EFL learners with explicit training in these strategies can empower them to navigate challenging texts more effectively, thereby fostering greater confidence and competence in their reading abilities. By integrating these strategies into the curriculum, educators can help students not only improve their reading skills but also develop a more proactive and self-regulated approach to their learning.

Peer collaboration has emerged as an effective strategy for enhancing reading skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Research by Storch (2005) indicates that engaging in discussions with peers not only facilitates a deeper understanding of reading materials but also improves retention of information. Through collaborative interactions, students have the opportunity to clarify doubts, share insights, and explore different interpretations of texts, which enriches their comprehension and critical thinking skills. Such collaborative learning environments foster a sense of community and support among students, which can significantly enhance their motivation and engagement in reading tasks. When learners feel connected to their peers and supported in their academic endeavors, they are more likely to participate actively and invest effort into their reading assignments. This increased engagement can lead to a more positive attitude toward reading and ultimately contribute to better academic outcomes. By promoting peer collaboration in the classroom, educators can create a dynamic learning atmosphere that encourages EFL students to take ownership of their reading development, thereby improving both their skills and their overall academic experience.

Previous research has highlighted numerous aspects of reading skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners,

underscoring the complexity of the reading process for non-native speakers. According to Grabe (2009), reading encompasses a range of cognitive processes, including decoding, comprehension, and integration of information, all of which can present significant challenges for EFL students who may lack familiarity with the language's nuances. Additionally, studies by Alderson (2000) emphasize the critical role of vocabulary knowledge and comprehension strategies in facilitating effective reading skills. These elements are essential not only for understanding texts but also for engaging with them critically. This literature review synthesizes the existing findings on these challenges and strategies, while also identifying gaps in the current research that this study aims to address. By exploring these under-researched areas, the study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the reading difficulties faced by EFL learners, as well as to inform the development of targeted instructional strategies that can better support their reading development in academic contexts.

The literature indicates that while EFL learners face considerable challenges in developing reading skills, there are effective strategies that can facilitate improvement. Addressing vocabulary gaps, enhancing motivation, and promoting collaborative learning are essential for supporting EFL students in their reading endeavors. This study aims to build upon these findings by exploring the specific experiences of EFL Al-Ghifari university students and identifying tailored strategies for enhancing their reading skills.

METHODOLOGY
Participants

The participants in this study were 100 university students enrolled in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs at Al-Ghifari university. The sample included in the first-year students from various academic

disciplines to provide a comprehensive overview of reading skills across different educational backgrounds and stages. The participants were recruited through announcements in classes and through the university's online platforms, ensuring a diverse representation of students.

Data Collection

A mixed-method approach was employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The data collection methods included:

Surveys

A structured questionnaire was developed to assess students' reading habits, self-perceived proficiency, and strategies used in reading. The survey included multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale items, and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to ensure ease of access and completion.

Interviews

To gain deeper insights into students' reading experiences and challenges, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 20 participants. These interviews were designed to explore participants' perceptions of their reading skills, the difficulties they face, and the strategies they employ in their reading practices. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and was conducted in a quiet setting to facilitate open discussion.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process consisted of both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative Analysis

The survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize participants' self-reported reading proficiency levels, challenges, and employed strategies. Statistical software (e.g., SPSS) was used to calculate frequencies, means, and standard deviations.

Qualitative Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded (with participants' consent) and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes and patterns in the participants' responses. The coding process involved reading through the transcripts, generating initial codes, and grouping these codes into broader themes that reflected the key aspects of students' reading experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university's ethics committee. Informed consent was secured from all participants before data collection, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process, with all personal identifiers removed from the data to protect participants' privacy.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the reading skills of EFL university students, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The sample size, although sufficient for initial analysis, may not be representative of all EFL learners at different institutions. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported measures may introduce bias, as students may overestimate their reading proficiency. Future research could expand on this study by including a larger, more diverse sample and incorporating objective measures of reading comprehension.

RESULTS

The analysis of the data collected from the surveys and interviews provided valuable insights into the English reading skills of Al-Ghifari university students. The findings are organized into three main categories: reading proficiency levels, challenges faced by

students, and strategies employed to improve reading skills.

The analysis of the data collected from Al-Ghifari university students provided a comprehensive overview of their reading proficiency levels, revealing a diverse range of self-assessments. As shown in Tabel 1, approximately 30% of participants rated their reading skills as highly proficient, indicating confidence in their ability to comprehend complex texts. In contrast, 50% considered themselves proficient, suggesting a moderate level of competence, while 20% identified as beginner or intermediate readers, which highlights a significant portion of students who may struggle with academic reading tasks.

Tabel 1. Reading Proficiently Level

Category	Percentage
Highly Proficient	30%
Proficient	50%
Beginner or Intermediate	20%

This variability in self-assessment points to the differing levels of readiness among the learners, emphasizing the need for tailored instructional approaches to address individual needs.

Tabel 2. Key Challeges Faced by Students

Challenge	Percentage
Limited vocabulary	65%
Understanding idiomatic expression	50%
Lack of motivation	40%

In Tabel 2, key challenges that students faced in their reading experiences were also evident in the survey results. A substantial 65% of respondents indicated that limited vocabulary significantly hindered their comprehension, often leading to frustration when encountering unfamiliar words in texts. Additionally, 50% reported difficulties in understanding idiomatic expressions and cultural references, which are commonly found in English literature and academic materials. A lack of motivation was another notable barrier, cited by 40% of participants, many of whom felt overwhelmed by the

extensive reading requirements of their courses. These challenges not only impede comprehension but may also contribute to lower engagement and academic performance among EFL students.

Tabel 3. Strategies Demonstrated by Students

Strategy	Percentage
Skimming and Scanning	70%
Note-Taking	60%
Peer Discussion	50%

Table 3 summarizes the proactive strategies employed by students to improve their reading skills despite the challenges they faced.

Despite these obstacles, the students demonstrated a proactive approach to improving their reading skills through various strategies. As shown in Tabel 3, a significant 70% utilized skimming and scanning techniques to quickly identify key information and main ideas, which helped them manage the large volumes of reading required in their courses. Additionally, 60% engaged in note-taking while reading, which reinforced their understanding and retention of information. Peer discussions emerged as another effective strategy, employed by 50% of students, allowing them to clarify doubts and share insights, thereby enhancing their comprehension of complex materials. These strategies reflect students' efforts to navigate their reading challenges and highlight the importance of fostering effective learning techniques.

Qualitative insights gained from interviews further enriched the understanding of students' reading experiences. Participants emphasized that motivation and interest in the subject matter significantly influenced their reading engagement. Many expressed a desire for more interactive and varied reading materials that could capture their attention and enhance their learning experience. This feedback suggests that a curriculum incorporating diverse and engaging texts may not only improve reading skills but also foster a more

positive attitude towards reading in English. Overall, the findings underscore the pressing need for targeted support and resources that can assist EFL learners in overcoming their reading difficulties, ultimately improving their academic performance and fostering a deeper appreciation for reading in a second language.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal critical insights into the reading skills of EFL university students, highlighting both the challenges they face and the strategies they employ. The variability in self-reported reading proficiency suggests that while some students feel confident in their abilities, a significant number struggle with fundamental reading tasks. This disparity underscores the necessity for differentiated instructional strategies that cater to varying proficiency levels. Educators must recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach may not effectively meet the diverse needs of EFL learners.

The challenges identified—particularly limited vocabulary and difficulties with idiomatic expressions—align with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of vocabulary acquisition in reading comprehension (Zhang, 2010). The high percentage of students reporting these challenges indicates a pressing need for targeted vocabulary development programs. Such programs could incorporate contextualized learning, where vocabulary is taught within the framework of authentic texts, thus enhancing both comprehension and retention.

Motivation emerged as a significant factor affecting reading engagement, corroborating previous research that links motivation to academic performance (Dörnyei, 2001). The findings suggest that students who experience a lack of motivation may be less likely to engage with reading tasks, creating a cycle of avoidance and underachievement. Therefore, fostering intrinsic motivation through engaging and relevant reading materials is crucial. Educators should consider integrating diverse genres and topics that resonate with students' interests to cultivate a more positive reading experience.

The strategies employed by students, such as skimming, scanning, and peer discussions, reflect a proactive approach to overcoming reading challenges. These findings highlight the effectiveness of metacognitive and cognitive strategies in enhancing reading comprehension (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Encouraging students to adopt these strategies systematically can further improve their reading skills. Additionally, promoting collaborative learning environments, where students can discuss readings and share insights, can enhance comprehension and build a supportive learning community.

Qualitative insights from interviews also emphasize the need for more interactive and varied reading materials. Students expressed a desire for texts that not only challenge them but also engage their interests. This feedback suggests that curriculum designers should prioritize the inclusion of diverse and culturally relevant materials to motivate students and foster a deeper connection with reading in English.

In conclusion, the study highlights the multifaceted nature of English reading skills among Al-Ghifari university students, revealing a combination of challenges and strengths. Addressing vocabulary gaps, enhancing motivation, and promoting effective reading strategies are essential for improving reading proficiency. By implementing targeted interventions and a more engaging curriculum, educators can better support EFL learners in their academic journeys, ultimately leading to improved reading skills and greater academic success.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study highlights the multifaceted nature of reading skills among EFL university students, revealing a combination of challenges and strengths. Addressing vocabulary gaps, enhancing motivation, and promoting effective reading strategies are essential for improving reading proficiency. By implementing targeted interventions and a more engaging curriculum, educators can better support EFL learners in their academic journeys, ultimately leading to improved reading skills and greater academic success.

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