AN ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC READING DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY THE SECOND YEAR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH STUDY PROGRAM FKIP UNIVERSITAS RIAU

Reni Novianti[1], Erni[2], Fadly Azhar[3]
Email: reni.novianti0433@student.unri.ac.id, erni@lecturer.unri.ac.id, fadly.azhar@lecturer.unri.ac.id
Phone Number: +6285382321718

English Education Study Program
Department of Language and Art Education
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education
Universitas Riau

Abstract: *Academic reading is one of the challenges commonly faced by university students. This quantitative descriptive research aimed to know the aspects of academic reading difficulties and the factors that cause the problems faced by the second-year students of the English study program FKIP Universitas Riau. The population was 111 students. A random sampling technique was applied to decide the sample. There were 38 students as the samples. The instrument used to collect the data was a reading test categorized into 7 components about the aspects of the student's academic reading difficulties faced and a questionnaire with categorized 3 aspects of the factors that cause academic reading difficulties. To analyze the data, the researcher calculated the data using Microsoft Excel 2013. The data analysis showed that the mean score was 50.59 categorized into medium level. The findings of the research showed that the highest aspects of academic reading difficulties faced by the students were in answering questions about identifying inference with 22 students (58%) and the factors that caused academic reading difficulties faced by the students such as lack of language proficiency (57%), limited of background knowledge (58%), and Inadequate use of effective reading strategies (63%). Hence, students are suggested to be more practiced in learning and reading academic texts to understand better how to overcome their problems by developing their reading skills by applying various reading strategies and encouraging their reading habits in learning academic texts.*

Key Words: *Analysis, Academic Reading, Difficulties*

ANALISIS KESULITAN MEMBACA AKADEMIK YANG DIHADAPI MAHASISWA TAHUN KEDUA PROGRAM STUDI BAHASA INGGRIS FKIP UNIVERSITAS RIAU

Reni Novianti[1], Erni[2], Fadly Azhar[3]
Email: reni.novianti0433@student.unri.ac.id, erni@lecturer.unri.ac.id, fadly.azhar@lecturer.unri.ac.id
Phone Number: +6285382321718

Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa dan Seni
Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan
Universitas Riau

Abstrak: Membaca akademis merupakan salah satu tantangan yang umumnya dihadapi oleh mahasiswa. Penelitian deskriptif kuantitatif ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui beberapa kesulitan membaca akademik dan faktor-faktor penyebab kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa tahun kedua program studi Bahasa Inggris FKIP Universitas Riau. Populasi pada penelitian ini adalah 111 siswa. Teknik pengambilan sampel secara acak diterapkan untuk menentukan sampel. Sampel berjumlah 38 siswa. Instrumen yang digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data adalah tes membaca yang dikategorikan menjadi 7 komponen tentang aspek kesulitan membaca akademik yang dihadapi siswa dan angket dengan kategori 3 aspek faktor penyebab kesulitan membaca akademik. Untuk menganalisis data, peneliti menghitung data menggunakan Microsoft Excel 2013. Analisis data menunjukkan bahwa skor rata-rata adalah 50,59 termasuk dalam kategori sedang. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa aspek kesulitan membaca akademik tertinggi yang dihadapi siswa adalah dalam menjawab pertanyaan tentang mengidentifikasi inferensi dengan 22 siswa (58%) dan faktor penyebab kesulitan membaca akademik yang dihadapi siswa seperti kurangnya kemampuan berbahasa. (57%), latar belakang pengetahuan yang terbatas (58%), dan penggunaan strategi membaca efektif yang kurang memadai (63%). Oleh karena itu, siswa disarankan untuk lebih berlatih dalam mempelajari dan membaca teks akademik untuk lebih memahami cara mengatasi permasalahannya dengan mengembangkan keterampilan membaca dengan menerapkan berbagai strategi membaca dan mendorong kebiasaan membaca mereka dalam mempelajari teks akademik.

Kata Kunci: Analisis, Membaca Academic, Kesulitan

INTRODUCTION

The complex situation that university students currently face requires them to reflect on the competencies that should have as part of their graduate profile. One of the transversal competencies that is considered fundamental is academic literacy (Carlino 2013; Solimine *et al.,* 2020). Academic reading is one aspect of the multi-component construct of academic literacy, and it is treated as an essential ability that students need to acquire to ensure overall academic success in university learning (Kavlu, 2015). It is also a key to academic literacy competencies because students can learn, acquiring knowledge and information to help them deeply understand their subject matter (Noor 2006; Mabruroh 2020).

Reading at university presents a higher challenge to students since they read for academic purposes. It is more complicated and requires students to perform multiple skills, such as reading relevant texts critically (by finding out the author's intentions, purposes and point of view), analyzing, synthesizing, interpreting, and reflecting on the text (Sengupta, 2002; Anwar & Sailuddin, 2022). Hence, students find academic reading learning as stressful and time-consuming because it is different from reading in general which involves complex, discipline-specific reading that carefully synthesizes material from multiple sources (Sengupta, 2002; Shen, 2013).

Academic reading is foundational to equity and participation in higher education because it provides gateways to other academic activities (Baker *et al.,* 2019). Hence, the ability to read academic text is regarded as one of the most crucial skills that students need to acquire (Delgadova, 2015). However, reading academic texts is not an easy process. It necessitates complex skills that involve engagement between the readers contextual knowledge and the use of the printed language and requires asking critical questions about the information they have read (Sohail, 2015). Then, academic reading texts are more challenging because they are longer, have denser paragraphs, and contain complex sentences and complicated vocabulary (Hirano, 2015).

Furthermore, the ability to successfully comprehend, synthesize, and reproduce the ideas presented in academic texts is central skill for university student's success in their learning. However, comprehending academic reading text is a complex process and not an easy process due to the common problems that most of the students faced difficulty in extracting and synthesizing meaning or information from several sources, inability to engage deeply with the content of a text, and unfamiliarity with the vocabulary in the text (Manjet *et al.,* 2017).

In line with the fact based on informal observation through the documentation on students course result sheets (KHS) who had finished the course, the researcher found that most of the students were still not successful in the course. Because most of the students got low scores. From a total 111 students as many as 59 students (0,53%) got low scores in the Pre-Intermediate Reading & Writing course, then as many as 62 students (0,55%) got low scores in the Intermediate Reading & Writing course, and as many as 65 students (0,58%) got low scores in the Post Intermediate Reading & Writing course. Based on the analysis results, the student's difficulties were reflected in their achievement on result scores. In addition, the researcher did informal observation by interviewing several students and found the result that most of them agreed that comprehending academic reading text is not an easy process since they faced difficulty in synthesizing information and meaning of complex sentences in a text, then difficult in employing

effective reading strategies (taking notes by using own words) in doing reading comprehension exercises.

Several research have underlined difficulties of students in reading academic texts that students reported the difficulties in working out the meaning of difficult words (Anwar and Sailuddin, 2022). In Mabruroh (2019), the students mentioned the difficulties faced include a lack of vocabulary for specific terms, comprehension difficulties focused on repeated reading, difficulties related to concepts and topics focused on the use of titles, and a lack of teacher motivation. Another difficulties also found that students encountered problems of a lack of time, critical literacy skills, information literacy, unfamiliarity with language style and general features of the author's writing, limited content knowledge, inadequate statistical literacy and interaction with peers, and high expectations and vague instructions from teachers (Nejadganbar et al., 2022).

The difficulty in understanding academic reading must be understood and resolved by students and lecturers because the ability to comprehend academic reading text is considered the most crucial skill that students need to acquire, and lack of comprehension affects students academic performance and their achievement in the academic reading learning process (Davoudi and Yousefi, 2015). However, the difficulties experienced by students at one university may differ from what is found at another university. Therefore, the researcher is intended and interested in researching this problem at the English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau to find out about the aspects of academic reading difficulties faced by the second-year students and the factors that cause those difficulties

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive quantitative research. The population of this research was the second-year students of the English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau. The total population was 111 students. In the sample selection process, the cluster random sampling technique with selected by using the lottery method to obtain the respondents. The researcher composes three classes on each paper roll bundles them in a carton and then chooses one sheet of paper.

Furthermore, the researcher used a reading test consisting of 40 multiple-choice questions and questionnaire consisted 25 statements as instruments to collect the data. There were 7 components of the aspects of academic reading difficulties encountered by the students such as determining the main idea, factual and supporting detailed information, understanding vocabulary, locating references, identifying inferences, developing critical reading, and identifying types of text structure. After that, students were asked to answer the questionnaire about the factors that caused those difficulties faced containing three indicators such as lack of language proficiency, limited background knowledge, and inadequate use reading strategies. Then, the students were asked to answer the instruments within 90 minutes.

The researcher conducted a try-out of the instruments to know the rejected items of the test and to test the validity (qualified) and reliability (consistency) of the instruments before conducting the real instruments to get significant results. To know the rejected items of the test, the researcher used the index of difficulty that indicates if the accepted items are too easy or too difficult that refers to the facility values, and the classification of the facility value was adopted from Harris, (1974), as shown in Table 1

Table 1. Indices of Difficulty and Discrimination

Index	Difficulty	Discrimination
0.86 above	Very Easy	To be discarded
0.71 - 0.85	Easy	To be revised
0.30 - 0.70	Moderate	(Accepted) Very good items
0.15 – 0.29	Difficult	To be revised
0.14 below	Very Difficult	To be discarded

Source: Harris, (1974)

Furthermore, in analyzing data, the researcher calculated the total score, mean, and percentages to categorize the level of students' academic reading ability and to know their difficulties based on their incorrect test answers. The reading test was analyzed and scored using a technique analysis method by Wayan and Sumartana (1986; Ritmawati, 2021). The classification score of students' ability to comprehend academic texts was adopted from Harris (1974), as shown in Table 2

Table 2. The classification of students' score

No.	Score	Categories
1.	80-100	Excellent
2.	60-79	Good
3.	50-59	Mediocre
4.	00-49	Poor

Source: Harris, (1974)

After getting the mean score of the reading test, the researcher measures the results of questionnaire with a Likert scale. Then, to determine the level of academic reading difficulties, the percentage of incorrect test answers and the percentage of the items factors that cause those difficulties encountered by students was adopted from Arikunto (2006) difficulty-level classification, as shown in Table 3

Table 3. The classification of students academic reading difficulties and the factors that cause those difficulties

Percentage	Category
76% - 100%	: Very High
55% - 75%	: High
40% - 55%	: Medium
0% - 39%	: Low

Source: Arikunto (2006)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. The result of the Tryout

The researcher tried out the test consisted of 40 multiple-choice questions. After obtaining data from respondents, the researcher calculated the acceptance or rejection of each test item to assess the validity of the reading test. The test items are acceptable if their difficulty level falls between 0.30 and 0.70, and they are refused if they fall between 0.30 (too difficult) and 0.70 (too easy). After being calculated by using the formula, seventeen items should be revised and discarded; there were items numbers 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, and 29. All of the items were discarded and changed to new questions because their index difficulty was above 0.71, which means that they were too easy. After the seventeen items of the academic reading test were rejected, the researcher changed and constructed a new item test to recalculated to get the result of the validity of the instruments by using SPSS 24.0 version and the result showed that all of the items were valid and very highly realible.

2. Academic Reading Test

Table 4. The Classification of the Students' Score in Academic Reading Test

No	Score	Frequency	Percentage	Description
1	81 - 100	0	0%	Excellent
2	60 - 79	5	14%	Good
3	50 - 59	12	31%	Mediocre
4	00 - 49	21	55%	Poor
Total Mean score: 50.59		38	100%	Mediocre

Table 4 shows students' ability in comprehending academic text. The total mean score of the students comprehending academic text was 50.59 classified in the mediocre level. From 38 students, there are 5 students (14%) are in good level, 12 students (31%) are in mediocre level, 21 students (55%) are in poor level, and 0 (0%) students in excellent level. The mean score of the students is 50.59, which can be interpreted as the average performance level is the "mediocre" category, suggesting that while there are a few high and low abilities.

Table 5. The Average of the Aspects of Academic Reading Difficulties Encountered by the Students

No	Components of Academic Reading Test	Percentage	Classifications
1	Determining main idea	57%	High
2	Identifying supporting detail information	56%	High
3	Understanding vocabulary	56%	High
4	Locating reference	42%	Medium

No	Components of Academic Reading Test	Percentage	Classifications
5	Identifying inference	58%	High
6	Developing critical reading	57%	High
7	Identifying types/ text structure	53%	Medium
	Mean	56%	High

Table 5 displays the average of the aspects of academic reading difficulties encountered by the students. From the academic reading test result, that students experience difficulty in five aspects with high levels of incorrectly answers and two aspects with medium levels. The highest difficulty was obtained by students in identifying inference, with scoring 58% (High). To is closely followed by difficulty by difficulties in finding main ideas at 57% (High), the difficulties in applying critical reading at 57% (High) and the difficulty in identifying supporting detail information and understanding vocabulary at 56% (High). The difficulties in identifying types of text structure at 53% (Medium)are slightly higher than the percentage of difficulties in locating reference at 42% (Medium) respectively and also as the lowest difficulties.

3. Questionnaire

Table 6. Frequency of the Aspect of Lack of Language Proficiency

No	Item	SA	A	D	SD	%	Category
1	1	3	18	14	3	42%	Medium
2	4	2	19	14	3	59%	High
3	10	5	18	11	4	62%	High
4	11	5	15	11	7	63%	High
5	12	4	21	12	1	58%	High
6	17	6	19	12	1	58%	High
		25	110	74	19		
	Total					228	
	Mean					57%	High

Table 6 shows that there is a comparison of the scores of students who answered "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree" about the aspect of lack of language proficiency as the factors that cause difficulties students face in comprehending academic reading. A significant difference exists between students who "agree" with 117 scores and those who "disagree" with 74 scores. Then, 25 scores were given to students who chose "strongly agree" and students who chose "strongly disagree" with 19 scores. Based on the explanation, the result is a 228 score with 57% as High category which

indicating that the lack of language proficiency became one of the factors causing academic reading difficulties encountered by the students. Many students have insufficient vocabulary and the concept of grammar knowledge; therefore, in learning academic reading, they are often constrained in comprehending the meaning of the academic reading text they have read.

Table 7. Frequency of the Aspect of Limited Background Knowlede

No	Question	SA	A	D	SD	%	Category
1	2	4	18	15	1	57%	High
2	7	1	19	15	3	57%	High
3	9	2	17	17	2	60%	High
4	18	3	18	16	1	62%	High
5	19	1	21	13	3	63%	High
		11	93	76	10		
	Total					190	
	Mean					58%	High

Table 7 displays that there is a comparison of the scores of students who choose "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree" about limited background knowledge as the factors that cause academic reading difficulties encountered by the students. A significant difference exists between students who choose "agree" with 93 scores and those who choose "disagree" with 76 scores. Meanwhile, 11 scores were given to students who chose "strongly agree" and students who chose "strongly disagree" with 10 scores. Based on the description, the result is a 190 score with 58% as High category, which indicates that limited background knowledge became one of the factors causing academic reading difficulties encountered by the students. Many students have inadequate knowledge of text type or text organization; therefore, in learning academic reading, they are often constrained in comprehending the text because they do not know what the text is about.

Table 8. Frequency of the Aspect of Inadequate Use Effective Reading Strategies

No	Question	SA	A	D	SD	%	Category
1	3	3	19	15	1	70%	High
2	5	3	17	17	1	55%	Medium
3	6	2	17	17	2	61%	High
4	8	2	18	16	2	69%	High
5	13	3	17	16	2	68%	High
6	14	4	17	14	3	57%	High

No	Question	SA	A	D	SD	%	Category
7	15	6	13	14	5	57%	High
8	16	4	15	18	1	55%	Medium
9	20	5	18	11	4	62%	High
10	21	3	18	15	2	65%	High
11	22	7	17	11	3	71%	High
		42	186	164	26		
	Total					418	
	Mean					63%	High

Based on the table above, there is a comparison between the scores of students who answered "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree" about the inadequate use of effective reading strategies as the factors that cause difficulties students face in comprehending academic reading. A significant difference exists between students who choose "agree" with 186 scores and those who choose "disagree" with 164 scores. Then, 42 scores were given to students who chose "strongly agree" and 26 to students who chose "strongly disagree". Based on the explanation, the result is a 418 score of 63% as High category, and it indicates that inadequate use of effective reading strategies became one of the factors causing academic reading difficulties encountered by the students. Many students lack knowledge in selecting and applying reading strategies effectively; therefore, in learning academic reading, they are often constrained in comprehending the text.

Discussion

Based on the data provided, the ability of the second year students of English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau in comprehending academic reading text is classified into mediocre level with the mean score 50.59. From 38 students, there are 5 students (14%) are in good level, 12 students (31%) are in mediocre level, and 21 students (55%) are in poor level. It indicates that students that half of students appear to have difficulties in the process of learning academic reading.

The purpose of this research was to find out the academic reading difficulties difficulties and the factors that cause those difficulties faced by the second year students of English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau. It was measured by using reading text and questionnaire as instrument. From the reading test result, the aspect of difficulties that faced by the students are determining main idea with 20 students (57%) was categorized high level, Identifiying factual and supporting detail information with 21 students (56%) was categorized High level, understanding vocabulary with 21 students (56%) was categorized High level, locating reference with 16 students (42%) was categorized medium level, identifying inference with 22 students (58%) was categorized high level, developing critical reading with 21 students (57%) was categorized high level and identifying types of text structure with 20 students (53%) was categorized medium level.

Furthermore, the factors that cause the academic reading difficulties encountered by the students was found from the questionnaire that consists of three aspects. The first aspect is lack of language proficincy that considered as high category with the percentage 57%. It indicates that most students have a limited vocabulary and insufficient grammar knowledge which makes them unable to get the meaning of the text. This result is in line with Alqahtani, (2015) states that a lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge is the most significant barrier to successfully comprehending a reading text. The second aspect is limited of background knowledge with the percentage (58%) in high category. It indicates many students still struggling to get an overview of the text, relating the new information in connecting from different parts to get a summary of the text and making inferences. This result is supported by (Shen, 2013), that inadequate knowledge of text type or text organization is a problem in reading activities. If students have limited background knowledge in reading a text, they cannot follow and understand the text because they do not know what the text is about. Then, the least aspect that considered as high level is inadequate use effective reading strategies (63%). It indicates the students had a lack of knowledge in selecting and applying reading strategies effectively in comprehending the text. It relates to many students failing to perform well, and getting low achievement in learning reading, because of the lack of knowledge in applying effective reading strategies (Jou, 2015).

In short, the result of this research showed the aspects of academic reading difficulties and the factors that caused academic reading difficulties encountered by the students. Hopefully, it can contribute to the students to be more practicing in learning and reading academic text to understand better how to overcome their problems by developing their reading skills by applying and encouraging their reading habits in learning academic text as well the lecturers need to encourage the students to adopt various techniques or reading strategies for dealing with the aspect of the problem faced by the students to improve the student's ability in comprehending academic reading.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Based on the analyzed data, the resercher found that the students had problems in the aspect of determining the main idea that was 20 students (57%), identifying factual and supporting detail information 21 students (56%), understanding vocabulary 21 students (56%), locating the references 22 students (59%) and identifying inference 22 students (58%). Then students who had difficulty in critical reading were 21 students (57%) and difficulties in identifying types or text structure were 20 students (53%). As a result, a lot of students found it difficult to achieve the minimum score needed on the academic reading comprehension test. This showed from their mean score for the academic reading comprehension test which at 50.59. Meanwhile, the average percentage of students' difficulties was 56% (high). It means second-year students of the English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau had difficulty comprehending academic reading texts.

Then, based on the questionnaire, the researcher found three factors that cause the academic reading difficulties encountered by the students. The factors are a lack of

language proficiency (57%), limited background knowledge (58%), and inadequate use of effective reading strategies with (63%) as a high category. In language proficiency, most students have a limited vocabulary and insufficient grammar knowledge which makes them unable to get the meaning of the text. Then, in the aspect of background knowledge, many students still struggle to get an overview of the text, relating the new information in connecting from different parts to get a summary of the text and making inferences. Last, in the aspect of reading strategies, students also struggled and had difficulties because they did not know the strategies in reading comprehension that they could use to be more effective when reading academic text.

Recommendations

From the conclusion, the researcher would like to offer some recommendations:
1. Students are need to be more practiced in learning and reading academic texts to understand better how to overcome their problems by developing their reading skills by applying various reading strategies and encouraging their reading habits in learning academic texts. It needs to be done because the factors that caused their difficulties faced as give significant effect were their language proficiency and background knowledge in academic reading comprehension.
2. Lecturers are needs to encourage the students to adopt various techniques or effective reading strategies (survey, skim, scan, practicing effective use of dictionaries, and making applicable vocabulary records) for dealing with the aspect of difficulties to improve the student's ability to comprehend academic reading text.
3. For further research, the result of this research can be used as an additional reference for the next researcher to carry out this research to identify or analyze the other aspects; the strategies applied by the students to solve their academic reading difficulties or the strategies used by the students in developing their academic reading skills to improve their academic reading comprehension.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anwar, I. W., & Sailuddin, S., P. (2022). Academic reading difficulties in higher education. *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, *10*(2), 309-314.

Arikunto, S. (2014). *Prosedur penelitian suatu pendekatan praktik.* Jakarta: Rineka Cipta

Baker, S., Bangeni, B., Burke, R., & Hunma, A. (2019). The invisibility of academic reading as social practice and its implications for equity in higher education: a scoping study. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *38*(1), 142-156.

Davoudi, M., & Yousefi, D. (2015). Comprehension breakdown: A review of research on EFL learners' reading difficulty and problems. *International Journal of Language and Applied Linguistics, 1(1), 58-72.*

Delgadova, E. (2015). Reading literacy as one of the most significant academic competencies for the university students. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *178*, 48-53.

Hirano, E. (2015). 'I read, I don't understand': refugees coping with academic reading. *ELT journal*, *69*(2), 178-187.

Kavlu, A. (2015). The place of reading in EFL context. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, *2*(1).

Nejadghanbar, H., Atai, M. R., & Snow, C. E. (2023). Development and validation of an academic reading instrument for graduate students of applied linguistic. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 1-22.

Shen, M. Y. (2013). Toward an understanding of technical university EFL learners' academic reading difficulties, strategies, and needs. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 10(1).*

Sohail, S. (2015). Academic reading strategies used by Leeds Metropolitan University graduates: A case study. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, *2*(2).

Tarchi, C. (2015). Fostering reading comprehension of expository texts through the activation of readers' prior knowledge and inference-making skills. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *72*, 80-88.