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Challenges in Reading English Academic Texts for Non-English Major Students of an Indonesian University

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Abstract

This study examines the barriers to reading academic texts among university students for whom English is a foreign language. While many previous studies have focused on instructional design for building academic reading skills, this study focuses on the fundamental issues that need consideration before setting up the instructional design for English academic reading. Taking an interpretive phenomenological viewpoint, this study applied a qualitative method through an online survey and interviews. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, online data collection was the most accessible means of approaching the students. Ninety-five students from various non-English study programs (courses) at a private university voluntarily responded to the open-ended online questionnaire, providing survey data. Five students provided further data through individual interviews on their academic reading challenges. A thematic analysis of the survey data revealed four themes and eight subthemes representing the students' challenges, which were explored further in the interviews. These challenges and the relationships among them are discussed. The results suggest that most students depended on single-word meanings as their

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prime strategy for achieving comprehension. However, this strategy also represented the most notable challenge in their effective reading of English academic texts. They failed to comprehend the text effectively because their translation did not make sense. Furthermore, the nature of the reading strategies of the student cohort had an impact on their baseline reading proficiency.

Keywords: Academic reading obstacles, academic reading skills, comprehension, English as a foreign language, translation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to successfully read, comprehend, synthesize, and reproduce the ideas presented in academic texts is central to university students' success in their studies. The currency of academia is represented by peer-reviewed texts, such as journal articles, which capture the development of knowledge and ideas. However, these texts present a considerable challenge to the uninitiated because they employ abstract and technical language, representing abstract 'institutional' rather than 'everyday' knowledge. This challenge is exacerbated for students for whom English is not their first language. According to Rose (2018a), students are generally left to work out the meanings of these complex texts on their own, which may lead them to avoid readings and consequently miss out on critical understandings of course content and the academic language necessary to produce assignments effectively. Thus, students must grasp this language and knowledge to engage profoundly and successfully in their coursework and professional lives (Rolls & Wignell, 2018).

Studies on reading in academic settings in the Indonesian context report that university students have problems extracting meaning and receive limited reading support. Previous studies on academic reading suggest that students struggle with digesting the meaning of academic reading texts (Anwar & Sailuddin, 2022; Dardjito, 2019; Erten, 2018; Fitriana, 2018). In this regard, many English classrooms in Indonesian higher education are organized for academic or specific purposes, emphasizing English grammar and reading skills (Solikhah, 2020; Yulia et al., 2020). This implies that the lecturers focus on the disciplinary content and do not prioritize reading support for the students (Andrianatos, 2019; Nabhan & Hidayat, 2018; Rahmat et al., 2020). Some studies also explore instructional models to facilitate academic reading, highlighting the need for a reading support system (Ismail & Edi, 2022; Pustaka & Wiedarti, 2019).

Despite this study being based in Indonesia, which represents a specific cultural and linguistic context, similar issues with reading strategies and comprehension have been revealed in various English as a foreign language settings. For example, Hartshorn et al. (2017) and Singh (2019) suggest that students in the US and Malaysian universities faced exacerbated reading challenges because English was not their first language. Similarly, Owen et al. (2021) found that students in Nepal and Sweden struggled with academic reading readiness, primarily due to a lack of English exposure in academic settings. Hezam et al. (2022) identify vocabulary and word recognition as the most significant challenges among male and female Saudi students. A study by Al-Shboul et al. (2013) examining reading anxiety and difficulties faced by students in

Jordan reveals five constructs: unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, unfamiliar culture, worry about reading effects, and fear of making errors. The strong implication of this research is that the introduction of reading scaffolding and metacognitive skills could significantly decrease students' reading anxiety and improve comprehension. While many studies on academic reading focused on the challenges faced by master's level students, research on English academic reading difficulties and students' strategies to understand English academic text within the early year of undergraduate studies is limited. Therefore, this research study aims to address this gap by examining the challenges and strategies of first-year undergraduate students in an English as a foreign language setting when reading English academic texts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the literature and findings related to English academic reading and the research methodology used for this study.

2.1 The Complexities of Academic Text

Understanding how meaning is made in academic texts is essential to determine the extent and approach required to help students unpack the texts for meaning. In more abstract forms of written language, there is a disruption in the alignment between the language used and the actual events being described. [Halliday and Matthiessen \(2013\)](#) and [Rolls and Wignell \(2018\)](#) refer to this phenomenon as a grammatical metaphor and technicality. Consequently, academic texts become complex due to the use of abstract language, which may obscure the texts' meanings for students unfamiliar with these terms.

While spoken (everyday) language explicitly states the relationships between processes and participants using concrete terms, written (academic) language bundles these processes into words or clauses, which may be one of many within a sentence. For example, the grammatical metaphor 'deforestation' refers to the concept of 'when humans cut down forests'. Consequently, in an academic text, a single sentence may present a sequence of different (but related) concepts bundled together in several clauses that include grammatical metaphors or technical terms.

Beyond understanding the text at a lexical and clause level, extracting meaning from an academic text also requires recognizing the discourse semantic patterns in which its genre, field, tenor, and mode are realized ([Martin & Rose, 2007](#)). According to [Rose \(2018b\)](#), texts are not strings of un-associated words; rather, meanings are arranged in layers starting at the level of the whole text, then sections, paragraphs, and sentences. Each paragraph represents a phase of meaning, and 'each sentence is made of groups of words that provide a chunk of meaning'. Therefore, the sense of a text can only be found by interpreting these 'chunks of meaning' about the context of the meanings conveyed in each text layer. Interpreting meanings then requires students to be critical and active readers.

Lecturers tend to assume that students will manage the reading requirements of their courses independently. [Rose \(2018b\)](#) advocates for university lecturers to take a more active role by providing explicit scaffolding of course readings to help students

recognize and make meaning at the whole text, paragraph, sentence, and word level and to model reading strategies.

2.2 The Context for Indonesian University Students

Undergraduate university students in Indonesia are required to write a thesis as the final project of their three-year study. Consequently, they must immerse themselves in academic text from the beginning of their university life to enrich their content knowledge, appraise a comprehensive body of literature within their discipline, and prepare themselves for thesis writing. In the context of university studies in countries where English is not the lingua franca, academic texts present a challenge for the students and the teaching staff. Previous studies conducted in the Indonesian context support these observations, revealing that students often lack enthusiasm when reading academic materials in English (Sholah, 2021; Wijayanti, 2020; Yulia et al., 2020). This implies that acquiring comprehension of English academic texts will be a long journey for students and staff.

Since the English language dominates academic publications in the Indonesian context, it becomes the students' principal tension in their studies. They often struggle with general English proficiency and must take an enormous leap in acquiring academic English or English for Academic Purposes (Wilson, 2016). For example, students find their lack of English vocabulary, the complexity of English grammar, pronunciation difficulties, and inadequate speaking and listening skills all create challenges in reading and understanding the academic text in English (Angellia & Listyani, 2019; Nurhayati, 2020; Suryanto & Sari, 2021). This, in turn, affects their ability to improve their academic English.

Furthermore, because the students realize that reading comprehension of academic texts in English is essential to their study, these barriers create anxiety. These tensions then become a barrier for the students to engage with their academic texts (Rafik-Galea, 2010; Wu, 2011), and many students respond by avoiding English academic texts and all English texts altogether (Dardjito, 2019). For instance, Rahmat et al. (2020) and Anwar and Sailuddin (2022) found that university students experienced problems translating and comprehending difficult academic words. Thus, students experienced frustration in comprehending English academic texts and understanding the language (Habibian et al., 2015; Masduqi, 2014). This lack of engagement inhibits students' potential to enhance their ability to critically engage with the discourse in their discipline and actively contribute to advancing knowledge in their discipline.

Because reading English academic texts is largely unavoidable, students attempt to comprehend the texts, albeit not necessarily successfully. In a previous study on reading comprehension, Dardjito (2019) found that the undergraduate students of cross-study programs had been taught reading strategies, including metacognitive reading strategies to read effectively, in their previous level of study. However, they did not appear to apply these strategies effectively, resulting in their reading comprehension ability being in the lowest quartile. These findings contradict the application of metacognitive reading strategies in the Master's Program for English Education students. The strategies significantly correlate to students' reading self-efficacy (Sulistiyawati & Mbato, 2022). It indicates that, as a rule of thumb, language maturity and language mastery enable the students of the Master's Program to have some extent of self-efficacy in reading English academic text and the ability to apply

metacognitive reading strategies more than undergraduates from cross-study programs.

Finally, while many studies on reading comprehension have been content to examine approaches to reading instruction and reading problems, this study focuses on the students' challenges when engaging in reading English academic texts. In considering the tensions of reading academic texts and the challenges of reading English in an academic setting, this study seeks to understand these challenges from the student's perspective.

3. METHODS

The following sections present the research method used for this study.

3.1 Research Design

This study aims to uncover the students' difficulties in reading academic English texts, which can be identified from their academic reading experiences. The students' reading experiences can be effectively explored using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA aims to provide insights into how individuals in particular contexts or situations experience and interpret those situations, which, in this study, pertains to reading English academic texts as part of their coursework. IPA seeks to reveal and uncover implicit meanings in lived experiences and, at the same time, recognizes the subjectivity of interpretations. As a vehicle for taking an interpretive phenomenological viewpoint (Smith et al., 1999), this study applied a qualitative method that involved surveys and interviews to delve into the participants' experiences regarding their difficulties in reading English academic texts. This method is suitable for investigating the process of learning English as a foreign language because it provides an in-depth understanding of individual students' learning experiences by collecting naturalistic data (Nassaji, 2015). Offering first-hand information about the experiences and perceptions of the research participants allows the researchers to understand better the various factors that influence each individual's reading, thereby revealing both commonalities confirmed by the literature and distinctive features that may be unique to individuals or groups in this cultural context.

3.2 Research Participants

The research participants were 95 first-year students across non-English study undergraduate programs at a university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. They were from the Faculty of Economics and Psychology with an English proficiency score ranging from 300 to 345 (assumed to be equivalent to a paper-based TOEFL score). These students, aged between 19 and 20, had different English learning backgrounds, having formally studied English ranging from 6 to 12 grades, depending on the school they attended. Due to these differences in English study experiences, it was predicted that they might also have different English proficiency. In the university they were attending, they had an English subject in their first-year study.

These students participated in this research from snowball-random sampling. It was conducted by asking lecturers to invite their classes to participate after describing

and discussing the study with their students. This sampling approach aimed to have varied responses from students in the diverse non-English study program.

3.3 Data Collection

The data were acquired through an online survey collection process because of the Covid-19 outbreak. The survey data aimed to provide information about the students' challenges in reading English academic texts utilizing the following instrument. The students were introduced to the voluntary survey by invitation through their WhatsApp group, moderated by their unit lecturers. They were asked if they would like to participate, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their participation. It was also assured that their identities would remain anonymous, and no institutional or lecturer bias would influence their decision to participate. The research team prepared a Google form for the survey and shared the questionnaire link through the unit lecturers, who forwarded the links to their students in the WhatsApp group. Ninety-five students voluntarily responded to this questionnaire and participated in the research.

The online questionnaire comprised open-ended questions about the students' experience reading English journal articles. This instrument was developed by the researchers and validated by an expert before the data collection. The questionnaire encompassed questions about their experience comprehending academic texts, including journal articles and course reference books, at the vocabulary, sentences, and whole text levels. The four open-ended questions included:

1. *Ketika Anda membaca artikel ilmiah seperti artikel jurnal berbahasa Inggris, apa yang menjadi kesulitan Anda dalam memahami isi artikel?* [When you read scientific articles such as English journal articles, what are your difficulties in understanding the content of the article?]
2. *Dari aspek kosa kata, kesulitan apa yang Anda hadapi?* [In terms of (understanding the) vocabulary, what difficulties do you have?]
3. *Dari aspek kalimat, kesulitan apa yang Anda hadapi?* [In terms of (understanding the) sentences, what difficulties do you have?]
4. *Sebutkan satu hal yang paling menyulitkan Anda dalam memahami artikel berbahasa Inggris?* [Name one aspect that you consider the most difficult for you when trying to understand English articles.]

3.4 Data Analysis

The text data of this research were analyzed using thematic analysis, which offers flexibility to discover unexpected responses to our questions because it emphasizes identifying meaningful patterns in the dataset with no priory assumption. Instead, the themes emerged from the qualitative data as a result of the researchers' reflective analysis. The thematic analysis comprises familiarization with the data, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the emerged themes, and writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In applying thematic analysis, this current research used a semantic approach that explicitly inferred the data content for the theme (Anderson & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2020; Rance et al., 2014). In applying the thematic analysis, three researchers analyzed the text data and conducted online discussions via email and video conference to synchronize their data analysis.

Interviews with five respondents were conducted to confirm and further explore their experience in dealing with English academic articles. The data enriched the online questionnaire distributed in advance and provided a complete understanding of the themes that emerged through thematic analysis.

4. RESULTS

This study aimed to discover the students' reading difficulties in reading English academic texts. The main research question is: 'What are the key problems of first-year undergraduate students in reading English academic text?' The survey of 95 students indicated that students encounter various challenges while reading English journal articles, as illustrated in Figure 1.

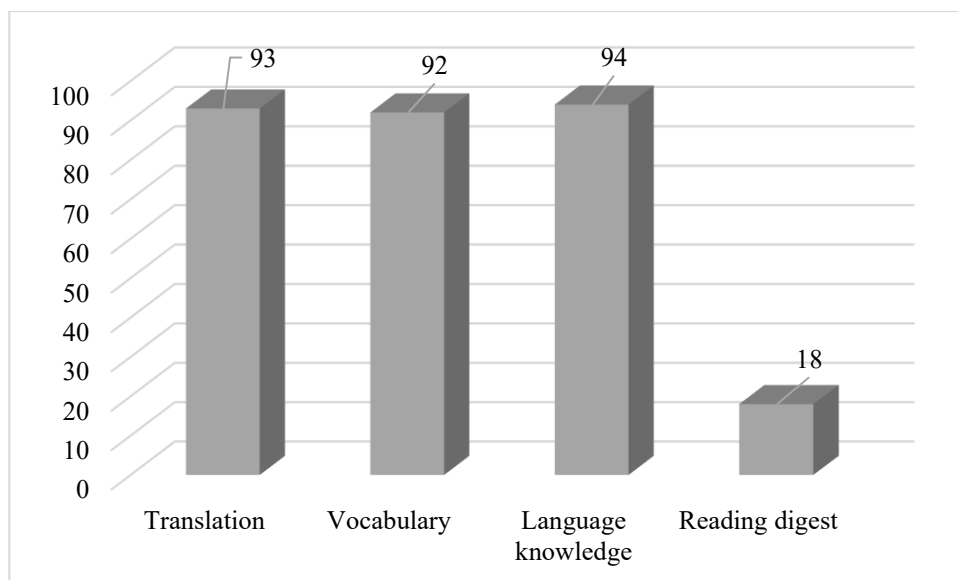


Figure 1. Themes emerging regarding challenges in reading English academic texts and the extent to which they were experienced across the cohort.

Figure 1 illustrates the four main themes and the number of participants (overall $n=95$) who reported the themes as challenging in reading academic texts, such as journal articles in English. The four main themes are vocabulary, translation, language knowledge, and reading digest. Most participants said that it was challenging to comprehend English text because of their low proficiency in English language knowledge. Only 18 of the 95 respondents suggested they were aware of their problem comprehending the academic text after translating it into Bahasa Indonesia.

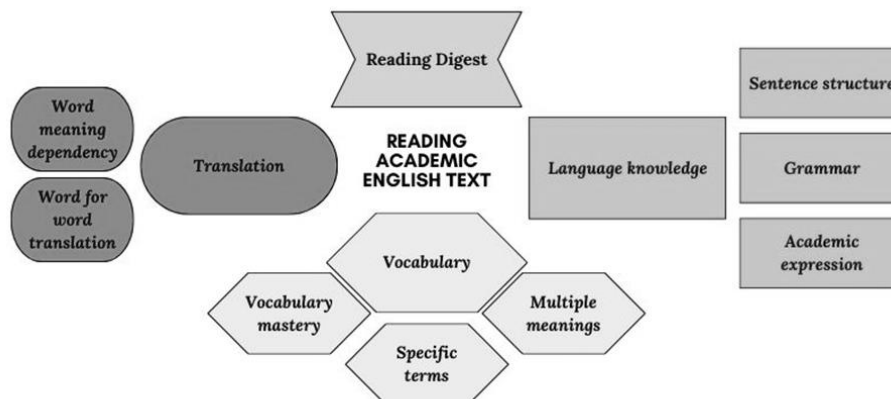


Figure 2. Themes and subthemes of the students' challenges in reading English academic texts.

The following discusses the details of each theme and the subthemes. All themes but Reading Digest comprise sub-themes that provide more nuanced dimensions to the themes.

4.1 Vocabulary

The vocabulary theme has three sub-themes, i.e., vocabulary mastery, specific terms, and multiple meanings. Participants admitted that vocabulary was the main challenge for them. Some participants stated that they often consulted the dictionary to ensure individual word meanings. While multiple-word meanings were sometimes recognized, participants did not usually know which meaning was correct for the context.

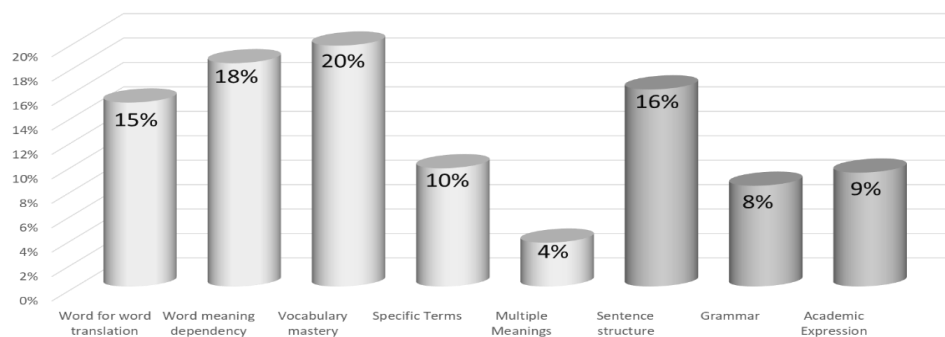


Figure 3. The extent to which participants reported reading comprehension difficulties represented by the sub-themes.

4.2 Translation

The translation is defined by [Hendrawati and Budiarta \(2017\)](#) as the meaning transfer process from the source language into the target language. In the context of this study, it was found that translation encompasses two sub-themes: word-meaning

dependency and word-for-word translation. These two themes were interrelated with regard to how the participants in this study tried to translate English into Indonesian based on the ‘word’ definition as in the vocabulary theme.

The participants’ feedback suggests that their primary focus was understanding the meaning of single words and mistakenly believed that knowing every word’s meaning would guarantee their reading comprehension. For example, the participant coded L11 states:

- (1) “...*Tidak tahu artinya, harus buka kamus. Setelah buka kamus dan diartikan perkata ternyata kalimat tidak nyambung*”. – [I] did not know the meaning [of the words] and needed to consult the dictionary. After consulting the dictionary and understanding the meaning of every single word, [I] found that the sentences still did not convey any relevant meaning.

Thus, the student’s approach was to decode every word to understand the text rather than decoding meanings in the context of the field, tenor, and mode of the text and meanings at the whole text, paragraph, and sentence level. They instantly used online translation, which translated the text word for word.

4.3 Language knowledge

Language knowledge in this study is defined as the student’s ability to comprehend and correctly recognize the language rules, such as word spelling, syntax, and grammatical mechanisms. This theme comprises subthemes of academic expression, grammar, and sentence structure. Students in this study found complex and compound sentences in the texts challenging, and getting the gist of long sentences was hard for them. They reasoned that the way to meet this challenge was to know the meaning of each word.

Additionally, the students indicated that their confusion about the knowledge of English language grammar was another issue. They argued that they did not understand the grammar and vocabulary. The research participants found identifying the subject and verb difficult in a sentence. They considered this error as a failure in identifying word meaning. For example, the participant coded L83 states that:

- (2) “...*kurang menguasai bahasa Inggris, apalagi kurang menguasai kosa katanya, sehingga susah untuk mentranslet ke Bahasa Indonesia.*” – [I] have not mastered English and, moreover, have not mastered English vocabulary, so it is hard [for me] to translate [the text] into Indonesian.

4.4 Reading Digest

The responses of the research participants also helped the researchers understand their attitudes and the strategies utilized to comprehend an English academic article. Participants considered the 5000 to 8000-word English journal article to be lengthy. One of the respondents in the interview stated that she usually summarized the article first, tried to comprehend the article, and translated the summary version when she did not comprehend it. She used a summary online application, Resoomer, and then translated this shorter version to understand the article.

The rest of the respondents in the interview translated the article using Google Translate. They believed knowing each word’s meaning would enable them to understand the text. Consequently, they usually translated any English text using

online translation machines, which mostly approach the translation word for word. After reading the translated version, they realized they did not grasp the text's main idea. Additionally, the word-for-word translation did not provide a solution for them to understand the given text.

5. DISCUSSION

This discussion explores and elaborates on three main areas of students' reported difficulties in academic reading: vocabulary, translation (of words from the source language to the target language), and language knowledge. The study has revealed students' perceptions of what makes English academic texts challenging, with vocabulary and translation approaches being key areas of difficulty. Regarding unfamiliar vocabulary, previous discussions (Rolls & Wignell, 2018) on how academic text provides specialized meanings through abstraction and metaphor predict the challenges that novice students face, particularly those from EFL backgrounds who are simultaneously grappling with the typical challenges of reading and comprehending general English in L2.

5.1 Vocabulary

In this study context, the students identified vocabulary as individual words, which aligns with the definition provided by experts defining vocabulary as the lexicon, the dictionary entry, or the word (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010; Nagy & Townsend, 2012). When faced with unfamiliar vocabulary, the student-respondents looked at the word-for-word meaning before attempting to grasp the meaning of the whole sentence unsuccessfully. Vocabulary emerged as one of the biggest obstacles to students' academic reading, consistent with Anwar and Sailuddin (2022), who propose that students frequently encounter difficulties comprehending challenging vocabulary. Similarly, in the Malaysian undergraduate students' context, vocabulary is recognized as a significant factor contributing to students' anxiety (Rahmat et al., 2020). Responding to the findings of vocabulary mastery as a reading problem, this study reveals the strategies (albeit unsuccessful) students employed to overcome this difficulty. Additionally, Liu and Read (2020) found that participants in their research lacked knowledge of both general academic vocabulary and discipline-specific terminology to support more fluent academic reading.

Regarding the strategies employed, the required contextualization of vocabulary knowledge can be overwhelming, and synonym searches are poor compensation for vocabulary knowledge (Lawrence et al., 2019). Hence, students should be encouraged to utilize their relevant background knowledge, including prior knowledge, experiences, interests, goals, and language competency, which are crucial in interpreting a text (Kim, 2017). Furthermore, the students failed to interpret or guess the meanings of individual words by drawing on the context at the sentence and whole-text level. Rose (2018b) suggests that this metacognitive strategy recognizes that meanings are found in "chunks of text," not individual words, underpinning adequate comprehension. Some participants of our research admitted their low vocabulary mastery, leading them to frequently consult dictionaries to identify multiple individual word meanings. It corresponds to the findings of Levine et al. (2000). As reading is an

active cognitive process toward understanding a text's meaning, it involves understanding the meaning of words through reference to the reader's prior knowledge and inferring the meaning from the context (Rutamornchai & Tepsuriwong, 2022; Velásquez, 2020; Wongwiwattana & Watanapokakul, 2021).

Erten (2018) describes the reciprocal interaction between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension as twofold. The first set of implications involves ways to improve vocabulary through reading, while the second set of messages about the need to pay attention to lexical knowledge while improving reading. Meanwhile, Zhang and Koda (2018) claim that for reading acquisition, pre-existing vocabulary knowledge builds semantic foundations for further exploitation of morphological awareness, which subsequently contributes to reading comprehension and boosts the connection between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. This is why students in Zhang and Koda's study tended to gain more vocabulary through immersion in the context of drawing on pre-existing vocabulary, and this led to higher reading comprehension scores. Conversely, students with lower pre-existing vocabulary knowledge were hindered in their reading comprehension growth and made only small gains in vocabulary size (Dong et al., 2020).

5.2 Translation

From the perspective of translation challenges, the participants of this study presented the multiple meanings of words as a major impediment to their ability to translate individual word meanings effectively. These results fit with the findings of previous studies, which reported that their participants had difficulties in translating and understanding academic words (Anwar & Sailuddin, 2022; Nurmalasari & Haryudin, 2021; Nurul et al., 2022). Translating general English words, let alone academic and discipline-specific terms, in discipline-based texts is difficult for many EFL students (Baumann & Graves, 2010). Lawrence et al. (2019) also found that multiple-meaning words posed a significant problem for the students and that vocabulary knowledge varies and affects reading proficiency and comprehension. Therefore, translation must be accompanied by the aforementioned strategies for selecting the correct translation based on the context at the sentence and whole-text level.

Therova (2020) suggests that prior vocabulary knowledge is one of the most paramount factors in comprehending texts. This finding is in line with Brooks et al.'s (2021) study, which examined 31 students in an international school, 25 of whom English was their additional language and 6 for whom English was their first language. Their study found that vocabulary knowledge correlated significantly with the student's reading comprehension. Further, they explain that a deliberate focus on words in context would further augment the vocabulary learning gains that would be beneficial for developing knowledge. However, considering the number of word families presented in an English L2 reading environment and the importance of gaining a nuanced context-specific understanding of the word meanings, the vocabulary learning task is inevitably formidable (Godfroid et al., 2018).

Several strategies focusing on vocabulary knowledge have been suggested. However, the usefulness of vocabulary building as the main strategy for improving reading comprehension is questionable. According to Crosson et al. (2019), fluency might be improved by infusing lexical morphology instruction to enhance the accuracy

aspect of lexical access to academic words. Students in their study were taught derivational morphological awareness in reading comprehension and indirect paths of morphological awareness through vocabulary knowledge, sight words reading efficiency, and passage reading efficiency, and thus their comprehension was improved. However, as [Martin and Rose \(2007\)](#) explain, meanings in texts are found by recognizing the semantic patterns in the text as they relate to the texts' genre, field, tenor, and mode. Thus, comprehension involves a range of sophisticated strategies that go far beyond simply focusing on words at a morphological level.

Despite being aware of metacognitive strategies for effective reading, the students in our study resorted to the most immediate strategy at hand. They tended to apply word-for-word translation to comprehend the reading text. Unsurprisingly, their comprehension test revealed a low level of word recognition and reading comprehension proficiency in keeping with findings in similar studies ([Alderson, 2000](#); [Dardjito, 2019](#)). In his research, [Sakurai \(2015\)](#) found a decrease in word-level translation, where students no longer depend on every word's meaning to comprehend multiple reading texts, resulting in improved reading comprehension. However, it must be acknowledged that L2 readers need to accommodate more reading strategies than L1 readers to comprehend the texts ([Altalhab, 2019](#); [Par, 2020](#); [Rutamornchai & Tepsuriwong, 2022](#)).

5.3 Language Knowledge

The student's knowledge of the grammatical structures of English and comprehension of the whole meaning conveyed through the text was another factor that affected their reading comprehension process. This finding corresponds with the results of [Endley \(2016\)](#), who describes English language knowledge as comprising word recognition, word focus of attention, and grammatical issues as the most common problems among his research participants. Further, as emphasized by [Martin and Rose \(2007\)](#) and [Rose \(2018b\)](#), understanding how texts are structured (grammatically) at the whole text, paragraph, sentence, and clause level and grasping the relationship between the chunks of meaning conveyed at each of these levels is an essential aspect of comprehension. In the academic context, vocabulary and grammatical proficiency play a facilitating role in reading comprehension ([Babayiğit & Shapiro, 2020](#)), contributing to the development of vocabulary and reading comprehension through L2 enhancement and the introduction of new ways of thinking ([Dong et al., 2020](#)). The findings of this study correspond to other studies in the Indonesian context that suggest the understanding of English grammar assists the readers in comprehending their readings and, likewise, reading facilitates learning grammar ([Masduqi, 2014](#); [Masduqi et al., 2021](#); [Nurul et al., 2022](#); [Rochmawati et al., 2022](#); [Suryanto & Sari, 2021](#)). It indicates that in English as a foreign language, the readers need English grammar proficiency to read academic English text. This type of text typically utilizes advanced grammar with extensive use of complex sentence clauses.

5.4 Reading Digest

Importantly, motivation in reading, self-efficacy, and achievement goals are positively related to reading strategy use. However, this study found that motivation for reading was, in turn, affected by proficiency levels. [Lin \(2019\)](#) found that students

with high motivation tended to be more persistent in using various reading strategies. The inherent characteristics of extensive reading, such as reading for enjoyment, and the benefits to language skills of extensive L2 reading affected students' motivation and the number of texts they read (Ro, 2016). Therefore, language interactivity is considered one of the specific-purpose reading abilities defined as the interaction between language proficiency and background knowledge (Vahed & Alavi, 2020). In either case, motivation in reading plays an important role in the reading strategies utilized and reading comprehension.

In terms of overall strategies, regarding the above findings, Kim and Kim (2017) established that by initially providing students with reading strategies to effectively comprehend texts in students' L1, comprehension in reading abilities in L2 will increase. Further, prior L1 language and conceptual understanding of texts are essential 'hooks' to build comprehension of the texts in English. Cai and Kunnan (2019) supported this approach by highlighting the importance of building readers' effectiveness and vocabulary proficiency in L2, which can lead to the acquisition of reading skills in the process. As EFL students reach a threshold gained from these general reading interventions, they will be more equipped with comprehension strategies.

Kim and Godfroid (2019) support Rose's (2018a) suggestions that deploying strategies to deeply engage with studying English academic articles is the key for university students to survive in reading understanding. To achieve this, reading materials could be incorporated into a communicative learning sequence, in which the students are required to extract relevant information from a range of additional meaningful tasks requiring linguistic production. Rolls and Wignell (2018) suggest that text concepts can be fleshed out before reading by relating them to students existing knowledge and experience using various media, activities, and discussions. For scaffolding reading of texts, Rose (2018b) provides a sequence for helping students engage with the text meaningfully. This involves introducing the texts in students' everyday language (in this instance Bahasa Indonesia), previewing key concepts and terms, and talking about how the text is structured and where key ideas can be found. Ideally, students should be supported in summarizing these meanings in their own words in English.

6. CONCLUSION

University students must read academic texts such as journal articles as an essential venue for gaining and sharing knowledge in their respective disciplines. However, students who are non-native English speakers face a significant disadvantage in this regard, as English serves as the dominant language in academia and academic publications. The findings of this current study indicate that reading academic texts in English is a challenging activity and that students did not employ effective strategies for unpacking meanings in texts. The students in this study were weak in their English language proficiency, let alone Academic English. Most participants of this research were struggling to comprehend the articles, potentially becoming a barrier to their successful study at the university level and creating anxiety among the students in reading English academic text. Most participants in this research could not comprehend the text because they did not employ the required strategies for

reading, nor did they have sufficient vocabulary, translation, and language knowledge. These findings confirm that relying on word-for-word translation is not an adequate strategy, especially where students have low vocabulary and grammar knowledge levels. This current study was limited to first-year university students at one Indonesian university. Conducting this research across different years of study in a broader range of disciplines and contexts might provide a more comprehensive picture of university students' academic reading performance. Finally, further study on institution policy and professional development for staff to incorporate academic reading scaffolding into the curriculum might provide a good model for facilitating students to be independent learners.

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