

Exploring the Challenges Encountered by Sixth-Semester Students of English Education in Comprehending English Academic Journal Articles

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges faced by sixth-semester students of an English Education program in comprehending English academic journal articles. While previous studies have discussed general reading comprehension in EFL contexts, limited attention has been given to students' lived experiences in reading authentic academic journals and the strategies they use to cope with these difficulties. To address this gap, this study employed a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with six students who regularly engage with academic journal articles. The findings reveal that students experience major difficulties related to academic vocabulary, technical terms, and complex sentence structures. The methodology and results sections were identified as the most challenging due to their use of statistical terminology and dense explanations. Topic familiarity also played a significant role in comprehension, with unfamiliar or highly theoretical topics increasing reading difficulty. To overcome these challenges, students relied on rereading, digital tools such as online dictionaries and translation applications, peer discussions, and summarizing key points. These findings indicate that students' difficulties in reading academic journals are influenced by both linguistic and disciplinary factors. The study highlights the need for targeted academic reading instruction that focuses on academic vocabulary development, structural awareness, and guided practice with research articles. By presenting students' perspectives, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of academic reading challenges in EFL higher education contexts.

Keywords: English Education; Academic Journal Articles; Reading Comprehension; EFL Students

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Introduction

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) higher education context, the ability to comprehend English academic journal articles is a fundamental academic skill rather than an optional one. University students, particularly those enrolled in English Education programs, are required to engage with scholarly literature to complete academic assignments, develop research proposals, and prepare undergraduate theses. Academic journal articles function as primary sources of knowledge that introduce students to current theories, research methodologies, and disciplinary discourse. However, despite their central role in academic life, many EFL students continue to experience serious difficulties when reading academic journals written in English (Hyland, 2016; Grabe, 2020).

These challenges are especially apparent among mid-to-late undergraduate students, such as sixth-semester English Education students, who are transitioning from language-focused coursework to research-oriented academic tasks. At this stage, students are expected to read independently, synthesize multiple sources, and critically evaluate research findings. Nevertheless, academic journal articles often demand a level of linguistic, cognitive, and disciplinary competence that many students have not yet fully developed. Academic texts are characterized by dense information, abstract concepts, discipline-specific vocabulary, and complex syntactic structures that differ significantly from textbooks or general reading materials (Grabe & Zhang, 2016; Hyland, 2019).

One of the most widely reported difficulties in academic reading is limited academic vocabulary knowledge. Academic journal articles contain a high proportion of low-frequency and technical words that are rarely encountered in everyday communication or general English instruction (Nation, 2016; Dang & Webb, 2016). Insufficient vocabulary knowledge disrupts reading flow, forces frequent dictionary consultation, and hinders students' ability to understand arguments, research procedures, and conclusions. Studies have shown that vocabulary knowledge is one of the strongest predictors of

academic reading comprehension, particularly in EFL contexts (Schmitt, 2019; Nation & Coxhead, 2021).

In addition to lexical challenges, sentence-level complexity poses another major obstacle. Academic writing frequently employs long sentences with multiple embedded clauses, passive constructions, nominalizations, and dense referencing, all of which require advanced grammatical awareness and inferencing skills (Hyland, 2019; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Many EFL students report needing to reread the same sentence or paragraph several times before reaching partial understanding. This difficulty often leads to slow reading speed, frustration, and reduced confidence when engaging with scholarly texts (Jiang & Kuehn, 2021).

Beyond linguistic factors, disciplinary knowledge and familiarity with research conventions strongly influence comprehension of academic journal articles. Sections such as methodology and results are consistently identified as the most challenging parts of research articles due to their use of statistical terminology, data interpretation, and formal reporting structures (Bruce, 2018; Flowerdew, 2019). Undergraduate students who are still developing research literacy often struggle to interpret these sections, as they require not only language proficiency but also understanding of research design, data analysis, and disciplinary norms. Topic familiarity further affects comprehension, as articles addressing familiar educational themes are easier to process than those dealing with abstract or highly theoretical issues (Grabe, 2020).

Although academic reading has been widely discussed in applied linguistics and EFL research, much of the existing literature focuses on general reading strategies, motivation, or instructional interventions in classroom settings (Grabe & Zhang, 2016; Jiang & Kuehn, 2021). Many studies adopt quantitative approaches that measure reading proficiency or strategy use, often overlooking students' lived experiences when engaging with authentic academic journal articles outside structured instruction. As a result, there is limited qualitative insight into how undergraduate EFL students perceive the specific challenges of academic journal reading and how they independently cope with these difficulties in real academic contexts, particularly in Indonesian higher education settings.

This study addresses this gap by exploring the challenges encountered by sixth-semester English Education students in comprehending English academic journal articles and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges. Unlike previous studies that emphasize general reading comprehension or classroom-based reading tasks, this research focuses specifically on academic journal articles as a distinct literacy genre. The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on students' lived experiences with authentic scholarly texts and its examination of both linguistic factors (such as vocabulary and sentence structure) and non-linguistic factors (such as topic familiarity and research conventions). By employing a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, the study captures students' perspectives in detail, providing insight into how they navigate academic reading demands using digital tools, peer discussions, rereading, and summarization strategies.

Understanding these challenges is essential for improving academic literacy instruction in English Education programs. Insights from this study can inform curriculum design, reading instruction, and academic support services aimed at helping students engage more effectively with scholarly literature. Strengthening students' academic reading competence is crucial not only for academic success but also for preparing future English teachers who are expected to model critical reading practices and engage with research throughout their professional careers.

Literature Review

a. Academic Reading Challenges in EFL Higher Education

Academic reading is widely recognized as one of the most demanding skills for EFL university students, particularly when engaging with scholarly journal articles. Academic texts require readers to process complex ideas, unfamiliar terminology, and formal rhetorical structures simultaneously, which often exceeds the reading demands of general English materials (Biber et al., 2021). Several studies have shown that EFL students struggle not because of basic reading ability, but because academic texts require higher-level cognitive processing, including critical evaluation, synthesis of information, and interpretation of disciplinary discourse (Casanave, 2017). In higher education contexts, academic journal articles present additional difficulty because they are written for expert audiences and assume familiarity with research conventions and theoretical frameworks. According to Wingate (2018),

undergraduate students are often expected to read academic journals without sufficient preparation in academic literacy, leading to frustration and surface-level comprehension. This issue is particularly evident in teacher education programs, where students must read research articles to support pedagogical understanding despite limited exposure to academic genres early in their studies.

b. Vocabulary Load and Terminology in Academic Journals

A major challenge identified in previous research is the heavy lexical load of academic journal articles. Academic texts contain a high density of technical terms, abstract nouns, and discipline-specific expressions that are rarely taught explicitly in EFL classrooms (Gardner & Davies, 2014; Miller, 2020). When students encounter a large number of unfamiliar words, their cognitive resources are consumed by word-level processing, leaving little capacity for global comprehension. Research by McLean and Kramer (2015) demonstrates that frequent interruption of reading to look up words negatively affects comprehension and reader confidence. While digital dictionaries and translation tools provide immediate assistance, overdependence on such tools can fragment reading and prevent students from developing deeper lexical inferencing skills (O’Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2017). These findings suggest that vocabulary difficulty remains a persistent barrier in academic reading and requires targeted instructional support rather than incidental exposure alone.

c. Syntactic Density and Textual Complexity

In addition to vocabulary, syntactic complexity has been identified as a major obstacle in academic reading. Academic journal articles commonly employ extended noun phrases, passive voice, and compressed clause structures, which make sentence processing cognitively demanding (Biber, Gray, & Staples, 2016). EFL students often report understanding individual words but failing to interpret sentence meaning as a whole, especially in long and information-dense passages. Research by Crossley et al. (2019) indicates that syntactic complexity strongly correlates with perceived text difficulty among EFL readers. Students with limited exposure to academic grammar structures tend to rely on rereading as a primary strategy, which increases reading time but does not always improve comprehension. This highlights the need to examine how sentence complexity affects students’ reading experiences when engaging with authentic academic journals.

d. Understanding Research Article Structure

Another important issue in academic journal comprehension is students’ limited understanding of research article structure. Studies have shown that undergraduate EFL students often struggle to interpret the methodology and results sections of journal articles due to unfamiliar research terminology and lack of statistical literacy (Swales & Feak, 2018). These sections are typically written in a highly condensed and technical manner, making them inaccessible to novice readers. According to Huang (2020), many students skip or skim these sections, focusing instead on introductions or conclusions, which results in partial understanding of the research. This behavior reflects limited genre awareness rather than lack of motivation. Without explicit instruction on how research articles are organized and how each section functions, students are unlikely to develop full academic reading competence.

e. Students’ Strategies and Adaptive Practices

Despite these challenges, EFL students actively develop strategies to cope with academic reading demands. Previous studies have identified rereading, note-taking, summarizing, peer discussion, and the use of digital tools as common strategies employed by students (Rose et al., 2021; Teng, 2022). These strategies demonstrate learners’ agency and willingness to adapt to academic expectations. However, research also suggests that strategy use alone is insufficient without guidance. Teng (2022) argues that many students use strategies inefficiently because they lack metacognitive awareness of when and how to apply them effectively. This finding supports the need for qualitative research that explores students’ personal experiences and perceptions, rather than merely measuring strategy frequency.

Although previous studies have examined academic reading difficulties, vocabulary challenges, syntactic complexity, and reading strategies, most research has focused on general academic texts or classroom-based reading instruction. There is limited qualitative research that specifically explores students’ lived experiences of reading English academic journal articles, particularly in English Education programs in Indonesian higher education contexts. Moreover, few studies have examined how students perceive different sections of journal articles and how they independently cope with comprehension challenges outside formal instruction. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by

investigating the challenges faced by sixth-semester English Education students in comprehending English academic journal articles and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges, providing context-specific insights into academic literacy development in EFL higher education.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of sixth-semester English Education students in comprehending English academic journal articles. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions, difficulties, and strategies rather than to measure reading performance quantitatively. The phenomenological perspective allowed the researcher to focus on how students experienced academic reading challenges in real academic contexts.

The participants were six sixth-semester students from the English Education program at Universitas Pendidikan Muhammadiyah Sorong. They were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria. All participants had completed core reading and academic writing courses and were actively engaged in academic tasks that required reading English journal articles. In addition, they self-reported experiencing difficulties in understanding academic journals. The number of participants was considered sufficient for qualitative inquiry, as the aim was to obtain rich, detailed insights rather than generalizable data. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to allow participants to express their ideas clearly and comfortably. The interviews focused on the challenges students encountered when reading academic journal articles, the sections they found most difficult to understand, and the strategies they used to cope with these difficulties. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. To support and triangulate the interview data, participants were also asked to write brief reflections on one English academic journal article they had recently read, highlighting difficult vocabulary, complex sentences, or confusing sections.

The data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Meaningful units related to reading challenges and coping strategies were coded inductively. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories and developed into themes that reflected recurring patterns in the data. These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately represented participants' experiences. Relevant excerpts from the interviews and written reflections were used to support the interpretation of each theme.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. Peer debriefing with colleagues experienced in qualitative research was used to minimize researcher bias and enhance analytical credibility. Data triangulation was achieved by combining interview data with written reflections. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and all participants provided informed consent. They were informed of their right to withdraw at any time, and all data were stored securely to maintain confidentiality.

Result

The analysis of interview data and written reflections revealed several major difficulties faced by sixth-semester English Education students in comprehending English academic journal articles. These difficulties are grouped into four main themes: academic vocabulary and technical terms, complex sentence structures, challenges in specific journal sections, and topic familiarity. Each theme is supported by evidence from participants' statements.

1. Academic Vocabulary and Technical Terms

All participants reported that academic vocabulary and technical terms were the most significant obstacles in reading English academic journal articles. Students frequently encountered words related to research methodology, theory, and statistics that were unfamiliar and rarely used in daily communication or classroom instruction. These unfamiliar terms disrupted reading flow and forced students to stop frequently to search for meanings, which affected overall comprehension.

One participant explained:

“When I read journals, the vocabulary is very different from what we usually learn in class. Many words are new, and I have to stop reading to check the meaning again and again.”

Another student stated:

“Sometimes I understand the sentence structure, but because I don’t know the technical terms, I still don’t understand what the article is talking about.”

These responses indicate that limited academic vocabulary knowledge prevented students from understanding key concepts and arguments in journal articles, even when their general English proficiency was adequate. In many cases, students reported that they could recognize common English words but failed to grasp the intended meaning of entire paragraphs because key technical terms carried crucial conceptual information. As a result, students often relied heavily on dictionaries or translation tools, which fragmented the reading process and reduced their ability to read fluently and critically. This difficulty also limited students’ confidence, as repeated encounters with unfamiliar vocabulary made academic journal articles appear intimidating and inaccessible. Consequently, academic vocabulary deficiency not only hindered literal comprehension but also affected students’ ability to identify research purposes, interpret findings, and evaluate the relevance of the article to their academic tasks.

2. Complex Sentence Structures

Another major difficulty identified by participants was the complexity of sentence structures in academic journal articles. Students described sentences as long, dense, and containing multiple clauses, passive constructions, and formal expressions. Such structures required repeated rereading and high concentration, making the reading process slow and mentally exhausting.

One participant commented:

“Some sentences are very long. I have to read one sentence three or four times, and sometimes I still don’t understand it.”

Another participant shared:

“After reading one paragraph, I feel tired because the sentences are too complicated and full of information.”

These findings suggest that syntactic complexity significantly affects students’ ability to process academic texts efficiently and contributes to frustration during reading. Many students explained that even when they were familiar with most of the vocabulary, the way ideas were compressed into long sentences made it difficult to identify the main point of a paragraph. The presence of multiple embedded clauses and abstract noun phrases often caused students to lose track of relationships between ideas, leading to partial or incorrect interpretation. As a result, students tended to focus on decoding individual sentences rather than understanding the overall argument of the article. This difficulty also reduced reading motivation, as prolonged effort with minimal comprehension made academic reading feel overwhelming. Consequently, sentence-level complexity not only slowed reading speed but also limited students’ capacity to engage critically with the content of academic journal articles.

3. Difficulty in Understanding Methodology and Results Sections

Participants consistently identified the methodology and results sections as the most difficult parts of academic journal articles. These sections were perceived as highly technical due to the use of research design terminology, statistical concepts, numerical data, and formal explanations of data analysis. Many students admitted that they tended to skim or skip these sections because they felt overwhelmed.

One student stated:

“I usually skip the methodology section because I don’t understand the research terms and the explanation is too complicated.”

Another participant explained:

“The results section is confusing because there are many numbers, tables, and statistical terms that we never really learn deeply.”

This indicates that students’ difficulties were not only linguistic but also related to limited familiarity with research conventions and statistical literacy. Many participants reported that they had never received explicit instruction on how to read methodology and results sections effectively, which made these parts of journal articles appear inaccessible. As a consequence, students often focused only

on the introduction or discussion sections, resulting in incomplete understanding of the overall study. This practice limited their ability to evaluate the validity of research methods or interpret findings critically. The lack of confidence in handling quantitative data and research procedures also contributed to anxiety and avoidance behavior when encountering these sections. Overall, the findings suggest that students' challenges stem from a combination of language barriers and insufficient research literacy, highlighting the need for more guided exposure to academic research conventions in English Education programs.

4. Topic Familiarity and Background Knowledge

Topic familiarity was also found to influence students' comprehension of academic journal articles. Participants reported that articles discussing familiar educational topics were easier to understand because they could relate the content to prior knowledge. In contrast, articles on unfamiliar or theoretical topics caused confusion and reduced comprehension.

One participant noted:

"If the topic is something we have learned before, it's easier to understand the journal. But if the topic is new, I feel lost from the beginning."

Another student added:

"Even when the language is not too difficult, if the topic is unfamiliar, I still struggle to understand the article."

These responses suggest that background knowledge plays a crucial role in supporting academic reading comprehension. When students could activate prior knowledge, they were better able to predict content, interpret arguments, and infer meaning from the text. Conversely, limited familiarity with a topic increased cognitive load, as students had to process both new concepts and complex language simultaneously. This often led to surface-level reading, where students focused on individual sentences without fully understanding the overall argument of the article. The findings indicate that topic unfamiliarity can hinder comprehension even when linguistic difficulty is moderate, highlighting the importance of scaffolding academic reading materials by gradually introducing more complex and unfamiliar topics.

5. Students' Coping Strategies

Despite these difficulties, students employed various strategies to cope with academic reading challenges. Common strategies included rereading difficult sections, using digital tools such as online dictionaries and Google Translate, discussing the articles with peers or lecturers, and summarizing content in simpler language.

One participant explained:

"I usually reread the article and use Google Translate to help me understand difficult words."

Another student stated:

"After reading, I discuss the journal with my friends or ask the lecturer to explain the confusing parts."

These strategies demonstrate students' active efforts to adapt to the demands of academic reading, even when facing significant challenges. Many participants reported that rereading helped them gradually grasp meaning, although it required additional time and effort. The use of digital tools provided immediate assistance with vocabulary and sentence meaning, enabling students to continue reading without completely losing focus. Peer and lecturer discussions played an important role in clarifying misunderstandings and confirming interpretations, especially for complex concepts. Summarizing content in simpler language helped students organize information and check their own understanding. These strategies reflect developing metacognitive awareness, as students consciously selected methods that supported comprehension and reduced frustration when engaging with academic journal. The results show that sixth-semester English Education students experience substantial difficulties in comprehending English academic journal articles, mainly due to academic vocabulary, complex sentence structures, technical journal sections, and unfamiliar topics. However, students also demonstrate resilience by applying various strategies to support their comprehension.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by sixth-semester English Education students in comprehending English academic journal articles and the strategies they employ to overcome those

challenges. The findings reveal that students experience persistent difficulties related to academic vocabulary, complex sentence structures, technical sections of research articles, and topic unfamiliarity. At the same time, students actively apply various coping strategies, demonstrating adaptive and self-regulated learning behavior. These findings contribute new insights into academic reading as a situated literacy practice in EFL higher education contexts.

One of the most significant findings of this study is the dominant role of academic vocabulary and technical terminology as barriers to comprehension. Students reported that unfamiliar research-related terms prevented them from understanding key ideas, even when they were able to follow sentence structures. This finding supports recent research by Coxhead and Demecheleer (2018), who argue that academic texts rely heavily on specialized vocabulary that carries conceptual meaning essential for interpretation. Unlike general English texts, academic journal articles often compress complex ideas into single lexical items, making vocabulary knowledge central to comprehension. The present study extends this argument by showing that vocabulary difficulty not only interrupts reading flow but also undermines students' confidence and willingness to engage critically with academic texts. This suggests that vocabulary challenges in academic reading are not merely linguistic but also affect students' affective responses, such as anxiety and avoidance.

Another important finding relates to the complexity of sentence structures in academic journal articles. Students described academic sentences as long, dense, and mentally exhausting, often requiring repeated rereading. This aligns with the findings of Kyle and Crossley (2018), who found that syntactic complexity significantly increases processing difficulty for EFL readers. However, the present study adds a new perspective by highlighting how sentence complexity shifts students' focus from meaning-making to sentence decoding. Many participants reported understanding individual words but failing to identify the main idea due to overloaded sentence structures. This indicates that syntactic difficulty can fragment comprehension and prevent students from engaging with the overall argument of an article. Such findings suggest that academic reading instruction should address sentence-level processing explicitly, rather than assuming that grammar knowledge automatically transfers to academic reading contexts.

The difficulty students experienced in the methodology and results sections represents another key contribution of this study. While previous research has acknowledged that research articles are challenging for novice readers, this study provides detailed evidence that students often skip or skim these sections due to limited research literacy. Studies by Löwenadler (2020) and Bitchener and Basturkmen (2021) indicate that understanding research articles requires familiarity with disciplinary conventions and epistemological practices, not just language proficiency. The current findings reinforce this view by showing that students' difficulties stem from unfamiliarity with research terminology, statistical concepts, and formal reporting styles. Importantly, this study highlights that students' avoidance of these sections results in partial comprehension of research articles, limiting their ability to evaluate research quality and apply findings meaningfully. This finding underscores a critical gap in English Education programs, where reading research articles is expected, but explicit instruction on how to read them is often limited.

Topic familiarity was also found to play a crucial role in students' comprehension of academic journal articles. Students reported that familiarity with the subject matter helped them predict content, infer meaning, and follow arguments more easily. This finding aligns with research by Pulido and Hambrick (2019), which demonstrates that background knowledge reduces cognitive load during reading. However, this study adds nuance by showing that topic unfamiliarity can hinder comprehension even when language difficulty is relatively manageable. In other words, linguistic simplicity alone does not guarantee comprehension if conceptual knowledge is lacking. This suggests that academic reading difficulty is multidimensional, involving the interaction of language, content knowledge, and cognitive processing demands.

Despite these challenges, a notable finding of this study is students' active use of coping strategies. Participants employed rereading, digital tools, peer discussion, and summarization to support comprehension. These strategies reflect developing metacognitive awareness, as described by Zhang and Wu (2021), who argue that successful academic readers consciously monitor and regulate their comprehension. The present study contributes new insight by showing how students combine individual and social strategies to manage academic reading demands. Digital tools provided immediate linguistic

support, while peer and lecturer discussions helped clarify conceptual understanding. However, some students acknowledged that these strategies were time-consuming and did not always lead to deep comprehension. This finding suggests that while students demonstrate resilience and adaptability, their strategies may be compensatory rather than fully effective, highlighting the need for guided academic reading instruction.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the view of academic reading as a complex literacy practice that extends beyond language proficiency. The difficulties identified in this study reflect the interaction of linguistic competence, research literacy, background knowledge, and affective factors. This aligns with recent perspectives in academic literacy research that emphasize reading as a socially and disciplinarily situated practice (Lea & Street, 2018). By focusing on students' lived experiences, this study provides empirical support for the argument that academic reading challenges cannot be addressed through language instruction alone.

The findings of this study have several important implications for English Education programs. First, academic reading instruction should place greater emphasis on academic vocabulary development, particularly vocabulary related to research methods and academic discourse. Rather than relying solely on incidental learning, explicit instruction and repeated exposure to research-related terms may help students build confidence and comprehension. Second, instructors should provide guided practice in processing complex sentence structures commonly found in academic journals. Teaching students how to break down long sentences and identify key ideas may reduce cognitive overload and improve reading efficiency.

Third, the findings suggest a need to integrate research literacy instruction into English Education curricula. Students should be explicitly taught how to read different sections of research articles, especially methodology and results sections. This may include introducing basic research terminology, explaining common research designs, and practicing interpretation of tables and statistical data. Finally, educators should encourage collaborative reading practices and strategic use of digital tools, while also guiding students to use these tools critically and effectively.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the small number of participants limits the generalizability of the findings. While the qualitative approach allowed for in-depth exploration, future studies with larger and more diverse samples could provide broader insights. Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported data from interviews and written reflections, which may be influenced by participants' perceptions and recall. Observational data or reading task analysis could strengthen future research. Third, this study focused on one academic context, which may not fully represent the experiences of students in different institutions or disciplines.

This study reveals that sixth-semester English Education students face significant challenges in comprehending English academic journal articles due to linguistic complexity, limited research literacy, and topic unfamiliarity. At the same time, students demonstrate adaptability by employing various coping strategies. These findings highlight the need for more targeted academic reading support that addresses both linguistic and disciplinary demands. By foregrounding students' perspectives, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of academic reading challenges in EFL higher education and provides a foundation for improving academic literacy instruction.

Conclusion

This study investigated the challenges faced by sixth-semester English Education students in comprehending English academic journal articles and the strategies they use to cope with these challenges. The findings show that students experience persistent difficulties related to academic vocabulary, complex sentence structures, technical sections of research articles, and unfamiliar topics. These challenges indicate that academic journal reading requires more than general English proficiency, as it involves academic vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, research literacy, and background knowledge. Despite these difficulties, the students demonstrated active engagement and adaptability in responding to academic reading demands. They employed various strategies such as rereading, using digital tools, discussing articles with peers and lecturers, and summarizing complex information. These strategies reflect developing metacognitive awareness and a willingness to take responsibility for their own learning, although they often required considerable time and effort. The findings suggest that while students are able to cope with academic reading challenges, their strategies are largely compensatory and may not fully support deep comprehension without instructional guidance. This study contributes

to the understanding of academic reading in EFL higher education by highlighting students' lived experiences with authentic academic journal articles. By focusing on both linguistic and non-linguistic factors, the research underscores the complexity of academic reading as a literacy practice situated within specific disciplinary and institutional contexts. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating academic vocabulary instruction, sentence-level processing skills, and research literacy into English Education curricula.

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