



ELEP Students' Experiences in Reading English Journal Articles: Do they Have Difficulties?

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Article History

Submitted: 2024-01-26

Accepted: 2024-02-13

Published: 2024-02-15

Abstract

English Language Education Program (ELEP) students at Universitas Negeri Padang are burdened with complex English journal articles. This research investigates the difficulties and factors influencing their comprehension of these demanding texts and dominant difficulties and factors. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach; the research involved 96 participants who answered the questionnaire and two from each class for in-depth interviews. The results of this research showed that are seven main factors contributing to students' difficulties: Difficulty understanding idea, Main idea, Supporting idea, Complicated sections of English journal article, Concluding English journal article, Topic-related vocabulary/technical terms/ difficult words, Inability to read quickly to find information, Complex language style and sentence structure, and challenging topics. Among these difficulties, vocabulary problems emerged as the most dominant aspect, posing a significant barrier to comprehension. In particular, the research identified an emerging trend of over-reliance on translation tools that hinders independent comprehension. The findings have valuable implications for future research, directing efforts to increase students' interest in reading English journal articles and developing effective strategies to overcome vocabulary challenges. By addressing these underlying issues, we can empower ELEP students to navigate the world of English academic literature confidently.

Keywords:

Reading Difficulties, English Journal Articles, ELEP Students

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How to Cite: Saputri, S., & Fudhla, N. (2024). ELEP Students' Experiences in Reading English Journal Articles: Do they Have Difficulties?. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 13. (1): pp. 111-124, DOI: [10.24036/jelt.v13i1.127351](https://doi.org/10.24036/jelt.v13i1.127351)

INTRODUCTION

Some universities in Indonesia have English Education departments, which require students to seek out English-language resources to complete their coursework. At Universitas Negeri Padang, the curriculum used by 2020 entry-year

students in the English Language Education Program (ELEP) contains four compulsory reading-related courses that ELEP students must complete, namely basic reading, intermediate reading, advanced reading, and finally reading and critical thinking activities that Universitas Negeri Padang ELEP students must master. However, reading is a complex activity based on (Safura & Helmanda, 2020), who said that reading comprehension is the ability to read text, process and understand its meaning. (Kendeou et al., 2014) also mentioned that reading is a complex interaction between automatic cognitive and strategic cognitive processes that allow readers to create mental representations to understand information from the text.

Thus, reading complex academic texts in English journal articles as one academic text significantly presents difficulties for ELEP students in synthesizing information in English journal articles. As identified by (Phakiti Li, 2011), various factors can hinder information synthesis in academic reading, including limited language proficiency, weak reading motivation, different educational backgrounds, lack of self-confidence, and cultural adjustment difficulties. These difficulties become even more pronounced when facing the specific content and vocabulary demands of journal articles, which require a high level of language dexterity, self-directed learning, academic confidence and a strong knowledge base. (Sultana, N 2016) further underlines this point, highlighting vocabulary constraints as a significant source of frustration and barrier to understanding for students engaging with academic texts.

The issue of ELEP students in this study arises because many courses in the 2020 English language education program used English journal articles as primary sources, covering areas such as research language teaching, academic writing, essay writing, critical reading and thinking, and thesis writing through observations and surveys conducted by the researcher among incoming ELEP students in 2020. In particular, when reading English journal articles, many students prefer to read the Indonesian translation or even translate the entire text themselves. This phenomenon prompted further investigation, which revealed that students often attributed their choice to difficulties understanding the content of English journal articles.

Several researchers also researched to identify students' academic text reading difficulties; the first one was the research from (Anwar & Sailuddin, 2022) at Khairun University, Indonesia. The research entitled "Academic Reading Difficulties in Higher Education." The second research was conducted by (Eriksson, 2023) at Orebro University, Sweden. The research is entitled "Difficulties in Academic Reading for EFL Students: An Initial Investigation." Lastly, the research conducted by (Satriani, 2018) at the Universitas Islam Riau. The research entitled "Reading Comprehension Difficulties Encountered by English Students of Universitas Islam Riau." Different from the above studies, which only focus on the academic text in general, this study specifically focuses on English journal articles and seeks to dig deeper into the difficulties and factors underlying this phenomenon, explicitly exploring why ELEP students enrolled in English education programs tend to prefer Indonesian over English when reading English journal articles.

METHOD

To answer the questions raised, the researcher used descriptive methods in this study. The population for this study was chosen from the results of observations made by the researcher. Hence, the researcher chose English language education students who entered 2020 at Universitas Negeri Padang, with as many as 128 students from 5 classes for this study. Then, in determining the sample, the researcher used proportionate random sampling by using the Slovin formula to draw the sample so that 96 students were obtained as a sample of this study. Questionnaires and interviews were used as instruments in data collection, where 32 questionnaire items were given to 96 students. Then, 2 participants with the lowest questionnaire scores became interview participants from each class. In addition, the researcher analyzed the data using Excel and SPSS formulas, and then, to analyze the interview, data was analyzed using Miles and Huberman's theory.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The results of this study are based on two research questions that have been analyzed, namely, related to aspects and factors of ELEP students' difficulties in reading English journal articles; the aspects and factors of difficulty are as follows.

1. Aspects of Students' difficulties in reading English journal article

There are seven categories of student difficulties in reading English journal articles based on the theory of (Alghail & Mahfudh 2016) and (Anwar & Sailudin, 2022), namely Idea, Main idea, Supporting idea, Contents of English Journal articles, Draw Conclusion, Topic-related vocabulary, technical terms, Reading quickly to find information, Language style and Topics. After conducting research, the results found that ELEP students at Universitas Negeri Padang experienced all aspects of these difficulties.

1.1. Idea, Main Idea, Supporting Idea

Based on the questionnaire data, it is known that almost half of ELEP students find it challenging to identify ideas. At the same time, 46.9% of all participants agreed that finding ideas in each paragraph is difficult. Meanwhile, the results also prove that almost half of ELEP students who entered in 2020 find it difficult to find the main idea contained in English journal articles namely 43.8%, and this proves that identifying the main idea is one of the difficulties experienced by ELEP students at Padang State University. In addition, ELEP students also need help identifying supporting ideas, where almost half of the participants agreed that understanding the points or supporting ideas written by the author is difficult, which is around 47.9% of participants. When interviewed, participants said that identifying idea, main ideas and supporting ideas was complicated.

1.2. Sections of English Journal Articles

There are several sections in an English journal article, such as the Abstract, Literature Review, Methods, Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion. After conducting the research, different results were obtained for each section, but all sections were difficult for some participants. However, of all the sections, ELEP students felt the most difficulty in the Findings section; it was found that to understand complex statistics, almost all ELEP students found it difficult to understand, and as many as 24% or around 24 participants stated that it was tough to understand complex statistical data, and 67.7% of students stated that it was difficult to understand complex statistical data. Then, there is a lot of data, such as statistical data, tables, figures, and diagrams, where all data must be interpreted. However, it turns out that data interpretation is difficult for some ELEP students in the class of 2020 at Universitas Negeri Padang; namely, 66.7% of participants also agreed with the statement that they also found it difficult to understand the interpreted data.

1.3. Draw conclusions from English journal article.

The results prove that more than half of ELEP students find it difficult to make inferences and have difficulty in synthesizing information obtained from English journal articles, where the data shows that 61.5% or around 59 participants stated that they had difficulty in synthesizing information to make inferences, then the statement was reinforced by data that as many as 3.1% of participants stated that they had great difficulty in synthesizing information to make inferences independently. So, about 62 participants out of 96 participants had difficulty with this.

1.4. Topic-related vocabulary/technical terms/ Difficult Words.

ELEP students find it difficult to understand technical terms in English journal articles, whereas around 19.8% of ELEP students strongly agree; this means they very often need clarification on technical terms. Then, the data is reinforced by the number of responses from ELEP students who agree, which is around 67.7% of participants; if ELEP students who strongly agree and agree are combined, then there are around 84 participants who often find technical terms confusing, then ELEP students often find unknown words where around 30.2% of participants strongly agree with the statement that they often find unknown words in English journal articles. Then, the data

is reinforced by data where as many as 59.4% or around 57 participants agree with the statement. Therefore, when finding difficult words, ELEP students often use translation aids so that they are dependent. The data shows that almost all participants, namely 59.4%, agree with the statement that they often use translation tools, and an additional 26% strongly agree. Based on the data above, the researcher can conclude that ELEP students need help understanding topic-related vocabulary, technical terms, and words in English journal articles because they often use Google Translate to understand these tricky words.

1.5. Read Quickly

Based on the study results, more than half of the ELEP students need help reading quickly or using scanning and skimming to get information, where they need much time to get information in English journals. The researcher made this conclusion based on the questionnaire results, where, for the statement explaining that students need much time to get information from the text, 21.9% of participants strongly agreed. 60.4% of students agreed, so ELEP students need much time to understand and get information from English journal articles. Then, scanning and skimming activities also did not help participants find information and ideas in the article, where as many as 8.3% strongly agreed with the statement above, and 64.6% of participants agreed with the statement.

1.6. Language Style and Sentence Structure

Researchers found that students have difficulty understanding the language style in English journal articles, from the results of the questionnaire, around 54.2% of participants agreed with the statement that the language style used by writers in English journal articles is difficult to understand, then added participants who answered strongly agree, which was around 6.3%. Then, academic language or academic terms became one aspect of the difficulties felt by ELEP students, where the questionnaire results showed that 13.5% of students strongly agreed with the statement regarding difficulties in understanding academic language, the data was reinforced because, as many as 64.6% of participants agreed with the statement. So, from the results of these data, around 75 ELEP students in 2020 still experience difficulties in understanding academic language and unfamiliar academic terms. Besides, the text structure in English journal articles is also one aspect of difficulty, where the results of the study were around 65.6% difficulty, then added participants who stated that it was very difficult as many as 6.3% of participants. Therefore, the researcher concluded that the

structure and vocabulary in English journal articles are very difficult for ELEP students to understand.

1.7. Topics

Based on the results of the data obtained, 14.6% strongly agreed with the statement that they need to read the topic repeatedly to understand the topic, and 67.7% of students agreed with the above statement. Then, look again at the statement that to understand the topic, ELEP students often translate from English to Indonesian; as many as 12.5% strongly agreed with the statement, and 58.3% of participants agreed. So, the researcher concluded that ELEP students need help understanding the topic because to understand the topic of English journal articles, they must read it repeatedly and often ask for help translating it.

2. *Factors that cause of difficulties in reading English journal articles at low score of questionnaires.*

After conducting interviews, ten factors cause students' difficulties in reading English journal articles, namely Low interest in reading English journal articles, unfamiliar/difficult Vocabulary, Vocabulary that is too sophisticated, Many confusing technical terms, The data presented (tables, statistics, figures, diagrams) are too complex, Lack of Vocabulary, Limited background knowledge, Language style that is too high and formal, Unfamiliar topics, Reliance on the use of translation.

2.1. Low interest in reading English journal articles

After conducting interviews, the researcher found that reading interest is one of the factors that cause students' difficulties in reading English journal articles. They convey that their reading interest in English journal articles is very low, so when reading English journal articles for college needs, they are very difficult. After analyzing the interview results, the researcher can conclude that low reading interest is a contributing factor to their difficulties in reading English journal articles. Therefore, as ELEP students, they are required to read English journal articles. Still, their reading interest is very low in reading English journal articles due to lazy reading because they do not like to read and do not read English journal articles much; for ELEP students who are required to read English journal articles, it is a factor of difficulty.

2.2. Unfamiliar/difficult vocabulary.

The results of the study, after giving questionnaires and conducting interviews with participants, the researcher found that one of the factors that make it difficult to read English journal articles is unfamiliar/difficult vocabulary. From various interview answers, it can be proven that ELEP students find it difficult to understand the text in English journal articles because the vocabulary is difficult and unfamiliar to them.

2.3. Vocabulary that is too sophisticated

Vocabulary is still an aspect that causes difficulties in understanding English journal articles. English students admitted that they are still beginners in terms of vocabulary and are not fluent in English, so when asked to read English journal articles, they stated that they had difficulty understanding them because the vocabulary was very advanced.

2.4. Many confusing technical terms

After conducting interviews, the results obtained were that many ELEP students stated that English journal articles use a lot of technical terms or terms related to very confusing topics. This phenomenon makes the process of understanding English journal articles difficult because many technical terms are difficult to understand, so it is also difficult to understand the information contained in the text of English journal article.

2.5. The data presented are too complex

In English journal articles, results from research are presented in several forms, such as statistical data, tables, figures, or complex sentences for qualitative research. Apparently, this is a factor in the difficulty of ELEP students in 2020 at Universitas Negeri Padang in understanding English journal articles because they state that researchers often present research data in a form that is complex and difficult to understand.

2.6. Lack of Vocabulary

In addition to factors such as advanced, difficult, and unfamiliar vocabulary, ELEP students also stated that the difficulty in understanding English journal articles is due to the very limited vocabulary owned by ELEP students, so understanding English journal articles is very difficult due to limited vocabulary. Participants stated that the limited vocabulary was caused by not reading diligently, and then the ability to remember the vocabulary was low. Hence, they lacked vocabulary, which was one of the factors that made it difficult for them to understand English journal articles.

2.7. Limited background knowledge

Background knowledge is needed to make it easier for students to understand the new information they read. ELEP students stated that their difficulty in understanding English journal articles was due to their low reading interest, so the background knowledge they have is also small because there is not much information they receive. Limited background knowledge is one of the factors that causes students to have difficulties in understanding English journal articles, especially in understanding the topics presented by the author.

2.8. Language style that is too high and formal

English journal articles are written by researchers who already have a high education, especially English journals that are written by international researchers and published in international journals and have a high and very formal language style, especially academic journals that use academic language. This high and very formal language style is one of the factors of difficulty felt by ELEP students in 2020 at Padang State University. ELEP students stated that they had difficulty understanding English journal articles because of the high language style written by professional researchers. English journal articles have complex sentences and are difficult for ELEP students in 2020 at Universitas Negeri Padang to understand.

2.9. Unfamiliar topic

Unfamiliar topics are one of the factors that contribute to ELEP students' difficulties in understanding English journal articles. ELEP students stated that the difficulty arises because sometimes the topics they read are new to them, and because the topic is a new topic to read, it is difficult to understand it. After conducting interviews, researchers can conclude that unfamiliar topics are due to limited background knowledge, so every time they read a topic, English journal articles become a new topic and are difficult to understand by ELEP students in 2020 at Universitas Negeri Padang.

2.10. Dependence on the use of translations

Researcher include dependence on the use of translation as one of the causes or factors that make ELEP students at Universitas Negeri Padang understand English journal articles and have limited vocabulary, find many terms that are not familiar; this is due to their dependence on using translation when reading English journal articles. After conducting interviews, an

average of eleven students translates the journal, where they immediately translate all journals from English into Indonesian, and then they will read the Indonesian version only. This phenomenon will make the ability of English students to understand English journal articles never improve. Hence, the researcher concludes that dependence on the use of translations is one of the factors of difficulty for ELEP students in reading English journal articles.

DISCUSSION

Based on the research results found seven categories included aspects of ELEP students' difficulties in reading English journal articles, namely Idea, Main idea, Supporting idea, Contents of English Journal articles, drawing conclusion, Topic-related vocabulary, technical terms, Reading quickly to find information, Language style, and Topics. After the analysis, it turned out that all of the above difficulties were felt by ELEP students in 2020. However, of all these difficulties, two difficulties were most dominantly felt by ELEP students, namely difficulties in understanding the English journal article section of the result section and difficulties in understanding vocabulary/technical terms where these two aspects had the highest percentage felt by ELEP students.

1. Students' difficulties in Understanding the Sections of English Journal Articles.

In this study, the most dominant difficulty felt by students is in the results section, namely difficulties in understanding complex statistics namely 88 participants stated difficulties out of 96 other participants. Then, participants also had difficulty understanding how the implications of a study were explored; as many as 71 participants stated that it was difficult to understand. Students find it difficult because in the results section, there is a lot of statistical data, and researchers interpret the data in academic language and not the language that participants use in communication, so they have difficulty understanding the results section.

2. Difficulties to Understand topic-related vocabulary/technical terms/ Difficult Words.

Based on the findings of the researcher above, the aspect became the second most dominant aspect felt by ELEP students in 2020 when reading English journal articles. The researcher concluded that when conducting interviews, all participants stated that understanding topic-related vocabulary and technical terms is a very difficult aspect because the key to understanding all texts in English journal articles is vocabulary.

Woolley, G. (2010), in his research entitled *A Multiple Strategy Framework Supporting Vocabulary Development for Students with Reading Comprehension Deficits*, states that Students who experience difficulties in reading comprehension struggle with vocabulary acquisition due to interconnected factors such as tend to read less, thus limiting their exposure to new vocabulary. They have difficulty in applying meaning to unfamiliar words when they encounter them.

Understanding a text requires high ability related to vocabulary because if students lack or are unfamiliar with vocabulary, they will have difficulty understanding the content of the text. This statement is supported by research conducted by Karini, Z. (2019) entitled *The Design of Learning Methods for Reading Comprehension*; the researcher stated that A lack of understanding of vocabulary can prevent students from adequately comprehending the text. Moreover, even when students know the meaning of individual words, they may not be able to connect these words to form a coherent understanding of the sentences and the overall message of the text. Therefore, to understand a text in English journal articles, vocabulary mastery is needed so that it is easy to understand the information conveyed in the text.

Then, based on the results of the study, there are ten factors that cause difficulties for ELEP students in 2020 to find it difficult to understand English journal articles, namely low reading interest in reading English journal articles, unfamiliar / difficult vocabulary, vocabulary so advanced, a lot of confusing technical terms, presented data (statistics, tables, figures) is too complex, lack of vocabulary, limited background knowledge, language style is too high and formal, unfamiliar topics, dependence on the use of translation. The researcher found two factors that are different from the previous findings, where two causal factors are dominant and felt by ELEP students when reading English journal articles, namely the students' low interest in reading English journal articles and dependence on translation tools.

The first different factor that makes it difficult for students to understand English journal articles is the lack of interest in reading ELEP students in reading English journal articles, where some of them said that they did not like reading English journals, participants stated that, reading English journal articles only for course purposes, for example when required to read English journals, then they read the English journal. Related to low students' interest in reading, (Cooter, R. 1994) said this lack of interest can lead to what is described as "reading atrophy", where due to students' passive attitude towards reading, they do not engage with the text

over time and thus do not develop their reading skills. So, it can be concluded that interest in reading does affect the difficulty in reading the English journal.

The second factors is dependence on the use of translation. After analysing the data and finding the results of the study, the researcher concluded that one of the factors that caused ELEP students to have difficulty in understanding English journal articles was their dependence on the use of translation. They lose their reading skills because all texts can be translated into Indonesian, so problems such as finding many technical terms, difficult vocabulary, advanced vocabulary and so on, because ELEP students tend to translate directly the text to be read into Indonesian, so when reading the English version, they have difficulty. Related to this, (Iwai, Y. 2008) also found the same thing in his research entitled *Perceptions of Japanese Students toward Academic English Reading: Implications for Effective ESL Reading Strategies*, in his research he found that Japanese ESL Students have difficulty reading in the United States because of their reliance on translation, which focuses on word-for-word translation rather than thinking about meaning in context. The findings of (Iwai, Y. 2008) are similar to the findings in this study, where if EFL students experience dependence on the translator, they will have difficulty in understanding texts in the context of English.

CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to fulfill the research objectives that have been set, namely to find out the aspects of difficulty experienced by students in reading English journal articles to find out what factors cause these difficulties and to see what aspects and factors are most dominantly felt by ELEP students at Universitas Negeri Padang when reading English journal articles. Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that there are seven aspects of difficulty experienced by participants, namely: Students' difficulties in identifying the ideas, main ideas, and supporting ideas, Students' difficulties in Understanding the Sections of English Journal Articles, Students' difficulties in concluding English journal articles, Difficulties in understanding topic-related vocabulary/technical terms/Difficult Words, Students have difficulties in reading quickly to find information, Difficulties in understanding the Language Style and Sentence Structure, Students' difficulties in understanding the topic of English journal articles.

Then, the researcher also concluded that ten factors cause ELEP students' difficulty in reading English journal articles, namely: Low reading interest in reading English journal articles, Unfamiliar/Difficult Vocabulary, Vocabulary so advanced, A lot of confusing technical terms, The presented data (table, statistic, figure, diagram) is too complex, Lack of Vocabulary, Limited background knowledge, The

language style is too high and formal, Unfamiliar topic, Dependence on the use of the translations.

In addition, the researcher also concluded that the most dominant aspect felt by ELEP students is the difficulty in understanding complex statistical data, and the factor causing students' difficulties in reading English journal articles is the most dominant vocabulary problem.

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