



Postgraduate Students' Strategies in Reading Journal Articles for Thesis Writing: A Qualitative Study

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2026-04-17 Revised: 2026-04-26 Accepted: 2026-04-27</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Academic Reading;</i> <i>Metacognition;</i> <i>Postgraduate EFL</i> <i>Students; Strategic</i> <i>Learning</i></p> <p>DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.10188</p> <p>Corresponding Author: Andi Nur Annisa nurannisaandi11@gmail.com Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar</p>	<p><i>Reading journal articles is a central yet challenging activity for postgraduate students engaged in thesis writing. This study aims to explore how postgraduate students approach academic reading, the strategies they employ at different stages of thesis writing, the reasons underlying their strategic choices, and the challenges they encounter along with their adaptive responses. Grounded in metacognitive theory, sociocultural theory, and the academic emotions framework, this study adopts a qualitative multiple-case study design within an interpretivist paradigm. Six postgraduate students from an English Education program at a state university in Indonesia were purposively selected. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document-based stimulated recall, and reflective reading logs, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that postgraduate students engage in active and critical reading practices characterized by evaluation, questioning, and selective engagement with texts. Reading strategies are found to be dynamic and stage-dependent, shifting from exploratory approaches during the proposal stage to more focused and analytical strategies in the literature review and methodology stages. Participants demonstrate strong metacognitive awareness by planning, monitoring, and evaluating their comprehension while flexibly adapting strategies to meet specific academic purposes. Despite these competencies, students face challenges related to complex academic language, dense theoretical content, and</i></p>

information overload. These challenges, however, stimulate strategic adaptation, including selective reading, systematic organization of information, and the use of social and technological support. This study contributes to the understanding of postgraduate academic reading as a complex, situated, and adaptive practice shaped by cognitive, social, and emotional factors, and offers pedagogical implications for supporting strategic reading development in English Language Teaching contexts.

1. Introduction

Reading journal articles is a central academic activity in postgraduate education, particularly for students writing a thesis. At this stage, students are expected to move beyond textbooks and engage critically with current research literature. Journal articles provide theoretical foundations, empirical findings, and methodological insights that help students understand their research field and position their studies within ongoing academic discussions. Therefore, the ability to read and use journal articles effectively is essential for successful thesis writing. In postgraduate contexts, reading is not a passive activity. Students read journal articles to explore research topics, refine research questions, justify methodological choices, and support arguments across different chapters of the thesis.

Reading also helps them understand how knowledge is constructed and communicated within their discipline. As noted by Ken Hyland (2019), academic writing is closely connected to reading, as writers learn disciplinary conventions and rhetorical structures through engagement with published texts. Thus, reading journal articles is not only about understanding content but also about developing academic writing competence.

However, academic journal articles are often difficult to read. They are typically dense, conceptually complex, and written in formal academic language, often containing abstract theories and unfamiliar terminology. William Grabe and Fredricka L. Stoller (2019) argue that academic reading requires advanced cognitive skills, such as analyzing arguments, synthesizing information, and critically evaluating research. These demands make reading journal articles a challenging and time-consuming task, particularly for postgraduate students working in a second or foreign language.

To address these challenges, students rely on reading strategies, defined as deliberate and goal-oriented actions used to understand and evaluate texts (Oxford, 2018). Common strategies include skimming for general understanding, scanning

for specific information, highlighting key points, taking notes, summarizing, and rereading difficult sections. Students may also focus selectively on sections such as abstracts or discussions depending on their research needs. These strategies enable more efficient and purposeful reading, especially when dealing with a large volume of literature.

Metacognitive theory provides a useful framework for understanding how such strategies are applied. John H. Flavell (1979) defines metacognition as awareness and regulation of one's cognitive processes. In reading, this includes planning, monitoring comprehension, and evaluating outcomes. In addition, reading practices are shaped by social and academic contexts. From a sociocultural perspective, Lev Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that learning occurs through interaction with cultural tools, including academic texts. Supervisors, peers, and academic communities therefore influence how students interpret texts and develop strategies aligned with disciplinary norms.

Previous studies have examined reading strategies primarily among undergraduate and EFL learners. For example, Kouider Mokhtari and Carla Reichard (2002) categorize strategies into global, problem-solving, and support strategies. Other research suggests that skilled readers use flexible combinations of cognitive and metacognitive strategies depending on their goals. However, many of these studies rely heavily on quantitative methods, such as surveys, which tend to capture general patterns but overlook the complexity of strategy use in authentic academic contexts.

Moreover, they often pay limited attention to the role of emotional factors, such as confusion and cognitive fatigue, in shaping reading behavior. Reading for thesis writing differs from general academic reading because it requires sustained engagement with a large number of journal articles over time. Students must identify relevant literature, compare perspectives, and synthesize multiple sources into coherent arguments. Brian Kwan (2009) notes that postgraduate students often struggle with decisions about what to read, how much to read, and how to use sources effectively. In response to these challenges, students may adapt their reading practices by skimming texts, focusing on selected sections, or relying on summaries.

However, the interaction between cognitive strategies, metacognitive awareness, and emotional responses remains insufficiently explored, particularly through qualitative approaches. Based on these gaps, this study aims to explore postgraduate students' strategies in reading journal articles for thesis writing using a qualitative approach. It focuses on how students engage with journal articles, the strategies they use, and the reasons underlying their choices at different stages of the thesis process. The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do postgraduate students approach reading journal articles for thesis writing? (2) What reading strategies do they use at different stages of thesis writing? (3) Why do they choose particular strategies? and (4) What challenges do they

experience, and how do these challenges influence their strategy use and adaptation?

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative perspective, which examines academic reading as a dynamic and adaptive practice shaped by multiple factors. This study contributes by integrating cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions in postgraduate academic reading. By employing a qualitative design, it provides in-depth insights into students lived experiences and offers practical implications for supporting academic literacy development in English Language Teaching contexts.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore postgraduate students' strategies in reading journal articles for thesis writing. A qualitative approach was selected to capture participants' experiences, perspectives, and meaning-making processes rather than to quantify strategy use. The study was grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which views reality as socially constructed and knowledge as shaped through individuals' interpretations of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within this perspective, academic reading is understood as a contextualized and meaning-driven practice. A multiple-case study design enabled in-depth exploration of individual cases while allowing cross-case comparison (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995), with each postgraduate student treated as a distinct case representing a situated reading experience during thesis writing.

The design was informed by three complementary theoretical perspectives. Metacognitive theory conceptualizes reading as a self-regulated process involving planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction and academic context in shaping learning practices. The academic emotions framework highlights how emotional experiences, such as confusion and cognitive fatigue, influence engagement with academic texts. These perspectives guided the development of data collection instruments and the analytical framework.

The participants were six postgraduate students enrolled in the English Education program at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who were currently writing their thesis, actively engaging with journal articles, and willing to participate voluntarily (Patton, 2015). The participants represented different stages of thesis writing to capture variation in reading purposes and strategy use. The relatively small sample size aligns with qualitative case study research, which prioritizes depth and contextual richness.

Data were collected using three complementary techniques: semi-structured interviews, document-based stimulated recall, and reflective reading logs. A total of six in-depth interviews (one per participant) were conducted, each lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes and audio-recorded with consent. The interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework and research

questions, focusing on metacognitive processes, strategy use, social influences, emotional responses, and strategic adaptation. To complement the interview's, stimulated recall was used to ground participants' reflections in actual reading practices, where participants explained how they engaged with selected journal articles (Gass & Mackey, 2000). In addition, participants produced a total of 24 reflective log entries (approximately four entries per participant), documenting their reading purposes, strategies, challenges, and emotional experiences over time. These logs provided insight into the dynamic and ongoing nature of reading practices (Moon, 2006). Data collection was conducted over several weeks, and all interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). The analysis began with data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts and reflective logs, followed by initial coding of meaningful units related to strategies, challenges, emotions, and contextual influences. These codes were then organized into broader themes across cases and iteratively refined to ensure coherence and analytical depth. Both deductive and inductive approaches were employed. Deductive coding was guided by metacognitive, sociocultural, and academic emotions frameworks, while inductive coding allowed unexpected patterns to emerge from the data.

To enhance trustworthiness, multiple strategies were implemented, including member checking to validate participants' perspectives, triangulation across interviews, stimulated recall, and reflective logs, and peer debriefing to strengthen analytical rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description was also employed to support transferability.

Reflexivity was an integral part of the research process. The researcher, as a postgraduate student within the same academic context, acknowledged a dual role as both insider and researcher. This positionality provided contextual understanding of participants' experiences but also required careful reflection to minimize potential bias. Throughout the study, reflexive practices were maintained by critically examining assumptions, maintaining analytical transparency, and ensuring that interpretations were grounded in participants' accounts rather than personal perspectives.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms, and all data were securely managed.

3. Result

Critical Engagement

Postgraduate students approach journal articles as active and critical readers rather than passive recipients of information. Reading is constructed as an interactive process in which students' question, evaluate, and interpret texts in relation to their own research needs. Instead of simply understanding content, students focus on identifying research problems, evaluating methodological rigor, and assessing the relevance of studies. This critical engagement is reflected in how students position themselves in relation to the text. One participant explained:

"Reading is like a conversation with the text... I don't just accept what the author says, I always question whether the method is strong and whether it is relevant to my research." (P1, Interview, 2026)

This statement illustrates how reading is treated as a dialogic process, where meaning is actively constructed. It reflects a shift from passive reading to a more engaged and evaluative form of academic reading. The student does not treat the text as an unquestionable source of knowledge, but instead interacts with it by continuously examining and challenging the author's ideas. The phrase "a conversation with the text" suggests that reading is experienced as a two-way process, where meaning is actively constructed rather than simply received.

This response also indicates that the student applies critical thinking when engaging with journal articles, particularly by assessing the strength of the research methodology and its relevance to their own study. Rather than focusing only on understanding the content, the student evaluates how the study is conducted and whether it can meaningfully contribute to their research. This shows an awareness of research quality and an ability to connect existing literature to personal academic needs.

Similarly, students rely on guiding questions to direct their reading and maintain focus on research purposes. As one participant noted:

"I usually ask myself what problem the study is addressing and what gap the authors are trying to fill." (P2, Interview, 2026)

In addition to evaluating content, students also assess the credibility of sources before engaging deeply with them. They consider aspects such as journal quality, publication year, and author background to determine the reliability of the article. One participant stated:

"I always check the credibility... like the journal, the publication year, and the background before I decide to use it." (P3, Interview, 2026)

These findings suggest that postgraduate students engage in purposeful and evaluative reading practices, where both content and source credibility are critically examined.

The process of determining relevance involves several stages. Students typically begin by screening titles, abstracts, and keywords to obtain a general overview of the study. This initial step helps them decide whether the article aligns with their research focus. As one participant explained:

"I usually start from the title, abstract, and keywords to get a quick overview before deciding to read further." (P4, Interview, 2026)

This statement suggests that the student adopts a strategic and selective approach to reading rather than engaging with texts in a linear or exhaustive manner. By starting with the title, abstract, and keywords, the student is able to quickly evaluate the relevance of an article before committing to a deeper reading. This indicates an efficient use of time and effort, which is especially important when dealing with a large number of academic sources.

After this preliminary stage, students engage in deeper reading by examining introductions and literature reviews to understand how the study is positioned within the field. They pay attention to how arguments are constructed and how previous studies are used. One participant highlighted this approach:

"I look at who they cite and who they critique to understand their position." (P1, Interview, 2026)

Some students also prioritize methodological aspects when evaluating relevance, particularly when the goal is to inform their own research design. This is reflected in the following statement:

"I usually check how the researchers conducted their study first, because I want to see if it fits my methodology." (P5, Interview, 2026)

Overall, these findings indicate that students adopt a layered and strategic approach when selecting and engaging with journal articles.

Strategy Development

Postgraduate students employ flexible reading strategies that change across different stages of thesis writing. During the proposal stage, reading is generally broad and exploratory, with the aim of gaining general understanding and identifying key themes within a research area. At this stage, students tend to read widely without focusing on detailed analysis. Some participants described this experience metaphorically:

"It feels like exploring a new city without a map... I just try to find the main landmarks first." (P1, Interview, 2026)

"At the beginning, I read many articles just to understand the topic, not in detail." (P2, Interview, 2026)

Rather than focusing on detailed analysis, the student prioritizes gaining a general understanding of the topic by engaging with multiple sources. This suggests that reading at this stage is used to build foundational knowledge and to become familiar with key concepts, themes, and discussions within the field. It also implies that the depth of reading is intentionally adjusted based on the student's immediate goal. By choosing not to read in detail, the student manages cognitive load and avoids spending excessive time on individual articles. This reflects an efficient strategy, especially when the research area is still being defined and broad exposure to the literature is more important than in-depth evaluation.

As students move into the literature review stage, their reading becomes more focused and systematic. They begin to organize information, compare studies, and engage more critically with the content. This shift is reflected in the way students document their reading:

"I write down the research question, the methodology, the key findings, and also my own comments." (P1, Interview, 2026)

At the methodology stage, reading becomes more selective and practical. Students focus on articles that can serve as models for their research design, using them as references for methodological decisions. Participants explained:

"I use articles like a blueprint for my methodology." (P1, Interview, 2026)

"I focus on practical examples of how researchers design their studies." (P4, Interview, 2026)

These statements express that, at the methodology stage, students shift toward a highly practical and application-oriented approach to reading. Rather than reading for general understanding or theoretical exploration, they engage with journal articles as concrete models that can guide their own research design. The use of the term "blueprint" suggests that articles are treated as structured references, providing a clear framework for how research procedures should be organized and implemented.

This also implies that students focus selectively on specific aspects of the text, particularly methodological components such as research design, data collection techniques, and analysis procedures. The emphasis on "practical examples" shows that students are not only interested in what researchers did, but also in how those actions can be replicated or adapted in their own studies. This reflects a shift from knowledge consumption to knowledge application.

In addition, students organize articles based on specific criteria to support their research needs:

"I group them based on findings, research gaps, and the urgency of the study." (P5, Interview, 2026)

This statement reveals that the student engages in systematic organization of academic sources rather than treating articles as isolated pieces of information. By grouping articles based on findings, research gaps, and urgency, the student demonstrates an ability to categorize and synthesize information across multiple studies. This suggests that reading is not only about understanding individual texts, but also about building connections between them. It also implies that the student is actively constructing a structured understanding of the research field.

Organizing articles according to research gaps shows awareness of how studies relate to one another and where contributions can be made. The inclusion of “urgency of the study” further suggests that the student prioritizes certain articles based on their relevance and significance to the research topic.

These findings show that reading strategies are continuously adjusted based on the specific demands of each stage of thesis writing.

Metacognitive Regulation

Postgraduate students demonstrate strong awareness of their own reading processes, particularly in terms of planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension. Before reading, students often set specific goals to guide their focus, which helps them read more efficiently. One participant explained:

“Before reading, I decide what I want to understand, like the concept or the method.” (P1, Interview, 2026)

The student engages in deliberate planning before starting the reading process. By deciding in advance what to focus on, the student sets clear reading goals that guide attention and comprehension. This suggests that reading is not approached randomly, but is directed by specific academic needs. It also shows that the student is able to narrow down the scope of reading in order to make it more efficient. Instead of trying to understand every detail in the text, the student prioritizes particular elements that are most relevant to their research purpose. This reflects an awareness of how to manage time and cognitive effort when dealing with complex academic materials.

During reading, students actively monitor their comprehension and recognize when they are not fully understanding the text. This awareness allows them to adjust their strategies in response to difficulties. One participant noted:

“Sometimes I realize I’m not really processing, so I stop and try to annotate or reread.” (P1, Interview, 2026)

Other participants use strategies such as highlighting, summarizing, and rereading to support understanding. For example:

"I highlight important points and reread difficult parts." (P2, Interview, 2026)

"I check if I can explain the main idea in my own words." (P4, Interview, 2026)

When encountering difficulties, students adapt their strategies by using additional resources or seeking support. This includes consulting dictionaries, discussing with peers, or asking for guidance from supervisors. As one participant explained:

"If I don't understand, I use a dictionary, ask friends, or discuss with my supervisor." (P5, Interview, 2026)

These findings highlight that students do not approach reading as a fixed or routine activity, but as a flexible process that requires continuous adjustment. They actively monitor their level of understanding while reading and are able to recognize when comprehension is incomplete or when a particular strategy is not effective. This awareness allows them to pause, reflect, and modify their approach, rather than continuing passively without fully grasping the content.

In addition, students make strategic decisions by selecting and applying different reading strategies based on their specific goals and the demands of the text. For example, they may choose to skim for general ideas, read selectively for relevant sections, or engage in deeper analysis when detailed understanding is required. These decisions are influenced by factors such as text complexity, time constraints, and the relevance of the material to their research.

Challenges and Adaptation

Despite their strategic awareness, postgraduate students face several challenges when reading academic journal articles. One of the main difficulties is the complexity of academic language, including dense sentences, unfamiliar terminology, and abstract theoretical explanations. These features make reading cognitively demanding and time-consuming. One participant described this challenge:

"Sometimes one sentence has three or four complex terms, so it's really hard to understand." (P1, Interview, 2026)

Other participants expressed similar concerns:

"The sentences are long and the vocabulary is very specific." (P4, Interview, 2026)

"Some explanations are very complicated, especially in methodology." (P5, Interview, 2026)

Due to the abundance of articles they must read, students not only struggle with language but also suffer from information overload. This can lead to confusion and difficulty in selecting relevant sources. Participants explained:

"There are so many articles, it feels overwhelming... sometimes I don't know which one to focus on." (P2, Interview, 2026)

"It can feel paralyzing when there is too much information." (P1, Interview, 2026)

The postgraduate students experience significant difficulty in managing the volume of academic literature, leading to feelings of overwhelm and uncertainty. The large number of available articles makes it challenging for students to determine which sources are most relevant, suggesting that the issue is not only about comprehension but also about selection and prioritization. This reflects the complexity of academic reading at the postgraduate level, where students are required to engage with extensive bodies of literature.

The use of expressions such as "overwhelming" and "paralyzing" also highlights the emotional impact of information overload. These responses suggest that the abundance of information can hinder students' ability to make decisions and move forward with their reading. Instead of facilitating learning, excessive input may create confusion and reduce efficiency, particularly when students lack clear strategies for filtering and organizing information.

To address these challenges, students adopt various adaptive strategies. They prioritize relevant articles, focus on key sections such as abstracts and conclusions, and avoid reading all materials in full detail. One participant stated:

"I learned to prioritize and not try to read everything." (P1, Interview, 2026)

Students also organize information systematically through summaries and categorization:

"I group articles based on findings and research gaps to make it easier to understand." (P5, Interview, 2026)

In addition, technological tools are used to support comprehension and manage information:

"I use AI to explain difficult sections in simpler language." (P3, Interview, 2026)

These results indicate that students do not remain passive when encountering difficulties in reading academic texts, but instead actively adjust their approaches to overcome those challenges. When faced with complex language,

dense content, or an overwhelming number of sources, they modify their strategies by becoming more selective, focusing on key sections, or prioritizing only the most relevant articles. This indicates that reading strategies are not fixed routines, but flexible tools that can be adapted depending on the situation.

Additionally, this adaptability reflects students' ability to respond to varying academic demands. As the complexity of tasks increases, students shift from general reading to more targeted and efficient approaches, such as skimming for main ideas, organizing information systematically, or using external support like summaries and technological tools. These adjustments allow them to maintain productivity even when the reading task becomes cognitively demanding.

The Interplay of Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Factors in Academic Reading

Postgraduate students' reading practices are influenced by a combination of cognitive, social, and emotional factors. Cognitively, students employ various strategies to process complex texts and regulate their understanding. However, reading is not solely an individual activity, as social interactions also play an important role. Students often seek support from peers and supervisors when encountering difficulties. One participant explained:

"If I don't understand something, I discuss it with my friends or ask my supervisor." (P5, Interview, 2026)

This statement points out that academic reading is not solely an individual activity, but is supported and shaped by social interaction. When the student encounters difficulties in understanding a text, they seek assistance from peers and supervisors, suggesting that comprehension is often developed collaboratively. This highlights the role of discussion as a means of clarifying meaning, resolving confusion, and deepening understanding.

It also suggests that the student recognizes the value of external support in the learning process. Rather than struggling independently, the student actively engages with others who may provide different perspectives, explanations, or guidance. This behavior reflects an awareness that understanding complex academic material can be enhanced through shared knowledge and interaction.

Moreover, technological tools contribute to shaping reading practices, particularly in helping students simplify complex information. One participant noted:

"AI helps explain difficult sections in a simpler way." (P3, Interview, 2026)

Emotionally, students experience feelings of overwhelm and pressure, especially when dealing with large volumes of reading. These emotional responses influence how students approach reading tasks and manage their workload. One participant described this experience:

"It feels overwhelming... sometimes I feel stuck because there is too much to read." (P1, Interview, 2026)

These findings confirm that academic reading is shaped by multiple interacting factors, where cognitive processes, social support, and emotional experiences all influence students' engagement with journal articles.

4. Discussion

This study reveals that postgraduate students engage with journal articles as active and critical readers rather than passive recipients of information. They approach texts through questioning, evaluation, and interpretation, indicating a dialogic engagement with academic literature. This finding reinforces the view that academic reading is closely linked to knowledge construction and disciplinary participation (Hyland, 2019). In line with Flowerdew (1993), critical reading extends beyond comprehension to include evaluating the purpose, credibility, and contribution of research. However, rather than merely confirming previous studies, the present findings extend this perspective by showing how such critical engagement is enacted in the context of thesis writing, where reading is closely tied to students' immediate academic goals and research development.

The findings further demonstrate that reading strategies are dynamic and evolve across different stages of thesis writing. While previous research has acknowledged that reading is goal-directed (Grabe & Stoller, 2011) and stage-sensitive (Kwan, 2009), this study provides more nuanced insight into how students actively shift from exploratory to analytical and selective reading practices. This progression reflects not only increasing familiarity with the research topic but also growing strategic awareness. At the same time, this staged development suggests that students may initially lack clear direction in navigating academic literature, highlighting the need for more structured support during the early phases of thesis writing.

Another important finding is the strong metacognitive awareness demonstrated by postgraduate students. Participants actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading processes, which aligns with Flavell's (1979) concept of metacognition. Their ability to adapt strategies based on reading purposes, text complexity, and time constraints also supports Mokhtari and Reichard's (2002) framework of strategic reading. However, it is important to note that such awareness does not always guarantee effective comprehension, particularly when students encounter highly complex or unfamiliar texts. This suggests that metacognitive knowledge must be complemented by sufficient disciplinary knowledge and linguistic competence.

Despite these strengths, students continue to face significant challenges when engaging with academic journal articles. The complexity of academic language, dense theoretical content, and unfamiliar terminology remain major

barriers, confirming Grabe's (2009) assertion that academic reading imposes high cognitive demands. In addition, the experience of information overload highlights the difficulty of managing extensive bodies of literature, which can exceed students' cognitive capacity, as explained by Sweller's (1988) cognitive load theory. These challenges suggest that academic reading is not only a cognitive activity but also a demanding process that requires effective management of attention, time, and information.

Importantly, the findings show that these challenges do not necessarily lead to disengagement. Instead, students demonstrate adaptive responses by prioritizing relevant texts, employing selective reading strategies, and organizing information systematically. The integration of technological tools, including AI, further illustrates how students adjust their practices in response to evolving academic demands. This indicates that reading strategies function as adaptive mechanisms rather than fixed techniques, enabling students to cope with both cognitive and contextual constraints. Such adaptability reflects a higher level of strategic competence that is essential in postgraduate study.

The findings also highlight the interplay of cognitive, social, and emotional factors in shaping academic reading practices. While cognitive and metacognitive processes are central, social interaction with peers and supervisors plays a crucial role in supporting comprehension and decision-making. This supports Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, which emphasizes learning as a socially mediated process. In addition, emotional experiences such as confusion, pressure, and cognitive fatigue influence how students engage with reading tasks, aligning with Pekrun's (2006) framework of academic emotions. These dimensions interact dynamically, suggesting that academic reading cannot be understood as a purely cognitive skill, but rather as a situated and multidimensional practice.

Figure 1. A Conceptual Model of Postgraduate Students' Academic Reading as An Adaptive Practice

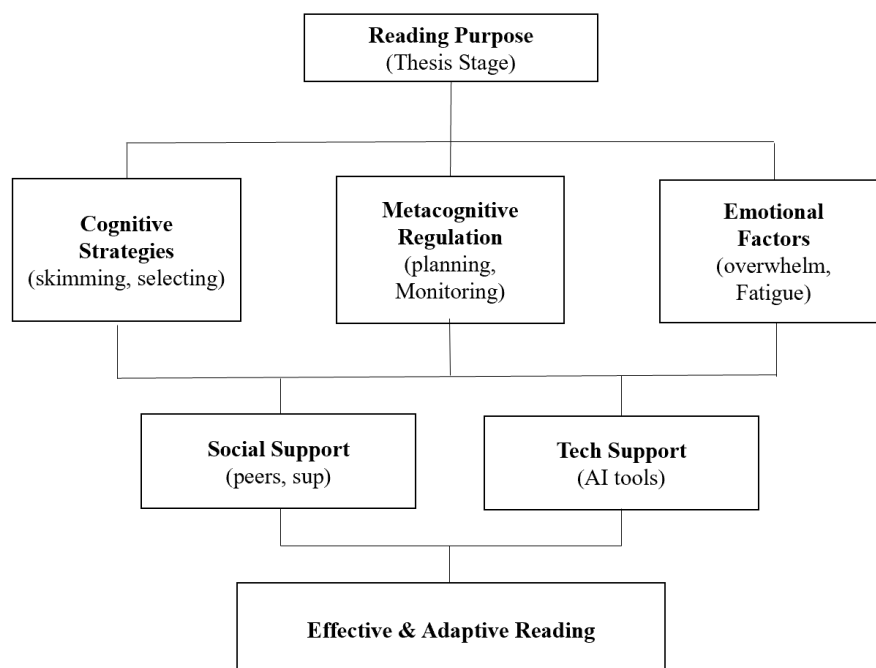


Figure 1 synthesizes the key findings of this study by illustrating how postgraduate students' reading practices are shaped by the interaction of multiple factors. Reading purpose, which is influenced by different stages of thesis writing, directs the use of cognitive strategies such as skimming and selective reading. These strategies are regulated through metacognitive processes, including planning and monitoring, while also being influenced by emotional factors such as overwhelm and fatigue. In addition, social support from peers and supervisors, along with technological support such as AI tools, contributes to shaping students' engagement with academic texts. The interaction of these elements results in effective and adaptive reading practices, highlighting the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of postgraduate academic reading.

From a critical perspective, several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. As a qualitative multiple-case study with a small sample size, the findings are context-specific and not intended for broad generalization. In addition, the interpretive nature of the analysis introduces the possibility of researcher bias, particularly given the researcher's position within the same academic context. Although reflexive practices and trustworthiness strategies were employed, the findings remain shaped by subjective interpretation. Future research may benefit from combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of postgraduate reading practices.

The findings of this study also carry important pedagogical implications. First, academic reading instruction should move beyond teaching isolated strategies and instead focus on developing students' ability to adapt strategies across different stages of research. Second, curriculum design in postgraduate programs should explicitly integrate guided reading practices, particularly in the early stages of thesis writing, to support students in navigating large volumes of literature. Third, postgraduate training programs should address not only cognitive and metacognitive aspects of reading, but also the social and emotional dimensions, including how to manage information overload and academic pressure. Providing structured support, such as reading workshops, peer discussion groups, and supervisor guidance, may enhance students' ability to engage effectively with academic texts.

Overall, this study offers a significant contribution to the field of academic literacy by reconceptualizing postgraduate academic reading as a multidimensional adaptive practice shaped by cognitive, social, and emotional factors. It highlights that reading is not merely a technical skill, but a dynamic and situated process that evolves in response to academic demands. By foregrounding the complexity of students' reading experiences, this study provides a more holistic understanding of how postgraduate students engage with academic literature in the context of thesis writing.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore how postgraduate students approach reading journal articles, the strategies they employ, the reasons behind their strategic choices, and the challenges they encounter along with their adaptive responses. The findings demonstrate that academic reading at the postgraduate level is a highly active, purposeful, and strategic process rather than a passive act of information consumption. Students engage critically with texts by evaluating arguments, identifying research gaps, and assessing relevance based on their disciplinary needs. Such practices reflect the influence of disciplinary conventions, where reading is shaped not only by individual goals but also by the expectations and norms of the academic community.

The study further reveals that reading strategies are dynamic and evolve across different stages of thesis writing. During the proposal stage, students tend to adopt exploratory and broad reading approaches, which gradually become more focused, selective, and analytical in the literature review and methodology stages. This shift highlights that strategy use is strongly influenced by academic purpose, supporting the view that reading is a goal-directed activity. Additionally, postgraduate students demonstrate a high level of metacognitive awareness, as they actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their comprehension, and adjust their strategies in response to reading demands and difficulties.

Despite these competencies, students continue to face significant challenges, particularly in relation to complex academic language, dense theoretical content, and information overload. However, rather than hindering their progress, these challenges often prompt strategic adaptation. Students respond by employing selective reading, organizing information systematically, and utilizing external resources such as peer discussion and digital tools. This indicates that successful academic reading involves not only cognitive skills but also adaptive and self-regulatory capacities.

Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of postgraduate academic reading as a complex and situated practice shaped by cognitive, metacognitive, social, and contextual factors. The findings suggest important implications for English Language Teaching, particularly in supporting students to develop strategic and critical reading skills that are responsive to disciplinary expectations. Future research may further investigate how these strategies develop over time or explore interventions that can better support postgraduate students in managing the demands of academic reading.

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