



## Reading Strategies in EFL Classrooms: Overcoming Obstacles in Drawing Conclusion and Prediction

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### Abstract

*Drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes are essential inferential reading skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. However, many students experience difficulties in applying these strategies due to low self-confidence, reliance on explicit information, and limited experience with inferential reading tasks. This study investigates the challenges faced by EFL students in drawing conclusions and making predictions during reading comprehension activities. A qualitative case study design was employed involving 30 second-semester university students enrolled in an Inferential Reading course at Universitas Islam Madura. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and inferential reading tasks, and were analyzed thematically using triangulation to ensure credibility. The findings reveal that students tend to avoid inferential reasoning because of fear of making mistakes, insufficient instructional modeling, and limited vocabulary knowledge. As a result, students rely heavily on literal comprehension and demonstrate passive engagement with texts. This study suggests that explicit instruction in inferential strategies, supportive classroom environments, collaborative reading activities, and formative assessments focusing on reasoning processes can enhance students' confidence and inferential reading abilities. These findings provide pedagogical implications for improving reading instruction in EFL classrooms.*

## **1. Introduction**

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning as it strongly influences their academic performance. Effective reading comprehension goes beyond recognizing words or understanding explicitly stated information; it requires readers to actively interpret meanings, integrate prior knowledge, and construct understanding from both explicit and implicit textual information. Among higher-order reading skills, the abilities to draw conclusions and predict outcomes are essential because they enable learners to engage critically with texts and anticipate ideas beyond surface level meanings.

Despite their importance, many EFL learners struggle to apply inferential reading strategies, particularly drawing conclusions and making predictions. In many classroom contexts, students tend to rely heavily on literal comprehension and demonstrate limited engagement in inferential reasoning when answers are not directly stated in the text. This passive reading behavior is often associated with low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited exposure to inferential tasks, and instructional practices that prioritize accuracy over critical thinking. As a result, students become dependent on explicit textual cues and demonstrate limited engagement with deeper meaning construction.

Previous studies have identified several factors contributing to students' difficulties in reading comprehension. Bensalah and Gueroudj (2020) argue that EFL reading comprehension requires the interaction of linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, and strategic competence. Similarly, Erni (2021) found that Indonesian learners often experience difficulties in academic reading due to limited strategy use and insufficient practice in critical reading. Other studies have highlighted vocabulary limitations, anxiety, and lack of motivation as major barriers to effective reading comprehension in EFL contexts (Vongsawath et al., 2025; Rahmawati et al., 2025). These challenges are further intensified when students are infrequently guided to make inferences or predictions during reading instruction.

Although numerous studies have explored reading strategies and instructional models to improve reading comprehension, limited attention has been given to students' reluctance to engage in inferential reading, particularly in drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes in EFL university classrooms. Many studies focus on improving reading comprehension outcomes through specific instructional models, such as project-based learning (Sari, 2021), yet fewer studies examine the underlying emotional, cognitive, and instructional factors that cause students to avoid inferential reading strategies. This gap suggests a need for qualitative exploration of students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in applying these strategies.

Furthermore, inferential reading is not solely a cognitive process but is closely related to affective and metacognitive dimensions. Learners must be aware of their own comprehension processes, regulate their reading strategies, and feel

confident enough to take interpretive risks. Without adequate support and explicit modeling from teachers, students may perceive inference and prediction as mere guessing rather than as evidence-based reasoning processes. This misconception discourages active engagement and limits students' development as independent readers.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the difficulties faced by EFL students in drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes during reading comprehension activities. Specifically, the study seeks to explore the cognitive, emotional, and instructional factors that contribute to students' passive engagement with inferential reading tasks. By examining students' reading behaviors and perceptions in an Inferential Reading course, this study is expected to provide pedagogical insights for improving reading instruction in EFL classrooms.

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What difficulties do EFL students face in drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes during reading comprehension activities?
2. What cognitive, emotional, and instructional factors contribute to students' reluctance to engage in inferential reading strategies?
3. How can instructional practices be improved to support students' inferential reading skills in EFL classrooms?

## **2. Method**

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore EFL students' difficulties in drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes during reading comprehension activities. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow an in-depth understanding of students' reading behaviors, perceptions, and challenges within a specific instructional context.

The study was conducted in the second semester of the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Madura during the Inferential Reading course. The participants consisted of 30 second-semester university students enrolled in the course. This class was selected based on preliminary observations and recommendations from the course lecturer, which indicated that many students experienced difficulties in understanding implicit meanings, drawing conclusions, and making predictions from English texts.

Data were collected using multiple data sources, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and inferential reading tasks. Classroom observations focused on students' reading behaviors and responses to questions requiring inferential reasoning and prediction. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted to explore students' perceptions, attitudes, and perceived challenges in applying inferential reading strategies. In addition, inferential reading tasks were administered to examine how students used textual

evidence to draw conclusions and predict outcomes.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved several stages: (1) transcribing interview data and organizing observation notes, (2) conducting initial coding to identify meaningful units of data, (3) grouping codes into broader themes, and (4) interpreting the themes to explain patterns related to students' difficulties and contributing factors. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and reading tasks.

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles. Prior to data collection, all participants provided voluntary informed consent after being briefed on the study objectives. Participants identities were kept confidential, and all data were used solely for academic and research purposes.

Table: Research Method Summary

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Research Design</b>	Qualitative case study focusing on students' difficulties in drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes in EFL reading comprehension.
<b>Research Setting</b>	Inferential Reading course, English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Islam Madura
<b>Participants</b>	30 second-semester university students enrolled in the Inferential Reading course.
<b>Data Collection Methods</b>	Classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and inferential reading tasks.
<b>Research Instruments</b>	Observation checklist, semi-structured interview guide (open-ended questions), and reading comprehension tasks focusing on inference and prediction.
<b>Data Analysis</b>	Thematic analysis involving transcription, coding, theme categorization, and interpretation.
<b>Trustworthiness Strategy</b>	Data triangulation across observations, interviews, and reading tasks.
<b>Ethical Considerations</b>	Voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants.

### 3. Result

Analysis of the collected data identified a number of recurring themes that reflect students' challenges in making inferences and predicting outcomes in EFL reading contexts.. These themes emerged from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and inferential reading tasks. Participant excerpts are included to illustrate the findings.

#### *Theme 1: Reliance on Literal Comprehension*

Classroom observations revealed that most students relied heavily on literal comprehension when responding to reading tasks. Students tended to search for explicitly stated information in the text rather than interpreting implicit meanings. When asked to draw conclusions or predict outcomes, many students reread the text repeatedly without attempting interpretation. Results from inferential reading tasks further confirmed this pattern. More than half responses when answering inferential questions.

This behavior suggests that students perceived reading comprehension as identifying surface-level information rather than constructing meaning through reasoning and interpretation. Interview data supported these findings. Several students expressed greater confidence when answering literal questions because the answers were clearly visible in the text. One student stated: If the answer is written in the text, I can answer it. But if I have to conclude, I am not confident because I am not sure. This strong reliance on literal comprehension limited students' engagement with deeper levels of text understanding and reduced their willingness to apply inferential strategies independently.

#### *Theme 2: Fear of Making Mistakes and Low Self-Confidence*

Fear of making mistakes emerged as a significant affective factor influencing students' participation in inferential reading activities. Observational data showed that when inferential questions were posed, only a small number of students volunteered responses, while most remained silent or avoided eye contact.

Interview responses indicated that students perceived inferential questions as challenging and risky. Many believed that such questions had only one correct answer and feared giving incorrect responses in front of their peers. One participant explained: I am afraid my answer is wrong, and my friends will laugh. So I prefer to keep silent. This fear contributed to low self-confidence and discouraged active participation. Even when students had ideas, they often hesitated to express them. Consequently, inferential reading activities became largely lecturer-centered, with limited student engagement.

*Theme 3: Limited Vocabulary and Language Proficiency*

Limited vocabulary knowledge was identified as another major obstacle to inferential reading. Classroom observations showed that students frequently paused reading to consult dictionaries or translation applications, which disrupted reading flow and hindered overall comprehension. Analysis of inferential reading tasks revealed that students struggled to understand key ideas due to their focus on individual words rather than contextual meaning. Several students reported difficulty drawing conclusions or making predictions because they did not fully understand the text. One student stated: I cannot conclude because I don't understand many words. I must translate first. This reliance on word-by-word translation limited students' ability to connect ideas across sentences and paragraphs, thereby constraining their inferential reasoning.

*Theme 4: Lack of Instructional Modeling and Strategy Awareness*

The findings also revealed that students had limited awareness of how inferential reading strategies should be applied. Observations indicated that inferential questions were often presented without explicit explanation or modeling of the reasoning process required.

Interview data showed that many students viewed prediction as mere guessing rather than as an evidence-based strategy. One student commented:

*"Prediction is just guessing, so I don't know how to make it correctly."*

This perception reflects insufficient instructional modeling. Although students showed greater engagement when guided examples were provided, they struggled to apply inferential strategies independently without consistent instructional support.

*Theme 5: Passive Classroom Participation*

The combined influence of literal reading habits, fear of mistakes, limited vocabulary, and lack of strategy awareness contributed to passive classroom participation. Observations revealed that most students waited for the lecturer's explanations rather than attempting to interpret texts independently.

Group discussions were often dominated by a small number of confident students, while others remained silent. One student stated:

*"I wait until the lecturer explains because I am not sure about my own answer."*

This passive behavior reduced opportunities for students to practice inferential reading skills and develop confidence as independent readers. In sum, the results demonstrate that students' difficulties in drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes stem from intertwined cognitive, affective, and instructional

factors. These challenges collectively limit students' engagement with inferential reading tasks in EFL classrooms.

#### **4. Discussion**

This study examined the challenges faced by EFL students in drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes during reading comprehension activities. The findings indicate that students' difficulties in inferential reading stem from the complex interaction of cognitive limitations, affective factors, and instructional practices. These results provide insights into the underlying processes that influence EFL learners' ability to engage with higher-order reading strategies.

**Cognitive Factors:** Students' strong reliance on literal comprehension aligns with prior research suggesting that EFL learners often equate reading comprehension with locating explicitly stated information rather than constructing meaning through inference (Bensalah & Gueroudj, 2020; Erni, 2021). From a cognitive perspective, drawing inferences requires readers to integrate textual information with prior knowledge, activate relevant schemata, and monitor comprehension processes. The participants' difficulty in engaging in these processes suggests limited metacognitive awareness, particularly in planning, monitoring, and evaluating reading strategies (Flavell, 1979; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). This underlines the need to explicitly teach students how to think while reading, including identifying textual clues, connecting ideas across sentences and paragraphs, and evaluating the plausibility of their inferences.

**Affective Factors:** Fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence were prominent affective barriers in this study. Many students hesitated to respond to inferential questions due to anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. These findings are consistent with second language acquisition research, which highlights that affective factors such as anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation can significantly impact language performance (Vongsawath et al., 2025). From a socio-cultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), learning is socially mediated, and students' reluctance to participate limited opportunities for scaffolded learning within their zone of proximal development. Therefore, classroom practices that encourage risk-taking, provide supportive feedback, and normalize mistakes as part of learning are critical for developing inferential reading skills.

**Language Proficiency:** Vocabulary limitations also emerged as a critical obstacle to inferential reading. Participants frequently relied on word-by-word translation, which disrupted reading flow and hindered comprehension of broader textual meanings. This finding supports previous research indicating that limited lexical knowledge constrains students' ability to integrate ideas across sentences and paragraphs, thereby affecting inference-making (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

To address this challenge, teachers should integrate targeted vocabulary instruction within reading activities, emphasizing contextual understanding and semantic relationships rather than isolated word memorization. Activities such as

pre-reading word mapping, semantic clustering, and guided vocabulary exercises can facilitate deeper comprehension and support inferential reasoning.

**Instructional Practices:** The study highlights the significant role of instructional practices in shaping students' inferential reading abilities. Students' perception of prediction as mere guessing reflects insufficient explicit instruction and modeling of inferential strategies. Reading strategy research emphasizes that learners benefit from observing how skilled readers generate meaning, connect textual clues, and make predictions based on evidence (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmermann, 2007). Without explicit modeling and guided practice, students struggled to apply these strategies independently. These findings underscore the importance of scaffolded instruction, where teachers demonstrate inferential thinking, provide structured support, and gradually transfer responsibility to students through practice and feedback.

**Classroom Participation:** Passive classroom participation emerged as a cumulative effect of cognitive, affective, and instructional challenges. Observations revealed that class discussions were often dominated by confident students, while others waited for the lecturer's explanation. Limited interaction reduces opportunities for collaborative meaning-making and peer-mediated scaffolding, which are essential for developing higher-order reading skills. Implementing collaborative activities, such as group predictions, peer discussions, and think-pair-share tasks, can create a supportive environment for practicing inferential strategies, increasing both engagement and confidence.

**Pedagogical Implications:** Overall, the findings suggest that enhancing EFL students' inferential reading skills requires an integrated instructional approach that addresses cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors simultaneously. Effective instruction should include:

**Explicit strategy instruction:** Teachers should model inferential reading strategies, explain reasoning processes, and provide guided practice before gradually transferring responsibility to learners.

1. **Metacognitive scaffolding:** Students should be taught to monitor their comprehension, evaluate their inferences, and reflect on their reasoning processes.
2. **Vocabulary support:** Pre-reading and contextual vocabulary activities should be incorporated to enhance comprehension and reduce reliance on literal word-by-word decoding.
3. **Affective support:** Classroom environments should encourage participation, normalize mistakes, and reduce anxiety to increase student confidence in applying inferential strategies.
4. **Collaborative learning:** Structured group activities and peer discussion can provide opportunities for social interaction, scaffolding, and joint problem-solving, aligning with socio-cultural learning principles.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study investigated the challenges faced by EFL students in drawing conclusions and predicting outcomes during inferential reading activities. The findings demonstrate that students' difficulties are shaped by the interaction of cognitive, affective, and instructional factors. Specifically, students tend to rely heavily on literal comprehension, experience fear of making mistakes, possess limited vocabulary knowledge, and lack awareness of inferential reading strategies. These factors collectively contribute to passive classroom participation and limited engagement with deeper levels of text comprehension.

The results highlight that inferential reading is not merely a linguistic skill but also a strategic and affective process. Without explicit instructional modeling and supportive learning environments, participants in this study struggled to move beyond surface-level understanding toward higher-order comprehension. Vocabulary limitations further restrict students' ability to integrate textual information and prior knowledge, which is essential for drawing conclusions and making predictions.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study underscores the importance of explicitly teaching inferential reading strategies in EFL classrooms. Lecturers are encouraged to model the reasoning process involved in making inferences, provide guided practice, and create a classroom atmosphere that reduces fear of making mistakes. Collaborative reading activities and formative feedback may also help increase students' confidence and active participation.

Although this study offers valuable insights, it is limited by its focus on a single institutional context and a relatively small number of participants. Future research may involve larger samples, different educational settings, or experimental designs to examine the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions in improving inferential reading skills.

In conclusion, addressing EFL students' inferential reading difficulties requires an integrated approach that attends to cognitive development, emotional support, and instructional practices. By fostering strategic awareness and confidence, EFL educators can better support students in developing deeper and more meaningful reading comprehension.

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