



## **Exploring the Cognitive and Social Benefits of Reading Skills Among 6th Semester Students of English Education at Hamzanwadi University**

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**ABSTRACT**

Reading is one of the four language skills that are very important to master, as it contributes not only to academic success but also to cognitive and social development. This study aims to explore the cognitive and social benefits obtained from reading skills among 6th semester students of the English Language Education Program at Hamzanwadi University. Using qualitative descriptive methods, data was collected through questionnaires (closed-ended and open-ended questions) validated by linguists and semi-structured interviews that had been tested for reliability. The research population was all semester 6 students of the English Education Study Program, Hamzanwadi University, which amounted to 120 students, with a sample of 12 students selected using purposive sampling techniques based on consistent reading activities. Data analysis uses thematic analysis through coding, categorization, and theme development stages. The findings show four main themes: (1) the improvement of critical thinking skills, (2) the development of vocabulary and language structure, (3) the improvement of social skills and participation, and (4) the formation of independent learning habits. This study concludes that reading skills significantly promote cognitive enrichment through improved analytical and linguistic skills, as well as improving students' ability to interact meaningfully with others in and out of the classroom. The implications of the study point to the need for the development of a more comprehensive reading curriculum and learning strategies that emphasize cognitive and social aspects in English language education.

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's era of ongoing social and academic transformation, reading is one of the most important skills that individuals can develop, especially for students taking academic paths. Reading is a thinking process that includes understanding, conveying, and interpreting the meaning of written symbols by involving vision, eye movements, mental speech, and memory (Harianto, 2020). Reading skills are the ability to understand, interpret, and decipher texts well (Faridah et al., 2023). (Annida Azhari Ritonga et al., 2023; Lathifah et al., 2017; Rinawati et al., 2020; Saputro et al., 2021; Zulfa, 2019)

Based on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 report, Indonesia ranks 71st out of 81 countries in reading ability, with a score of 359 which is still far below the OECD average of 476. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (2023) shows that only 30.2% of Indonesian students have the habit of reading non-academic books regularly, while 68.5% of students admit to having difficulty understanding academic texts in English. This condition shows the urgency of research on the benefits of reading at the higher education level, especially in the context of learning English.

Reading is a developmental process that begins with the skills of understanding words, sentences, and paragraphs in reading, understanding the content, and critically evaluating them. Reading is a process carried out by readers to get the message that the author wants to convey through the medium of words or written language (Hilda Melani Purba et al., 2023). This means that reading is not only the process of understanding the text but also taking the benefit or message that the writer wants to convey. Reading can increase knowledge and ideas, increase creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

Previous research has shown mixed findings on the benefits of reading in an educational context. Safira Nur Rahma et al. (2024) in a quantitative study of 200 students in Jakarta found a significant positive correlation ( $r=0.78$ ) between reading intensity and critical thinking skills, using the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal instrument. However, the study was limited to the cognitive aspect and did not explore the social dimension of reading. Madaminova (2023) conducted an experimental study on 60 English students in Uzbekistan, showing a 34% increase in cognitive test scores after a 12-week intensive reading program, but using a quantitative approach that could not capture the nuances of students' subjective experiences.

Meanwhile, Utomo et al. (2024) used a qualitative approach to examine the social impact of reading in 30 elementary school students, finding an increase in empathy and cooperation, but limited to the primary education context and not covering cognitive aspects in depth. The limitations of these studies lie in the partial focus (only cognitive or social), different contexts (basic or non-language education), and methodologies that cannot explore the complexity of the reading experience holistically.

In the context of sixth semester English Education students, the purpose of reading skills is not only as an academic tool, but also as a means of intellectual and social self-development. Ideally, reading should provide students with more than just completing academic assignments; It should also be to obtain information, increase knowledge, and

develop language skills. In addition, reading activities are also expected to provide an understanding that reading activities provide many benefits, such as cognitive and social benefits. Cognitively, reading improves critical thinking, comprehension, vocabulary, and the ability to process and analyze information, which are critical for academic success and lifelong learning (Moneta et al., 2023).

In addition, the purpose of reading also contributes to social skills such as understanding other people's perspectives, discussion, participation, and improving communication skills. Reading has many social benefits; by reading we can know how to communicate correctly, participate in the learning process, and be able to discuss in groups (Poster, 2021). Reading is one way to achieve these benefits. This means reading allows us to expand our knowledge and understanding of a wide range of topics, including cultures, perspectives, and new information. This means that reading skills in higher education are expected so that students can understand and realize that reading is an activity that provides many benefits that can lead to academic success. However, in practice, the lack of interest in reading is a factor that affects the low utilization of reading as a personal development tool.

The novelty of this research lies in a holistic approach that integrates the exploration of the cognitive and social benefits of reading simultaneously in the specific context of 6th semester English Education students. In contrast to previous research that tends to separate the two aspects or focus on different levels of education, this study uses an in-depth qualitative methodology to capture the complexity of the reading experience of students who have taken various reading courses (General Reading, Academic Reading, Reading for Professional Contexts, and Extensive Reading). The novelty of this research also lies in the context of vocational institutions in Eastern Indonesia which have unique characteristics in English language learning.

Based on the results of a questionnaire that has been distributed among English Education students, the reason why students have less interest in reading may be due to the fact that many of them are not yet fully aware of the cognitive and social benefits of reading. Some college students see reading only as an academic obligation, not as a habit that shapes their personality and mindset, especially in cognitive and social aspects. This may happen because in reading courses, some of them only complete assignments from lectures such as summarizing, looking for answers in the text, and then collecting them, so that after that they do not get any other benefits from the reading activity. This limited awareness leads them to view reading only as a class requirement, rather than as a valuable habit for personal and academic development (Namaziandost et al., 2024). On the other hand, there are many students who have good reading habits and show reading skills both in and out of the classroom tend to recognize and experience the benefits of reading more clearly.

From this case, researchers can conclude that there are several factors that arise in this study. First, students only engage with the text when required by the reading course, which limits the student's experience of the cognitive and social benefits of reading. Second, lecturers often only give assignments that make students only read to find answers

rather than to understand and without providing further insight into the benefits and impacts of better reading habits. Therefore, it is necessary to increase awareness for students who are not yet aware of the benefits of reading.

To address this problem, researchers must find appropriate ways to increase student awareness of how reading skills are related to the cognitive and social benefits of reading. Cognitive benefits include improved vocabulary, problem-solving, analytical thinking, and also social benefits such as participation, communication, and discussion. Seeing how important reading is to students' cognitive and social development, it is important to understand the factors that influence reading to encourage more meaningful engagement with reading. By identifying these aspects, this study aims to highlight the potential of reading as a tool for student development. It includes strategies for improving comprehension, developing an interest in reading, and providing deeper insights into the cognitive and social benefits of reading.

The practical implications of this research are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of the English Education curriculum, especially in designing more effective reading learning strategies. For lecturers, these findings could serve as a basis for developing teaching methods that not only focus on the technical aspects of reading but also optimize cognitive and social benefits. For educational institutions, this research can be a reference for a more comprehensive campus literacy development policy. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of language learning theories that integrate cognitive and social aspects in the context of higher education in Indonesia.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design to comprehensively explore the cognitive and social benefits of reading skills among 6th semester language education students at Hamzanwadi University. Lambert and Lambert (2012) state that the descriptive method is well suited for studies that aim to understand what participants experience and how they interpret those experiences. In the context of this research, this design will help uncover how students perceive and describe the cognitive and social benefits they derive from reading.

The population in this study is all students in the 6th semester of the English Education Study Program at Hamzanwadi University which totals 120 students, consisting of 4 classes (Class A: 30 students, Class B: 28 students, Class C: 32 students, and Class D: 30 students). The research sample consisted of 12 students for filling out questionnaires and 5 students for in-depth interviews. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) 6th semester students who have taken reading sequence courses (General Reading, Academic Reading, Reading for Professional Contexts), (2) have reading activities outside of lecture assignments at least 2 times a week, (3) actively participate in class discussions, and (4) are willing to participate in all stages of research. The selection of 6th semester students is based on the

consideration that they have had a fairly comprehensive reading experience and can provide a mature reflection on the cognitive and social benefits of reading.

The research instruments consisted of two types: (1) Structured questionnaires containing 25 questions (15 closed-ended questions using a 5-point Likert scale and 10 open-ended questions) designed to explore students' perceptions of the cognitive and social benefits of reading. The questionnaire has been validated by 3 linguists and education experts with a Content Validity Index (CVI) value of 0.89, indicating good validity. (2) Semi-structured interview guide consisting of 12 main questions with probe questions to dig deeper into the information. The reliability of the interview instruments was tested through inter-rater reliability with a Cohen's Kappa value of 0.85, indicating high consistency between researchers. Both instruments have gone through a pilot test on 5 5th semester students to ensure language clarity and content accuracy.

Data collection is carried out in three stages: (1) Preparation stage: research socialization to students, signing informed consent, and distribution of questionnaires in digital format through Google Forms. (2) Implementation stage: collection of questionnaire data for 2 weeks (November 15-28, 2024), selection of interview participants based on representative questionnaire responses, and implementation of semi-structured interviews individually for 45-60 minutes recorded with the consent of the participants. (3) Finalization stage: verbatim transcription of interviews, member checking for data validation, and data storage in a secure digital format.

Data analysis using thematic analysis follows the framework of Braun and Clarke (2022) which consists of 6 stages: (1) Familiarization with data: repeated reading of interview transcripts and responses to open questionnaires to understand the overall data. (2) Generating initial codes: identifying basic units of meaning through manual coding and using NVivo 12 software to organize the code. (3) Searching for themes: grouping the related codes to form the initial themes. (4) Reviewing themes: verifying and improving themes by returning them to the original data. (5) Defining and naming themes: provide a clear definition and proper name for each final theme. (6) Producing the report: compiling the report with the support of verbatim citations from the participants. To ensure credibility, data triangulation was carried out between questionnaires and interviews, as well as peer debriefing with research colleagues who are experienced in qualitative research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data collected from students in the sixth semester of the English Education Study Program through a questionnaire filled out by 12 students and semi-structured interviews with 5 students who were selected as participants (having representative answers in the questionnaire), several main themes were found that reflected the cognitive and social benefits of reading activities. Using thematic analysis, the researcher generated four main themes as follows:

1. Improved critical thinking skills (cognitive benefits)

Most participants stated that reading, particularly academic texts and English literature, helped them analyze information more deeply.

"When I read academic texts, I learned how to identify arguments and construct my own opinions logically." (Participant 5)

2. Improved vocabulary

Most students admitted to experiencing a significant improvement in their mastery of English vocabulary and grammar. They feel more confident.

"As I explained earlier, by reading books or texts in English, I can enrich my knowledge of new vocabulary, and I usually take notes." (Participant 3)

3. Improved social skills (social benefits)

Reading also provides benefits in the social aspect, especially in discussions and participation in class. Students feel more confident and ready to express their opinions because they have a better understanding of the reading material.

"Before I read outside of class and read material before class starts, I can confidently share ideas during group discussions or presentations. I feel more involved." (Participant 4)

4. Forming independent learning habits

Most of the participants stated that good reading habits encourage them to learn not only in class, but also independently learn many things outside of the classroom. They usually look for additional reading resources to deepen their understanding of a topic. One way is to share your reading results with friends and discuss interesting topics.

"I usually look for reading resources related to the topics studied in class. Reading makes me curious and understand many things. But when I find it difficult to understand, I will ask in class, both friends and lecturers." (Participant 1)

## Discussion

Based on the above results, this reinforces various relevant theories in the previous literature that stated that reading activities have many positive benefits, both cognitively and socially.

### 1. Cognitive benefits

The cognitive benefits of reading skills include improved critical thinking skills, vocabulary mastery, and understanding of language structures. This is in line with research (Safira Nur Rahma et al., 2024) which emphasizes that reading is not just a passive act of receiving information but is a complex cognitive process that involves the analysis, interpretation, evaluation, and synthesis of information from various sources. However, the findings of this study show a deeper nuance than the study of Rahma et al. which used a quantitative approach. While Rahma et al. found a statistical correlation between reading and critical thinking ( $r=0.78$ ), this study uncovered the specific mechanisms by which students develop analytical skills through reflective reading practice, as revealed in Participant 5's statement about "identifying arguments and constructing opinions logically."

These findings also support the argument (Madaminova, 2023) that reading activities can improve students' critical thinking skills, decision-making, information management, and memory retention. In contrast to Madaminova's study which used pre-posttest design in the context of Uzbekistan students, this study explores the subjective experiences of Indonesian students in developing cognitive abilities through reading. The findings complement Madaminova's study by providing insight into how students consciously use reading strategies to develop cognitive abilities, such as recording new vocabulary and associating reading with previous knowledge. Good reading habits can sharpen students' analytical and reflective abilities in an academic context.

### 2. Social benefits

From a social perspective, reading contributes to the development of empathy and communication skills, especially when students interact in group discussions. This is consistent with previous research by (Utomo et al., 2024) which found that group-based reading activities can foster empathy, cooperation, and social responsibility in students. Although Utomo et al.'s research was conducted on elementary school students, the findings of this study prove that the social benefits of reading remain relevant and even more complex at the higher education level. While Utomo et al. focused on the formation of basic social attitudes, the study uncovered more sophisticated dimensions such as argumentative ability in academic discussions and increased confidence in English-speaking communication, as expressed by Participant 4 about "sharing ideas confidently during group discussions."

The findings on the formation of independent learning habits (theme 4) are a unique contribution to this study that was not found in previous studies. This shows that at the higher education level, the benefits of reading are not only direct (cognitive and social) but also meta-cognitive, i.e. developing awareness of the learning process itself. This is in line with the theory of self-regulated learning which emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation and independent learning strategies in academic achievement. Although the research was conducted on elementary school students, the implications can be applied to higher education, including English language education students.

Overall, these findings suggest that reading is not only a tool for developing language skills, but also a means for character building, knowledge enhancement, and student academic achievement.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Theoretically, the findings of this study reinforce Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism which emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and cultural mediation. Reading activities followed by discussions and sharing experiences show how knowledge is constructed collaboratively. These findings also support schema theory which explains that reading comprehension depends on the reader's prior knowledge and experience, as seen from the way students relate reading to their academic and social context.

Practically, the results of this study have several important implications: (1) For curriculum development: it is necessary to design reading courses that not only focus on comprehension skills but also integrate activities that optimize cognitive and social benefits. (2) For learning strategies: lecturers need to implement an approach that encourages reflection and discussion in reading learning. (3) For the development of campus literacy programs: institutions need to design programs that facilitate the formation of a community of readers and an academic culture that supports sustainable reading habits.

### **Analysis of Interesting Findings**

One of the interesting findings is the emergence of students' meta-cognitive awareness of their own learning process, as revealed in the theme of independent learning habits. This shows that at the higher education level, students not only experience the benefits of reading directly, but also develop the ability to reflect and optimize their learning process. These findings indicate that reading learning in college has the potential to develop lifelong learners who can learn independently and sustainably.



## CONCLUSION

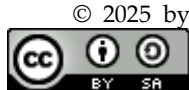
Good reading habits and skills play an important role in shaping cognitive and social development among English language education students. At Hamzanwadi University, sixth-semester students gain cognitive benefits such as improved analytical thinking and language skills, as well as social benefits such as readiness and confidence in participation, discussion, and collaboration. These findings suggest that integrating extensive and interactive reading activities into the curriculum can encourage an increase in students' interest in reading and also be a means of self-development for students, as they realize the benefits of reading in and out of the classroom.

This research contributes to the development of a language learning theory that integrates cognitive and social aspects, as well as provides empirical evidence on the holistic benefits of reading in the context of English language higher education in Indonesia. The limitation of this study lies in the relatively small sample size and focus on one institution, so the generalization of the findings needs to be done carefully. Further research is recommended to use a mixed-methods approach with a larger sample and cover a wide range of institutions to confirm these findings as well as explore contextual factors that influence the cognitive and social benefits of reading.

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