

Investigating EFL Learners' Perception of English Journal Article Structure

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceptions of EFL learners in the Islamic Education Department regarding reading English journal articles, with a particular focus on affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects. This study employed a descriptive quantitative method involving 54 respondents. Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms, which included Likert-scale items. The data were analyzed using simple percentage-based descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that while the majority (64.8%) of students did not have high anxiety in reading English articles, while 50% perceived English journal articles as difficult. Cognitively, most students (80%) understood the purpose and structure of articles, though a smaller group struggled with detailed structural awareness. Behaviorally, students reported benefits such as vocabulary improvement (87%) and acknowledged the importance of English journal articles, though only some consistently completed readings or compared article structures (50%). These insights suggest that although students generally recognize the relevance of English journal articles to their academic growth, targeted support is still needed to address specific affective and cognitive barriers to their use.

Keywords: *EFL learners, English journal articles, academic reading, reading perception*



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A. INTRODUCTION

In today's global academic environment, the ability to read and understand English-language journal articles has become a crucial skill for university students, particularly those in non-English-speaking countries. English serves as the primary medium for disseminating scholarly knowledge across diverse disciplines, including education, religious studies, and the social sciences (Hyland, 2009). Students are increasingly expected not only to possess general reading proficiency but also to understand the structural conventions of academic texts. This skill is particularly important in Islamic Education Department, where students are now required to engage with English academic sources to support their studies in Islamic pedagogy, educational theory, and research methodology.

This study uniquely contributes by exploring structural perception in an Islamic EFL context. Students in the Islamic Education Department at one university in Makassar are

introduced to English academic texts through a course called *Reading Comprehension*, which includes journal articles. However, many of these students are beginner-level EFL learners with limited exposure to English academic writing. Although they are expected to analyze journal articles as part of their coursework, they often encounter significant difficulties, particularly in understanding the rhetorical organization of these texts. The IMRaD format, which is the Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion, is commonly used in academic writing but is unfamiliar to many of these students. Without a clear understanding of each section's communicative purpose, learners may misinterpret content, overlook important information, or fail to grasp the logical progression of arguments (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Swales, 1990).

The students' academic background compounds reading challenges. The students of Islamic Education Department are typically more accustomed to reading religious texts in Arabic and Indonesian, such as classical commentaries or moral narratives, which follow different rhetorical traditions. Unlike the linear, evidence-based logic of English academic writing, Islamic scholarly texts often emphasize cyclical argumentation, narrative development, or moral reflection (Kirkpatrick, 2007). This disconnect can hinder students' ability to navigate journal articles, affecting their academic performance and engagement with scholarly work.

Given those challenges, a deeper understanding of how EFL learners perceive the structure of English journal articles is needed. While previous studies have addressed general reading difficulties among EFL students (Hirvela, 2004; Nation, 2001), few have focused on students' awareness of academic article structure. Even fewer studies have examined this issue in the context of Islamic education, where distinct textual traditions influence students' reading expectations and strategies. Understanding learners' perceptions of English academic text structure can shed light on how they engage with scholarly literature and where they encounter the most difficulty.

Despite the recognized importance of academic reading, many EFL learners receive insufficient instruction in how to approach academic genres. EFL reading classes often emphasize vocabulary development or general comprehension strategies, rather than fostering genre awareness and critical reading skills (Hyland, 2004). As a result, students may rely on translation, skip difficult sections, or focus only on easily understood parts of the text. While these strategies may offer short-term support, they limit deeper comprehension and hinder academic development. Recent research confirms that learners who are not explicitly trained in genre recognition often rely on surface-level reading strategies and fail to develop the skills needed for critical engagement with academic texts (Ali et al., 2022). Furthermore, the use of

reading strategies has been shown to vary based on proficiency level and text type (Li, Ahmad, & Jamil, 2024). While repeated reading can improve fluency, structural awareness remains a limiting factor for meaningful comprehension (Husni, Sunggingwati, & Kalukar, 2025).

Therefore, this study aims to explore how EFL learners in an Islamic university in Makassar perceive the structure of English academic journal articles. Specifically, it seeks to assess students' awareness and understanding of article organization, with a particular focus on affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects. By focusing on learner perceptions, this research contributes valuable insights that can inform reading instruction practices, curriculum development, and academic literacy support in Islamic higher education settings. Ultimately, enhancing students' ability to navigate English journal articles will not only improve their academic performance but also support their participation in global scholarly discourse.

B. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate EFL learners' perceptions and understanding of the structure of English academic journal articles. A descriptive quantitative design was selected to collect measurable and objective data regarding students' awareness of academic text organization, particularly the IMRaD structure (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion). The goal of the research was not to test hypotheses but to portray participants' familiarity and perceived difficulties in reading English journal articles.

Respondents

The target population in this study consisted of students from batch 2024 or the first year students enrolled in the Islamic Education Department of one of the Islamic universities in Makassar. They had previously taken a Reading Comprehension course as part of their learning curriculum. All respondents were beginner-level EFL learners with varying degrees of experience in reading English academic texts. These students were considered relevant participants due to their exposure to English journal articles through their coursework. Of those students, 54 responded to the questionnaire, forming the research sample. The sample was selected using convenience sampling, as participation was voluntary and based on the accessibility of students during the data collection period.

Data Source

The primary data for this research were collected through a questionnaire developed specifically for this study, administered via Google Forms (G-form). The instrument was based on established frameworks for academic literacy and the structure of journal articles. The questionnaire focused on awareness and understanding of English article structure, comprising 10 Likert-scale items. Those items were divided into three aspects: affective (items 2, 5, 8); cognitive (items 1, 3, 6); and behavioural (items 4, 7, 9, 10).

Research Procedure

The research was carried out in several stages between March and May 2025. First, permission was obtained from the department head to conduct the study among Islamic Education students. Next, the questionnaire was shared via institutional emails and WhatsApp groups to ensure accessibility and timely responses. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights to confidentiality, and that their participation was voluntary. The questionnaire link remained open for two weeks, during which students could submit their responses at their convenience. To ensure a high response rate, follow-up reminders were sent on a weekly basis. Once the data collection phase concluded, the researcher checked the dataset for completeness and duplicate entries before initiating data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using descriptive statistical techniques in Excel, focusing on percentages, means, and standard deviations to represent the students' questionnaire responses. The resulting quantitative data offered a comprehensive overview of how EFL learners in the Islamic Education Department perceive the structure of English academic journal articles.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reading academic journal articles in English is an essential yet often challenging task for students, particularly for those studying in non-native English contexts. This study examined students' perceptions, confidence, and challenges in engaging with English-language academic articles, particularly those related to Islamic topics. Through a 10-item questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale, the study captures various dimensions of students' experiences, including their understanding of article structure, vocabulary development, reading habits, and emotional responses such as anxiety or confidence. The following descriptive statistics present

the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) for each item, providing insight into the areas where students feel confident and where they may require additional support.

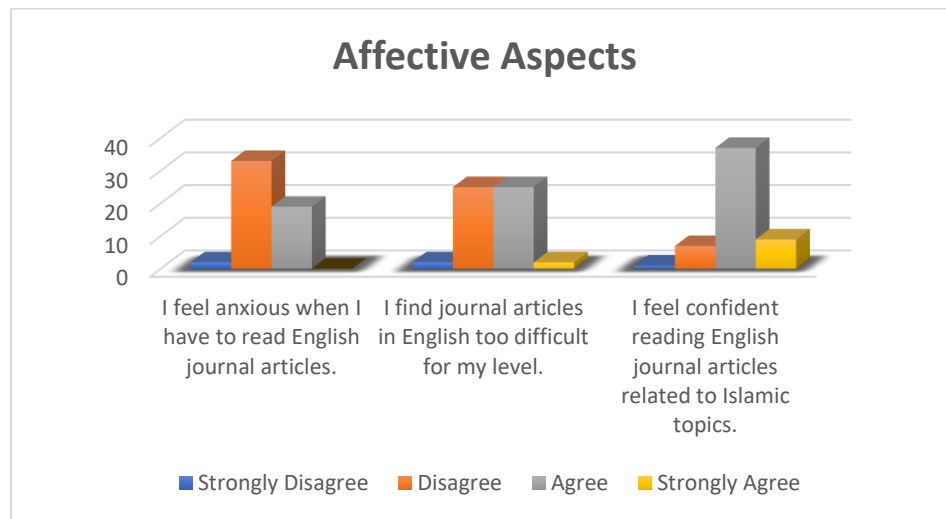
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Learners' Perceptions of Reading English Journal Articles

No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I understand what an academic journal article is.	2.87	0.58
2	I feel anxious when I have to read English journal articles.	2.31	0.54
3	I can identify the main idea in an English journal article.	2.67	0.64
4	Reading journal articles helps me improve my English vocabulary.	3.18	0.80
5	I find journal articles in English too difficult for my level.	2.50	0.64
6	I know the purpose of each section in a journal article.	2.72	0.56
7	I usually finish reading the whole article when assigned.	2.92	0.70
8	I feel confident reading English journal articles related to Islamic topics.	3.00	0.61
9	I compare the structure of journal articles with other texts I have read.	2.57	0.69
10	I believe that learning how to read journal articles is essential for my studies.	3.24	0.75

The descriptive results reveal varied familiarity with English journal articles. While students generally acknowledged the importance of reading academic journal articles for their studies ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.75$), and reported improved vocabulary through journal reading ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.80$), lower mean scores were observed in areas such as anxiety when reading English articles ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 0.54$) and difficulty understanding academic texts ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.64$). These findings suggest a gap between students' recognition of the value of journal reading and their perceived readiness or comfort in engaging with such texts.

Affective Aspects of Learners' Perception in Reading English Journal Articles

This section presents the affective responses of EFL learners in Islamic Education Department toward reading English journal articles. The data reveal students' feelings of anxiety, perceived difficulty, and confidence, particularly when engaging with English academic texts related to Islamic topics.

Figure 1. Affective Aspects of Learners' Responses

The first item in Figure 1 revealed the emotional response to anxiety when reading academic texts. The item asked whether respondents felt anxious when reading English journal articles. There were 2 respondents (3.7%) who strongly disagreed, 33 (61.1%) who disagreed, 19 (35.2%) who agreed, and none who strongly agreed. These findings indicated that while a majority of students (64.8%) did not feel anxious, a considerable proportion (35.2%) did experience anxiety. This result suggests that although anxiety may not be a dominant affective barrier, it remains present in a substantial subset of students and may affect their engagement with academic reading tasks (Zhou, 2019). In line with this, Grabe (2020) emphasized the role of emotional regulation in developing reading fluency in second-language contexts, especially when complex academic texts are involved. Moreover, when students lack understanding of rhetorical purposes, they may feel anxious or discouraged, which can inhibit reading motivation (Hyland, 2004).

In terms of perceived difficulty, students were asked whether they found English journal articles too difficult for their level. Responses were more balanced: 2 students (3.7%) strongly disagreed, 25 (46.3%) disagreed, another 25 (46.3%) agreed, and 2 (3.7%) strongly agreed. This finding indicated an even split in perception: while nearly half of the students (50%) believe the texts were too difficult, the other half did not. This ambivalence suggests variability in students' self-perceived reading proficiency and could be influenced by prior exposure, vocabulary knowledge, and topic familiarity (Grabe, 2020). Li, Ahmad, and Jamil (2023) argued that factors like syntactic complexity, unfamiliar terminology, and low reading fluency exacerbate this cognitive load. Furthermore, Yamashita (2015) highlighted that individual variation in vocabulary and syntactic awareness can significantly influence how

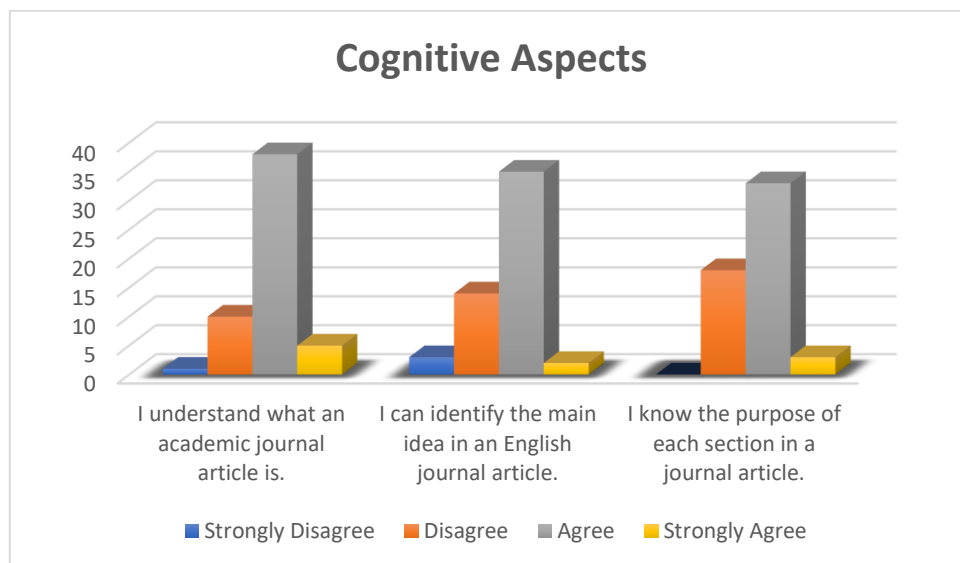
learners perceive the difficulty of learning reading. The presence of a notable portion of students who perceive difficulty may contribute to lower confidence and motivation, supporting the notion that affective filters play a role in second language reading comprehension (Krashen, 1982).

Interestingly, when asked about confidence, especially in reading articles related to Islamic topics, students responded more positively. Only one student (1.9%) strongly disagreed, seven (13%) disagreed, while thirty-seven (68.5%) agreed, and nine (16.7%) strongly agreed. Thus, a significant majority (85.2%) expressed confidence when reading English journal articles relevant to their discipline. This result suggested that topic relevance and content familiarity play a key role in reducing affective barriers and enhancing learner confidence (Brantmeier, 2005; Saito et al., 2018). Study by Ali et al. (2022) confirmed that content relevance is positively correlated with reading motivation among EFL learners. When students are more familiar with the subject matter, such as Islamic concepts, they are likely to feel more comfortable navigating complex English texts, which in turn strengthens their reading resilience.

Overall, the findings highlighted the complex affective landscape faced by EFL learners in academic reading. While anxiety was not a widespread issue for most, perceived difficulty still posed a challenge for half of the respondents. On the other hand, content familiarity emerged as a powerful motivator, boosting learners' confidence and potentially mediating the effects of difficulty or anxiety. These insights highlighted the importance of integrating thematically relevant texts in EFL instruction to foster affective engagement and promote more in-depth reading comprehension. These findings aligned with the existing literature, which advocated for genre- and content-specific reading instruction in EAP contexts (Hyland, 2019; Li et al., 2023).

Cognitive Aspects in Reading English Journal Articles

This section highlights the cognitive aspects of reading English journal articles among EFL learners in the Islamic Education Department. The focus is on students' perceived ability to understand the nature of academic texts, identify key ideas, and recognize the function of an article.

Figure 2. Cognitive Aspects of Learnes' Responses

The first statement on Figure 2 revealed whether learners understood what an academic journal article was. Responses were largely affirmative: 1 respondent (1.9%) strongly disagreed, 10 (18.5%) disagreed, 38 (70.4%) agreed, and 5 (9.3%) strongly agreed. With nearly 80% indicating agreement, this result suggested that the majority of learners possessed a foundational awareness of what constitutes an academic journal article. This finding aligns with Swales (1990) and Ali et al. (2022), who noted that learners unfamiliar with genre conventions often struggle to recognize rhetorical moves, which hinders their comprehension and ability to locate key information. This finding also supported Anderson's (1999) theory of schema activation, which emphasized the role of prior knowledge in text comprehension. Thus, when students are familiar with academic conventions, they are more likely to engage with texts in a meaningful way.

Furthermore, in terms of identifying the main idea in an English journal article, 3 students (5.6%) strongly disagreed, 14 (25.9%) disagreed, 35 (64.8%) agreed, and 2 (3.7%) strongly agreed. While the majority (68.5%) believed they could extract the central message, a considerable portion (31.5%) expressed doubt or uncertainty. This gap indicated variability in students' ability to employ reading strategies, such as skimming, inferring, or recognizing thesis statements, skills emphasized in Grabe's (2020) model of strategic reading. The results suggest a need for instructional support to help students efficiently locate and interpret core ideas within complex academic texts.

The third item assessed students' knowledge of the purpose of each section in a journal article. None strongly disagreed, but 18 (33.3%) disagreed, 33 (61.1%) agreed, and 3 (5.6%) strongly agreed. Although the majority (66.7%) report some level of understanding, the fact

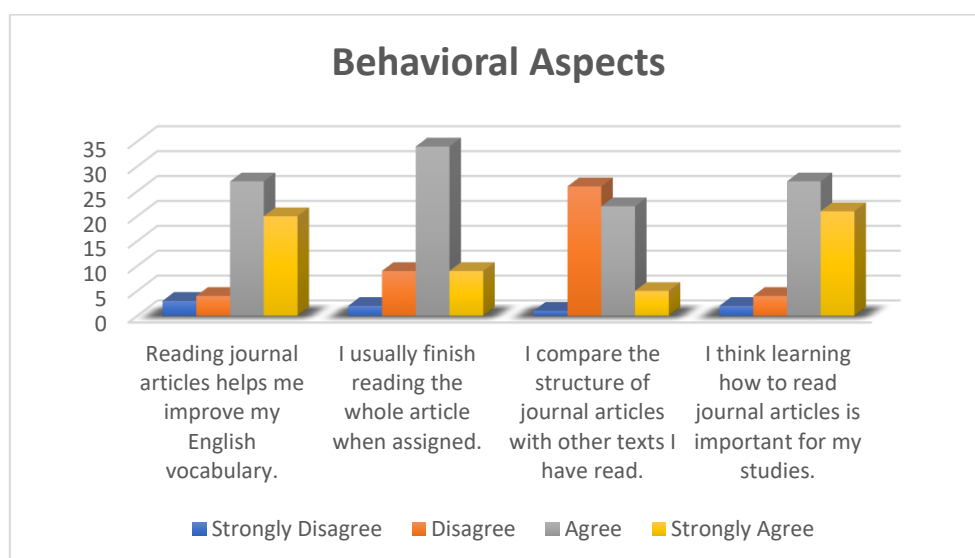
that one-third of respondents disagree indicates a notable area of concern. As highlighted by Swales and Feak (2012), genre awareness, specifically understanding the rhetorical moves and functions of different sections, is essential for academic literacy. Students who lack this structural awareness may struggle to navigate and comprehend research texts, particularly when engaging with Introduction, Method, or Discussion sections.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while learners generally demonstrate readiness in reading English journal articles, gaps remain in deeper strategic and structural comprehension. This statement resonates with the literature on academic literacy, which underscores the importance of explicit instruction in text structure and reading strategies (Alderson, 2000; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Moreover, given that these students are engaging with texts in a second language and within a specific disciplinary context, such as Islamic education, pedagogical scaffolding should be sensitive to both linguistic and content-based challenges.

Behavioral Aspects in Reading English Journal Articles

This section presents the behavioral tendencies of EFL learners in the Islamic Education Department regarding their reading practices of English journal articles. These behaviors reflect students' engagement, reading habits, and perceived importance of academic reading in their language learning process. Behavioral aspect data are presented as follows.

Figure 3. Behavioral Aspects of Learners' Responses



The first item of Figure 3 assessed whether students believed that reading journal articles helped improve their English vocabulary. The responses were positive: 3 (5.6%) strongly disagreed, 4 (7.4%) disagreed, 27 (50%) agreed, and 20 (37%) strongly agreed. This

result meant that an overwhelming majority (87%) recognized the vocabulary-enriching potential of reading academic texts. This finding aligned with Nation's (2001) assertion that extensive exposure to academic language significantly contributed to vocabulary development, particularly when learners repeatedly encounter high-frequency and domain-specific words in context.

Regarding the second item, students were asked whether they usually finish reading the entire article when assigned. The result revealed that 2 (3.7%) strongly disagreed, 9 (16.7%) disagreed, 34 (63%) agreed, and 9 (16.7%) strongly agreed. Most respondents (79.7%) indicated they tend to complete assigned readings. This result suggested a high level of academic responsibility and persistence among students, although a small percentage may still struggle with motivation or reading stamina. This finding aligned with Grabe and Stoller's (2011) view that behavioral engagement, including task completion and time on task, is essential for successful academic reading.

The third item measured whether students compare the structure of journal articles with other texts they have read. Only 1 (1.9%) strongly disagreed, 26 (48.1%) disagreed, 22 (40.7%) agreed, and 5 (9.3%) strongly agreed. This result indicated that just over half of the students (50%) engage in structural comparison. Such behavior reflected a metacognitive awareness of genre conventions, a crucial skill in academic literacy (Hyland, 2004). However, the large proportion of learners who disagreed suggested a need for more explicit instruction in recognizing and analyzing the structural features of academic writing, particularly for novice readers in EFL contexts.

The final item focused on whether learners believed that learning how to read journal articles is important for their studies. Responses were overwhelmingly positive: 2 (3.7%) strongly disagreed, 4 (7.4%) disagreed, 27 (50%) agreed, and 21 (38.9%) strongly agreed. With nearly 89% agreement, this reflects a strong awareness of the relevance of academic reading skills in their educational journey. This result supported the argument by Wallace (1992) and Carrell (1991) that effective academic reading was not only a language skill but a critical part of becoming a successful member of the academic discourse community.

In summary, the behavioral data suggest that most students have reading habits, perceive journal reading as beneficial for vocabulary learning, and value the skill in their academic studies. However, engagement in analyzing text structure suggests the need for a pedagogical emphasis on critical reading strategies. These results reinforce the call from the literature for integrated instruction that targets both the practical and analytical aspects of academic reading.

D. CONCLUSION

This study examined the perception of English journal article structure among EFL learners at an Islamic university, focusing on the affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects. Affective responses revealed that 85.2% of students were more interested in reading when topics aligned with Islamic themes, nearly half of the learners (50%) believe the English texts were too difficult, yet 35.2% admitted to feeling anxious when engaging with unfamiliar English academic articles, indicating emotional barriers that may hinder comprehension. Cognitively, learners demonstrated a solid grasp of understanding journal article, with nearly 80% indicating agreement a foundational awareness of what constitutes an academic journal article. Approximately 68.5% able to identify main topics and 66.7% understanding the article's objective of each section. From a behavioural perspective, 87% believed that reading journal articles improved their vocabulary, 79.7% reported that they usually completed assigned readings, 50% actively compared journal structures with other readings, indicating limited use of deeper analytical strategies, and nearly 89% acknowledged the importance of learning how to read such texts. These findings suggest that while students show positive attitudes and engage in active reading behaviours, they require additional instructional support to comprehend complex academic structures and adopt critical reading strategies, thereby fully engaging with English scholarly texts. Future studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach to further explore the relationship between learners' learning awareness and academic success.

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