



Students' Perception of Using Reading Matrix to Enhance EFL Academic Reading Comprehension in Extensive Reading Classes

Syifa Annisa Rismawati¹, Christianti Tri Hapsari²

^{1,2} Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

Corresponding Author :  rsyifaannisa@students.unnes.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Reading plays an essential role in higher education, particularly in EFL contexts where students are required to comprehend complex academic texts. However, many students experience difficulties due to limited vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and insufficient background knowledge, which often hinder their reading comprehension. To address this issue, the Reading Matrix has been introduced to support students in organizing and processing information. Therefore, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of using the Reading Matrix in supporting academic reading and to identify the challenges they encounter when completing it. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design, involving university students in an Extensive Reading class. Data were collected through close-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that the Reading Matrix helps students organize information, compare ideas, identify relationships, focus on key information, connect ideas, and support overall understanding. However, challenges related to vocabulary, sentence complexity, and background knowledge remain. These results suggest that the Reading Matrix is useful, but its effectiveness depends on additional instructional support.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

06 April 2026

Revised

05 May 2026

Accepted

18 May 2026

Key Word

Reading Matrix, Academic Reading, EFL Students, Extensive Reading, Reading Comprehension.

How to cite

<https://pusdikra-publishing.com/index.php/jetl>



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INTRODUCTION

Reading plays a fundamental role in higher education, where much of the learning process depends on students' ability to understand written materials. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, reading becomes even more essential because it serves as a means for students to access academic knowledge while simultaneously developing their language proficiency (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). University students are required to read textbooks, research articles, and other academic texts that contain complex ideas and specialized vocabulary. Therefore, academic reading is not merely about recognizing words, but also

involves understanding, interpreting, and integrating information to construct meaning.

Reading comprehension is a central component of academic reading and is understood as an active process in which readers integrate new information with prior knowledge and identify relationships among ideas. Skilled readers use various strategies to monitor and regulate their understanding, which helps them manage comprehension difficulties and construct meaning more effectively (Muijselaar et al., 2017; Rastegar et al., 2017). However, in EFL contexts, this process becomes more demanding because learners must simultaneously deal with linguistic and cognitive challenges. When appropriate strategies are not employed, comprehension becomes limited, particularly when students are dealing with long or complex academic texts.

Academic reading, therefore, presents significant challenges for EFL learners. Students often struggle with limited vocabulary knowledge, complex sentence structures, and insufficient background knowledge (Alderson, 2000), all of which make comprehension more difficult. In the context of Extensive Reading (ER), these challenges may become more pronounced, especially when students read independently without sufficient guidance, often resulting in only surface-level understanding. Therefore, appropriate instructional support is needed to help students process academic texts more effectively and become more strategic readers.

The Extensive Reading approach encourages learners to read a wide range of texts for general understanding and enjoyment, emphasizing fluency and learner autonomy (Renandya, 2021). While this approach provides meaningful exposure to authentic texts, students still require structured tools to help them analyze, organize, and retain the information they encounter.

To address these challenges, instructional support tools are needed to help students process reading materials in a more structured way. One commonly used tool is the Graphic Organizers (GOs), which support reading comprehension by visually representing information and helping learners structure ideas from a text (Albufalasa, 2019). Graphic Organizers may reduce cognitive load and help learners identify relationships among ideas more clearly (Guo et al., 2020). Previous studies also show that graphic organizers can enhance reading comprehension by helping students organize and connect information during reading activities (Hernández-chérrez & Hidalgo-, 2020; Qi & Jiang, 2021).

Among various graphic organizers, the matrix is particularly relevant for academic reading because its tabular structure helps learners compare, organize, categorize, and synthesize information across texts (Kiewra et al., 1988, 1991; Schwartz & Fattaleh, 1972). The matrix allows learners to compare and contrast

ideas while organizing complex information in a systematic way (Graney, 1992; Robinson & Kiewra, 1995). It also supports learners in identifying patterns, relationships, and key information across texts, which are important processes in academic reading (Manoli & Papadopoulou, 2012; Robinson & Schraw, 1994).

In the context of this study, the Reading Matrix is adapted from these theoretical concepts. It functions as a practical tool to help students organize information from academic texts during Extensive Reading activities. By completing the matrix, students focus on key aspects of each text, summarize essential information, and reflect on relationships among texts. These processes may promote analytical thinking and deeper comprehension.

To guide the analysis, this study draws on two complementary perspectives. First, this study draws on Alderson's (2000) reading difficulties in EFL contexts, including limited vocabulary knowledge, complex sentence structures, and insufficient background knowledge. This framework is used to analyze the challenges experienced by students when reading academic texts. Second, the Reading Matrix is viewed as a cognitive support tool that facilitates how students organize, compare, and process information during reading activities, which forms the basis for analyzing students' perceptions in this study.

Although previous studies have examined the use of graphic organizers in reading instruction, there is still limited research focusing specifically on the use of the matrix in academic reading contexts. Previous studies have shown that graphic organizers are effective in helping students identify main ideas and improve reading comprehension. For instance, Damayanti (2019) found that the use of graphic organizers in Extensive Reading classes improved students' reading comprehension. Similarly, Imsa-ard (2022) reported that Thai EFL students who used graphic organizers demonstrated better comprehension and more positive attitudes toward reading. However, these studies mainly focus on graphic organizers in general rather than the matrix as a specific tool. Therefore, little is known about how EFL learners perceive the use of a Reading Matrix in academic reading within Extensive Reading classes in Indonesia.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore EFL students' perceptions of using a Reading Matrix to support academic reading comprehension in Extensive Reading classes. It also seeks to identify the challenges students experience when completing the matrix. By examining these aspects, this study contributes to a better understanding of how structured visual tools can support comprehension, promote reading autonomy, and enhance academic literacy in EFL contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design supported by quantitative data from a close-ended questionnaire. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aimed to explore and interpret students' perceptions of using a Reading Matrix in Extensive Reading classes. According to Sugiyono (2013), qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena in natural settings and emphasizes meaning rather than generalization. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were used to provide an overview of students' perceptions before conducting a more in-depth qualitative analysis.

The participants of this study were 21 eighth-semester students from an English Program at a university in Indonesia. They were selected using purposive sampling, as they had previously taken an Extensive Reading course in their fifth semester during the 2024/2025 academic year, in which the Reading Matrix was introduced. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon being studied (Palinkas et al., 2015). All participants voluntarily took part in this study, and ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, were ensured.

Data were collected using two instruments: a close-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 18 items measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) (Ary et al., 2010). It was developed based on two theoretical frameworks, reading difficulties in EFL contexts by Alderson (2000) and the function of the Reading Matrix identified in previous studies, particularly related to organizing, comparing, contrasting, connecting, and processing information across texts. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants. Semi-structured interviews allow respondents to express their ideas freely while enabling the researcher to maintain focus on the research topic (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Each interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes and was conducted online. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis.

The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly percentages, to summarize students' responses to each item. The results were presented in tables to show the overall tendency of students' perceptions toward the use of the Reading Matrix. The interview data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014) which consists of three steps: data condensation/reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The researcher first selected and simplified relevant data from the interview transcripts. Then, the data were organized into

themes and presented in narrative form. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by comparing the interview results with the questionnaire data to ensure consistency.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study on students' perceptions of the use of the Reading Matrix as well as the challenges in academic reading. The findings are derived from two sources: the close-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire results provide quantitative evidence regarding students' perceptions and challenges, while the interview data offer deeper insights into students' experiences when using the Reading Matrix during Extensive Reading activities.

The findings are organized into two main sections. The first section discusses students' perceptions of the functions of the Reading Matrix, while the second section presents the challenges encountered by students.

Students' Perceptions of Using the Reading Matrix

Organizing Information Clearly

Table 1.
Organizing Information Clearly

No.	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	The Reading Matrix helps me organize basic information clearly.	4.8%	4.8%	9.5%	38.1%	42.9%

Table 1 shows that most students perceived the Reading Matrix as helpful in organizing information from academic articles clearly. A majority of respondents agreed (38.1%) or strongly agreed (42.9%) that the matrix helped them organize basic information systematically.

One participant explained:

"It is easier to find basic information using the Reading Matrix because the information is organized in a table. I can easily look at the columns to see the details of each article."

The Reading Matrix helped students organize and access information more systematically during reading activities.

Comparing and Contrasting Information Across Articles

Table 2.
Comparing and Contrasting Information Across Articles

No.	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
2	The Reading Matrix helps me compare and	0%	4.8%	9.5%	33.3%	52.4%

contrast ideas across
 different academic texts.

Table 2 indicates that students generally perceived the Reading Matrix as helpful for comparing and contrasting information across academic articles. More than half the respondents (52.4%) strongly agreed, while 33.3% agreed with the statements.

One participant stated:

“Because the Reading Matrix is arranged in a table form, it is easier to differentiate between the articles and compare their contents.”

The Reading Matrix supported students in comparing and evaluating information across texts.

Identifying Relationships Among Ideas Across Articles

Table 3.

Identifying Relationships Among Ideas Across Articles

No.	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
3	The Reading Matrix helps me identify relationships among ideas in academic texts.	4.8%	0%	4.8%	61.9%	28.6%

Students showed positive perceptions across multiple functions of the Reading Matrix. Most students agreed that the Reading Matrix helped them identify relationships among ideas across academic articles. A majority of respondents (61.9%) agreed, while 28.6% strongly agreed with the statement.

One participant reported:

“I can see how the research questions are connected with the findings and whether the articles have similar context.”

The Reading Matrix helped students identify relationships among ideas across texts.

Focusing Key Information

Table 4.

Focusing on Key Information

No.	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
4	The Reading Matrix helps me focus on important information rather than details.	4.8%	0%	19%	38.1%	38.1%

Table 4 shows that most students perceived the Reading Matrix as helpful in focusing on important information from academic articles. Both the agree and strongly agree responses accounted for 38.1%

One participant explained:

“By looking at the matrix, I can easily find the information that I need without rereading the whole article again.”

The Reading Matrix helped students focus on key information more efficiently during reading activities.

Connecting Ideas Across Different Articles

Table 5.

Connecting Ideas Across Different Articles

No.	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
5	The Reading Matrix helps me connect information from different articles	0%	4.8%	9.5%	52.4%	33.3%

Table 5 indicates that students perceived the Reading Matrix as helpful in connecting ideas across different academic articles. More than half of the respondents (52.4%) agreed, while 33.3% strongly agreed with the statement.

One participant stated:

“When the information is written clearly in the matrix, it helps me understand how the articles connect to each other.”

The Reading Matrix supported students in integrating and connecting information across texts.

Supporting Understanding of Academic Articles

Table 6.

Supporting Understanding of Academic Articles

No.	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
6	The Reading Matrix supports my understanding of academic texts	0%	0%	23.8%	47.6%	28.6%

As shown in table 6, students generally perceived the Reading Matrix as supportive of their understanding of academic texts. Nearly half of the respondents (47.6%) agreed, while 28.6% strongly agreed that using the Reading Matrix improves their comprehension.

One participant explained:

“The Reading Matrix helps me understand academic articles because the important information is summarized in one place.”

The Reading Matrix supported students’ understanding by helping them manage information more systematically.

Challenges in Completing the Reading Matrix

Limited Vocabulary Knowledge

Table 7.

Limited Vocabulary Knowledge

No.	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Limited academic vocabulary makes it difficult for me to understand the research questions of journal articles.	0%	4.8%	28.6%	38.1%	28.6%
2	I find it hard to understand the technical or methodological terms in the data collection section.	4.8%	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%	9.5%
3	Limited vocabulary makes it difficult for me to identify the main findings of an article.	0%	14.3%	28.6%	38.1%	19%
4	I struggle to summarize information in the Reading Matrix due to limited academic vocabulary.	0%	14.3%	47.6%	38.1%	0%

The questionnaire results across several items indicate that vocabulary limitations pose a significant challenge for students in understanding academic articles. These difficulties occur in understanding research questions, interpreting technical or methodological terms, identifying main findings, and summarizing information in the Reading Matrix. Overall, 38.1% of the respondents agreed and 28.6% strongly agreed that limited vocabulary affects their comprehension.

One participant stated:

“Sometimes limited vocabulary makes it difficult for me to understand some parts of the article, so I need to check the meaning of unfamiliar words.”

Limited vocabulary knowledge affected students' ability to interpret and summarize academic texts effectively.

Complex Sentence Structures

Table 8.
Complex Sentence Structures

No.	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Long and complex sentences make it difficult for me to understand the research questions and focus of the study.	9.5%	28.6%	14.3%	38.1%	9.5%
2	I find it difficult to understand the type of research because the explanation is written in complex sentences.	4.8%	33.3%	14.3%	38.1%	9.5%
3	Complex sentence structures make it hard for me to understand the data analysis procedures described in the article.	4.8%	28.6%	14.3%	47.6%	4.8%
4	I need to reread sentences several times before I can complete the Reading Matrix correctly.	4.8%	9.5%	14.3%	42.9%	28.6%

The questionnaire results also show that complex sentence structures present a considerable challenge for students. Across several items, agreement level ranged from 38.1% to 47.6%, showing that a substantial proportion of students experienced difficulty in processing texts with complex syntactic structures. In addition, a notable percentage of students (42.9% agreed and 28.6% strongly agreed) reported that they needed to reread sentences several times before they could complete the Reading Matrix.

One participant stated:

"Long sentences can be confusing because there are many ideas in one sentence."

Complex sentence structures slowed students' comprehension and made it difficult to identify and organize key information effectively.

Insufficient Background Knowledge

Table 9.

Insufficient Background Knowledge

No.	Questionnaire Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Insufficient background knowledge makes it difficult for me to understand the research context.	0%	4.8%	19%	61.9%	14.3%
2	I have difficulty understanding the overall purpose of a research topic in an article when I have insufficient background knowledge.	0%	28.6%	28.6%	42.9%	0%
3	Insufficient background knowledge makes it hard for me to comprehend and interpret the results or findings of a study.	4.8%	9.5%	33.3%	42.9%	9.5%
4	I find it difficult to understand and compare information across articles in the Reading Matrix due to insufficient background knowledge.	0%	28.6%	28.6%	42.9%	0%

Another major challenge identified in the findings is insufficient background knowledge. The questionnaire results across several items indicate that students experience difficulties in understanding the research context, identifying the purpose of the study, interpreting findings, and comparing information across articles when they lack prior knowledge. A majority of respondents (61.9%) agreed that insufficient background knowledge affects their comprehension.

One participant stated:

"When I am already familiar with the topic, it is easier for me to understand the ideas and the context of the article."

Insufficient background knowledge affected students' ability to interpret and connect information across texts. The Reading Matrix appeared to be more effective for students with sufficient prior knowledge.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the Reading Matrix supports students' academic reading comprehension by facilitating the organization and structuring of information from texts. Students showed positive perceptions across multiple functions of the matrix, including organizing information, comparing and contrasting ideas, identifying relationships, focusing on key information, connecting ideas across texts, and supporting overall understanding. These functions collectively contributed to students' ability to process academic texts in a more structured and manageable way. However, the findings also show that this support is more prominent at the level of identifying and organizing information rather than deeper interpretation. Despite the structured support, students continued to experience difficulties related to vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and insufficient background knowledge. This suggests that while the Reading Matrix assists in managing textual information, it does not fully resolve the linguistic and cognitive challenges highlighted in EFL academic reading contexts.

In relation to previous studies, the findings both support and extend existing research on graphic organizers. The results confirm that visual organizational tools can enhance comprehension by clarifying text structure and reducing complexity (Albufalasa, 2019; Qi & Jiang, 2021). The findings also resonate with Marginingsih et al. (2025), who emphasize the role of such tools in supporting more independent learning. However, unlike previous studies that suggest broader improvements in comprehension, the present findings indicate that the Reading Matrix mainly supports lower to mid-level comprehension processes, particularly identifying, organizing, and comparing information. Learner independence was also not fully evident, as some students still relied on guidance when completing the matrix. This further indicates that the effectiveness of the Reading Matrix is influenced by students' language proficiency, familiarity with the strategy, and the level of instructional support provided.

The results also highlight important pedagogical implications, particularly in the context of Extensive Reading. While Extensive Reading encourages learner autonomy and exposure to texts (Renandya, 2021), the findings suggest that students still require structured support to effectively process academic texts. The Reading Matrix can function as a practical tool that guides students to focus on key information and relationships within texts. However, its use should be

integrated with other instructional strategies, as it alone is not sufficient to develop deeper comprehension skills.

The limited impact of the Reading Matrix on deeper comprehension may be explained by the interaction between cognitive and linguistic factors in EFL reading, particularly limited vocabulary knowledge, complex sentence structures, and insufficient background knowledge (Alderson, 2000). As a result, students may be able to complete the matrix and organize information without fully understanding the content at a deeper level.

Based on these findings, several pedagogical recommendations can be drawn. First, teachers need to provide explicit instruction and modeling on how to use the Reading Matrix effectively, particularly in analyzing and synthesizing information across texts. Second, continuous practice and guided support are necessary to help students develop familiarity and use the matrix more strategically. Third, the integration of the Reading Matrix with vocabulary instruction and pre-reading activities is essential to address linguistic challenges. Through these combined efforts, the Reading Matrix can function not only as a tool for organizing information but also as a part of a broader approach to support the development of more effective and independent academic reading skills.

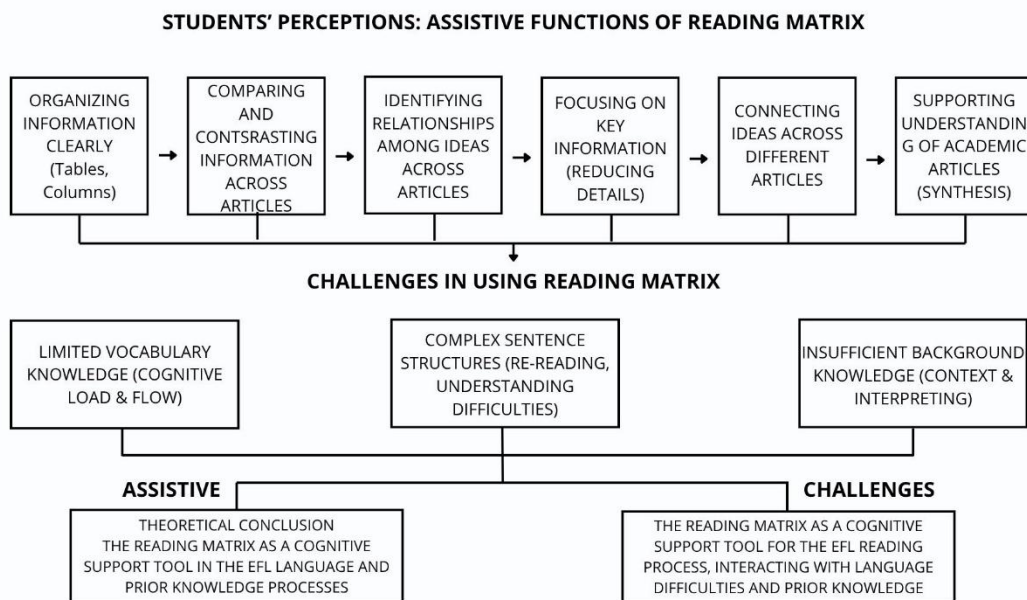


Figure 1.
Theoretical Model of the Role of the Reading Matrix in Supporting Academic Reading Comprehension

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that the Reading Matrix serves as an effective structural support in EFL academic reading. The most distinctive finding is that the matrix consistently facilitates students' ability to organize, identify, compare, and connect information across texts, enabling more systematic engagement with academic materials. However, its impact remains primarily at the level of information management and relational processing, rather than deeper interpretative comprehension. Persistent difficulties related to vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and insufficient background knowledge indicate that the Reading Matrix alone cannot fully address the multidimensional challenges of academic reading in EFL contexts.

This study contributes to the existing literature by offering a more specific understanding of the Reading Matrix as a distinct type of graphic organizer within Extensive Reading settings. Rather than confirming broad improvements in comprehension, the findings provide a more nuanced perspective by demonstrating that its effectiveness is partial and conditional. The study thus extends previous research by emphasizing that the success of such tools depends on learners' linguistic resources, prior knowledge, and the level of instructional support. In this sense, the Reading Matrix should be positioned as a complementary tool within a broader pedagogical framework rather than as an independent solution.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relies on students' perceptions, which may not fully reflect actual improvements in reading performance. In addition, the relatively small and context-specific sample limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research is therefore recommended to employ more rigorous designs, such as experimental or longitudinal studies, to examine the impact of the Reading Matrix on measurable comprehension outcomes. Further investigation is also needed to explore its integration with vocabulary instruction, background knowledge activation, and other reading strategies in order to enhance its effectiveness in supporting deeper comprehension.

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