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A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF ADVANCED READING INSTRUCTION BASED ON METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES AND SCAFFOLDING FOR EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT
The increasing complexity of academic texts requires English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to develop reading comprehension, metacognitive awareness, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. Although previous studies have shown the positive effects of metacognitive strategies and scaffolding on reading achievement, few have critically evaluated how these approaches are implemented throughout the learning process. This study critically evaluates advanced reading instruction based on metacognitive strategies and scaffolding for EFL university students. A qualitative evaluative case study involved one Advanced Reading lecturer and undergraduate students at Universitas Tangerang Raya. Data from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, document analysis, and assessment records were triangulated and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings show that integrating metacognitive strategies and scaffolding improved students' academic reading behaviours: they set reading goals, monitored comprehension, applied repair strategies, and evaluated arguments critically, while the gradual withdrawal of support fostered autonomy. However, dense academic vocabulary and discipline-specific terminology remained challenging. The study's novelty lies in its process-oriented evaluative perspective, which offers a comprehensive framework and practical implications for designing effective advanced reading instruction in EFL higher education.

Keywords: *advanced reading instruction; metacognitive strategies; scaffolding; critical academic reading; efl university students*

INTRODUCTION
Academic reading has become a fundamental component of higher education, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts where students are expected to engage critically with increasingly complex academic texts. Unlike general reading, academic reading extends beyond literal comprehension by requiring learners to analyse arguments, evaluate the credibility of evidence, identify authorial stance, synthesize information across multiple sources, and construct evidence-based interpretations. These competencies are essential for developing academic literacy, critical thinking, and independent learning, all of which are indispensable for successful participation in higher education and research-oriented learning environments.

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The growing availability of scholarly publications, digital learning resources, and interdisciplinary knowledge has significantly increased the cognitive demands of academic reading. University students are now expected to navigate various forms of academic discourse, including empirical research articles, theoretical papers, systematic reviews, and other scholarly materials. Consequently, successful academic readers must employ strategic approaches that enable them to plan their reading, monitor comprehension, evaluate textual information critically, and regulate their learning processes. Recent studies have consistently demonstrated that effective academic reading is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by learners' metacognitive awareness and self-regulated learning abilities, which allow them to adapt their reading strategies according to different academic tasks and textual complexities.

Despite the increasing importance of academic reading, many EFL university students continue to experience considerable difficulties in comprehending academic texts. Previous studies have reported that students often struggle to interpret implicit meanings, evaluate arguments critically, identify bias, and synthesize information from multiple sources, even when they demonstrate adequate literal comprehension. These difficulties are particularly evident in Indonesian higher education, where English is learned as a foreign language and opportunities for authentic academic interaction remain relatively limited. As a result, many students continue to depend heavily on teacher explanations, translation strategies, and surface-level comprehension rather than engaging in independent and critical reading practices.

One factor contributing to this situation is that advanced reading instruction in many EFL classrooms remains predominantly outcome-oriented. Instruction frequently emphasizes comprehension scores and assessment results while paying relatively little attention to the instructional processes that support students' cognitive and metacognitive development. Consequently, students receive limited opportunities to develop essential metacognitive skills such as planning reading objectives, monitoring comprehension, employing repair strategies, and evaluating their own understanding throughout the reading process. This instructional orientation often limits the development of learner autonomy and higher-order thinking skills, which are essential characteristics of successful academic readers.

Metacognitive strategy instruction and instructional scaffolding have been widely recognized as effective approaches for enhancing students' academic reading performance. Metacognitive strategies encourage learners to consciously plan, monitor, and evaluate their cognitive activities during reading, whereas scaffolding provides temporary instructional support that gradually transfers learning responsibility from the teacher to the students. The integration of these approaches has been shown to improve reading comprehension, critical thinking, learner autonomy, and self-regulated learning. Nevertheless, the majority of previous studies have primarily focused on measuring learning outcomes, such as reading comprehension achievement or test performance, rather than critically examining how metacognitive strategies and scaffolding are implemented throughout the instructional process. Consequently, limited evidence is available regarding how these pedagogical approaches influence students' cognitive engagement, learning behaviours, and classroom experiences during advanced reading instruction.

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To address this gap, the present study conducts a critical evaluation of advanced reading instruction based on metacognitive strategies and scaffolding among EFL university students. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize instructional outcomes, this research adopts a process-oriented evaluative perspective by examining the implementation of metacognitive strategies, instructional scaffolding, students' cognitive and behavioural responses, and the challenges encountered during classroom instruction. The study employs the Integrated Reading Assessment Model (IRAM) as an evaluative framework to analyse instructional practices through multiple qualitative data sources, including classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, instructional documents, and supporting assessment records. By integrating these sources of evidence, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how advanced reading instruction facilitates the development of critical, reflective, and autonomous academic readers.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of metacognitive strategy implementation, instructional scaffolding, learner responses, and classroom challenges within a single qualitative evaluative framework. Rather than merely determining whether students' reading performance improves, this study explains how instructional processes contribute to the development of critical academic reading competencies. Therefore, this study aims to critically evaluate the implementation of advanced reading instruction based on metacognitive strategies and scaffolding for EFL university students by examining the instructional practices, students' responses, and pedagogical strengths and challenges. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on process-oriented evaluation in EFL reading instruction while providing practical recommendations for designing more effective advanced reading instruction that promotes academic literacy, learner autonomy, and higher-order thinking skills.

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using an evaluative case study design to critically evaluate the implementation of advanced reading instruction based on metacognitive strategies and scaffolding for EFL university students. Rather than measuring instructional effectiveness solely through learning outcomes, this study focused on examining how instructional practices were implemented, how students responded throughout the learning process, and what pedagogical strengths and challenges emerged during classroom instruction. The evaluative perspective enabled an in-depth investigation of instructional processes within their authentic educational context while providing a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of classroom practices.

The study was conducted in an Advanced Reading course at the English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Tangerang Raya, Indonesia. The participants consisted of one lecturer responsible for teaching the course and undergraduate EFL students enrolled in the class. Participants were selected purposively because they were directly involved in the implementation of advanced reading instruction based on metacognitive strategies and scaffolding. This context provided a suitable setting for evaluating authentic instructional practices and students' learning experiences.

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To guide the evaluation, this study adopted the Integrated Reading Assessment Model (IRAM) as the analytical framework. IRAM was used to evaluate the instructional process through four interrelated dimensions: (1) instructional implementation of metacognitive strategies, (2) scaffolding practices provided by the lecturer, (3) students' cognitive and behavioural responses during learning activities, and (4) instructional outcomes and implementation challenges. The evaluation emphasized the interaction among these dimensions rather than focusing exclusively on students' academic achievement.

2. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected over one academic semester using multiple qualitative techniques to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the instructional process. The use of multiple data sources also strengthened the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation.

Classroom Observation

Non-participant classroom observations were conducted throughout the implementation of the Advanced Reading course. The observations focused on documenting how the lecturer implemented metacognitive strategies and scaffolding during pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. Particular attention was given to instructional interactions, students' engagement, metacognitive behaviours, collaborative learning processes, and classroom responses. Observation data were recorded using structured observation sheets supported by detailed field notes.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the course lecturer and selected students after the completion of the instructional program. The interviews explored participants' perceptions regarding the implementation of metacognitive strategies, instructional scaffolding, learning difficulties, reading autonomy, and overall classroom experiences. The flexible interview format enabled participants to provide detailed explanations while allowing the researcher to explore emerging issues during the interview process.

Reflective Journals

Students were required to maintain reflective journals throughout the course. The journals documented students' reading experiences, learning strategies, comprehension difficulties, problem-solving processes, and reflections on their metacognitive development. These reflective writings provided valuable evidence regarding students' internal cognitive processes that were not directly observable during classroom instruction.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was conducted to complement observational and interview data. The analyzed documents included lesson plans, instructional materials, students' reading assignments, assessment records, reflective journals, and classroom artifacts. These documents provided additional evidence concerning instructional implementation and students' academic progress during the course.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data credibility was established through source triangulation, method triangulation, prolonged classroom engagement,

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member checking, and peer debriefing. These procedures ensured that the interpretation of findings accurately represented participants' experiences and instructional practices.

3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These stages were conducted iteratively throughout the research process to ensure systematic interpretation of the data.

Data Reduction

The first stage involved organizing and reducing raw qualitative data obtained from classroom observations, interview transcripts, reflective journals, and instructional documents. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim before being coded using line-by-line coding techniques. Initial codes representing metacognitive strategies, scaffolding practices, students' cognitive responses, learning challenges, and instructional outcomes were subsequently grouped into broader thematic categories through pattern coding. This process enabled the researcher to identify meaningful patterns relevant to the objectives of the study.

Data Display

After the coding process, the categorized data were systematically organized into qualitative matrices based on the Integrated Reading Assessment Model (IRAM). The matrices facilitated comparisons across different data sources by presenting instructional practices, students' responses, and emerging themes in a structured format. Supporting quantitative information, including students' assessment records, was also summarized descriptively to illustrate patterns of learning development throughout the instructional process.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

The final stage involved interpreting the relationships among themes and drawing conclusions regarding the effectiveness of advanced reading instruction based on metacognitive strategies and scaffolding. Conclusions were continuously verified through source triangulation by comparing evidence obtained from classroom observations, interviews, reflective journals, instructional documents, and assessment records. This iterative verification process enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings while ensuring that the conclusions accurately reflected the instructional practices observed throughout the study.

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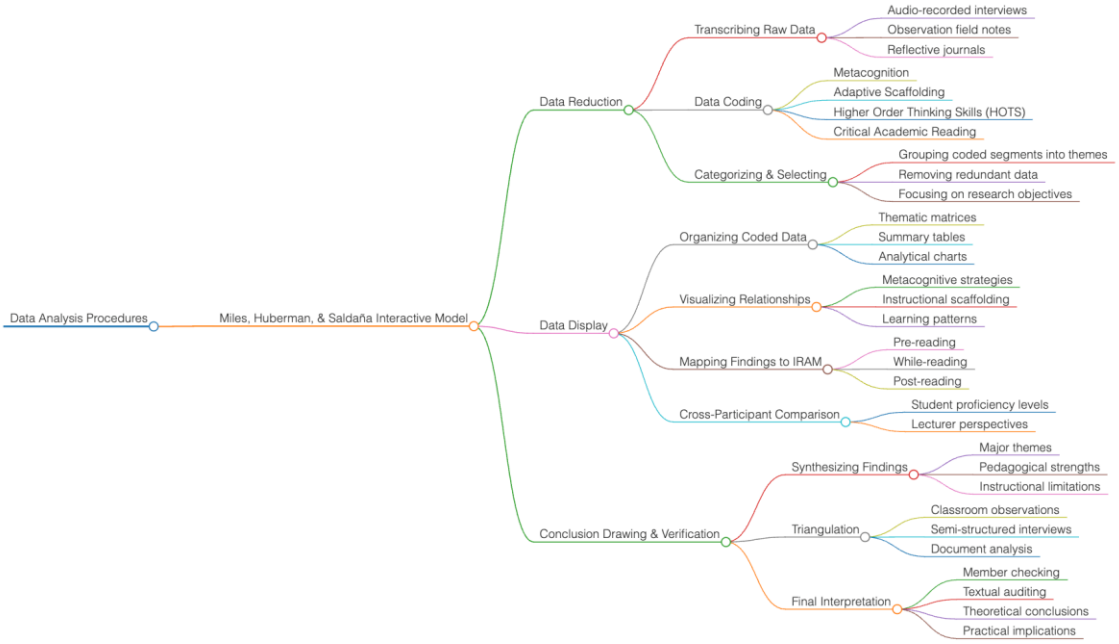


Figure 1. Data Analysis Procedures within the Integrated Reading Assessment Model (IRAM)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Implementation of Integrated Metacognitive Strategies and Scaffolding

The qualitative evaluative findings indicate that integrating metacognitive strategies with structured instructional scaffolding substantially transformed EFL university students' academic reading behaviors. Triangulated data from classroom observations, document analysis, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews demonstrated a shift from passive reading to active, self-regulated comprehension.

The integration unfolded across three phases. In the planning and modeling phase, the lecturer modeled pre-reading strategies such as text previewing, setting specific reading goals, and activating prior knowledge, so that students learned to approach dense academic texts intentionally rather than reading word for word. In the monitoring and guiding phase, as students engaged with complex literature, the lecturer provided guided prompts and questioning; when comprehension broke down, students began applying self-regulated repair strategies, such as re-reading critical sections, annotating main ideas, and contextualizing unknown terms. Finally, in the evaluating, reflection, and feedback phase, students continuously evaluated their understanding and critical stance toward academic arguments through authentic assessments and reflective journals, and the gradual fading of instructional support fostered stronger learner autonomy and sustained engagement throughout the reading process.

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2. Quantitative Achievement and Score Progression

The quantitative data derived from assessment records demonstrated measurable improvements in students' academic reading performance following the process-oriented intervention.

Table 1. Pre- and Post-Instructional Reading Score

Assessment Phase	Average Score	Score Difference / Gain	Primary Outcome
Pre-Intervention (Before)	72.3	-	Literal comprehension dominance; high dependence on lecturer prompts.
Post-Intervention (After)	86.3	+14.0 points	Critical text evaluation, improved metacognitive monitoring, and self-regulation.

This **14.0-point gain** highlights that combining explicit metacognitive instruction with systematic scaffolding directly translates into enhanced academic reading achievement.

3. Qualitative Insights from Interviews and Reflective Journals

Semi-structured interviews with both the lecturer and students, alongside reflective journal entries, provided in-depth qualitative evidence regarding the learning process:

Lecturer's Perspective on Metacognitive Scaffolding:

"Initially, students expected me to translate complex passages. By introducing guided questions and forcing them to set reading goals before jumping into the text, they began taking responsibility for their own understanding." (Advanced Reading Lecturer)

Student Reflection on Self-Monitoring and Autonomy:

"Previously, if I met a difficult paragraph, I just stopped reading. Now, I use monitoring strategies: I ask myself what the main claim is, look at the text structure, and write down marginal notes. It helps me stay focused and less anxious." (Student Participant A)

Student Reflection on Vocabulary and Autonomy Challenges:

"The scaffolding helped me break down long arguments, but dense academic vocabulary and specific jargon still slow me down when I read independently without the lecturer's guidance." (Student Participant B)

4. Summary Evaluation: Strengths and Remaining Challenges

A critical evaluation of the instructional practice reveals both key strengths and ongoing limitations in the classroom implementation:

Table 2. Critical Evaluation of Instructional Practice

Evaluative Dimension	Strengths Identified	Persistent Challenges / Limitations
Cognitive & Metacognitive Growth	Enhances Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), critical text evaluation, and active self-monitoring.	Transitioning from guided monitoring to full independence remains challenging for lower-proficiency students.
Instructional Dynamics	Promotes authentic learning, structured feedback, and sustained classroom engagement.	Implementation is time-consuming and heavily reliant on well-trained instructors.
Linguistic Factors	Improves overall academic literacy and critical reading confidence.	Dense academic vocabulary and discipline-specific terminology continue to constrain independent reading.

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Discussion

1. Transitioning from Outcome-Based to Process-Oriented Evaluation

One of the most significant contributions of this study is its shift from a conventional outcome-based evaluation toward a process-oriented evaluation of advanced reading instruction. In many EFL classrooms, instructional effectiveness is predominantly measured through students' achievement scores or post-test performance. Although such indicators provide evidence of learning outcomes, they offer limited insight into the instructional processes that facilitate students' cognitive development. The present findings demonstrate that evaluating instructional implementation through continuous classroom observation, reflective journals, authentic assessment, and learner responses provides a more comprehensive understanding of how students construct meaning and develop critical academic reading skills.

The implementation of the Integrated Reading Assessment Model (IRAM) illustrates that learning effectiveness cannot be adequately explained solely by improvements in academic performance. Instead, the instructional process itself, including explicit metacognitive prompting, adaptive scaffolding, collaborative discussions, and continuous formative feedback, plays a central role in supporting students' reading development. Throughout the instructional process, students gradually shifted from passive readers who depended heavily on teacher explanations toward more autonomous learners capable of establishing reading objectives, monitoring comprehension, identifying misunderstandings, and selecting appropriate repair strategies. These behavioural changes were consistently reflected across classroom observations, students' reflective journals, and interview responses, indicating that meaningful learning development occurred throughout the instructional process rather than exclusively at its conclusion.

Although the average reading score increased from 72.3 in the pre-test to 86.3 in the post-test, representing a gain of 14.0 points, this quantitative improvement should be interpreted as supporting evidence rather than the primary indicator of instructional effectiveness. The qualitative findings suggest that the observed improvement was closely associated with the gradual development of students' metacognitive awareness and self-regulated reading behaviours. This perspective supports contemporary views of educational evaluation, which argue that effective instruction should be assessed not only by measuring learning outcomes but also by examining how instructional interactions facilitate cognitive engagement, reflective thinking, and independent learning throughout the educational process.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings challenge the widespread reliance on summative assessment as the sole indicator of instructional success. A process-oriented evaluation enables educators to identify the specific stages at which students experience comprehension difficulties, determine the types of instructional support required, and modify teaching strategies accordingly. Consequently, instructional evaluation becomes an integral component of the learning process rather than merely a mechanism for measuring academic achievement. Such an evaluative perspective is particularly valuable in advanced reading courses, where students are expected to develop critical literacy, academic reasoning, and independent learning competencies rather than simply achieve satisfactory examination scores.

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2. Theoretical Synergy: Integrating Metacognition and Instructional Scaffolding

The findings also provide empirical support for the complementary relationship between metacognitive strategy instruction and instructional scaffolding in facilitating critical academic reading. Metacognitive strategies enable learners to regulate their own cognitive activities through planning, monitoring, evaluating, and reflecting during reading. These processes encourage students to become active constructors of meaning who consciously evaluate their own understanding rather than passively receiving textual information. However, metacognitive regulation alone may not be sufficient for many EFL learners who encounter complex academic texts characterized by unfamiliar disciplinary vocabulary, dense conceptual information, and sophisticated argumentative structures.

Within this context, instructional scaffolding functions as an essential pedagogical mechanism that bridges the gap between students' existing competencies and the demands of advanced academic reading. Through explicit modelling, guided questioning, contextual prompts, collaborative discussions, and gradually reduced instructional support, lecturers create learning environments in which students are encouraged to internalise strategic reading behaviours before applying them independently. As instructional support is progressively withdrawn, learners assume greater responsibility for regulating their own reading processes, thereby fostering the development of learner autonomy and self-regulated learning.

The interaction between metacognition and scaffolding observed in this study closely aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Within the ZPD, learners initially require external assistance to perform tasks beyond their current capabilities. Through systematic instructional guidance, these external supports are gradually internalised, allowing learners to perform similar tasks independently. The present findings indicate that metacognitive regulation becomes substantially more effective when supported by adaptive scaffolding that responds to learners' evolving needs throughout the instructional process. Rather than functioning as separate pedagogical approaches, metacognition and scaffolding operate synergistically to promote increasingly sophisticated cognitive engagement with academic texts.

Another important finding concerns the role of scaffolding in reducing students' cognitive overload. Many participants reported experiencing difficulties when reading texts containing dense academic vocabulary and complex theoretical concepts. Instead of directly providing explanations, the lecturer encouraged students to employ contextual inference, identify textual clues, and engage in collaborative problem-solving before offering additional guidance. This gradual release of responsibility prevented excessive dependence on teacher explanations while simultaneously strengthening students' confidence in applying independent comprehension strategies. Consequently, instructional scaffolding functioned not only as cognitive support but also as a mechanism for promoting metacognitive awareness, critical thinking, and sustained learner autonomy.

Taken together, these findings suggest that effective advanced reading instruction should not treat metacognitive strategy instruction and scaffolding as isolated pedagogical interventions. Rather, both approaches should be integrated within a coherent instructional framework that continuously adapts to students' cognitive development and learning needs. Such integration enables students to progress from guided participation toward independent

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academic reading, thereby fostering the critical literacy and higher-order thinking skills required for successful participation in higher education.

3. Practical Implications and Pedagogical Recommendations

Three recommendations follow from these findings. First, targeted vocabulary interventions are needed: given that academic vocabulary remains a primary constraint, future reading curricula should integrate explicit discipline-specific terminology instruction alongside metacognitive training. Second, scaffolding should be differentiated: because student proficiency levels vary, instructors must adjust the pace of scaffolding withdrawal (fading) to prevent low-proficiency students from feeling stranded. Third, institutions must provide support for faculty: process-oriented instruction and IRAM implementation require significant time and pedagogical preparation, so higher education institutions should provide professional development workshops to equip lecturers with advanced scaffolding and authentic assessment skills.

CONCLUSION

This study critically evaluated the implementation of advanced reading instruction based on metacognitive strategies and instructional scaffolding for EFL university students through a qualitative evaluative approach. Moving beyond conventional outcome-oriented assessment, the study adopted a process-oriented perspective to examine how instructional practices, learner engagement, and cognitive development interacted throughout the learning process. The findings demonstrate that effective advanced reading instruction is determined not merely by improvements in students' academic achievement but by the quality of instructional processes that foster strategic reading behaviours, critical thinking, and learner autonomy.

The implementation of metacognitive strategies enabled students to develop greater awareness of their reading processes by planning reading objectives, monitoring comprehension, applying repair strategies, and evaluating their understanding of academic texts. At the same time, instructional scaffolding provided systematic pedagogical support that gradually transferred learning responsibility from the lecturer to the students. This integration encouraged learners to become more independent, reflective, and actively engaged in constructing meaning from complex academic texts. The observed improvement in students' reading performance, supported by qualitative evidence from classroom observations, interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis, suggests that instructional effectiveness is closely associated with the continuous interaction between metacognitive regulation and adaptive instructional support rather than with assessment outcomes alone.

An important contribution of this study lies in the application of the Integrated Reading Assessment Model (IRAM) as a process-oriented evaluative framework for advanced reading instruction. By integrating multiple qualitative data sources, the model provides a comprehensive understanding of instructional implementation, students' cognitive and behavioural responses, pedagogical strengths, and instructional challenges. This evaluative perspective offers a richer understanding of reading instruction than traditional evaluation models that rely primarily on achievement scores, thereby extending current approaches to evaluating academic reading instruction in EFL higher education.

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The study also has important pedagogical implications. Lecturers are encouraged to integrate explicit metacognitive strategy instruction with adaptive scaffolding throughout all phases of advanced reading instruction rather than emphasizing comprehension outcomes alone. Classroom evaluation should incorporate authentic assessment, reflective learning activities, and continuous formative feedback to support students' development as critical, autonomous, and self-regulated academic readers. Such instructional practices are expected to better prepare university students to engage with increasingly complex academic discourse and research-based learning environments.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited to a single instructional context within one English Language Education Study Program, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to other educational settings. Future studies are therefore recommended to examine the implementation of IRAM across different universities, academic disciplines, and levels of English proficiency. In addition, mixed-methods or longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of metacognitive strategy instruction and adaptive scaffolding on students' critical academic reading development and broader academic achievement.

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