

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research background, three research questions, three research purposes, the scope of the research, the conceptual framework, the research hypothesis, and previous studies.

A. Research Background

Students encounter significant challenges when engaging with complex academic texts that demand advanced critical reading skills, such as analysis and inference, especially in EFL settings. Many struggle due to limited language proficiency and lack of effective reading strategies (Grabe 2014). According to Bloom's revised taxonomy, these skills—requiring interpretation, analysis, and evaluation—go beyond basic comprehension (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Stoller (2011), points out that university students are expected to attain this level of reading ability as part of their academic growth. Consequently, further research is necessary to explore the factors influencing students' development of critical reading skills.

Critical reading skills are vital for university students, especially when analyzing complex academic texts that demand comprehension, evaluation, and synthesis (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). It involves understanding explicit meaning as well as examining, interpreting, and assessing ideas within the text. Stoller (2011) notes that students in higher education are expected to develop these skills to engage more effectively with academic content. However, many struggle to distinguish facts from opinions, assess source credibility, or evaluate arguments critically. Paul and Elder (2003) state that critical reading requires active engagement and independent judgment, rather than passive acceptance. Brookfield (2012) adds that students often read superficially, neglecting to question assumptions or analyze arguments, thereby hampering deep understanding. Therefore, educators should support the development of critical reading skills essential for academic success.

Students in the English Education Department at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung are expected to engage with English academic texts that require

comprehension, interpretation, analysis, and evaluation. Rianto (2022) investigated the relationship between metacognitive online reading strategies and online reading comprehension among Indonesian university EFL students. However, the study focused on online reading comprehension rather than critical reading as a performance-based higher-order ability. Consequently, limited empirical evidence remains regarding the relationship between students' overall metacognitive awareness and their ability to examine claims, evaluate evidence, recognize assumptions, and assess reasoning in this particular university context. Therefore, an empirical investigation of these two variables is needed.

Metacognition, or awareness of one's thinking, plays a key role in critical reading skills. According to Bean (2013), it helps students understand how they process information and choose strategies when faced with tough texts. This awareness allows them to regulate their reading through planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Flavell (1979). Specifically, metacognitive awareness involves students' ability to plan their approach, monitor their comprehension during reading, and assess their understanding afterward. Students with stronger metacognitive skills tend to engage more actively, rereading difficult parts, asking questions, checking their comprehension, or adjusting their reading speed based on complexity. (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002). Such readers are better equipped to handle the challenges of complex academic texts.

Moreover, challenges in critical reading may stem from students' limited awareness and control over their reading strategies. Research shows a link between metacognitive awareness and reading success (Zhang, 2018; Mohseni, 2020). Students who actively plan, monitor, and assess their reading tend to analyze information more effectively, recognize comprehension issues, and revise their interpretations. In EFL settings, it has also been suggested that students who regulate their reading processes engage more deeply with the text and question the author's intentions (Langer, 1990). This underscores that critical reading skills are connected not just to language ability but also to metacognitive awareness. Students who reflect on their understanding and adapt their strategies are more likely to engage in tasks requiring critical judgment.

Although metacognitive awareness has received considerable attention in EFL reading research, previous studies have mainly examined reading strategy use and general reading performance. Rianto (2022), for example, investigated the relationship between metacognitive online reading strategies and online reading comprehension among Indonesian university EFL students. In another context, Dang (2024), examined metacognitive reading strategy use in relation to students' final reading test scores. However, these studies provide limited evidence regarding critical reading as a performance-based higher-order ability involving the analysis of arguments, evaluation of evidence, recognition of assumptions, and assessment of reasoning. Furthermore, the relationship between students' overall metacognitive awareness and their performance on a critical reading test remains insufficiently examined among Indonesian university EFL students. Therefore, further research is needed to determine whether students' reported awareness and regulation of reading strategies are statistically associated with their ability to engage critically with English academic texts.

This study aims to determine EFL students' metacognitive awareness scores, assess their critical reading skills, and examine the relationship between these two variables. It employs the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory to measure students' self-reported awareness and use of reading strategies, alongside a researcher-developed Critical Reading Test to assess their critical reading performance. The findings are expected to provide an empirical description of both variables and clarify the direction, strength, and statistical significance of their relationship. In addition, the results may inform the development of EFL reading activities that integrate metacognitive strategy awareness with explicit critical reading practice.

B. Research Questions

The research background highlights the need to examine students' awareness of their reading processes and their capacity for critical engagement with English academic texts. Accordingly, this study focuses on EFL students' metacognitive

awareness and critical reading skills, and on the relationship between them. To guide the investigation, the researcher has formulated the following research questions:

1. What is the score of EFL students' metacognitive awareness?
2. What is the score of EFL students' critical reading skills?
3. What is the correlation between EFL students' metacognitive awareness scores and their critical reading skills scores?

C. Research Purposes

The research objectives were derived from the research questions listed earlier. This study seeks to empirically describe EFL students' metacognitive awareness and critical reading abilities and to explore the nature and importance of the relationship between these two variables. Accordingly, the aims of this research are:

1. To determine the scores of EFL students' metacognitive awareness.
2. To reveal the scores of EFL students' critical reading skills.
3. To find out the correlation between EFL students' metacognitive awareness scores and their critical reading skills scores.

D. Research Significances

This study may inform concrete practices for integrating metacognitive reflection into activities designed to develop university EFL students' critical reading skills. Selected MARSİ statements may be adapted as reflective prompts that help students plan their reading, monitor their comprehension, respond to reading difficulties, and evaluate the effectiveness of their reading strategies. Lecturers may connect these prompts with critical reading tasks, such as identifying claims, evaluating evidence, recognizing assumptions and bias, and assessing the quality of reasoning. Since this study employed a correlational design, these proposed applications should be understood as pedagogical implications rather than evidence that metacognitive strategy instruction directly improves students' critical reading skills

1. Theoretical Significance

This research primarily advances the field of foreign language education, particularly by deepening understanding of metacognitive awareness and critical reading skills in an EFL setting. It offers empirical evidence of the link between EFL students' metacognitive awareness scores and their critical reading skills, aligning with Flavell's (1979) concept of cognitive regulation in reading. The results suggest that students' awareness and regulation of their reading strategies are connected to higher-level skills such as analysis, evaluation, interpretation, and judgment. Nevertheless, because the study employs a correlational approach, it does not aim to prove a causal connection between these variables.

2. Practical Significance

This study may inform concrete practices for integrating metacognitive reflection into activities designed to develop university EFL students' critical reading skills. Selected MARSİ statements may be adapted as reflective prompts that help students plan their reading, monitor their comprehension, respond to reading difficulties, and evaluate the effectiveness of their reading strategies. Lecturers may connect these prompts with critical reading tasks, such as identifying claims, evaluating evidence, recognizing assumptions and bias, and assessing the quality of reasoning. Since this study employed a correlational design, these proposed applications should be understood as pedagogical implications rather than evidence that metacognitive strategy instruction directly improves students' critical reading skills.

a. For students

Selected MARSİ items may be used as a self-reflection checklist before, during, and after students engage in critical reading tasks involving English academic texts. Before reading, students may identify their reading purpose and preview the organization of the text. During reading, they may record comprehension difficulties and the strategies used to address them, such as rereading, adjusting their reading speed, or using contextual clues. After reading, students may evaluate whether those strategies helped them identify claims, interpret and evaluate evidence, recognize assumptions and bias, and assess the

quality of reasoning. Through these activities, students may become more aware of the strategies they use when performing tasks that require critical reading skills.

b. For teachers

The three MARS categories may guide the sequencing of activities intended to develop students' critical reading skills. Global Reading Strategies may be introduced before reading to support purpose setting, text previewing, and activating prior knowledge. Problem-Solving Strategies may be applied during reading to help students monitor comprehension, adjust their reading pace, reread difficult sections, and infer unfamiliar meanings. Support Reading Strategies may be linked to annotation, note-taking, paraphrasing, summarizing, discussion, and reference use. These strategies may be integrated into critical reading tasks that require students to identify central claims, connect claims with evidence, recognize assumptions and bias, and assess the quality of reasoning.

c. For other researchers

This study may serve as a reference for further research on metacognitive awareness and critical reading skills among university EFL students. Future studies may involve larger samples, examine the relationship between MARS categories and specific indicators of critical reading skills, or use experimental and longitudinal designs to investigate changes after metacognitive strategy instruction. Researchers are also encouraged to combine self-report and performance-based measures.

B. Research Scope

This study examines the relationship between EFL students' metacognitive awareness and their critical reading skills within the English Education Department at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. The sample included 40 fourth-semester students from Classes C, D, and E. The research aimed to describe the students' scores on both variables and analyze the direction, strength, and significance of their correlation. No experimental intervention or variable manipulation was conducted. Metacognitive awareness, designated as variable X, was assessed using the 30-item Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory by Mokhtari and

Reichard (2002). This tool measures Global Reading Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Support Reading Strategies. The study concentrated on the overall MARSİ scores, rather than specific subscales or individual items, to represent participants' metacognitive awareness in academic reading as a unified construct.

Critical reading skills, considered as variable Y, were assessed with the researcher-developed 30-item Critical Reading Test. This test evaluated eight indicators, including identifying central claims and main ideas, making inferences, analyzing authorial intent and argument structure, evaluating evidence, detecting bias and underlying assumptions, and assessing the quality of reasoning. The study emphasized participants' overall critical reading scores rather than individual indicator scores. As the research used a correlational design, the results were interpreted as showing an association between metacognitive awareness and critical reading skills, rather than establishing causality.

C. Conceptual framework

This study's framework illustrates the link between metacognitive awareness and critical reading skills among EFL students in the English Education Department. Metacognitive awareness is students' capacity to recognize, monitor, and regulate their cognitive processes during reading, while critical reading skills involve analyzing, evaluating, and questioning the information within texts. Employing metacognitive reading strategies can help students better manage comprehension and respond effectively to difficulties when understanding academic materials. Consequently, this framework explores the connection between students' *metacognitive* awareness and their ability to engage with English academic texts critically.

Metacognitive awareness refers to students' capacity to plan, monitor, and assess their reading comprehension. Students with higher metacognitive awareness are typically more proactive in managing their reading processes, making strategic adjustments when faced with difficulties, and frequently checking their understanding. Mokhtari & Reichard (2002). Bean (2013), notes that readers aware of their cognitive processes are better equipped to control their approaches to

complex texts. This ability to regulate reading strategies helps students identify comprehension issues and take corrective actions, such as rereading challenging sections, changing their reading pace, or employing additional strategies. Mohseni et al. (2020), also highlight that students with heightened metacognitive awareness tend to utilize reading strategies more effectively and perform better in reading tasks. Overall, these findings emphasize that metacognitive awareness is crucial for students to manage their cognitive resources while reading efficiently.

Critical reading skills involve questioning, analyzing, and evaluating ideas in texts, allowing readers to move beyond basic understanding toward a deeper, more reflective comprehension of academic materials. As Stoller (2011) points out, higher education students are expected to develop these skills to engage effectively with complex content, yet many struggle to distinguish facts from opinions and assess source credibility. Paul and Elder (2014), also emphasize that critical reading requires active participation and independent judgment, with students needing to evaluate information rather than accept it at face value. Brookfield (2012), notes that students often read superficially, miss underlying assumptions, and fail to assess argument strength, which can hinder their understanding. This study uses these perspectives to explore the statistical link between metacognitive awareness and critical reading ability among university EFL students.

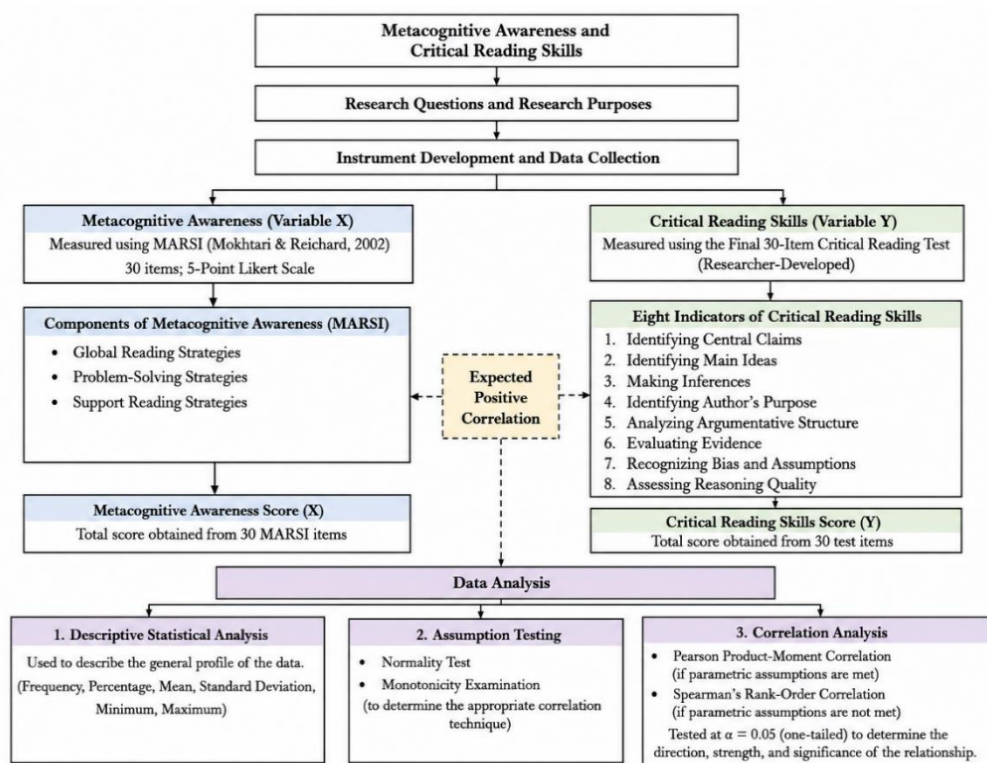


Figure 1.1 The Conceptual Framework

D. Hypotheses

The present study employs a quantitative correlational research design to examine the statistical relationship between EFL students' metacognitive awareness and their critical reading skills without manipulating either variable. Metacognitive awareness is designated as variable X, while critical reading skills are designated as variable Y. The analysis is intended to determine the existence, direction, strength, and statistical significance of the relationship between the two variables.

In a correlational study, a directional hypothesis can be formulated if theoretical frameworks and prior empirical research suggest a specific direction of the relationship. Drawing on the theories and earlier studies reviewed here, it is anticipated that metacognitive awareness will positively correlate with critical reading skills. Accordingly, the hypotheses of this study are stated as follows.:

1. Alternative Hypothesis (H_a): There is a positive correlation between EFL students' metacognitive awareness and their critical reading skills.
2. Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no positive correlation between EFL students' metacognitive awareness and their critical reading skills.

Hypotheses are tested at $\alpha = 0.05$ using a one-tailed correlation because the alternative predicts a positive relationship between the two variables. The choice of correlation method depends on preliminary assumption testing. Pearson's correlation is used when parametric assumptions are met; otherwise, Spearman's rank correlation serves as a nonparametric alternative. This approach determines the direction, strength, and significance of the relationship between EFL students' metacognitive awareness and their critical reading skills.

E. Previous Studies

Recent research has examined metacognitive awareness in EFL reading by investigating students' reading strategy use, online reading comprehension, general reading performance, and English reading proficiency. Although these studies generally recognize the relevance of metacognitive processes in reading, their findings regarding the relationship between metacognitive awareness and reading performance remain inconsistent. Some studies reported statistically significant associations, whereas others found that students' self-reported strategy use was not significantly associated with their reading test performance. These differences suggest that participant characteristics, measurement instruments, reading formats, academic backgrounds, and the specific reading abilities assessed may influence the findings.

Nguyen and Phung (2021) explored the relationship between metacognition and reading strategies among 92 English-major EFL students at a private Vietnamese university. They used the Metacognitive Awareness Inventory and the Reading Strategies Inventory to analyze different aspects of metacognition and their relationship to students' use of reading strategies. The results showed that metacognition comprises interconnected components, such as knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition, that influence how students choose and use

reading strategies. This research enhances our understanding of the complex link between metacognitive awareness and strategic reading. However, it focused on students' self-reported strategies rather than their actual performance in critical reading tasks.

Extending the discussion from general strategy use to online reading performance, Rianto (2022) investigated the relationship between metacognitive online reading strategies and online reading comprehension among 602 Indonesian university EFL students majoring in language, social science, and science. The participants completed the Online Survey of Reading Strategies and an online reading comprehension test, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis. The findings showed that overall metacognitive online reading strategies, problem-solving strategies, and support strategies were frequently used, whereas global reading strategies were used at a moderate level. Nevertheless, significant relationships between strategy use and online reading comprehension were found only among students majoring in languages. These findings indicate that the relationship between metacognitive strategy use and reading performance may differ according to students' academic backgrounds. However, the study examined online reading comprehension rather than critical reading as a distinct higher-order ability.

While Rianto (2022) linked strategy use directly with reading comprehension performance, Al-Khresheh and Al Basheer Ben Ali. (2023) concentrated more specifically on students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. Their mixed-method study included 210 Saudi EFL university students in the quantitative phase and 15 English instructors in the qualitative phase. Results indicated that students' overall metacognitive awareness was moderate, with moderate awareness of global reading strategies and lower awareness of problem-solving and support strategies. Differences emerged based on gender and university level, while instructors' responses generally aligned with the quantitative results. Although this study provided a detailed profile of students' metacognitive awareness, it did not examine whether that awareness was

statistically associated with performance on a critical reading test.

A further distinction between self-reported strategy use and demonstrated reading performance was examined by Dang (2024). Using an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, the study involved 297 Vietnamese university students from Information Technology, Economics, and English Studies programs. The participants completed the Survey of Reading Strategies, and ten students participated in follow-up interviews to provide further explanations of the quantitative findings. The results showed statistically significant differences in strategy use across academic majors, but no significant relationship was found between overall metacognitive reading strategy use and final reading test scores. This finding indicates that frequent reporting of reading strategy use does not necessarily correspond to stronger reading performance. It also suggests that students' reading outcomes may be related to additional linguistic, personal, academic, and task-related factors.

Consistent with Dang's findings, Seng (2025) also demonstrated that students' self-reported metacognitive strategy use did not consistently correspond to their English reading proficiency. The study involved 91 Cambodian EFL undergraduates who completed the Survey of Reading Strategies and a multiple-choice reading proficiency test, and were then followed by semi-structured interviews with 8 selected participants. The findings revealed moderate overall strategy use, with problem-solving strategies reported most frequently. However, the study reported a weak but statistically significant relationship only between support reading strategies and reading proficiency scores. These results indicate that the relationship between metacognitive strategy use and reading performance may vary depending on the specific strategy category examined. Nevertheless, the study assessed general English reading proficiency rather than critical reading abilities, such as analyzing arguments, evaluating evidence, recognizing assumptions, and assessing the quality of reasoning.

Taken together, the studies reviewed above demonstrate that metacognitive awareness is related to how EFL students approach, regulate, and support their reading processes. Nguyen and Phung (2021) identified relationships between

components of metacognition and reading strategy use, while Rianto (2022) found that the association between online reading strategies and comprehension differed across academic majors. Al-Khresheh and Al Basheer Ben Ali (2023) further demonstrated variation in students' awareness of different reading strategy categories. In contrast, Dang (2024) found no statistically significant relationship between overall strategy use and reading test scores, whereas Seng (2025) identified a weakly significant relationship only for support reading strategies. These findings indicate that the relationship between metacognitive awareness and reading outcomes may depend on participants, academic contexts, instruments, reading formats, and the specific dimensions of reading performance being assessed.

Although these recent studies provide valuable empirical insights, the studies reviewed above primarily focused on reading strategy use, online reading comprehension, general reading test scores, or English reading proficiency. They did not specifically examine critical reading as a performance-based ability that involves identifying central claims and main ideas, making inferences, analyzing authorial purpose and argumentative structure, evaluating evidence, recognizing bias and underlying assumptions, and assessing the quality of reasoning. Moreover, the reviewed studies provide limited evidence concerning the relationship between students' overall metacognitive awareness scores and their performance on a critical reading test, particularly among Indonesian university EFL students. Therefore, further research is needed to determine whether students' awareness and regulation of reading strategies are statistically associated with their ability to analyze and critically evaluate English academic texts.