

**EXPLORING EFL STUDENTS' INFERENTIAL READING
COMPREHENSION SKILLS THROUGH PEER
TUTORING METHOD**

THESIS

Submitted by

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**FACULTY OF TARBIYAH AND TEACHER TRAINING
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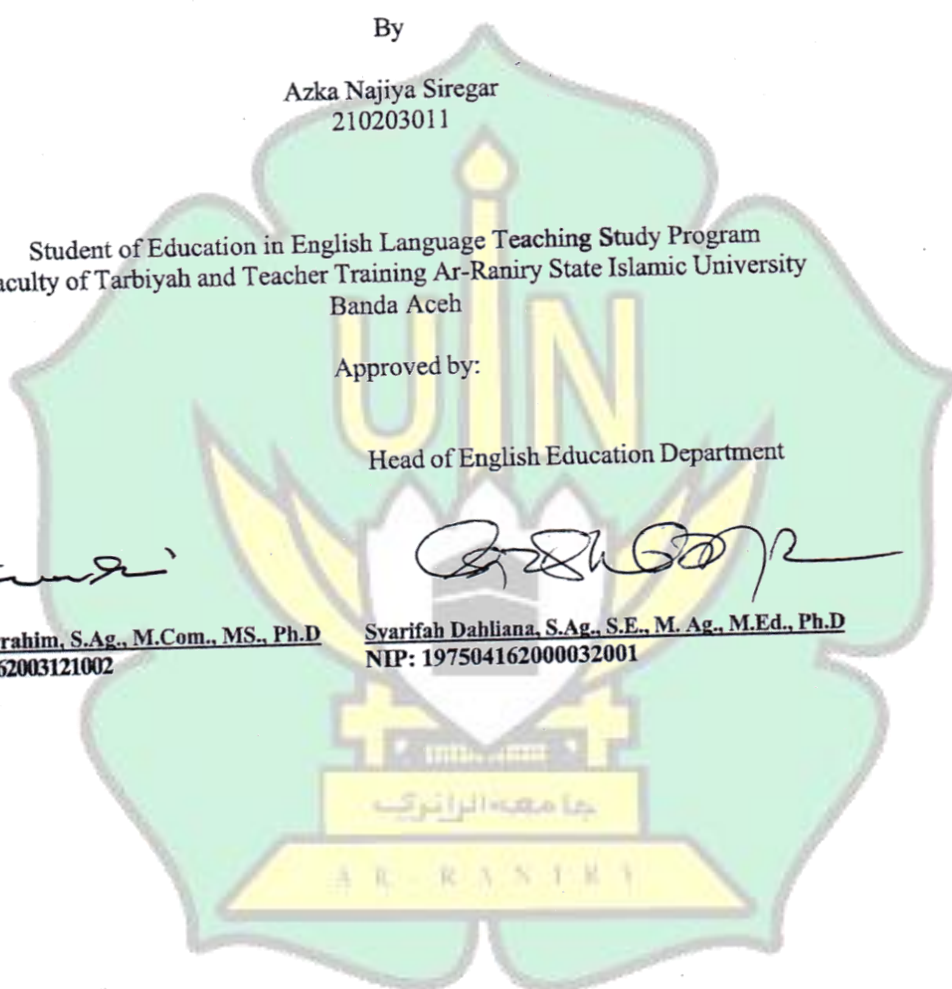
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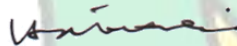
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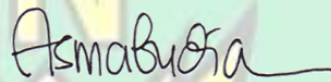
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Adalah benar-benar karya saya, kecuali semua kutipan dan referensi yang disebutkan sumbernya, apabila terdapat kesalahan dan kekeliruan di dalamnya, maka akan sepenuhnya menjadi tanggung jawab saya. Demikian surat pernyataan ini saya buat dengan sesungguhnya.

Banda Aceh, 26 Agustus 2025

Saya yang membuat pernyataan,



Azka Najiya Siregar

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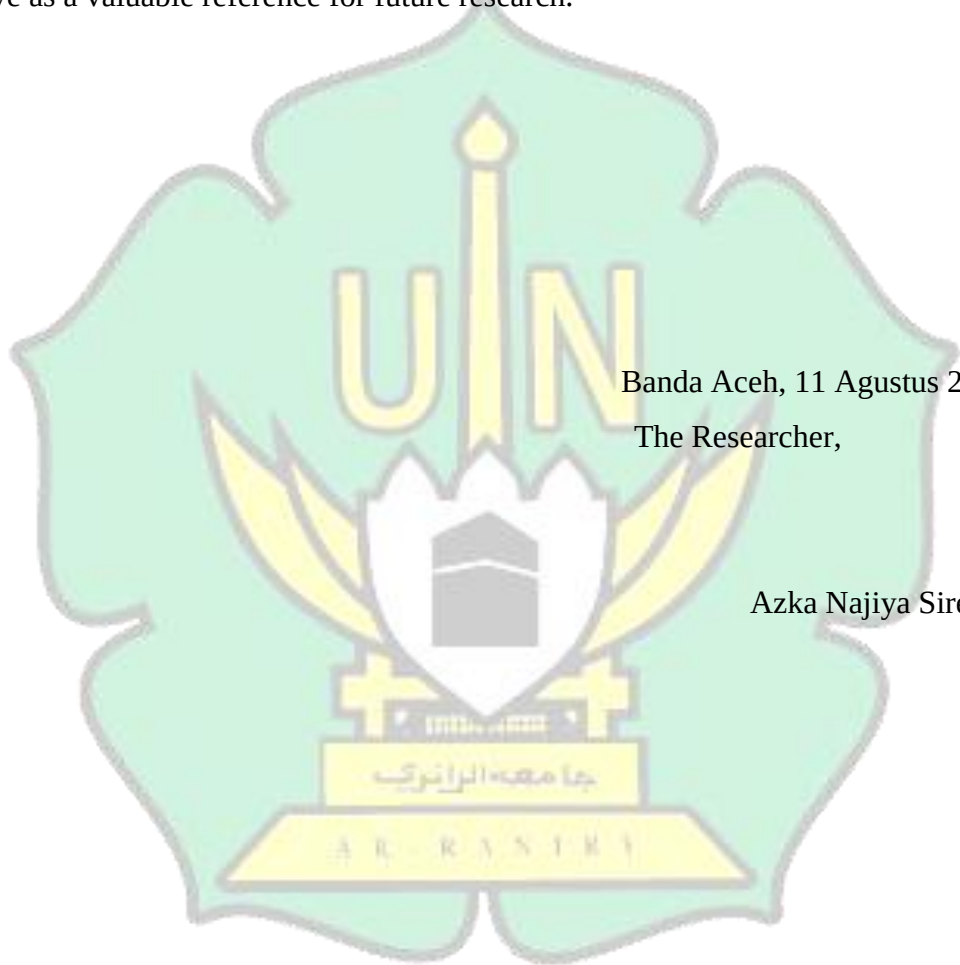
My heartfelt thanks go to all the lecturers and staff of the English Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry, for the knowledge and assistance given throughout my academic years. Their dedication has helped shape my growth both academically and personally. May Allah reward them abundantly in this world and the Hereafter.

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Lastly, the researcher realizes that this thesis is far from perfect. Therefore, constructive feedback and suggestions are warmly welcomed for the improvement of this work. I sincerely hoped that this thesis will be beneficial for readers and serve as a valuable reference for future research.



Banda Aceh, 11 Agustus 2025

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ABSTRACT

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Thesis title : Exploring EFL Students' Inferential Reading Comprehension Skills
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Reading comprehension is a crucial skill for EFL students, yet many struggle with identifying main ideas, understanding vocabulary in context, and developing reading confidence. Peer tutoring has emerged as an effective collaborative learning strategy to address these challenges, as supported by prior research highlighting its benefits for both academic and social development. This study aimed to explore the influence of peer tutoring on EFL students' reading comprehension skills, their perceptions of the peer tutoring method, and the challenges they encountered during peer tutoring sessions in a university setting. A qualitative research approach was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of participants who had experienced peer tutoring during courses that involved peer tutoring as one of the teaching instruction. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes emerging from participants' responses. The findings revealed that peer tutoring positively influenced students' analytical abilities, vocabulary and pronunciation development, and reading confidence. Participants perceived the method as fostering a supportive and collaborative learning environment, although they recommended clearer structure, defined roles, and occasional instructor guidance for improvement. Challenges included communication barriers, group dynamics issues, and knowledge limitations of peers, which at times hindered the effectiveness of the sessions. Peer tutoring was found to be a valuable strategy for enhancing EFL students' reading comprehension, promoting active engagement, and building learner confidence. The study implies that while peer tutoring has clear academic and social benefits, its success depends on structured planning, balanced group participation, and adequate support for peer tutors. These insights can inform the design of peer-assisted learning programs in university-level EFL contexts to optimize both cognitive and affective learning outcomes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL LETTER FROM SUPERVISOR	
APPROVAL LETTER OF THE MUNAQASYAH BOARD OF EXAMINERS	
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY	
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF APPENDICES	vi
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. Background of Study	1
B. Research Question.....	4
C. Aims of Study	4
D. Significance of Study	5
E. Terminology.....	5
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW	7
A. Conceptual Definitions	7
B. Theoretical Framework.....	10
C. Review of Related Studies	13
D. Positive Impact of Peer Tutoring Method	17
E. Challenges in Peer Tutoring Method	18
CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	20
A. Research Design.....	20
B. Research Participants	21
C. Data Collection Instrument	22
D. Data Analysis Procedures	22
CHAPTER IV RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION	24
A. Research Finding.....	24
B. Discussion	35
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION	40
A. Conclusion	40
B. Suggestions	41
REFERENCES.....	43

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4. 1 The participants' demographic information	25
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LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix A Appointment Letter of Supervisor
- Appendix B Recommendation letter from The Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan
to conduct field research
- Appendix C Confirmation Letter of Conducting Research at the English
Education Department
- Appendix D Interview Protocol



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill in language learning and serves as a foundation for both academic achievement and intellectual development. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where comprehension goes beyond the act of only decoding words; it involves constructing meaning, interpreting ideas, and making connections between the text and the reader's prior knowledge. Successful comprehension requires readers to engage in complex cognitive processes such as predicting, inferring, evaluating, and synthesizing information from the text. As Grabe and Stoller (2019) emphasize, reading comprehension is a multifaceted, interactive process that demands active engagement and critical interaction with written materials.

However, for many EFL learners, mastering reading comprehension remains a persistent challenge. In Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, students often struggle to fully comprehend English texts due to a range of factors. These include limited vocabulary knowledge, insufficient exposure to authentic English materials, and a lack of strategies to navigate unfamiliar or implied information (Hidayati & Fitriana, 2020). Consequently, students frequently encounter difficulties in identifying main ideas, interpreting implicit meanings, and linking textual information to broader contexts, all of which are essential for academic success. Without these abilities, learners risk becoming passive readers, focusing only on surface-level understanding rather than cultivating the deeper comprehension skills required for higher education and lifelong learning.

The extent of these challenges is particularly evident in global assessments of literacy. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an international evaluation led by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD), measures the reading, mathematics, and science skills of 15 and 16-year-old students worldwide. In the 2022 PISA results, Indonesia's performance in reading literacy in the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) highlights ongoing challenges in its education system. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Indonesia's average reading score was approximately 359, significantly below the OECD average of 476 and the global average of around 437. Only about 25% of Indonesian students achieved at least Level 2 proficiency in reading, the baseline level indicating the ability to comprehend and interpret moderately complex texts, compared to 74% on average across OECD countries. Furthermore, almost no Indonesian students reached the highest proficiency levels (Level 5 or above), whereas about 7% of students in OECD countries attained this level (OECD, 2023). These results suggest that many Indonesian students struggle with fundamental reading skills and lack the critical literacy competencies necessary for higher-order comprehension. This underperformance underscores systemic issues, such as an overemphasis on rote learning, insufficient exposure to diverse and authentic texts, and a lack of emphasis on critical engagement with reading materials. Consequently, there is an urgent need for innovative instructional approaches—such as peer tutoring—that actively involve learners in meaning-making, collaborative problem-solving, and critical analysis to bridge these gaps and improve reading outcomes.

This problem becomes even more prominent at the university level, where EFL students are expected to engage critically with academic texts. Despite years of English instruction emphasizing grammar, vocabulary, and reading strategies, many students continue to struggle with inferential comprehension—the ability to deduce implied meanings, evaluate arguments, and draw logical conclusions from texts. As Cain and Oakhill (2011) note, inferential comprehension reflects higher-order thinking skills such as reasoning, evaluating evidence, and synthesizing ideas, which are essential for academic discourse and success in knowledge-based societies. The inability to develop these skills not only hindered reading performance but also limits students' overall academic progress.

Recognizing these challenges, educators and researchers have sought innovative pedagogical strategies to improve reading comprehension in EFL contexts. One promising approach is peer tutoring, an instructional method in which students work collaboratively to support each other's learning. Unlike teacher-centered instruction, peer tutoring promotes active student participation, positioning learners as co-constructors of knowledge. Topping (2015) defines peer tutoring as a structured form of cooperative learning where one learner assists another in acquiring academic skills, producing mutual benefits for both tutor and tutee. In reading comprehension, peer tutoring allows students to clarify challenging concepts, share diverse interpretations, and receive immediate feedback, all of which deepen understanding (Gubalani et al., 2023; Rachmawati & Supriyadi, 2021).

The theoretical foundation of peer tutoring further supports its effectiveness in enhancing EFL reading comprehension. Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory highlights the role of social interaction in cognitive development, particularly through the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—the space where learners can achieve more with guidance than independently. Peer tutoring operates within this zone by providing scaffolding through peer collaboration. Bandura's (1997) Social Learning Theory complements this by emphasizing learning through observation and modeling; in peer tutoring, students can adopt effective reading strategies demonstrated by their peers, reinforcing skills through imitation and practice. Additionally, Constructivist Learning Theory (Fosnot & Perry, 2013) views learning as an active process of building understanding through experience and interaction, a principle directly embodied in peer-led discussions where students negotiate meaning and collaboratively solve problems.

Despite the benefits of peer tutoring, research focusing specifically on its impact on inferential comprehension in EFL contexts remains limited. Most existing studies emphasize general reading improvement, vocabulary gains, or increased learner motivation (Kholifuddin et al., 2019; Pratama et al., 2022), with less attention given to its potential in fostering critical, higher-order reading skills

necessary for academic success. This gap underscores the need for empirical studies that investigate how peer tutoring can be systematically implemented to enhance not just surface-level understanding but also the ability to analyze, infer, and evaluate information in complex texts.

In response to this gap, this study explores the influence of peer tutoring on the reading comprehension of EFL university students, with particular attention to analytical and inferential skills. It also examines students' perceptions of peer tutoring and the challenges they encounter during peer-led sessions. By addressing these areas, this research aims to contribute to the part of literature on collaborative learning in EFL education and provide meaningful insights for improving reading instruction within Indonesian universities context. Ultimately, this study responds to the pressing need—evidenced by Indonesia's low performance in international literacy assessments—to adopt innovative strategies capable of equipping students with the critical reading skills essential for academic and professional success nowadays.

B. Research Question

To achieve the aim of the study, this research will address the following research questions:

1. How does peer tutoring influence EFL students' reading comprehension skills?
2. What are EFL students' perceptions of their experiences with peer tutoring in college settings?
3. What challenges do EFL students encounter during peer tutoring sessions, and how do these challenges affect their learning outcomes?

C. Aims of Study

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To explore EFL students' lived experiences with peer tutoring on how EFL students participation in peer tutoring method influence them in enhancing their reading comprehension proficiency along

with their perception regarding their experiences while participating in peer tutoring.

2. To identify challenges or barriers faced by EFL students particularly in university setting that they encounter during peer tutoring sessions to provide insights into factors that may contribute to hinder effective learning process.

D. Significance of Study

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it enriches the existing literature on peer-assisted learning by focusing on its application to inferential reading comprehension in EFL contexts, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. Practically, the findings may inform educators and curriculum developers about the potential benefits and challenges of integrating peer tutoring into reading instruction, ultimately helping to design more effective and engaging learning environments. Furthermore, for students, this study highlights the value of collaborative learning as a means to develop critical reading skills, build confidence, and foster independent learning habits.

E. Terminology

To prevent misunderstandings, a few terms used in this study need to be explained. The terms are as follows:

1. EFL Students

EFL, or English as a Foreign Language, refers to the study of English by non-native speakers in a context where English is not the primary language (Chi, 2015). They are students who majored in English Language Education Department at the university. The EFL students in this study refers to the students at the English Language Education Department of Ar-Raniry State Islamic University of Banda Aceh who participated in peer tutoring sessions during classroom course over the past semesters in university.

2. Peer Tutoring Method

Peer tutoring is an educational method in which students help each other learn academic material. According to Topping and Lindsay (2020), it involves "structured social interaction where one student assists another to learn material that is at or below the helper's level of mastery." Huang and Hong (2016) further define it as "an instructional method in which one student assists another in completing academic tasks." This collaborative approach enhances both academic performance and social skills among students. According to the criteria given above, peer tutoring method on this topic is one of the instructional strategies that EFL students in English Department at UIN Ar-Raniry have participated during classroom learning sessions over the past semesters in university.

