



An investigation into the use of skimming and scanning strategies in reading comprehension at Thainguyen University of Technology

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Abstract

This paper presents a study on investigating the awareness, use, and challenges of skimming and scanning strategies in English reading among first and second-year English-majored students at Thai Nguyen University of Technology (TNUT). The study surveyed 30 students from a Vietnamese university using a Likert-scale questionnaire. The findings show that while most students understand the concepts of skimming and scanning and use them frequently, many still experience difficulties in applying them effectively. Furthermore, a large number of students expressed a desire for more training and activities. The results suggest that explicit instruction and classroom integration of these reading strategies can improve students' reading proficiency and confidence.

Keywords: Reading strategies, skimming, scanning, English learning, reading comprehension

Introduction

Reading is "a psycholinguistic process by which the reader, a language user, reconstructs, as best as he can, a message which has been encoded by a writer as a graphic display" (Goodman, 1971)^[6]. It is an essential skill that helps people gain knowledge and information. Therefore, reading is one of the most essential skills in learning a foreign language, especially for academic purposes. In learning English, reading helps improve vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension skills. It helps students see how words and sentences are used in context, making it easier to understand and use the language effectively. In many English classrooms today, students are expected to read and understand large volumes of information in a limited amount of time. To achieve this, they must develop strategies to read more efficiently. Two common strategies used for this purpose are skimming and scanning.

According to Brown (2001)^[4] skimming helps readers grasp the general meaning of a passage. Skimming means reading a text quickly to get the main idea. We do not need to read every word. Instead, we focus on the title, headings, first and last paragraphs, and topic sentences. This helps us understand what the text is about without reading all the details. For example, when we look at a newspaper article, we can skim it by reading the headline and first few lines. This tells us if the article is interesting or important to us. Skimming is a good way to decide if we want to read more or move on to another text. It also helps us get a general idea before reading more carefully.

In contrast, scanning is different from skimming. Scanning supports the location of particular words, phrases, or data. When we scan a text, we look for specific information such as a name, date, number, or word (Mark Ways). We do not read the whole text. Instead, we move our eyes quickly to find what we need. For example, if we are looking for the price of a product in a catalog, we can scan the page to find it. Or, if we want to find a word in a dictionary, we scan the entries until we find the right one. Scanning saves time and helps us find answers faster.

However, while the strategies are commonly taught, it remains unclear how well students understand and apply them. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What is the students' awareness of skimming and scanning strategies?
- How often do they use these strategies?
- What difficulties do they face, and do they want more training?

The Study

The Subjects

The participants in the study were 30 first and second-year students. All of them had received formal instruction in academic reading and had experience using reading strategies.

The Instruments

The main data collection instrument for the study was a questionnaire survey.

Questionnaire

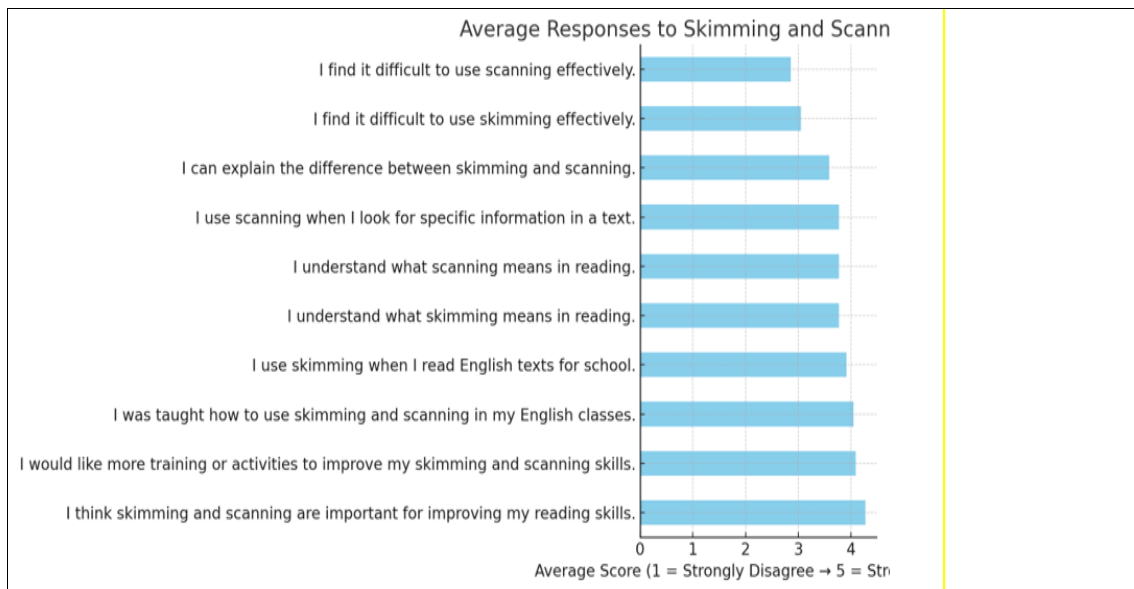
The questionnaire consisted of ten questions, all of which were close-ended based on five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Four items addressed students' awareness, three examined usage, and the remaining three focused on difficulties and the desire for more instruction.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was administered with all the 30 students and it was returned within one day. The data was analyzed through the descriptive statistics.

Results

The findings collected from the questionnaire are presented and discussed in three categories: students' awareness, frequency of use, and difficulties.



1. Awareness of Skimming and Scanning

Most students reported a good understanding of skimming and scanning. The average score for understanding both strategies was 3.77, while the ability to explain the difference between them scored 3.59. Additionally, students agreed that these strategies are important for improving their reading (4.27).

2. Frequency of Use

Students used both skimming and scanning frequently in their academic reading. The average score for skimming use was 3.91, and for scanning 3.77. The score for having been taught these strategies in class was also high (4.05), suggesting that these techniques have been introduced during formal instruction.

3. Difficulties and Desire for Support

Despite using these strategies, students reported moderate difficulty, especially with skimming (3.05) and scanning (2.86). Importantly, the majority indicated a strong desire for more training (4.09).

Discussion

1. Awareness of skimming and scanning

The results indicate that students possess a moderate to high awareness of skimming and scanning strategies. The mean scores for understanding the concept of skimming and scanning were both 3.77, and the ability to differentiate between the two was 3.59. This suggests that students recognize these strategies as important tools for academic reading.

However, despite this general understanding, some students may still confuse when and how to apply each strategy effectively. Awareness without practical experience can limit performance during real reading tasks. Therefore, teachers should not only define skimming and scanning but also provide clear, contextual examples during reading lessons. For instance, introducing mini-lessons where students must decide whether a task requires skimming or scanning based on the reading goal can help solidify conceptual understanding.

2. Frequency of use

Students frequently used both strategies, with mean scores of 3.91 for skimming and 3.77 for scanning. Additionally, the instruction of these strategies in class was rated 4.05, indicating that the majority had some exposure during their studies. Nonetheless, frequent use does not always equate to effective application. Students might use skimming or scanning superficially without achieving the desired comprehension or accuracy. This gap might be due to practice that focuses more on usage than on strategic thinking. Hence, teachers should create targeted practice tasks that simulate academic reading needs. For example, skimming tasks could include reading abstracts to summarize the main idea within a time limit, while scanning tasks could involve locating specific data points in research articles. Timed activities and strategy-focused reading logs can encourage purposeful practice.

3. Difficulties and desire for support

Although students used skimming and scanning often, they also reported moderate difficulties: skimming (mean = 3.05), scanning (mean = 2.86). Furthermore, students expressed a strong desire for further support and training (mean = 4.09).

These findings highlight that while students are familiar with the strategies, confidence and efficiency in using them are still developing. Without structured feedback or systematic training, students may not refine their technique adequately. Teachers should offer individual or group feedback after practice tasks and give students self-assessment checklists after reading tasks, prompting students to reflect on their strategic approach and outcome.

Conclusion

This study investigated the awareness and use of skimming and scanning strategies among university students. The results show that most students understand these strategies and use them regularly. However, many still find them challenging and want more support. This highlights the need for targeted instruction that moves beyond theoretical explanation toward practical classroom application. By incorporating interactive, purpose-driven reading tasks, teachers can help students become more efficient and strategic readers.

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