

EXPLORING STUDENTS' STRUGGLES IN IDENTIFYING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SKIMMING AND SCANNING IN EFL READING

Siti Khadijah¹, Panji Putra Haris Ardiyanto², Faiz Al-Aufarezhy³, Era Karlina⁴, Gatot Subroto⁵

¹Raja Ali Haji Maritime University, Riau Archipelago, Indonesia

²Raja Ali Haji Maritime University, Riau Archipelago, Indonesia

³Raja Ali Haji Maritime University, Riau Archipelago, Indonesia

⁴Raja Ali Haji Maritime University, Riau Archipelago, Indonesia

⁵Raja Ali Haji Maritime University, Riau Archipelago, Indonesia

Corresponding Author(S): 2403050008@student.umrah.ac.id¹

Abstract:

Skimming and scanning are important reading methods in EFL because they allow students to efficiently access both broad and specialized information. Many EFL students still find it difficult to differentiate between the two, despite their significance. The purpose of this study is to investigate the conceptual and procedural challenges that first-semester students experience while using skimming and scanning in academic reading assignments. This study aims to: (1) ascertain students' comprehension of scanning and skimming; (2) pinpoint difficulties in using both techniques; and (3) investigate the causes of their misunderstandings. Descriptive qualitative and quantitative techniques were combined in a mixed-methods methodology. Questionnaires, two pre-test interviews, and observations of students' decision-making processes when choosing reading techniques were used to gather data from 29 first-semester students. The results showed that skimming was more common among students than scanning. Eight out of ten interview participants successfully used both strategies; nevertheless, two participants showed inconsistent, particularly when identifying precise information. Most mistakes resulted from routine reading habits, limited vocabulary, and a lack of metacognitive awareness when identifying reading goals. Although students had a basic comprehension of skimming and scanning, their use of these skills remained uneven. To improve their strategic reading abilities, more organized instruction and contextual practice are required. The findings highlight how crucial explicit, contextual, and guided training is in improving students' capacity to differentiate and successfully use reading methods in EFL contexts.

Keywords:

Skimming; Scanning;
Reading Strategies;
EFL Students;
Metacognitive
Awareness



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INTRODUCTION

Reading is such a complex activity, it involves understanding what you're reading, interpreting it, and interacting with the text in a way that helps you understand it better (Adiatma et al., 2023; Saijao et al., 2023). It's not just about decoding; it's about engaging with the content in a way that helps you understand it. So, when we're teaching reading

in English as a foreign language, it's really important to make sure we're using the right reading strategies.

In our academic reading education, we tend to focus on teaching skimming and scanning first because these are the skills that get you started with reading. Skimming is a really helpful reading technique. It allows you to get the main idea of something quickly. Scanning, on the other hand, is great at finding specific data like names, dates or important information (Munisaxon et al., 2022; Novasyari, 2023). Preliminary research shows that students' reading comprehension can improve a lot when these tactics are used successfully (Faradilla et al., 2024). But, there's something important to remember: for these strategies to really work, the learners need to understand the concepts and the steps.

Even though skimming and scanning are crucial, many EFL students find it difficult to use these techniques when they are reading for the first time in a real-world setting. According to research, students' comprehension of reading strategies differs from their actual application of them (Adiatma et al., 2023; Kamasiah et al., 2023). It's critical to acknowledge that becoming proficient in academic reading can occasionally be difficult. This is especially true in settings related to higher education, where the learning process may be impacted by certain differences.

Preliminary findings from English education students at Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji (UMRAH) point to similar challenges. First-year students exhibit conceptual ambiguity and inconsistent use of scanning and skimming when engaging with academic literature. This behavior is in line with past research Novasyari, 2023; Saijao et al. (2023) that found procedural confusion to be a persistent issue in EFL reading instruction.

The aforementioned challenges are caused by a variety of factors, including inadequate linguistic competence, limited contextual practice, poor metacognitive awareness, and unclear instructional explanations (Adiatma et al., 2023; Munisaxon et al., 2022). Children frequently misuse or switch between different strategies when reading methods are taught only through definitions without enough guided practice.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the difficulties EFL students encounter when utilizing and distinguishing between skimming and scanning techniques. The 2025 cohort of Universitas Maritim Raja Ali Haji first-year English education students is the subject of the current study. Descriptive qualitative interviews provide in-depth contextual insights into students' beliefs and strategic reading behaviors.

The first objective of this study is to identify the main obstacles that EFL students face when attempting to distinguish between skimming and scanning, and the second is to investigate the elements that lead to misunderstandings or incorrect use of these strategies. The findings are expected to contribute to the theoretical framework of research in the area of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading strategies and pedagogical practices. The findings of this study will specifically aid in the creation of more contextualized and successful teaching methods for academic reading.

METHOD

Research design and method

The research method used in this study was a mixed method, which combined descriptive qualitative data and quantitative data (Fitriana & Yusup, 2025). The researchers chose this approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the extent to which first-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Raja Ali Haji Maritime University understood and applied scanning and skimming techniques in critical reading activities. In the data collection process, students were given a questionnaire aimed at exploring their perceptions, experiences, and level of confidence in using these two techniques. In addition, two pre-tests were given to students to evaluate their ability to determine the most appropriate reading strategy for answering each question. The pre-tests were conducted through interviews, so that researchers could observe directly how the students chose specific reading techniques. Utilizing a combination of questionnaires and pretest-based interviews allowed the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the students' conceptual understanding and how they practiced scanning and skimming.

Research participants

This research involved 15 female students and 8 male students in their first semester. The main methods used to measure the students' understanding of skimming and scanning techniques in critical reading activities were interviews and questionnaires. Interviews were conducted to explore students' reasons, strategies, and thought processes for choosing specific reading techniques, while questionnaires were used to obtain quantitative data on the students' perceptions and beliefs about the two techniques. Moris's interpretation of observation, namely the use of tools to record events for scientific or other purposes, was in line with the recording actions that were carried out during the interview process in this study (Hasanah, 2016). Through a combination of these two instruments, this study sought to obtain a comprehensive picture of the students' initial abilities in applying skimming and scanning reading techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Sari (2016), skimming and scanning were more efficient reading techniques that enabled readers to obtain general and specific information. Therefore, these strategies were highly relevant for language learners at the early stages. The results of this study showed that first-semester students in the English Education Study Program were still progressing in choosing one of the reading methods. The quantitative results of the survey showed that most students were more familiar with skimming. Meanwhile, scanning remained difficult because it required precision in finding detailed information in a short time. These results were in line with Rosmarie & Mualimin (2021), who stated that beginner readers tended to find it easier to understand the general outline of a text before concentrating on the details.

The initial findings were reinforced by additional analysis involving interviews with ten students. Of the two questions given to each interview participant, eight students were able to answer both questions correctly, while two students answered one question correctly and answered one question incorrectly. This pattern showed that the students generally understood the basic concepts of the reading method. However, its application was not yet stable. The errors were mainly caused by the tendency of some students to rely on habitual reading patterns rather than selecting an appropriate strategy based on

the purpose of the question. Students tended to skim both types of questions, including questions that actually required scanning. This was in line with Basuki's (2018) explanation that beginner readers often had difficulty finding keywords that were important for scanning.

In addition, as shown by the interviews, some students chose a reading method because they felt comfortable with it, not because of the characteristics of the questions. One reason why reading techniques were ineffective for early learners, according to Fisher (2016), was a lack of strategic awareness. In this study, the researchers found a similar situation; some students even said that they often reread the entire text when they did not know the right way to read it. These results were in line with the opinion of Chamba & Ramirez-Avila (2021), who stated that the application of appropriate reading strategies required metacognitive awareness on the part of the reader, which was not yet fully developed in the early stages of reading.

Overall, the findings of this study were consistent with those of Faradilla et al. (2024), who stated that targeted practice with skimming and scanning could improve students' reading comprehension if the techniques were tailored to the reading objectives. As indicated by the questionnaire data and interviews in this study, first-semester students already had a basic understanding of both reading techniques. However, they still required specific guidance and regular practice to apply them.

The findings suggested that early critical reading training should have focused on exercises that assisted students in differentiating between skimming and scanning skills, especially by teaching them to recognize main concepts, keywords, and reading purposes. As a result, the results of this study gave a thorough picture of the students' early critical reading capabilities and had significant implications for creating more effective teaching methods that would improve the students' academic reading abilities and strategic awareness.

Table 1 Participant

NO	NAME	RIGHT	WRONG
1	Student 1	2	
2	Student 2	2	
3	Student 3	1	
4	Student 4	2	
5	Student 5	2	
6	Student 6	2	
7	Student 7	2	
8	Student 8	2	
9	Student 9	2	
10	Student 10	1	

Source:

The results of this study, derived from questionnaire data and follow-up interviews, indicate that first-semester EFL students experience noticeable difficulties in differentiating between skimming and scanning, particularly at the procedural level.

Quantitative findings from the questionnaire administered to 29 students showed that skimming was more familiar and more frequently used than scanning, with 41.38% of

respondents agreeing and 13.79% strongly agreeing that they regularly used skimming to grasp the main ideas of a text. However, the relatively high percentage of neutral responses (37.93%) suggested that although skimming was commonly practiced, it was not always applied with strong confidence or strategic awareness. In contrast, the students' responses toward scanning revealed greater uncertainty, as 48.28% agreed and 13.79% strongly agreed that they used scanning to locate specific information, while 34.48% remained neutral, indicating limited confidence in applying this strategy consistently. This uncertainty was further reflected in the students' ability to distinguish between the two strategies, as more than half of the respondents (51.72%) selected neutral responses and 24.14% agreed that they still experienced difficulty differentiating skimming from scanning, suggesting partial conceptual understanding but insufficient procedural clarity.

Additionally, a considerable number of students (37.93% agreed and 13.79% strongly agreed) reported receiving limited explicit instruction on skimming and scanning in reading classes, which might have contributed to their confusion and inconsistent strategy use, despite the students' positive beliefs that regular reading practice could help them better differentiate the two strategies. These quantitative findings were supported by qualitative data from interviews, in which several students demonstrated inconsistent strategy use, often selecting strategies based on personal comfort rather than task demands, or rereading entire texts when they were unsure, indicating limited strategic and metacognitive awareness.

These findings were consistent with recent studies emphasizing that familiarity with reading strategy concepts did not necessarily lead to effective strategy application without sufficient instructional support and contextualized practice (Stoller et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2021). The dominance of skimming over scanning might have been explained by novice readers' tendency to prioritize global comprehension, as lower-proficiency EFL learners often relied on less cognitively demanding strategies, according to (Laufer, 2020).

Furthermore, the students' confusion in differentiating strategies aligned with recent research showing that inadequate emphasis on reading purposes and keyword identification often resulted in ineffective strategy selection (Al-Moteri et al., 2024). The interview data also highlighted the crucial role of metacognitive awareness, as students with limited ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading processes tended to apply strategies inconsistently, according to (Teng, 2019). In addition, limited vocabulary knowledge might have constrained the students' ability to apply scanning effectively, as lexical difficulties frequently led learners to adopt word-by-word reading patterns that interfered with selective reading strategies, according to (Laufer, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The capacity of first-semester students to use skimming and scanning techniques is still in its infancy, according to the analysis of the data gathered from both the questionnaire and the interview sessions. While the majority of students have shown a basic comprehension of the conceptual distinctions between the two reading strategies, their consistency in choosing the best approach to complete reading assignments has not yet fully mirrored this comprehension.

Eight out of ten students were able to properly answer both questions, according to the interview results, suggesting that they have a respectable level of conceptual and procedural understanding about when to utilize scanning and skimming. The other two students, however, struggled to choose the right approach, especially when faced with tasks that required the identification of precise or detailed information. These mistakes imply that certain students are more likely to rely on regular reading habits or personal comfort than to consider the nature of the assignment or the reading goal.

All things considered; the results show that first-semester students have a solid foundation in critical reading abilities. To apply reading strategies correctly and consistently, they still need structured guidance, gradual practice, and enhanced metacognitive awareness. This study also underscores the necessity for Critical Reading education to stress strategic awareness, explicit reading aims, and supervised practice in finding main concepts and key information through accurate use of skimming and scanning.

As a result, the study's findings not only show how well students are already reading, but they also offer insightful information for bettering teaching strategies meant to raise students' academic reading competency in English.

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