ISSN: 2582-4686 SJIF 2021-3.261,SJIF 2022-2.889, 2024-6.875 ResearchBib IF: 9.948 / 2024

THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME-6, ISSUE-1

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SKIMMING AND SCANNING STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract. This article examines how skimming and scanning strategies can improve students' reading comprehension, especially when learners must handle long texts under time pressure. Skimming supports global understanding by helping readers capture topic, purpose, and main ideas quickly, while scanning enables fast location of specific facts such as names, dates, definitions, and key details. Drawing on established reading scholarship and classroom evidence, the article explains why these strategies work, what conditions make them most effective, and how teachers can train students to use them deliberately rather than randomly. The discussion highlights cognitive benefits such as better allocation of attention, clearer reading goals, and reduced overload during academic tasks.

Keywords: skimming, scanning, reading comprehension, reading strategies, academic literacy, English language teaching, timed reading.

INTRODUCTION

In many classrooms, students are expected to read more than time allows. They face textbook chapters, articles, exam passages, instructions, and digital texts that demand quick decisions: what is important, where the answer is, and whether the text is even relevant. If students attempt to read everything carefully, they often run out of time, lose focus, and misunderstand the main point. If they rush without a method, they may miss structure and meaning. Skimming and scanning are two widely taught strategies designed for this real-world constraint. Reading research describes such rapid approaches as a form of expeditious reading that differs from careful word by word processing and includes skimming and scanning [1].

Skimming and scanning are sometimes treated as simple tricks, but they can be powerful tools when integrated into comprehension instruction. Their effectiveness depends on how they are taught, when they are used, and how they connect to broader reading skills such as vocabulary, inference, and discourse awareness. The goal is not to replace deep reading, but to help students choose the right reading mode for the task and move through texts with purpose rather than panic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Skimming is rapid reading for global meaning. The reader aims to understand the topic, overall argument, and main points by paying attention to titles, headings, first and last sentences of paragraphs, signal words, and repeated key terms. Scanning is rapid searching for a specific piece of information, guided by a clear target such as a date, term, name, definition, or answer to a question. In effective instruction, these strategies are not presented as guessing. They are purposeful and selective. A major reason they work is that they shift reading from passive decoding to goal-driven processing. When students have a goal, their attention becomes organized: they know what to ignore and what to notice [2].

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Reading scholarship emphasizes that reading is not one single activity but a set of abilities and purposes. Different goals require different processing depth. Grabe and Stoller describe reading as meaning construction that varies by purpose, task, and reader resources, and they treat strategy use as part of competent reading performance in second-language contexts. This view supports a balanced model: skimming and scanning are tools for certain purposes, especially previewing, locating, and navigating information, while careful reading supports detail, inference, and critical evaluation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At first glance, skimming and scanning look like shortcuts. Yet they can improve comprehension because they reduce cognitive overload. Many students fail comprehension tasks not because they are incapable of understanding, but because they allocate attention poorly. They may spend too long on a difficult sentence early in the passage and then rush later, losing coherence. Skimming helps them build a mental map of the text before diving into details. That map supports prediction, better inference, and stronger memory because information is placed into a structure rather than stored as scattered facts [3].

Scanning supports comprehension in a different way. It trains students to recognize text organization and informational cues. For example, definitions often appear near key terms, dates cluster in historical narratives, and results appear in sections with specific markers in academic texts. When students learn to scan effectively, they become more sensitive to how texts are built. That sensitivity transfers to other comprehension skills, including identifying main ideas and distinguishing supporting details. In other words, scanning can function as training in textual awareness, not merely fast searching.

Empirical classroom research commonly reports improved performance when scanning and related rapid-reading strategies are taught and practiced systematically. For example, Komara and Dewi report that scanning strategy instruction in a quasi-experimental design improved English reading comprehension outcomes for ninth-grade students studying narrative texts. While contexts differ by country, grade, and assessment type, the pattern is consistent: students benefit when teachers demonstrate the strategy, provide guided practice, and connect tasks to clear reading goals [4].

It is also important to interpret such findings realistically. Skimming and scanning do not magically increase vocabulary knowledge or grammatical competence. They help students use what they already know more efficiently. When students lack basic decoding skills, or when texts are far above their language level, speed strategies alone will not solve comprehension problems. In such cases, strategy training must be paired with language support such as vocabulary pre-teaching, simplified texts, or graded reading.

Skimming and scanning are most effective under several conditions. First, students must have a clear purpose. Scanning without a target becomes random eye movement. Second, texts should have accessible structure: headings, paragraphing, topic sentences, or recognizable patterns. Third, students need explicit modeling. Telling learners to skim is like telling someone to cook without explaining heat, timing, or tools. Fourth, teachers must treat errors as part of training. Beginners will scan the wrong line, misread numbers, or confuse similar names. Feedback is the difference between practice and repetition of mistakes.

Another key condition is balanced integration. If students only skim and scan, they may become fast but shallow readers. If they only read carefully, they may become accurate but slow and overwhelmed. A practical model is staged reading: preview by skimming, locate needed details by scanning, then

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select important sections for careful reading and synthesis. This staged approach aligns with the idea that expeditious reading and careful reading serve different learning goals within a single curriculum [5].

A workable teaching sequence can be implemented across several lessons.

Step one is demonstration. The teacher shows a short text on screen or paper and performs skimming aloud, narrating decisions such as focusing on headings, opening sentences, and repeated terms. Then the teacher performs scanning with a visible target such as find the year of an event or locate the definition of a key concept. Students observe the logic, not just the speed.

Step two is guided practice. Students receive a text with structured tasks. For skimming, tasks may include writing a one-sentence gist, choosing the best title, identifying the purpose, or outlining main points. For scanning, tasks include locating specific facts, matching questions to paragraph locations, or highlighting where the text answers a given prompt. Timed practice can be added gradually, but accuracy should come first. Speed without accuracy is just fast wrongness, which is not a skill anyone wants on exam day.

CONCLUSION

Skimming and scanning strategies can improve students' reading comprehension, not only by increasing speed but by organizing attention, clarifying purpose, and strengthening awareness of text structure. Their effectiveness is highest when instruction is explicit, practice is regular, and feedback is specific. Classroom evidence indicates that students often show measurable gains in comprehension performance when scanning instruction is integrated into reading lessons, especially in contexts where time pressure and large reading loads are common.

However, these strategies are not a substitute for language development or deep reading. They are tools that help students choose an efficient route through a text so that limited time is spent on the most valuable parts. The best instructional approach is balanced: teach students to skim to build a map, scan to locate targets, and then shift into careful reading for interpretation, inference, and critical understanding. When taught this way, skimming and scanning become not exam hacks but academic survival skills, and students stop reading like they are chasing every word with a net.

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