

# DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION OF 10<sup>TH</sup>-GRADERS AT THAI PHIEN HIGH SCHOOL AND APPLICATION OF SKIMMING AND SCANNING TECHNIQUES

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**Abstract:** Reading comprehension is essential for EFL learners; however, many Vietnamese high school students continue to face ongoing challenges. This study explores difficulties of 10th-grade students at Thai Phien High School and the application of skimming and scanning techniques. Data were gathered through a questionnaire delivered to 100 students. The findings show that limited vocabulary is the main barrier, affecting over half of the students. Many also rely on inefficient habits like word-by-word translation due to a lack of strategy awareness. After being trained in skimming and scanning, students showed improved reading speed and the ability to identify main ideas. However, some students still struggled with applying the techniques correctly. The study concludes that teaching explicit reading strategies with engaging, authentic materials boosts reading efficiency and student confidence. It recommends incorporating these strategies into regular instruction and offering continued support to help students overcome reading difficulties.

**Keywords:** Difficulties, EFL learners, reading comprehension, scanning, skimming.

## TÌM HIỂU NHỮNG KHÓ KHĂN TRONG VIỆC ĐỌC HIỂU TIẾNG ANH CỦA HỌC SINH LỚP 10 TẠI TRƯỜNG THPT THÁI PHIÊN VÀ VIỆC ÁP DỤNG KỸ THUẬT ĐỌC LƯỚI VÀ ĐỌC QUÉT

**Tóm tắt:** Đọc hiểu là kỹ năng thiết yếu đối với người học tiếng Anh như ngoại ngữ; tuy nhiên, nhiều học sinh trung học Việt Nam vẫn thường xuyên gặp phải nhiều khó khăn. Nghiên cứu này tìm hiểu những khó khăn của học sinh lớp 10 trường THPT Thái Phiên và việc áp dụng kỹ thuật đọc lướt (skimming) và đọc quét (scanning). Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua phiếu khảo sát gửi đến 100 học sinh. Kết quả cho thấy vốn từ vựng hạn chế là rào cản lớn nhất, ảnh hưởng đến hơn một nửa số học sinh. Nhiều em

còn dựa vào những thói quen không hiệu quả, như dịch từng từ, do thiếu nhận thức về các chiến lược đọc. Sau khi được hướng dẫn kỹ thuật skimming và scanning, học sinh đã cải thiện tốc độ đọc và khả năng xác định các ý chính. Tuy nhiên, một số em vẫn gặp khó khăn trong việc vận dụng đúng các kỹ thuật này. Nghiên cứu kết luận rằng việc dạy các chiến lược đọc rõ ràng cùng với tài liệu học tập hấp dẫn và mang tính thực tế giúp nâng cao hiệu quả đọc và sự tự tin của học sinh. Nghiên cứu cũng khuyến nghị tích hợp các chiến lược này vào quá trình giảng dạy thường xuyên và cung cấp sự hỗ trợ liên tục để giúp học sinh khắc phục những khó khăn trong kỹ năng đọc.

**Từ khóa:** Khó khăn, học sinh học ngoại ngữ là tiếng Anh, đọc hiểu, đọc quét, đọc lướt.

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## 1. Introduction

Reading is a vital skill for acquiring knowledge and is one of the four core language skills in learning languages, including English. It helps learners expand vocabulary, understand sentence structures, and develop cognitive abilities. According to Patel and Jain (2008), reading not only provides information and enjoyment but also strengthens linguistic proficiency. Hill (2000) describes reading as an active process of understanding and interpreting the author's message, while Alderson (2000) highlights its immersive and enjoyable nature. Although reading proves its surmountable significance, Vietnamese students may struggle with English reading comprehension due to limited vocabulary, grammar issues, difficulty identifying main ideas, and time constraints. These issues hinder students' ability to grasp main ideas and locate key information. To address these challenges, strategies like skimming and scanning are effective. Skimming helps grasp the overall meaning quickly, while scanning

aids in locating specific information. These techniques are particularly useful under time pressure. No research has been conducted on the difficulties in reading comprehension of 10th-graders at a high school in Hai Phong. This study addresses the gap by exploring the reading difficulties 10th-grade students at Thai Phien High School may face and finding out the effect of skimming and scanning strategies on the improvement of their English reading comprehension. The main research questions guiding this study are:

(1) What are the difficulties 10th-grade students at Thai Phien High School face in English reading comprehension?

(2) What are their perceptions of the application of skimming and scanning strategies in addressing those difficulties?

The research can provide insight into the difficulties in reading comprehension of a group of high school students, their perceptions of skimming and scanning strategies in addressing the issues.. The research result can be a reference for interested stakeholders.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Reading comprehension**

Reading comprehension refers to the ability to process, decode, and construct meaning from written texts. Grabe and Stoller (2002) emphasize that comprehension involves an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge, linguistic competence, and use of cognitive strategies. In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings like Vietnam, reading comprehension poses unique challenges because learners are required to understand texts written in a language they are still acquiring. According to Day and Bamford (1998), reading comprehension includes both lower-level skills, such as word recognition and syntactic parsing and higher-level skills like inference, evaluation, and integration of information. These skills work in tandem to support a deeper and more meaningful understanding of text. However, many students tend to rely on surface-level processing, especially when they lack the vocabulary or the confidence to tackle more advanced comprehension tasks. Carrell (1988) and Hill (2000) point out that EFL learners need training in metacognitive strategies such as predicting content, monitoring understanding, and adjusting reading speed depending on the text's complexity. Without these strategies, learners may resort to word-by-word translation a habit that reduces fluency and overall understanding.

### **2.2. Difficulties in English reading comprehension**

In the Vietnamese EFL context, several types of reading difficulties have been observed and documented. These can be categorized into the following:

#### **(1) Linguistic-related difficulties**

These include limited vocabulary knowledge, grammatical confusion, and poor familiarity with text structures. Research by Le (2021) and Phuc (2020) revealed that many Vietnamese high school students struggle to retain vocabulary or recognize sentence-level meaning, which hinders their ability to follow the flow of a text.

#### **(2) Strategy-related difficulties**

Students often lack awareness of reading strategies such as skimming and scanning. This leads to ineffective reading habits, such as over-reliance on dictionaries or translating each word literally. As noted by Alderson (2000), the absence of strategic behavior is a major cause of reading breakdowns.

#### **(3) Cognitive-affective barriers**

These include low motivation, test anxiety, and poor engagement with materials. A recent study by Mai, Lien, and Trang (2024) suggests that unfamiliar cultural references or uninteresting reading topics reduce learners' ability to connect with the content and apply reading strategies effectively.

These three categories of difficulties highlight the necessity of equipping learners with effective reading

strategies that promote flexibility and independence. Specifically, the use of skimming and scanning has been proven to reduce the cognitive load associated with unfamiliar words or time pressure. By training students to apply these techniques strategically, educators can help them focus on meaning rather than form, improving both comprehension and confidence..

### **2.3. Reading Strategies: Skimming and Scanning**

Skimming and scanning are foundational strategies in efficient reading. Skimming involves quickly reviewing a text to grasp its general ideas, often by focusing on titles, headings, topic sentences, and conclusion statements (Maxwell, 1972). In contrast, scanning entails searching through a passage to locate specific information, such as names, dates, or numbers, without reading everything (Grellet, 1981).

Harmer (2007) advocates for the deliberate instruction of both strategies in language classrooms. These skills enable learners to manage time effectively and adjust their reading approach based on the task at hand. Recent studies (e.g., Arifitriyanti et al., 2021; Diaz & Laguado, 2013) confirm that students who receive training in skimming and scanning perform better in academic reading tasks and develop a more positive attitude toward reading.

Integrating these strategies into classroom instruction not only improves reading outcomes but also promotes

strategic autonomy. Teachers are encouraged to provide scaffolded instruction, use authentic reading materials, and allow learners to practice these skills in varied contexts. This flexible approach ensures that students learn not just to read, but to read with purpose and confidence.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Research design**

This study adopted a quantitative approach to investigate the difficulties in English reading comprehension encountered by 10th-grade students at Thai Phien High School and to evaluate the effectiveness of skimming and scanning techniques. A structured questionnaire was designed to gather data on reading habits, obstacles, and strategy usage. An open-ended question was added to attain deeper, more nuanced insights into students' experiences.

### **3.2. Description of subjects**

The participants of this study were 100 Grade 10 students from Thai Phien high school in Hai Phong, including 48 students from Class 10A8 and 52 from Class 10A9. Both classes were selected due to the convenience for the student-researcher as an internship at the research site. Overall, many of them had limited English reading proficiency. They commonly struggled to identify main ideas, felt overwhelmed by unfamiliar vocabulary, and lacked the confidence to deal with longer texts. In both classes, students tended to read mechanically often word by word without knowing what

information to focus on, which made reading slow, tiring, and sometimes frustrating. These difficulties appear from the absence of effective reading strategies and limited exposure to English beyond the classroom.

### **3.3. Description of data instrument**

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire composed of nine closed-ended questions and one open-ended question, designed to capture students' perspectives on reading comprehension and strategy use. The questionnaire focused on four key areas:

(1) Awareness of reading importance and self-assessment of reading skills.

(2) Obstacles to reading comprehension, such as vocabulary, grammar, and reading speed.

(3) Awareness and application of skimming and scanning techniques.

(4) Perceived benefits and difficulties in using these strategies.

To ensure clarity and accessibility, explanations of skimming and scanning were simplified and accompanied by examples within the survey. The open-ended question encouraged students to elaborate on personal experiences, which served as the basis for the thematic analysis.

### **3.4. Procedures and data analysis**

The study was carried out over a four-week period during the second

semester of the 2024-2025 school year. The process was divided into three phases:

Week 1 - Preparation: The questionnaire was developed and piloted to ensure clarity. Terms like “scanning” and “skimming” were adjusted based on student feedback to avoid confusion.

Week 2 - Administration: The survey was distributed to all 100 participants during class under teacher supervision. Clear instructions were provided, and students were encouraged to answer honestly. Over 95% of responses were completed without assistance.

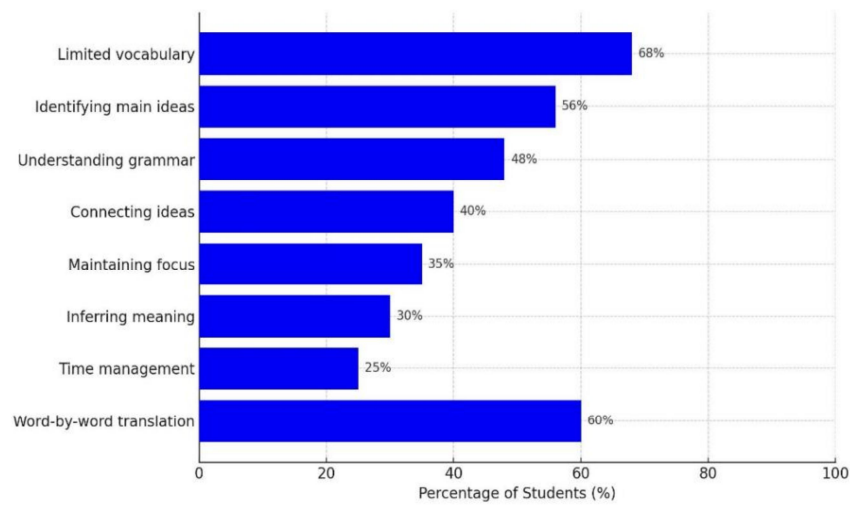
Weeks 3&4 - Data Analysis: Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics (percentages and frequencies) and presented via bar and pie charts. Open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies patterns and themes across qualitative data.

## **4. Results and discussions**

### **4.1. Results**

Most students surveyed recognized the crucial role of reading comprehension in English learning, with 80% rating it as “very important” and another 16% as “quite important.” Despite acknowledging its significance, half rated their comprehension skills as average, highlighting uneven skill levels. Only 25% and 18% respectively considered themselves good or very good at reading comprehension, indicating a need for targeted support.

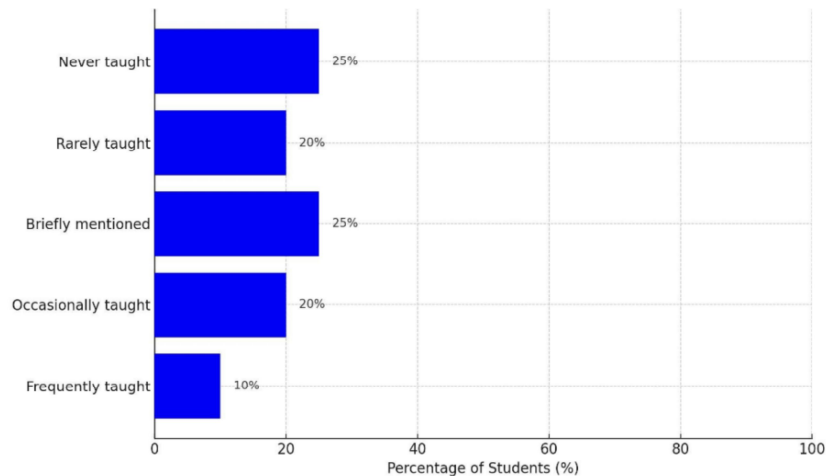
*Chart 1. General Reading Comprehension Difficulties*



The survey clearly identified challenges highlighted by existing literature. Vocabulary limitations were the most reported difficulty (65%), followed by difficulty identifying main ideas (55%), understanding grammatical structures

(50%), and connecting ideas across paragraphs (45%). Additional barriers included slow reading due to word-by-word translation (40%) and insufficient background knowledge (35%), reflecting common issues in EFL contexts.

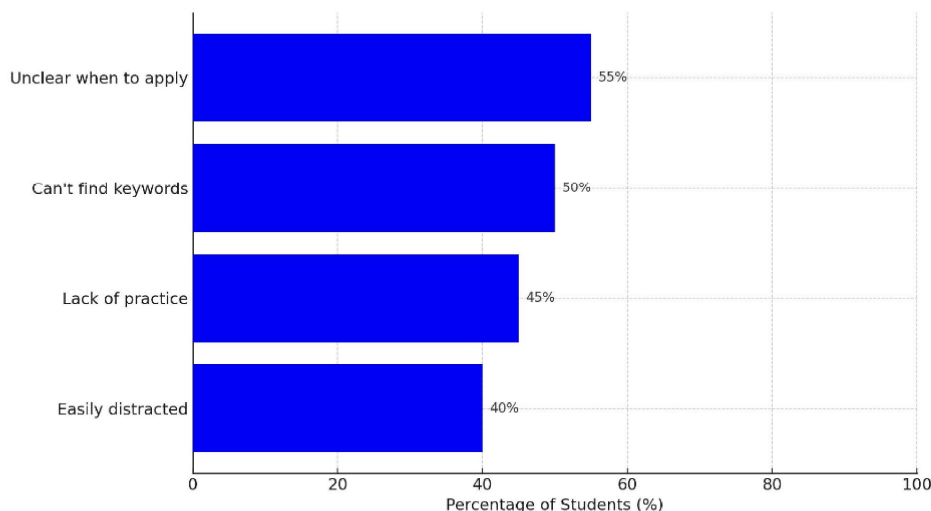
*Chart 2. Exposure to Skimming and Scanning Instruction*



Regarding strategic reading skills, while awareness of skimming and scanning techniques was moderately high, practical implementation was limited. Approximately 70% of students never or rarely use these strategies. Key obstacles

included uncertainty about when to apply them (55%), inability to identify keywords quickly (50%), lack of guided practice (45%), and distractions (40%). Students acknowledged the benefits of strategy use but lacked confidence in applying them effectively.

*Chart 3. Difficulties in Skimming and Scanning*



Responses to the open-ended question highlighted additional reading comprehension difficulties not captured in the fixed-response items. Thematic analysis identified three primary themes:

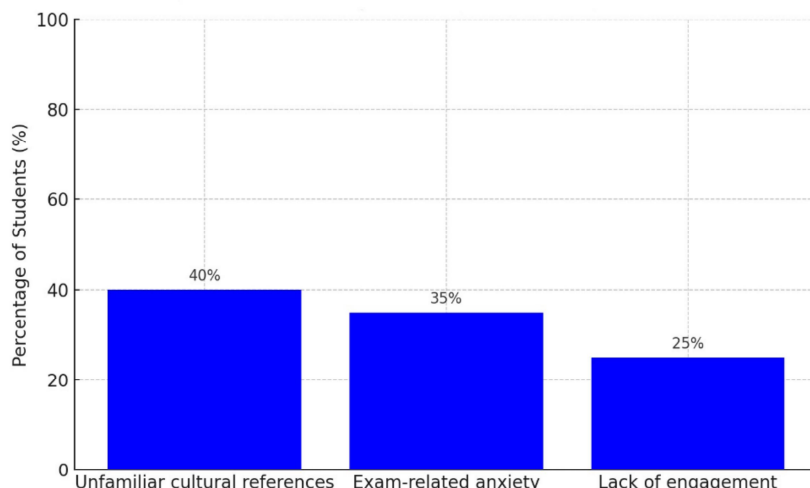
(1) Unfamiliar cultural references: 40% of students reported difficulty understanding topics with cultural or

contextual backgrounds they had not encountered.

(2) Exam-related anxiety: 35% expressed that stress and time pressure during tests impeded their comprehension.

(3) Lack of engagement: 25% felt the reading materials were unrelatable or uninteresting, reducing their motivation to read.

*Chart 4. Other Reading Comprehension Difficulties*



These insights suggest that, beyond vocabulary and strategy instruction, incorporating culturally relevant texts and

providing exam practice with stress-reduction techniques could further support students' reading development.

## **4.2. Discussion**

The difficulties revealed in this study reflect a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and psychological barriers. Students not only struggled with vocabulary and grammar, but also with strategic reading behaviors. Furthermore, the open-ended responses revealed deeper concerns such as exam-related anxiety, low engagement with reading texts, and unfamiliarity with culturally loaded content. These findings support the idea that effective reading instruction must go beyond linguistic proficiency. It must also cultivate learners' strategic awareness and emotional readiness. Skimming and scanning, when properly taught and practiced, offer efficient ways to navigate texts under time pressure, reduce reliance on translation, and enhance comprehension. However, the study found that without consistent guidance and reinforcement, students are unlikely to apply these strategies effectively on their own.

## **5. Conclusion and recommendations**

### **5.1. Conclusion**

This study explores the reading comprehension difficulties of 10th-grade students at Thai Phien High School and their perceptions of the application of skimming and scanning strategies in addressing those difficulties. The findings showed that limited vocabulary was the most frequently reported issue, affecting 65% of students. Other notable difficulties related to identifying main ideas, understanding grammatical

structures, and connecting ideas across sentences and paragraphs. A considerable number of students also reported slow reading due to word-by-word translation. Despite being aware of reading strategies like skimming and scanning, most students had not yet internalized or actively used them, primarily due to a lack of instruction, practice, and confidence. These results suggest a significant gap between theoretical awareness and practical application, indicating the need for more structured and sustained strategy training.

### **5.2. Recommendations**

To address the challenges identified, this study recommends improving the application of reading strategies like skimming and scanning directly into classroom instruction. Vocabulary and grammar instruction should be meaningfully connected to reading tasks to help learners decode texts more efficiently. For example, introducing key vocabulary before reading, or analyzing sentence structures while reading, can support overall comprehension and reduce reading fatigue. In addition, the selection of texts plays a crucial role in sustaining students' interest and engagement. Culturally familiar and age-appropriate texts can ease comprehension and motivate learners, while gradual exposure to authentic materials can bridge the gap between classroom English and real-world communication. Practice under

simulated test conditions can also help students apply strategies confidently in high-pressure contexts. Lastly, reflective tools such as reading journals or peer feedback sessions should be encouraged to build metacognitive awareness, helping learners assess their strategy use and take ownership of their reading process.

### 5.3. Limitations

Limitations are unavoidable in every research, including the current one. First, the number of participants cannot represent the broader student population. Second, the research methodology was simple with only a questionnaire, not other research instruments or deeper insights. Technology was not applied to the research. Future research can make amendments for these shortcomings.

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