



Chinese Students' Perceptions of ESL Teachers' Instruction in Reading Strategies: A Mixed-Method Study on Skimming and Scanning

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Reading is a multidimensional process involving the use of core strategies and skills such as word recognition, comprehension, fluency, decoding, and motivation. This study explores junior and senior secondary students' perceptions of their teachers' effectiveness in teaching ESL reading strategies, specifically skimming and scanning. Using a mixed-method approach, data were collected through questionnaires and focus group interviews. Findings revealed that while both groups had similar perceptions of their teachers' ability to teach skimming, significant differences emerged in perceptions of scanning instruction, with junior students rating their teachers more favorably than seniors. Similarly, self-perception of scanning ability was higher among juniors, whereas skimming self-perception showed no significant difference. Thematic analysis of interviews supported these statistical results, highlighting motivational and instructional gaps, particularly among senior students. These findings underscore the need for differentiated strategy instruction tailored to students' developmental stages and suggest further review of ESL reading pedagogy to enhance comprehension and learner autonomy.

Keywords: reading, ESL, reading strategies, Chinese learners, student perception, teaching reading

INTRODUCTION

Second language acquisition has evolved significantly since the dominance of the grammar-translation method, which prevailed until the 1940s. The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a paradigm shift in ESL instruction, moving toward more communicative and learner-centered approaches. The twenty-first century has introduced even more transformative changes, driven by technological advancements and the growing need to accommodate diverse learner profiles.

Among the core language skills—reading, listening, writing, and speaking—reading remains foundational, particularly in higher education contexts (Haque, 2006). Reading is a complex, multidimensional process that encompasses word recognition,

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comprehension, fluency, decoding, and motivation. Effective instruction in reading involves guiding learners to integrate these components to construct meaning from text. This thesis explores how educators can teach and motivate ESL learners to become proficient readers by leveraging these interconnected facets.

Over time, instructional methodologies have transitioned from grammar-based approaches to communicative language teaching, and more recently, to innovative models such as the flipped classroom and self-directed learning. Regardless of the instructional method, all four language skills must be addressed to ensure holistic language development.

Despite the widespread teaching of reading strategies such as skimming and scanning, their pedagogical implementation often lacks clarity and consistency. While existing research has examined various reading strategies, few studies have investigated how students perceive the teaching of these strategies in relation to their motivation and self-perception. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the interrelationship between students' motivation, self-perception, and their understanding of skimming and scanning strategies in ESL classrooms.

Literature Review

In today's globalized world, proficiency in English reading is an essential skill for academic and professional success. The competitive nature of modern society demands that students possess strong reading abilities—there is no alternative. As such, the teaching of reading warrants focused attention from educators and professionals to achieve the goals of active and extensive reading (Metruk & Kováčová, 2025). Achieving these goals contributes to greater productivity in higher education and beyond. It is a well-established principle: the more students read, the better readers they become.

Research in ESL reading strategies underscores the importance of strategic instruction to enhance comprehension and foster learner autonomy. Anderson (1991) emphasizes individual differences in strategy use, advocating for personalized instruction. Grabe and Stoller (2019) support integrating strategy instruction into curriculum design to cultivate fluent and strategic readers. However, many studies focus on describing strategy use without critically examining students' perceptions of their learning experiences or the role of motivation in strategy adoption.

Theoretical frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), and Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2000) offer valuable insights into the relationship between motivation, self-efficacy, and learning outcomes. These theories suggest that students' beliefs about their abilities and the value they assign to tasks significantly influence their engagement with reading strategies. Despite these insights, few studies synthesize these theories to explore how students' perceptions of teaching impact their strategic reading development.

This study builds on these frameworks to investigate how junior and senior ESL students perceive the teaching of skimming and scanning strategies, and how these

perceptions relate to their motivation and self-assessed competence. By comparing two distinct age groups, the research aims to identify instructional gaps and provide actionable recommendations for ESL pedagogy.

Poon (2009) reviewed 108 studies on English language education in Hong Kong, focusing on teaching practices, student perspectives, teacher attitudes, curriculum design, and learning outcomes. Among the four language skills, reading has received the most extensive attention in research. Koda (2005) identifies three central concerns in ESL reading research: identifying strategies that directly impact comprehension, evaluating strategies that address learner diversity, and examining the effects of strategy instruction on reading improvement. Grabe (2014) emphasizes the importance of aligning curriculum goals with coherent educational plans, requiring mutual understanding between educators and learners.

This emphasis on understanding is reflected in Hong Kong's "Read to Learn" initiative, which promotes reading through five key messages and five strategic actions. These messages include fostering interest and appreciation for reading, providing diverse texts, encouraging reading anytime, and implementing monitoring systems. The strategies involve a whole-school approach, parental involvement, dedicated reading periods, incentives, and upgrading reading tools—all aimed at enhancing motivation and engagement.

Harmer (2007) identifies two key reasons why reading is critical for students: it supports personal growth and academic development, and it plays a vital role in second language acquisition by improving writing and speaking skills through vocabulary expansion. However, reading cannot be imposed—it must be nurtured through both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Students thrive in environments where reading is encouraged, valued, and supported (Day & Bamford, 1998).

Effective reading instruction requires comprehensive teaching, understanding, and assessment of reading strategies. Dreyer and Nel (2003) note that many students enter higher education unprepared for its reading demands, often using ineffective strategies with limited metacognitive control. These challenges can be addressed through explicit instruction and the development of a solid repertoire of reading strategies (Guthrie & Cox, 2001).

Skimming and scanning are among the most commonly taught strategies. Skimming helps readers grasp the general idea of a text, while scanning allows them to locate specific information—both are essential in academic contexts. Additional strategies such as predicting, inferring, and summarizing further enhance comprehension. Predicting activates prior knowledge, inferring deepens understanding, and summarizing reinforces retention.

In Hong Kong, bilingualism requires students to be proficient readers in both English and Chinese. The "Read to Learn" initiative outlines strategies to support this goal, emphasizing the need for coordinated motivational and educational efforts. Research by Al-Hoorie (2017) and Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011) highlights the strong correlation between motivation and academic outcomes. Wong (2018) found that L2 learners' self-

concepts significantly influence their learning behaviors, with studies in Hong Kong, Japan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia showing mixed results that warrant further investigation.

Studies by Wigfield et al. (2016) and Froiland & Oros (2014) reveal differences in motivational behavior between successful and struggling readers. Dhanapala & Hirakawa (2016) found intrinsic motivation positively influenced reading efficacy among Sri Lankan ESL students, while Lin et al. (2012) reported positive outcomes from extrinsic motivation. Despite extensive research, few studies address the specific challenges faced by Hong Kong ESL students, particularly the interplay between motivation, self-perception, and academic understanding.

The literature still falls short in identifying the motivational and academic challenges in reading faced by Hong Kong students. Understanding these challenges requires examining both students' and teachers' perspectives. Akyel and Ercetin (2009) note that the distinction between skill and strategy is fading, yet it remains a crucial element in developing research questions and instruments.

This thesis aims to explore how language teachers interpret the reading curriculum and pedagogy, and how school-level reading schemes influence implementation. Recent research (Par, 2020) confirms that integrating reading strategies into ESL curricula enhances comprehension, autonomy, and motivation. Educational psychology supports this view, with Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Expectancy-Value Theory, and Achievement Goal Theory providing a robust framework for understanding how motivation, self-perception, and academic understanding interact to influence ESL reading strategy acquisition.

To further investigate this phenomenon, this thesis will examine the 2001 "Read to Learn" reform and its network of reading schemes. While the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study showed favorable results, significant deficiencies remain. These shortcomings, which have yet to be clearly identified, form the basis for this study's inquiry.

Significance Of Study

ESL educational research covers a broad spectrum of targets, e.g., teachers, teaching methods, pedagogy, students, learning strategies, educational policy, textbooks, to highlight the most common. Research in this area is paramount because the standard of education depends on students' reading proficiency. Strategy research suggests that learners facing difficulties may develop their skills by training in strategies demonstrated by more successful learners. The study aims to expose the disparity in perspectives between the two groups of participants. Identifying the inequalities and understanding the underlying causes will help develop new learning and teaching strategies to better equip students in reading strategies and skills acquisition. According to the Education Bureau of Hong Kong, one key strategy is to use more literary or imaginative texts to foster critical thinking and inspire free expression and creativity. Hence, the findings of this study will shed light on the challenges presented and their use of strategies to cope with them.

Research Questions

Given the importance of the educator and the students collectively in influencing the learning outcomes of reading, the implications of this paper will attempt to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What perceptions do junior and senior forms students have of their teachers as it relates to the teaching of skimming and scanning?
- 2) What are student's self-perception of skimming and scanning?

METHOD

Design

The literature review provided the foundational background and identified gaps that informed the development of the research questions. This study employed a mixed-methods design, offering flexibility in data collection and analysis to suit the nature of the information being gathered. The primary aim was to explore students' perceptions of learning specific reading strategies—namely, skimming and scanning.

This research forms part of a broader study, from which four questions were adapted for use in this paper. The larger study's questionnaire was developed based on extensive literature reviews and prior research, and was structured into three distinct sections to ensure clarity and validity:

1. SELF – Students' self-evaluation of reading skills
2. Descriptive Reading Abilities
3. SPOT – Students' Perception of Teaching

The tripartite structure was designed to manage the overall number of questions while maintaining response accuracy. A pilot study was conducted to identify and resolve any ambiguities or areas requiring clarification.

Participants (N = 50) completed the questionnaire anonymously using iPads during their scheduled reading lessons. Upon completion, responses were coded to facilitate categorization. This process enabled the identification of questions specifically related to skimming and scanning. From this categorization, two questions from the SELF section and two from the SPOT section were selected for analysis in this paper. These responses were charted to identify initial trends and establish a baseline for subsequent interviews.

To enrich the data and ensure methodological triangulation, both semi-structured and unstructured focus group interviews were conducted. This approach allowed for deeper exploration of students' experiences and perceptions, complementing the quantitative data.

The mixed-methods design was instrumental in capturing both the breadth and depth of student perceptions regarding ESL reading strategies. Quantitative data from the structured questionnaires enabled statistical comparisons between junior and senior

students (Groups 1A and 6A), revealing trends in self-perception and perceived teacher effectiveness. Qualitative data from focus group interviews provided nuanced insights into students' attitudes, contextual influences, and understanding of skimming and scanning strategies.

This triangulated approach enhanced the validity of the findings by cross-verifying results from multiple data sources. The combination of methods was particularly valuable in examining developmental differences in perception, which may not be fully captured through surveys alone.

Setting

The research was carried out in a Hong Kong Secondary school. Data collection for the questionnaire was done during the individual reading lessons of the participants. It was agreed by the school administration for group 1A to allow the researcher to administer the questionnaire during the first 30 minutes of each reading period over three consecutive days to complete. For group 6A the questionnaire was completed in the second English lesson of the term. Group 6A used 45 minutes to complete the entire questionnaire.

The interviews were held at a mutually convenient time which lasted for one hour and fifteen minutes. The format was both semi-structured and unstructured focus groups with maximum participation of 6 students per focus group session.

Procedures

After completing the initial questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with ten participants of mixed ages and varying English proficiency levels. The analysis revealed the need to include Chinese characters for better comprehension. Once this adjustment was made, the questionnaire was reviewed for grammatical accuracy and finalized for distribution. Participants were selected through convenience sampling, as the researcher was also their reading teacher.

For Group 6A ($n = 25$), students were informed via email that they would complete the questionnaire during their second English lesson. A bilingual teaching assistant and the researcher were present in the classroom to assist. Students completed the questionnaire using iPads, and no time limit was imposed.

Group 1A ($n = 25$) required a different approach due to their shorter attention spans. During their first reading lesson, students were informed about the questionnaire and how it would be administered over three reading lessons. Each session allowed 30 minutes for completion, and students were assured of the anonymity of their responses. Those who chose not to participate were asked to bring a book to read during the sessions. In the second reading lesson, the researcher and teaching assistant distributed iPads and guided students to access the questionnaire via a Google Form link sent by email. After completing each part of the questionnaire, students were instructed to clear their browsing history before resuming their regular reading activities. This process was repeated over the next two consecutive lessons to complete all three parts.

Following the questionnaire, four questions specifically related to skimming and scanning strategies were extracted and analyzed to identify common themes. These themes informed the development of interview questions. To gain deeper insights, both semi-structured and unstructured focus group interviews were conducted. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2008), interviews should focus on key themes while allowing participants to express their views freely.

Participants for the interviews were selected randomly, with the only requirement being that Group 6A and Group 1A students were not mixed. Group 6A students received an email invitation and signed up via a Google Form to attend semi-structured interviews. Group 1A students were informed during class and signed up manually by raising their hands and filling out a form. Interviews were conducted three weeks after the questionnaires, across two weeks on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, due to scheduling conflicts on other days. Each focus group consisted of six students, and six groups were interviewed in total.

Group 6A interviews followed a semi-structured format. Students were provided lunch and given 15 minutes to eat before the session began. The researcher led the discussion using guided questions and facilitated responses as needed. Group 1A interviews were unstructured and more relaxed. Students were also given lunch and encouraged to talk freely about reading, with the researcher taking a passive role. All interviews were recorded using iPhones and later transcribed for analysis.

The two groups—Group 6A (senior students) and Group 1A (junior students)—were handled differently during the data collection process due to their developmental and behavioral differences (see Table 1).

Table 1

Differences and intervention of the 2 groups

Aspect	Group 6A (Senior)	Group 1A (Junior)
Session Format	One full session	Three shorter sessions
Instruction Method	Email-based instructions	In-class verbal instructions
Support	Bilingual assistant	Teaching assistant
Attention Strategy	Assumed higher focus and independence	Adjusted for shorter attention span

Participants

The participants (N=50) were current students of an English medium of instruction secondary school located in Hong Kong. The participant's group was formed by senior and junior; group 6A (N=25) and group 1A (N=25), respectively. All participants are male with and range in age between 16-17 in group 6A and 11-12 in group 1A. The participants of each group are identified within the school as elite learners because of their ongoing assessment results. The term elite learners refers to the participants from both Group 6A (senior students) and Group 1A (junior students) who are identified within their school as high-performing students. This means that these students consistently perform well in academic assessments and are considered top achievers in their respective year levels. The designation is based on internal school evaluations, not necessarily external standardized testing. The participant's socio-economic backgrounds

were not a variable nor an influence on the results of the study. Employing convenience sampling allowed the study to gather information and data efficiently and effectively (see Table 2).

Table 2
Represents participation figures

Group	Total Group Members	Total Participants	Questionnaire Respondents	Focus Group Participants
6A	30	25	25	18
1A	32	25	25	12

Instrumentation

Questionnaires

The questionnaire consists of a total of sixty-eight questions and designed for a more extensive study to be carried out by the researcher in the future. The questionnaire was adapted from a culmination of previous literature reviews tailored to meet the specific needs of this study and the more extensive study. The questions design was modified to elicit genuine responses from the specific participants. The questionnaire was sectioned into three distinct parts; section 1 self-evaluate reading knowledge (SELF), section 2 students descriptive reading abilities, which are not pertinent to this study, and section three student's perspective on teachers (SPOT). The questionnaire developed used a 6-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from one to six, including 'never' 'always,' 'extremely dislike' 'extremely like,' 'extremely difficult,' 'extremely easy.' Likert scales are considered fundamental in social science and educational research. However, the scale used is debatable. This study used the 6-point scale to identify more descriptions from the respondents and appeal to practical reasoning.

In light of the focused based strategy required to conduct the study, it was determined to select only the pertinent questions from the questionnaire as they relate to skimming and scanning. While in sections one and three, there are 24 and 28 questions, respectively, only two questions from those respective sections pertained to and were used in this study.

Table 3
Represents the extracted questions from the questionnaire used for the study

Questionnaire section	Question number	Question
1 (SELF)	8	Can you read in detail to understand a text?
1 (SELF)	9	Can you read quickly to get the general idea of the text?
3 (SPOT)	57	Does your teacher teach you how to 'scan' a text to find specific information?
3 (SPOT)	58	Does your teacher teach you how to 'skim' a text to get a general idea?

Interviews

In-depth interviews are defined as a qualitative research technique to gather information on specific areas, subject matter, or program. In-depth interviews can take the form of

structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. While there are advantages and disadvantages to all three, the mutual advantage to in-depth interviews is the data collected from the interview is abundant in nature and enhances the insight of the researcher's ability to analyze and discuss the results collected from other means of data collection. Although, according to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2011) structured interviews are a standard method used in educational research and broadly used for research in language teaching, this study used semi-structured and unstructured focus group interviews due to participants' age and purpose of the interview.

The interview questions were developed based on the respondent's responses to the questionnaire questions. The purpose will be to elicit the interviewee's attitude to the variance of the phenomenon found in the data collection.

The flexibility of semi-structured and unstructured interviews allowed them to be conducted in a variety of ways since there is no specific format to adhere to—the assumption of the interview process where the participants are from the pool who completed the questionnaire. The main limitation of the interview process was the time constraint faced. All participants were asked to take part in the interview in groups of six. The researcher notes that the group interviews provided rich information.

Table 4

Represents the extracted interview questions that developed a common pattern and theme

Question number	Group asked	Interview question
4	6A/1A	What does reading mean to you?
6	6A/1A	What is your learning experience in reading?
7	6A/1A	Explain your usual reading lesson?
8	6A	When you are given mock HKDSE Paper 1, what is the first thing you do? Why?
10	1A	Why do we read quickly?
11	1A	Why do we need to read in detail?
13	6A/1A	When given a reading test, do you read the text first? Why or why not?

Statistical analysis and procedure

Questionnaire

Likert scales are commonly used to measure opinions and attitudes, typically using a 1–5 rating system. When analyzing data from Likert scales, researchers must decide whether to use parametric or non-parametric statistical tests. This decision has sparked debate in educational research. de Winter and Dodou (2010) addressed this issue and concluded that both the *t*-test (parametric) and the Mann-Whitney test (non-parametric) generally have similar statistical power. However, they noted that significant differences in power may occur with skewed, peaked, or multimodal distributions. Importantly, the Type I error rate for both tests remained within acceptable limits, even with unequal sample sizes.

Their findings suggest that, in most cases, there is no major difference between parametric and non-parametric tests—except in specific distribution conditions. Ultimately, the choice of test depends on the researcher's judgment or the requirements of the journal to which the study is submitted. A key consideration is whether the data is treated as ordinal or interval. In this study, the Likert scale data was treated as interval, as the series of questions formed coherent constructs—SELF and SPOT—related to reading strategies like skimming and scanning.

To explore perceptions of SELF and SPOT regarding these strategies, a mixed-methods approach was used. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to address the research questions. Several statistical tests were performed:

1. Group statistics for SELF on skimming (2 datasets)
2. Group statistics for SELF on scanning (2 datasets)
3. Independent t-tests to compare groups on skimming and scanning (4 datasets)
4. Paired samples t-tests to compare SELF and SPOT within groups for both strategies (8 datasets)

The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$. Since multiple comparisons were made within the same dataset, the likelihood of detecting a significant difference by chance increased. This was taken into account during analysis to ensure the reliability of the findings.

Reliability and internal consistency

A test of reliability was carried out on each section of the questionnaire section 1 24-items, section 2 16-items, and section 3 28-items to review the consistency of all the questions. Using Cronbach alphas for each section, the alpha values were 0.864, 0.796, and 0.843, respectively. All coefficients fall into the acceptable with sections 1 and 3, reporting a high coefficient to indicate a strong internal consistency within these sections of the questionnaire.

Interviews

The study used thematic content analysis to compare responses between participants who participated in the interview. The researcher transcribed all interviews and deleted any information that caused cognitive bias leading to overarching impressions. As the researcher studied, the transcription coding took place to identify common themes and patterns which developed based on the conversation and responses given by the participants. As stated by Rice and Ezzy (1998), content analysis requires attention to detail with reading and re-reading to ensure no salients point or statements are missing. The results of thematic content analysis assisted the researcher in identifying common themes and patterns in the responses negating a predetermined framework.

According to oxford

With this context in mind during the focus group interviews, the researcher had a list of 15 potential interview questions to ask based on how the focus group participated and interacted with each other. The researcher paid careful attention to the conversation to ensure rich information was subconsciously being provided. The table below represents seven guided questions that were presented to each focus group, respectively.

Ethnics of research

This study adhered to ethical standards in educational research to ensure the protection and dignity of all participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all student participants and their guardians, where applicable. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process; no identifying information was collected, and responses were stored securely.

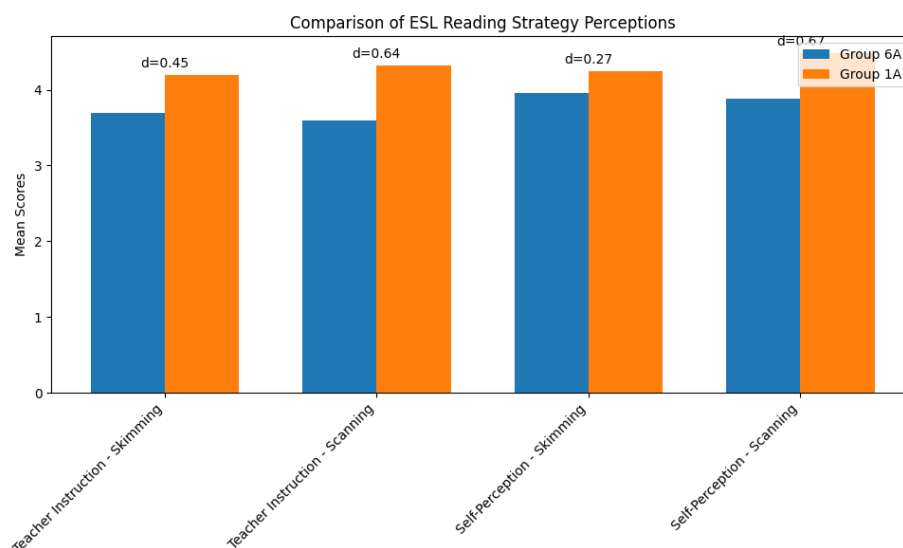
The study employed convenience sampling, and care was taken to avoid coercion, especially since the researcher was also the reading teacher of the participants. To mitigate potential bias, a bilingual teaching assistant was present during data collection to support clarity and neutrality. Ethical approval was granted by the school administration, and all procedures complied with institutional guidelines for research involving minors.

FINDINGS

Statistical Analysis

To evaluate students' perceptions of their teachers' ability to teach skimming and scanning strategies, independent-samples t-tests were conducted comparing responses from junior (Group 1A) and senior (Group 6A) secondary students.

This chart visualizes the differences in mean scores for teacher instruction and self-perception of skimming and scanning strategies. It also includes Cohen's d effect sizes to indicate practical significance.



Teacher Instruction: Skimming Strategy

The analysis of skimming instruction revealed no statistically significant difference between the two groups. Group 6A ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.18$) and Group 1A ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 1.04$) showed comparable perceptions, $t(48) = 1.65$, $p = 0.105$ (two-tailed). This suggests that students across both age groups perceive their teachers as equally competent in teaching skimming strategies. The consistency in responses may reflect a standardized approach to skimming instruction across grade levels, possibly due to curriculum guidelines or shared pedagogical practices.

Teacher Instruction: Scanning Strategy

In contrast, perceptions of scanning instruction differed significantly between the groups. Group 1A rated their teachers more favorably ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.22$) than Group 6A ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(48) = 2.29$, $p = 0.027$ (two-tailed). This statistically significant result indicates that junior students perceive their teachers as more effective in teaching scanning strategies. Several factors may contribute to this disparity, including differences in instructional delivery, classroom engagement, or developmental readiness. Younger students may benefit from more structured and scaffolded instruction, which could enhance their perception of teacher effectiveness.

Student Self-Perception: Skimming Strategy

When assessing students' self-perception of their skimming abilities, no significant difference was found between Group 6A ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.06$) and Group 1A ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.97$), $t(48) = 0.98$, $p = 0.34$ (two-tailed). This result aligns with the findings on teacher instruction, suggesting that both groups feel similarly confident in their ability to skim texts. It may also indicate that skimming is a more universally

understood and practiced strategy among ESL learners, regardless of age or academic level.

Student Self-Perception: Scanning Strategy

However, a significant difference emerged in students' self-perception of scanning abilities. Group 1A reported higher confidence ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.96$) compared to Group 6A ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.88$), $t(48) = 2.30$, $p = 0.026$ (two-tailed). This finding mirrors the results from the teacher instruction analysis and suggests that junior students not only perceive their teachers as more effective in teaching scanning but also feel more capable themselves. This dual perception may reflect a more supportive learning environment or more effective instructional strategies tailored to younger learners.

Qualitative Insights from Focus Group Interviews

Thematic analysis of focus group interviews enriched the quantitative findings. Junior students frequently described their reading lessons as engaging and well-structured, with clear guidance from teachers. They expressed enthusiasm for reading tasks and demonstrated a strong grasp of scanning techniques. In contrast, senior students voiced concerns about the relevance of reading activities, lack of motivation, and limited clarity in instruction. These qualitative insights suggest that while foundational strategies like skimming are consistently taught, scanning may require more adaptive and differentiated instruction, especially for older students who face increased academic pressure and exam-oriented learning.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study revealed both shared themes across groups and distinct patterns within each group regarding ESL reading strategies, particularly skimming and scanning. Statistical analysis showed that Group 6A (senior students) demonstrated lower confidence in both their own ability to use scanning strategies and in how these strategies were taught by their teachers. In contrast, Group 1A (junior students) reported higher confidence in both areas. Interestingly, both groups showed similar levels of confidence and perception regarding skimming strategies, suggesting a more consistent instructional approach or understanding of this strategy across age levels.

These quantitative findings were supported by qualitative data gathered through interviews. Thematic content analysis of responses to 15 interview questions—particularly those highlighted in Table 3—reinforced the statistical trends. Group 6A students frequently expressed confusion about the differences between skimming and scanning and their respective purposes. Their responses also reflected a strong focus on the HKDSE exam, indicating that their reading strategy use was often driven by exam preparation rather than deep comprehension or strategic awareness.

During the interviews, many Group 6A students struggled to articulate the difference between skimming and scanning, often conflating the two strategies or describing them in vague terms.

Student 5 from group 6A's response to interview question 8 stated, "I usually start by reading the questions first and then look through the text for keywords. I'm not sure if that's skimming or scanning, but I know I'm looking for specific answers."

Furthermore, student 9 responded similarly, stating, "I'm not really sure if I'm skimming or scanning—I just try to find the answer as fast as I can. I look at the questions first, then jump into the text to search for keywords. If I find something that looks relevant, I stop and read that part."

This conclusion aligns with the statistical findings that senior students reported lower confidence in scanning and perceived their teachers as less effective in teaching it.

In contrast, Group 1A students appeared more confident and engaged with both skimming and scanning strategies. Their responses, when considered alongside the statistical data, suggest a more integrated understanding of these strategies and their practical applications. This contrast points to a broader difference in achievement goals and learning orientations between the two groups.

Student 9 from group 1A responded to interview question 10 by stating, "We read quickly to get the main idea first, so we know what the text is about before we look at the questions. It helps me understand better and use my time better."

This reflects a higher self-perception of scanning ability and a more favorable view of teacher instruction, as shown in the qualitative data.

While both groups can be considered high-achieving ESL learners, the findings highlight motivational differences that influence how reading strategies are understood and applied. Group 6A's focus on exam performance aligns with a performance-oriented mindset, whereas Group 1A's engagement with strategy learning reflects a mastery-oriented approach. These differences are consistent with findings from Takeuchi (2002), who noted that strategy use varies depending on the learner's stage of development. Similarly, Alexander (2003) found that tertiary students often use fewer strategic reading techniques than postgraduate students, suggesting that academic maturity and context significantly influence strategy use.

According to interview question 6, student 11 from group 6A discussed the motivational decline among seniors: "Reading feels like just another thing to do for the exam. I used to enjoy it more when I was younger, but now it is all about timing and getting the right answer."

This thought was echoed by student 1, "After doing so many paper 1's in class, I have lost interest in reading. It is all mechanical, so look at the questions, find the answers, and finish all the questions before you run out of time."

These sentiments from Group 6A support the idea that academic pressure and high-stakes testing may shift students' focus away from strategic reading and deeper engagement with the text.

Conversely, several students from group 1A shared positive ideology, and as student 8 shared, "Learning how to skim and scan makes me feel like I'm unlocking secrets in the

text. It helps me read faster, find answers quicker, and understand more. I am eager to learn more and it makes me feel smart and ready for harder things.

The observed discrepancies between Group 6A and Group 1A also align with Guterman's (2020) findings, which emphasize the role of motivation and achievement goals in shaping ESL reading comprehension. These differences are not merely academic but reflect deeper developmental and contextual factors.

First of all, it is the developmental readiness and cognitive maturity (Semrud-Clikeman, 2015). Group 1A students (ages 11–12) are in the early stages of secondary education, where foundational skills are emphasized and strategy instruction is more explicit. Group 6A students (ages 16–17), on the other hand, are in senior secondary school, where instruction often shifts toward content mastery and exam preparation, potentially at the expense of strategy reinforcement.

Secondly, the instructional focus and teacher expectations may be different. Teachers may assume that older students have already mastered basic strategies like scanning, leading to less explicit instruction. In contrast, younger students receive more structured and scaffolded support, which enhances their understanding and confidence (Timmermans & Rubie-Davies, 2018).

Thirdly, the two groups of students may have different academic pressure and goal orientations (Pintrich, 2000). Group 6A students face high-stakes testing, which can foster a performance-driven mindset. This may result in the instrumental use of strategies without a deep understanding of their purpose. Group 1A students, with fewer immediate academic pressures, are more likely to focus on learning and skill development.

Forthly, the 2 groups of students may have different motivations and self-perception towards reading (van Steensel, et al., 2019). Senior students may experience academic fatigue or reduced intrinsic motivation, especially if they view reading strategies as mere tools for exam success. Junior students, still adjusting to secondary school, may be more open and motivated to learn new strategies, particularly when they see immediate benefits in classroom tasks.

Finlly, the curriculum design and pedagogical approach are different across the two groups (Kreijkes & Grooten, 2024). The junior curriculum often includes explicit instruction in reading strategies, while the senior curriculum may prioritize exam content, assuming prior mastery. This can lead to gaps in understanding among older students.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of tailoring reading strategy instruction to students' developmental stages and motivational profiles. While both groups received similar instruction in skimming, the differences in scanning suggest a need for more targeted support, especially for senior students. These findings underscore the value of ongoing strategy reinforcement, even at advanced stages of ESL learning, and suggest that motivation, instructional clarity, and developmental readiness all play critical roles in effective reading strategy acquisition.

IMPLICATIONS

These findings carry important implications for ESL educators and curriculum designers, particularly in how reading strategies such as skimming and scanning are taught and integrated into classroom practice.

Clarify the purpose of skimming and scanning

Skimming should be introduced as a tool for previewing texts, identifying main ideas, and enhancing reading fluency. Scanning should be taught as a practical strategy for locating specific information in real-world contexts, such as conducting research, navigating digital platforms, or using textbooks effectively. By framing these strategies as versatile tools rather than test-taking techniques, educators can help students see their broader relevance and utility.

Differentiate instruction by learning stage

Instruction should be differentiated according to students' developmental stages. Junior students, who are still building foundational literacy skills, benefit from structured and scaffolded activities that gradually introduce and reinforce strategy use. These learners require clear guidance and repeated practice to internalize the strategies effectively. Senior students, who may already be familiar with basic strategy concepts, need reinforcement and contextualization to maintain engagement and deepen their understanding. For these students, instruction should focus on applying strategies in more complex and varied reading tasks.

Integrate strategies into diverse reading tasks

It is important to integrate skimming and scanning into diverse reading activities. Using authentic materials such as news articles, academic texts, and online resources allows students to see how these strategies function in real-life scenarios. Teachers should encourage students to reflect on when and why they use each strategy, fostering a sense of purpose and strategic awareness. This reflective practice helps students become more intentional and effective readers.

Promote metacognitive reflection

Teachers should guide students in assessing their own strategy use, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, and setting personal goals for development. This process supports learner autonomy and encourages students to take ownership of their reading progress. Metacognitive skills are essential for lifelong learning and can significantly enhance students' ability to adapt strategies to new contexts.

Use formative assessments to monitor strategy development

Educators should use formative assessments to monitor strategy development. These assessments should include tasks that require meaningful application of skimming and scanning, allowing teachers to provide targeted feedback. Feedback should reinforce strategic thinking and encourage students to transfer their skills to unfamiliar texts and situations. By embedding strategy instruction into ongoing assessment practices,

teachers can support continuous growth and ensure that students are developing the skills necessary for academic success.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, which may have influenced the nature and honesty of responses. The researcher also served as the reading teacher for all participants, introducing potential bias in both data collection and interpretation. Additionally, the sample consisted exclusively of male students from a single school, resulting in gender imbalance and limiting the generalizability of the findings. Cultural bias may also be present due to the homogeneous educational context. The study relied heavily on self-report measures, which are subject to social desirability and recall bias. Future research should aim to include more diverse samples, utilize multiple data sources, and incorporate independent researchers to mitigate these limitations.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study using a mixed-method approach suggest a deficiency in the learning and teaching of critical reading strategies, specifically skimming and scanning. While both junior and senior student groups demonstrated a better understanding of skimming, there was a noticeable disconnect in comprehending the purposes of these two reading strategies. The findings indicate that students primarily view these strategies as tools for exam success or transitioning into new academic environments.

The findings and discussion have provided valuable insights into the learning and teaching of ESL reading strategies and how these are understood by learners at different stages of their educational journey. It is recommended that further research be conducted to explore the challenges students face during ESL reading lessons and how they cope with these challenges. Additionally, future studies should investigate English language teachers' interpretations of the reading curriculum and pedagogy in their schools, and how these interpretations influence the implementation of the 'Read to Learn' scheme in Hong Kong.

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