

# **An analysis on reading skills of first year Engineering undergraduates: Skimming, Scanning and Vocabulary**

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Teaching and learning English constitute a core part of the field of Humanities in Sri Lankan higher education as it encompasses both a utilitarian and humanitarian aspect. English education provides a bridge to its beneficiaries to a wide range of local and international opportunities in various fields. The present research was conducted with the objective of assessing and developing basic reading comprehension skills of first year Engineering Undergraduates following an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at the Sri Lanka Institute of Technology (SLIIT), Malabe. The study was a result of the researcher's observation of low performance by these students in reading comprehension tests. Experts in the field of reading identify effective reading in English as a crucial skill in current academic and professional settings while also highlighting a lesser amount of reading research being conducted compared to studies in the other language skills of listening, speaking and writing. Hence, research on reading skills at tertiary level, such as the present study, is significant in empowering learners with a language tool having a lifelong value and in creating better teaching practices and learning opportunities for future students. Three essential reading skills, skimming, scanning and vocabulary were assessed in this study and three hypotheses were tested. The hypotheses were centered on a comparison of the participant group's performance in scanning and skimming, a comparison of their knowledge of nouns, verbs and adjectives and their overall knowledge of these three parts of speech. A reading comprehension test based on the three reading skills was prepared by the researcher and administered to the target group. Primary data was collected through this test. Secondary data was obtained from books, journal articles and theses related to reading skills assessment and development. The results of the data analysis showed significant differences between the participants' competency in skimming and scanning and between their knowledge of nouns and the other two parts of speech, verbs and adjectives. It was also revealed that the group's overall vocabulary knowledge was significantly low. Therefore, it was concluded that the target group was better in using scanning skills than skimming and that they were more familiar with nouns than with verbs and adjectives while they had a low overall vocabulary knowledge. Recommendations are accordingly given for improving these skills through employing effective instructional practices, increasing student motivation, creating opportunities for extensive reading and regular testing of the relevant reading skills.

**Keywords:** Skimming, Scanning, Vocabulary Knowledge