Reading Journal Abstracts:
An Eye-tracking Study of EFL University Students Online Reading Behavior

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This study was conducted to examine the online reading behavior of EFL university students as a fundamental component of their academic writing. In particular, this study investigated how university EFL students read journal abstracts online. Journal abstracts are important sources of information as they summarize, describe, and highlight the major sections of a journal article and they aid students in classifying the paper as relevant to their study topic and purpose (Alspach, 2017). In this time of clicks and flicks, academic texts have become more accessible online to EFL university students. Whether on computers or mobile devices, such as gadgets and smartphones (Tanjung, Ridwan & Gultom, 2017), the attitudinal change of reading online is becoming common (Jabr, 2013).

Participants in this study were 10 Hotel Management students selected purposively based on their English academic performance in the first semester of 2017-2018 and were classified based on their English competency, as either high or low. Each classification had five respondents. They were subjected to reading an online journal abstract of an article published in 2016 in the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. They were assigned to a laptop equipped with the GP3 Eye tracker to capture eye tracking measures (i.e. time view in a given area) while they read the stimuli. “Measuring eye movements during reading is one of the most precise methods for measuring moment-by-moment (online) processing demands during text comprehension. Cognitive processing demands are reflected by several aspects of eye movement behavior, such as fixation duration, number of fixations, and number of regressions” (Raney, Campbell & Bovee, 2014, p. 1)

The study reveals that participants with different competency levels exhibited somewhat different viewing patterns. Highly competent students spent less time reading the article’s abstract, such as journal’s title, article’s title, objective, findings, and conclusion. However, the competent students spent longer time reading on methodology compared to low competency students. To that end, this section was also most frequently viewed by competent students, they also regressed to this area after reading other sections of the abstract. In particular, there were not much regression, and the sequence was, on average as follows: Journal Name, Year, Article Title, Objective, Methodology, Findings and Conclusion. Another common aspect shared by these two group of individuals, is the fact that both did not read the year of publication.

To supplement the results of the eye-tracking study, in-depth interviews were conducted where respondents revealed their motivations for reading and their strategies for an effective online academic reading experience.

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