

Elevating Reading Comprehension: Tailored Techniques for Non-English Majors

Dadang Zakaria¹, Maula Khoirunnisa²,

¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, ²UIN Maliki Malang

Email: dadangzakaria@umm.ac.id

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is essential for language acquisition and academic success, as it allows students to access information across all subjects. While numerous studies have examined the impact of various reading techniques on student comprehension, the process by which lecturers select and implement these techniques remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by investigating the decision-making processes of lecturers when choosing techniques for teaching reading comprehension, particularly in non-English departments. Utilizing qualitative methods, including online surveys, semi-structured interviews, and observations, data were collected from lecturers at the Language Center of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. The findings reveal a two-stage selection process, with student English proficiency as the primary consideration, followed by their academic majors. Additional factors influencing technique selection include age, behavior, attitude, classroom environment, and course content. These insights are valuable for curriculum developers, lecturers, and researchers aiming to enhance language teaching practices and curricular development, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes and pedagogical advancement.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a cornerstone of language acquisition and learning, offering students the ability to understand and interpret written texts effectively. This skill is crucial for developing correct language structures and overall language proficiency. For over a decade, experts in English language education have emphasized the importance of practical reading skills for second language (L2) learners, underscoring reading as a key component of language acquisition (Snow, 2021). Effective reading instruction is linked to successful language learning in children, enhancing vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and overall comprehension (Novitasari, Listianing Rahayu, et al., 2021). Additionally, reading fosters cognitive skills such as critical thinking, inference, and deduction, all vital for language development (Sarjoni et al., 2020).

Furthermore, reading supports knowledge acquisition and learning quality. Consistent reading develops an open mind, improving language knowledge (Sarjoni et al., 2020). Rajaei et al. (2020) highlight that reading enhances cognitive and metacognitive skills, including memory retention, attention, and self-regulation. It also improves reading speed, accuracy, and fluency, contributing to a positive attitude towards language learning.

In today's digital age, students across all fields need strong reading comprehension skills to access and understand vast amounts of information, much of which is in English. Audina et al. (2020) argue that reading is fundamental for acquiring knowledge and understanding messages accurately. This is particularly crucial for students in research-intensive fields like science, engineering, and technology, where comprehension of complex texts is essential.

Lecturers play a crucial role in fostering reading comprehension by employing various techniques in the classroom. Brown & Lee (2015) define teaching techniques as exercises or activities used to achieve lesson goals, which must align with broader educational objectives (Rahmiati & Abdul Samad, 2022). Techniques such as reciprocal teaching (Taka, 2020), skimming and scanning (Aritonang et al., 2019), semantic mapping (Zahro, 2021), and many others offer diverse methods to enhance comprehension. Each technique has unique strengths and weaknesses, and the choice of technique depends on learning objectives, student needs, and classroom context.

Despite research demonstrating the effectiveness of various techniques on student comprehension, there is limited understanding of how lecturers select and apply these techniques. Existing studies often focus on student outcomes rather than lecturers' perspectives. To address this gap, it is important to explore how lecturers choose specific techniques and the factors influencing their decisions.

This includes considering students' language proficiency, learning styles, and the materials used in class.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining how lecturers select teaching techniques for reading comprehension in specific departments. The research questions guiding this study are: How do lecturers choose a particular teaching technique for reading comprehension in a specific department? What factors influence lecturers' decisions when selecting a teaching technique for reading comprehension?

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to delve into the methods lecturers use to select and implement teaching techniques for reading comprehension in non-English departments. Kumatongo and Muzata (2021) define research design as a structured approach driven by theory or hypothesis, outlining systematic procedures for data collection, measurement, and analysis, as supported by Creswell and Poth (2018). The goal of this design was to achieve a deep understanding of lecturers' practices and the various factors that influence their choices. Qualitative research is particularly suited for this purpose as it prioritizes individuals' interpretations and their processes of making sense of social realities (Mohajan, 2018). This approach involves analyzing opinions, behaviors, attitudes, and social interactions through methods such as contrasting, comparing, and classifying, which is central to the qualitative analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To capture the lived experiences and genuine insights of the participants, the study employed a descriptive design. This approach was chosen for its ability to provide rich, qualitative data rooted in the actual experiences of lecturers, as highlighted by Stenberg and Maaranen (2020). The researcher played a crucial role as the primary instrument in data collection, meticulously preparing a set of research tools including questionnaires, interview guides, field notes, and observation checklists. These tools were designed to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the research questions and to uncover the nuances of the lecturers' decision-making processes.

The study's participants were drawn from the Language Center at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, focusing on lecturers who teach reading comprehension to students in non-English departments. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, including a minimum of two years of teaching experience in higher education and holding at least a master's degree (Salkind, 2010). This purposeful selection was intended to ensure that the participants could provide valuable and relevant insights that directly addressed the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In qualitative research, data collection is a critical process that involves gathering subjective data on opinions, behaviors, and social interactions (Mkandawire, 2019). For this study, a descriptive design was employed to gather detailed qualitative data from the participants, allowing the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the lecturers' decision-making processes regarding teaching techniques. Various data collection instruments were developed and utilized, including questionnaires, interview guides, field notes, and observation checklists, each designed to investigate the research questions thoroughly and to capture the complexities of the teaching practices being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

By employing a qualitative research design alongside carefully selected data collection methods, this study aimed to comprehensively address the research questions, providing valuable insights into how lecturers select and implement reading comprehension techniques in non-English departments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Lecturer's Selection Process to Select a Particular Teaching Technique for Teaching Reading Comprehension in a Specific Department

Regarding the results of the distributed questionnaire and the conducted interviews, most lecturers claim that they select a particular teaching technique for teaching reading two times. First, it takes place before starting the semester starts. The next is during the teaching and learning process. The following paragraph will discuss the detailed practice the lecturer takes.

The practice in selecting a teaching technique: before the semester starts

Before starting the semester, some lecturers state that they conduct document analysis, some conduct pre-tests, and others conduct both. They claimed that by conducting this practice, they could understand the current condition and situation of the students. Hence, they assert that by using this understanding, they can determine the best teaching techniques for the students. This finding was also proved by the interview result with one of the lecturers, and he narrated in the excerpt that:

Well, I did the need analysis before the semester started. Usually, I did it at the very beginning of the class. It is like on the first day of the class. ... So, from the need analysis, I wanted to know 'the wanted' and 'the need' from the students' perspectives.
(Participant 01)

For details of participants conducting document analysis, pre-test, and both, it can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. The Distribution of The Practice in Selecting Teaching Techniques

PARTICIPANTS	FACULTY	DEPARTMENT	DOCUMENT ANALYSIS	PRE-TEST
Participant 01	Faculty of Medicine (FK)	Department of Medical Education	✓	
Participant 02	Faculty of Health (FIKES)	Department of Physiotherapy Department of Pharmacy	✓	
Participant 03	Faculty of Islamic Religion (FAI)	Department of Islamic Religious Education		✓
Participant 04	Faculty of Engineering (FT)	Department of Industrial Engineering	✓	
Participant 05	Faculty of Agriculture – Animal Science (FPP)	Department of Food Science and Technology	✓	✓
Participant 06	Faculty of Psychology (FAPSI)	Department of Psychology		✓
Participant 07	Faculty of Law (FH) Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP)	Department of Law Department of Communication Science		✓
Participant 08	Faculty of Law (FH) Faculty of Engineering (FT)	Department of law Department of Industrial Engineering	✓	
Participant 09	Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) Faculty of Engineering (FT)	Department of Accounting Department of Civil Engineering		✓
Participant 10	Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) Faculty of Engineering (FT)	Department of Elementary School Teacher Education Department of Informatics Engineering	✓	✓

Regarding conducted interviews with the lecturers, eight out of ten lecturers (60%) conducted document analysis before starting teaching in the semester. The document analysis examined the existing higher education curriculum (*Kurikulum Perguruan Tinggi*, abbreviated KPT) belonging to the Language Center of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. Following the analysis of KPT, the lecturers also examined the materials uploaded to the Learning Management System (LMS).

From both analyses, they got the data used for deciding the teaching techniques that would be employed for the whole semester.

In the interview, another participant stated that he related documents to determine the teaching technique that would be used. He narrated in the following excerpt.

I examined the syllabus, learning the materials that will be taught for the whole semester. (Participant 05)

Some lecturers continued the process by conducting the pre-test (20%). They argue that the pre-test data can add to their data and confirm all their assumptions interpreted from the document analysis data. They claim that the decision to use teaching techniques becomes even more confident by conducting these document analyses and pre-test steps. It can be seen from the answer of participant 05 in the interview as shown in the following excerpt.

I also see from the English proficiency gained from the pre-test. The result of the pre-test will inform me of basic English belonging to the students. Then I determine the action to do for next. (Participant 05)

Conversely, the other lecturers do not carry out document analysis from the beginning. They jump to the pre-test (40%). They believe that the data obtained from the pre-test can provide them with adequate data to decide the best teaching techniques for the whole semester. The pre-test carried out by the lecturers was not a complex one. It was only the simple one. The pre-test focused on evaluating students' needs and English proficiency.

Initially, doing a need analysis was like a kind of wish or what later we need to know about students before choosing a proper teaching technique. I believe that there are many ways to find out that. But for me, I only used the pre-test at the beginning. By taking the test, I get the result, and I can decide the best teaching technique. (Participant 06)

By doing the process either document analysis, pre-test, or both, the lecturer is aware with the situation and condition of their student. Hence, they can determine the set of teaching techniques in the beginning of the semester, in which they would use this set for the whole semester. This statement is implied from the statement of the participant stated that:

Yes, it is true. So, in the beginning, I already had a set of teaching techniques for the whole semester. (Participant 06)

The practice in selecting a teaching technique: during the teaching-learning process

When the teaching and learning process runs, most lecturers conduct some evaluation of their teaching practice and the utilization of the teaching techniques. The result of the evaluation becomes the data of the student portfolio. From this portfolio, the lecturers decide to continue employing the selected teaching techniques from the first stage, modify the existing teaching technique, or completely change the teaching techniques. This data can be implied from the following excerpt of conversation with participant in the interview conducted. See the following excerpt.

Interviewee: For me, I use a portfolio to go to the next meeting. I have to check the performance of the students at the previous meeting.

Interviewer: So, you evaluate it at every meeting, and it becomes the students' portfolio. Then you decide what teaching technique you want to use for the next meeting based on the portfolio. You are not using the same teaching technique for all the meetings of the classes. It depends on the result of the portfolio.

Interviewee: Yes, I don't use the same for all meetings. (Participant 02)

The practice of evaluation is different from one lecturer to another. The evaluation is in the form of an assessment. Some lecturers conduct the assessment in every meeting as seen from the results of the interview.

... But in the middle of the road, there was something I couldn't use because the results of an evaluation in every meeting told me that it wouldn't work if I used this technique. (Participation 06)

Another interview with participant stated that:

Interviewee: It is in the middle of learning. For example, when finishing teaching a student, I confirm to the students whether they get along and usually keep wanting to learn with this teaching technique.

Interviewer: *It means that this Portfolio is obtained from an assessment when learning, then you get a response from them, then you use it for the next one to determine the next step in teaching, right?*

Interviewee: *Yes, it is. (Participant 10)*

Other lecturers conduct the assessment every several meetings (i.e., every three meetings). It can be seen from the following excerpt.

So, I want to know what their abilities are. After the third meeting, if I'm not mistaken, I just found out, oh, here, I finally decided, and I looked at the Canvas LMS. If it were suitable, I'd follow it. (Participant 04)

Indeed, selecting teaching techniques is important in teaching reading as it can facilitate student learning and help them actively engage with content (Al-Shawi, 2022). It also requires an effort from the lecturer, as their knowledge of psychological and educational principles is necessary for successful implementation (Hadi & Al-Taai, 2021). Therefore, this discussion elucidates the practice of the lecturers in selecting teaching techniques for their reading classroom. As the data found, the selection process is divided into two stages: before the semester starts (stage #1) and after the teaching and learning process runs (stage #2). See the following chart to see the process of the selecting.

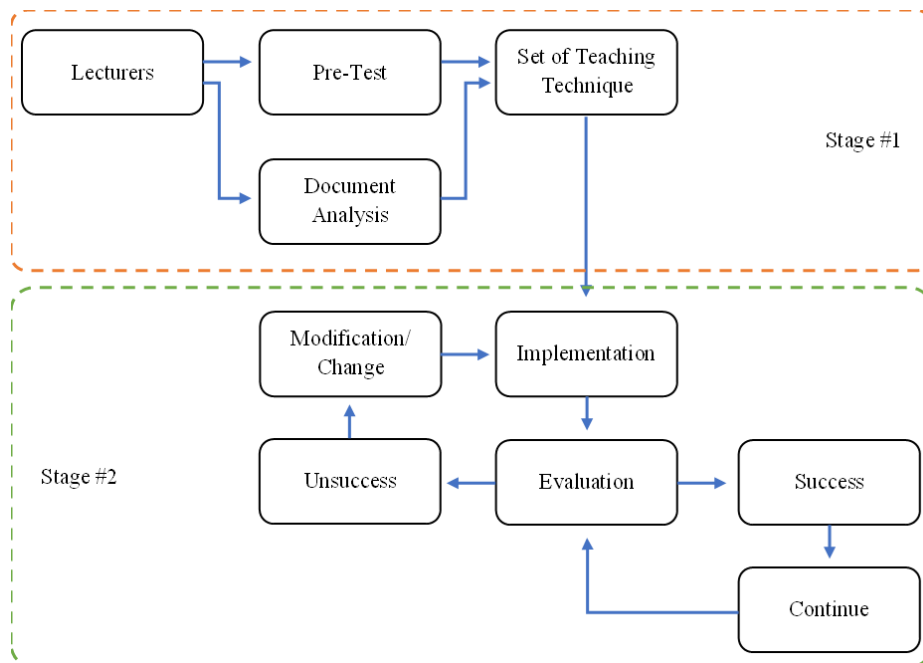


Figure 1. Flowchart of Selection Process

Based on the data in the finding section, in stage #1 taking place before semester starts, the lecturers are willing to know the condition of the student at the time. Johnson & Barrett (2017) stated that it is important for lecturer to understand their students' needs and interests in order to provide them with quality learning opportunities. Then selecting teaching strategies that align with those need can facilitate student learning towards meeting the objectives of the learning (Dunlosky et al., 2013). To know the needs of the students, the lecturer conduct document analysis and pre-test. Document analysis is an important tool for evaluating student needs (Cuiccio et al., 2018) as it helps students to think through primary source documents for contextual understanding and extract information to make informed judgments. Additionally, pre-test can be a powerful tool in providing lecturers feedback about how to better meet student learning objectives (Shivaraju et al., 2017). Then from the result of document analysis and pre-test, the lecturer can generate a set of teaching techniques that they will use for the whole semester. Therefore, the lecturer's practices in stage #1 align with prior research, suggesting that these practices are appropriate prior to beginning a semester.

As can be seen from the flowchart, the next stage of the teaching technique selection takes place where the teaching and learning process runs. The selection process is based on evaluation of the teaching. Evaluating teaching is important to select the next teaching technique as it helps to improve lecturer quality and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). Teaching is considered successful when students attain the intended learning objectives; conversely, if the learning objectives are not attained, the teaching is deemed unsuccessful. When it is considered that teaching is successful, the lecturer can continue to use the determined set of teaching techniques in stage #1. However, when the teaching is considered unsuccessful, the lecturers change and/or modify the teaching technique to align with the intended learning objectives.

The Factors Affecting the Lecturers' Decision to Select a Particular Teaching Technique for Teaching Reading Comprehension in a Specific Department

The results of the distributed questionnaire and the conducted interviews show that the decision of lecturers to select a particular teaching technique for teaching reading in a specific department is affected by some factors: students' major/field of expertise, students' English proficiency, students' age, students' behavior and attitude, classroom setting, and course topic.

Table 2. Factors Affecting the Lecturer’s Decision in Selecting Teaching Techniques

Participants	Factors					
	Students’ major/field of expertise	Students’ English proficiency	Students’ Age	Students’ Behavior and Attitude	Classroom Setting	Course Topic
Participant 01		✓				
Participant 02	✓	✓	✓			✓
Participant 03	✓					✓
Participant 04		✓				
Participant 05		✓				
Participant 06	✓	✓			✓	
Participant 07	✓	✓	✓			
Participant 08	✓	✓	✓			
Participant 09		✓	✓	✓		
Participant 10	✓	✓			✓	✓

Students’ major/field of expertise

Six of ten lecturers (60%) claim that they consider students’ major/field of expertise in selecting teaching techniques. This factor is correlated with the English proficiency of students and the course topics. English proficiency affects the lecturers’ decision in selecting teaching techniques for a certain department. Lectures believe that some departments are more proficient in English than other departments. Further, as stated in KPT, the topic of each meeting is adjusted with each department. Therefore, selecting teaching techniques affects the students’ major/field of expertise.

They are related to their field. For example, Islamic Education must have Islamic nuances but only sometimes lead to Islamic matters, such as discussing what the pillars of faith are or what are the pillars of Islam. So, according to their fields, they can be more involved in learning. (Participant 03)

Some lecturers believed that even though the student’ major is not directly affecting their decision in selecting the teaching techniques, it is still affecting the decision in certain point.

So, let's take medical students as an example. They have a must to read a lot of texts, maybe or they are often to read a lot of you know in English references and compare them to the students of communication department, so I am not saying that the department affects my choice of using teaching technique, but it is more for the individuals. And the individuals are also affected by the department. (Participant 01)

Students' English proficiency

As stated before, this factor significantly affects the lecturers' decision in selecting teaching techniques they use in their teaching and learning process. All the lecturers except one (90%) said students' English proficiency affects their decision. They claim that the higher the students' proficiency, the more varied and advanced the teaching technique will be. Vice versa, The lower the students' proficiency, the simpler the teaching technique will be used. Some lecturers claim that they even modified the implementation of teaching techniques to adjust to the level of student's English proficiency.

... I think I need to know it before I decide the medium or proper technique that suits their level of English proficiency. (Participant 01)

... I am teaching two classes in physiotherapy and pharmacy. Of course, their English proficiency is different, ... My pharmacy student's English proficiency is higher than my physiotherapy student's. So, there are several points of the technique that I apply in Pharmacy that cannot be used in physiotherapy. (Participant 02)

Course Topic

Since the English course is a featured course (*Mata Kuliah Penciri*) at *Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang*, the course is compulsory for both freshmen and transferred students. Therefore, the materials/topic for the English course will be based on the students' department with the aim of making the students familiar with using any reference in English. With this initial understanding, the lecturer learns that each department must have a different topic. two of ten lecturers (20%) claim that varied topics affect their decision in selecting teaching techniques.

Perhaps, it is the topic. For example, because the students are still learning parts of speech, a simple game can be applied to this topic. Likewise, If it gets more complex, such as sentence analysis, the simple game perhaps isn't suitable anymore. It is less effective. Then it seems that I will use discussion techniques for this topic. (Participant 02)

Another evidence found,

For each meeting, I change the technique depending on the topic. For instance, it's about "describing." I will use the question technique to begin by asking them

a question related to a thing or a place. Then at the end, I ask them to describe it. (Participant 03)

Students' Age

The age of students becomes one of the factors claimed by the lecturers (40%) in deciding which teaching technique will be used in their teaching and learning process. They claim that they consider this factor because it will affect their selection on teaching techniques in term of the difficulty level of the techniques used and the instruction used for the techniques used. They believed that they should differentiate the level and the instruction when they have adult learner and the younger learner.

... My point is that I differentiated these ages because this age will give me an insight into what suitable teaching techniques I will use. I can't apply the techniques for primary and secondary students to college students ... (Participant 07)

Another lecturer also added

Okay, it just so happens that I also teach homeschooling. So, besides teaching at the college student level, I also teach at several age levels. There are primary and secondary ones, and there are college students. Well, I chose the technique that is also distinguished. (Participant 08)

Another participant being interviewed stated that by seeing the age of students, she can determine that the teaching techniques that can trigger their critical thinking since she teaches college students.

The game should be designed for the student's age. I am afraid they will be bored and not get anything if I just use games without considering their age. The game should be able to provoke their critical thinking. (Participant 02)

Students' Behavior and Attitude

One of all lecturers (10%) involved as participant believed that students' behavior and attitude become one of the factors that he considers affecting his decision in selecting proper teaching techniques for his students. It is because students' behavior and attitude help them to recognize the students' response to techniques that focus on student-centered that he used.

Okay, it's very important because I'm still focusing on student-centered. Since the teaching techniques I used are based on a student-centered student, I think we have to look at the attitude of our students on how they respond to techniques that focus on student-centered. (Participant 09)

Classroom Setting

Based on the interview results, two lecturers (20%) stated that classroom setting was included in their consideration in selecting teaching techniques in teaching reading. The classroom setting being discussed here includes how the classroom landscape and how the classroom size is being created for teaching and learning.

The classroom landscape being discussed here talks about the composition of the member of the class between male and female, the teaching aid inside the classroom, and the selection of teaching inside or outside the classroom.

... I call this other factor the classroom landscape. So, I mean from this classroom landscape. It's easy for me to see that most of the population of this class is male or female. Or maybe a mix. Then I looked inside the classroom I was using to see if there was any equipment. Or perhaps I should teach outside (the room). That is also one of the factors that influenced me to choose my own teaching technique. ... (Participant 06)

While the classroom size is the number of members in the classroom which affects the decision of the lecturer in selecting or modifying teaching technique would be used.

The size of the class. For example, The PGSD class, in which there are 50 students there, can't be compared with the IT class, with 30 students. When I apply a certain teaching technique in an IT class, I should consider modifying it when I want to apply in PGSD because of the number of students. ... (Participant 10)

According to the results, multiple factors influence the choice of teaching technique made by the lecturers. The study under consideration, which focuses on the teaching technique used to teach reading across different departments, initially supposes that the student's major/field of expertise is the most crucial factor in determining the technique used. However, the findings indicate that the student's English proficiency is the most significant factor, while their major is the second most impactful factor. Additionally, the other factors affecting the decision are students' age, students' behavior and attitude, classroom setting, and course topic.

The English proficiency of a student is a crucial factor that impacts the choice of teaching methods for English language learners (Zarate, 2022). In general, students who have a higher proficiency in their native language tend to have more success in learning English. It is also acknowledged that students who receive more exposure to English at school can achieve higher proficiency levels. Furthermore, a student's beliefs about language learning can impact their approach and attitude towards studying English. Thus, the lecturers should take into account a student's level of English proficiency when deciding on teaching techniques that will be used in their reading class.

CONCLUSION

Selecting teaching techniques for reading classes involves a dynamic, two-stage process. Lecturers initially choose methods before the semester starts, then adapt these techniques based on student progress and needs throughout the course. The most influential factor is students' English proficiency, which determines the complexity of the techniques used. Additionally, lecturers consider students' majors, age, behavior, classroom settings, and the course topic to tailor their approach, ensuring that the methods align with both academic requirements and the developmental stage of the learners.

By carefully considering these factors, lecturers create engaging and effective lessons that foster deeper understanding and accommodate the diverse needs of their students. This comprehensive approach is crucial for educational success, enabling students to interact with complex content and achieve their learning goals.

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