

The Influence of Teaching Methods on Reading Anxiety among University Students: A Relational Pedagogical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Reading anxiety has become an increasingly important issue in higher education, particularly amongst university students who are required to engage with complex academic texts. This study investigates the influence of teaching methods on reading anxiety amongst university students through the lens of relational pedagogy. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 88 university students through a structured questionnaire of 27 items, measuring perceptions of teaching methods and levels of reading anxiety. The survey consisted of three sections: top-down reading anxiety, bottom-up reading anxiety, and classroom teaching method. The findings revealed significant relationships between teaching methods and reading anxiety. The results suggest that instructional approaches employed by the lecturers may influence students' emotional responses toward reading activities, particularly when students encounter difficulties related to comprehension, vocabulary, decoding, and language structures. The study highlights the importance of grounding teaching practices in empathy, encouragement, and interaction to encourage students' engagement in reading tasks.

Keywords: Reading anxiety, teaching method, relational pedagogy, higher education, students' experiences

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Reading plays an important role in higher education as university students are expected to engage with diverse academic materials to gain knowledge, complete assignments, and involve themselves in classroom discussions. Nevertheless, academic reading is considered challenging, especially for students who learn in a second or foreign language context (Al-Obaydi et al., 2023; Fitrawati et al., 2023; Saito et al., 1999). Apart from requiring comprehension skills, reading academic materials also involves emotional and psychological experiences which might impact the learning process of students (Tan et al., 2021). One of the common emotional factors in language learning is reading anxiety. Anxiety is a complex subjective feeling that includes apprehension, nervousness, tension, and worry linked to autonomic nervous system responses (Spielberger, 1983). Past literature reported that anxiety in learning can impede students from comprehending and producing good English and eventually influence their learning process (Abrar et al., 2022; Damayanti & Listysani, 2020; Rahmati, 2017).

Saito et al. (1999) stated that reading anxiety happens when students experience discomfort and apprehension when processing written texts in a second language. A more recent study conducted by Onur (2025) revealed that reading anxiety is caused by factors like fear of making mistakes while reading aloud, poor reading skills, peer bullying, and classroom practices like competitive reading activities. The study also found that emotional

symptoms (e.g., shyness, fear, and low self-confidence) and behavioural symptoms (e.g., avoidance behaviours) were identified as main indicators of reading anxiety. Mardianti et al. (2021) stated that reading anxiety is categorised into three main aspects, i.e., top-down reading anxiety, bottom-up reading anxiety, and classroom reading anxiety. They also found out that the most potent source of reading anxiety is bottom-up reading anxiety, which is related to the unclear meaning of vocabulary in written text.

Despite these linguistic challenges, the classroom environment and instructional strategies can also impact students' emotional responses in language learning (Maulana & Kaniadewi, 2025). Fan (2022) highlighted that effective classroom practices can create a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment. He further highlighted the significance of employing innovative teaching approaches, real-life communication tasks, and technology-based tools to grab students' interest and make the learning process more engaging. Different teaching strategies can influence students' confidence, motivation, and participation during reading activities. Supportive teaching practices and classroom environment may help students feel encouraged and comfortable, while rigid evaluative classroom approaches and environment may elevate students' anxiety in learning.

The present study is grounded in the perspective of relational pedagogy. According to Hickey and Riddle (2024), relational pedagogy accentuates how teachers, students, and knowledge are closely linked, viewing the teaching and learning process as the result of this connection. For instance, in a reading lesson, a teacher not only explains the text and gives correct answers, but also the teacher works together with the students to make sense of the text. These relational pedagogical practices may play a vital role in decreasing students' reading anxiety and elevating their engagement with the given academic texts.

Even though reading anxiety has been widely examined in language learning contexts, the research area remains relevant due to the increasing academic demands placed on university students. Today, students are continuously required to engage with huge amounts of academic reading materials such as journal articles, online resources, and complex disciplinary texts. At the same time, many students still experience academic reading difficulties with comprehension and vocabulary limitations in reading academic English (Anwar & Sailuddin, 2022; Phakiti & Li, 2011). Prior research has mainly focused on cognitive and linguistic causes of reading anxiety (Jannah & Juniardi, 2025; Onur, 2025), while there has been a scarcity of research that examines how teaching approaches and classroom interactions influence students' emotional experiences in reading tasks. Additionally, limited studies have explored reading anxiety from a relational pedagogical perspective, especially in the settings of tertiary education.

Therefore, there is a need to further investigate how lecturer-student interaction and teaching strategies may affect levels of reading anxiety among students. Specifically, the present study examines the relationship between classroom teaching methods and students' experiences of top-down and bottom-up reading anxiety. The findings are expected to contribute to the prior studies on reading anxiety and shed some light for lecturers in creating more supportive, empathetic, and student-centred reading instruction approaches in tertiary education.

Statement of Problem

Reading anxiety is a well-documented affective barrier that negatively influences language learners' comprehension, confidence, and overall academic achievement. Research consistently reports that learners who experience high levels of reading anxiety are more likely to disengage from reading tasks and perform poorly in language assessments (Miao & Vibulphol, 2021; Zoghi, 2012). In the Malaysian higher education context, a recent survey of Malaysian university students participating in online distance learning revealed high levels of reading anxiety, primarily attributed to uncertainty about English proficiency and insufficient instructor support (Kamaruddin & Kaur, 2023). Such findings suggest that reading anxiety remains a pressing and persistent concern among ESL learners, warranting continued scholarly attention.

A number of studies have investigated the sources of foreign language reading anxiety across diverse learner populations. Miao and Vibulphol (2021) found that among 459 Chinese university students, the primary source of reading anxiety was a lack of general reading ability, followed by vocabulary-related difficulties, findings

that align with the top-down and bottom-up dimensions of reading anxiety proposed by Zoghi (2012). Similarly, research suggests that reading anxiety among ESL learners has predominantly been examined in relation to oral performance rather than reading activities, leaving a notable gap in the understanding of anxiety specific to academic reading contexts (Fitriawati et al., 2023). This indicates that despite growing interest in the field, the classroom-based factors that trigger reading anxiety, particularly instructional practices, have received comparatively less systematic attention.

The role of teaching methods constitutes a vital yet frequently overlooked factor in the broader reading anxiety equation. In a study by Rama (2021), it was found that foreign language classroom anxiety maintains a statistically significant moderate positive correlation with the reading comprehension performance of students ($r = .381, p < .05$), a finding that suggests classroom-based anxiety does not exist in a vacuum but rather exerts measurable effects on how ESL learners process written materials. This relationship is especially pertinent within classroom reading contexts, as it implies that any instructional approach that elevates learner anxiety may simultaneously impede their overall comprehension capabilities. Along the same lines, Rahmat et al. (2020) suggest that the fear of reading functions as a cycle that is often triggered by specific classroom interactions, such as the techniques used for questioning, the practice of calling on students to read aloud, or the general conduct of comprehension tasks. Such pedagogical practices, though commonplace, can inadvertently place learners in positions of perceived vulnerability, thereby intensifying their anxiety instead of facilitating growth. Additionally, Li and Dewaele (2021) discover that learners who experience distress when using a second language are at a heightened risk of compounding their existing linguistic challenges, further emphasizing the necessity of investigating instructional triggers of anxiety.

Despite these insights, a clear gap exists in the literature regarding the specific relationship between teaching methods and the two major dimensions of reading anxiety, top-down and bottom-up, particularly among Malaysian ESL learners in tertiary education. Studies report that instructional factors, including teaching methods and the broader classroom environment, can significantly shape language anxiety, yet targeted investigations connecting specific pedagogical approaches to the distinct sub-dimensions of reading anxiety remain scarce (Kasim & Maniam, 2025; Jugo, 2020). Miao and Vibulphol (2021) suggest that future research should examine how different instructional contexts contribute to reading anxiety, as their study was limited to Chinese EFL learners and may not generalise to other educational settings. Zoghi (2012) similarly recommends that further investigations employ validated instruments across varied learner populations to advance understanding of reading anxiety's multidimensional nature. This study responds directly to both calls.

Without a clearer understanding of how teaching methods relate to learners' top-down and bottom-up reading anxiety, educators and institutions are limited in their capacity to make informed pedagogical decisions. Research highlights the urgent need for supportive instructional practices that can enhance reading engagement and reduce anxiety in ESL reading classrooms (Kamaruddin & Kaur, 2023; Miao & Vibulphol, 2021). Addressing this gap is therefore essential, not only for improving the affective learning experiences of Malaysian ESL students, but also for guiding instructors toward more anxiety-sensitive and learner-responsive teaching practices. Accordingly, the present study seeks to investigate the influence of teaching methods on reading anxiety among university students in Malaysia, specifically in relation to the research questions outlined in the following section.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore the influence of teaching methods on reading anxiety. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How do learners perceive teaching methods for reading?
- How do learners perceive top-down reading anxiety?
- How do learners perceive bottom-up reading anxiety?
- Is there a significant relationship between teaching methods and reading anxiety?

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between teaching methods and reading anxiety

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Teaching Methods in Reading

The role of teaching methods in shaping students' reading experiences has been a subject of considerable interest in language education research. Teaching methods refer to the instructional strategies and approaches employed by educators to facilitate reading comprehension and language learning in the classroom. In the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, these methods encompass a wide range of classroom practices, including oral reading, comprehension questioning, translation tasks, and the use of the target language as the primary medium of instruction. According to Rahmat et al. (2020), the way in which reading is taught can significantly influence how learners feel about the act of reading itself, with certain instructional approaches inadvertently creating conditions that trigger anxiety rather than encouraging engagement. When learners feel put on the spot, whether through being called upon to read aloud, translate passages, or respond to comprehension questions in front of peers, the classroom environment itself can become a source of discomfort. This suggests that teaching methods are not merely pedagogical tools but are also affective forces that shape the emotional or affective environment of the reading classroom, making it essential to understand how learners perceive and respond to the instructional approaches they encounter.

Reading Anxiety among ESL Learners

Reading anxiety among ESL learners has become a significant concern in second language acquisition because it negatively influences learners' comprehension, confidence, and academic achievement. In the Malaysian university context, reading difficulties and anxiety remain prevalent, especially when engaging with academic texts in English. Edward et al. (2021) reported that Malaysian undergraduate ESL learners faced challenges such as poor vocabulary mastery, inability to identify main ideas, and limited reading habits, which contributed to reading-related anxiety and weak academic performance. Similarly, Petrus and Shah (2020) found that anxiety experienced whilst reading English materials significantly affected Malaysian ESL learners' language competence and reading performance. In addition, Batiha et al. (2021) highlighted that learners with higher levels of reading anxiety often demonstrate lower comprehension abilities and reduced confidence in handling academic reading tasks. Yu and Shin (2020) further emphasised that the use of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies could help reduce reading anxiety and improve reading among ESL learners. Therefore, educators in higher education institutions should adopt supportive pedagogical approaches, provide suitable reading materials, and encourage strategic reading practices to help learners manage reading anxiety more effectively.

Past Studies on Methods of Teaching Reading

Numerous studies have been done to examine the influence of teaching approaches on students' reading performance, especially related to how different teaching approaches like active reading strategies, discipline-specific literacy, and collaborative and task-based approaches affect students' comprehension and their engagement.

For example, Sari et al. (2025) examined the use of the Active Reading approach to improve students' reading comprehension in English texts among 32 tenth-grade school students in Indonesia. Employing a classroom action research design, data were collected through reading comprehension tests. The findings revealed that the students' initial reading comprehension was low (mean score= 44.3). After the implementation of the Active Reading strategy, the mean scores improved to 71 in Cycle 1 and 82.9 in Cycle 2, presenting a clear increase in reading performance. All in all, the findings suggest that the Active Reading strategy had a positive effect on students' reading comprehension.

In another study, But et al. (2017) explored the relationship between discipline-specific literacy approaches and students' critical reading skills, disciplinary literacy, and academic success. The initiative was

implemented in three gateway courses (Biology, Engineering Technology, and Marketing). The findings revealed an improvement in student pass rates after the introduction of structured reading strategies and instructional support. The findings support that guided and discipline-based reading instruction can enhance students' academic performance.

Ismail et al. (2023) studied the impacts of task-based instruction (TBI) on students' reading comprehension, motivation, anxiety, and L2 grit among two intact intermediate-level classes at a university in China. One class received task-based reading instruction, and the other was taught using traditional lecture-based methods. The findings revealed that students in the TBI group outperformed the control group in reading comprehension. Additionally, TBI was found to positively influence students' motivation and grit, while decreasing reading anxiety. A more recent study by Peng and Zhu (2025) examined how student engagement differs between comprehension-based and production-based tasks in second language classrooms. The study involved 25 third-grade students and used a mixed-methods design, including questionnaires, classroom observations, focus group interviews, teacher reflections, and learning documents. The findings revealed that students demonstrated higher behavioural engagement in comprehension-based tasks compared to production-based tasks. The study also found that student engagement was influenced by diverse interacting factors, including students themselves, peers, lecturers, learning materials, task design, curriculum structure, and broader educational policies.

In summary, the prior studies show that teaching approaches such as active reading, discipline-specific literacy, and task-based instruction generally improve students' reading comprehension and engagement. Some studies also report positive effects on motivation and reduced anxiety. However, most research still focuses on outcomes rather than how classroom interactions and teaching processes shape students' reading experiences. This indicates a need for further research that examines the role of classroom interaction more closely in reading instruction.

Past Studies on Reading Anxiety

Many studies have examined reading anxiety as an important affective factor in second and foreign language reading. Saito et al. (1999) introduce foreign language reading anxiety as a specific form of language anxiety that occurs during the reading process, rather than as a general fear of language learning. Their study suggests that reading in a foreign language can be anxiety-provoking because learners may face unfamiliar writing systems, unfamiliar cultural meanings, and difficulty making sense of texts in the target language. This early study is important because it establishes reading anxiety as a distinct construct that deserves attention in language learning research.

Zoghi (2012) further develops this area by constructing and validating the English as a Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Inventory (EFLRAI). Zoghi argues that reading anxiety among EFL learners can be understood through several dimensions, including top-down reading anxiety, bottom-up reading anxiety, and classroom reading anxiety. Top-down reading anxiety is related to background knowledge, cultural knowledge, and general reading ability, while bottom-up reading anxiety is associated with linguistic difficulties such as vocabulary, grammar, and sentence-level processing. This distinction is useful for the present study because it shows that reading anxiety does not come from one single source. Instead, learners may become anxious because of broad comprehension problems, language-level difficulties, or classroom-related reading experiences.

Miao and Vibulphol (2021) also examine the sources of EFL reading anxiety among Chinese university students. Their quantitative study involved 459 non-English major students from four universities in China and used an adapted version of Zoghi's EFL Reading Anxiety Inventory. Miao and Vibulphol report that the students experienced a moderate level of EFL reading anxiety overall. More importantly, their findings show that lack of general reading ability was the main source of anxiety among the participants. This finding suggests that learners may feel anxious not only because of difficult vocabulary or grammar, but also because they struggle to understand the overall meaning, gist, and organisation of a text.

Rahmat et al. (2020) investigate academic reading fear among undergraduate students and explain that reading

anxiety may become a cycle. Their study uses the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale to examine students' fear and perceived difficulties in academic reading. Rahmat et al. state that when learners repeatedly experience difficulty in understanding academic texts, they may begin to associate reading with fear, uncertainty, and failure. This study is relevant because it highlights the emotional side of academic reading. It also suggests that students' anxiety should not be treated as a weakness only, but as a response to repeated reading difficulties that may be influenced by text difficulty, classroom experience, and learners' confidence.

More recent studies have continued to show that reading anxiety is connected to learners' reading strategies, comprehension, and classroom support. Ghaith (2020), for example, investigates foreign language reading anxiety and metacognitive reading strategies among undergraduate EFL learners. The study reports that reading anxiety and reading strategies are both related to reading comprehension, which suggests that anxious readers may need support not only in language knowledge but also in how to approach texts strategically. Similarly, Dang (2024) examines English foreign language reading anxiety and reading strategies among Vietnamese university students. Dang reports that foreign language reading anxiety is linked to learners' use of reading strategies, showing that anxiety and strategy use should be considered together when understanding learners' reading experiences.

In summary, previous studies suggest that reading anxiety is a multidimensional issue. Saito et al. (1999) establish reading anxiety as a distinct form of foreign language anxiety, while Zoghi (2012) provides a more specific framework through top-down, bottom-up, and classroom reading anxiety. Miao and Vibulphol (2021) discover that general reading ability can be a major source of reading anxiety, whereas Rahmat et al. (2020) highlight how academic reading fear may develop into a repeated cycle. More recent studies by Ghaith (2020) and Dang (2024) further suggest that reading anxiety is related to learners' strategy use and comprehension. Therefore, the present study builds on these past findings by examining learners' perceptions of reading anxiety and exploring its relationship with teaching methods.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study investigates the influence of teaching methods on students' reading anxiety. According to Milao & Vibulphol (2020) and Zoghi (2012), there are two types of reading anxiety: top-down and bottom-up reading anxiety. Top-down reading anxiety includes a lack of background knowledge and also general reading ability. Next, bottom-up reading anxiety includes a lack of vocabulary and grammar. Learners' fear of reading may also stem from classroom reading.

According to Rahmat et al. (2020), fear of reading is a cycle. For some learners, it could begin with the teaching methods. Some teaching methods may make learners feel at a disadvantage; for instance, the way questions were asked, the way interactions were made, and many more. These methods may hinder further learning, and learners end up fearing reading. This fear becomes a cycle because in an academic setting, reading is necessary to gain information and knowledge.

This study explores whether there is a relationship between teaching methods and top-down and bottom-up reading anxiety.



Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study

The Influence of Teaching Method on Reading Anxiety

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to explore the influence of teaching methods on reading anxiety. A convenient sample of 88 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5-point Likert-scale survey and is adapted from Milao & Vibulphol (2020) and Zoghi (2012) to reveal the variables in Table 3 below. Table 1 below shows the categories used for the Likert scale; 1 is for Strongly Disagree, 2 is for Disagree, 3 is for Undecided, 4 is for Agree, and 5 is for Strongly Agree.

Table 1- Likert Scale Use

1	Strongly Agree
2	Agree
3	Uncertain
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

Table 2- Distribution of Items in the Survey

Sect	Type Of Anxiety	Construct	No Of Items Indicator		CA
B	Top-Down Reading	Background and Cultural Knowledge	3	7	0.834
		General Reading Ability	4		
C	Bottom-Up Reading	Vocabulary	8	14	0.914
		Grammar	6		
D	Classroom Reading	Teaching Methods	6	6	0.869
		TOTAL		27	0.928

Table 2 shows the distribution of items in the survey.

Table 2 presents the distribution of items across the three sections of the survey instrument, which was adapted from Miao and Vibulphol (2020) and Zoghi (2012). Section B measures top-down reading anxiety through two constructs: Background and Cultural Knowledge (3 items) and General Reading Ability (4 items), totalling 7 items. Section C assesses bottom-up reading anxiety through Vocabulary (8 items) and Grammar (6 items), amounting to 14 items in total. Section D captures classroom reading anxiety through the Teaching Methods construct, comprising 6 items. Altogether, the survey consists of 27 items covering three major constructs of reading anxiety. Table 2 also presents the reliability coefficients for each section. Based on the reliability levels outlined in Table 3 by Ahmad et al. (2024), the Cronbach's alpha of .834 for top-down reading anxiety indicates good internal consistency, while the .914 for bottom-up reading anxiety and .869 for teaching methods reflect excellent and good reliability, respectively. The overall Cronbach's alpha of .928 across all 27 items confirms excellent internal consistency, establishing the instrument as a reliable tool for measuring the constructs under investigation in this study.

Table 3- Reliability Levels, Cronbach's Alpha Ranges, and Their Interpretations

Reliability Level	Cronbach's Alpha range	Interpretation
Excellent	0.9 and above	Indicates very high internal consistency
Good	0.80-0.89	Reflects strong internal consistency
Acceptable	0.70-0.79	Indicates acceptable internal consistency
Questionable	0.60-0.69	Reflects questionable internal consistency
Poor	Below 0.6	Indicates poor internal consistency

Table 2 also shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis is based on the information in Table 3, which

reveals the reliability levels by Ahmad et al. (2024). The analysis shows a Cronbach's alpha of .834 for top-down reading, .914 for bottom-up reading, and .869 for teaching method. The overall Cronbach alpha for all 27 items is .928, thus revealing good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

FINDINGS

Demographic Analysis

According to Zienefuss et al. (2021), researchers report demographic data in percentages to establish sample representativeness and allow for generalizability to a larger population. The reporting also provides an overview of participants' characteristics. Percentages offer a clear and understandable picture of the sample makeup.

Table 4- Percentage for Demographic Profile

Question	Demographic Profile	Categories	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	46%
		Female	54%
2	Discipline	Science & Technology	32%
		Social Sciences, Humanities	34%
		Business management	31%
4	Level	Diploma	75%
		Degree	25%

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 4. The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents were female students, comprising 54% of the sample, while male students represented 46%. In terms of academic discipline, respondents from Social Sciences and Humanities formed the largest group at 34%, followed closely by students from Science and Technology at 32%, and Business Management at 31%. Regarding the level of study, most respondents were pursuing Diploma programmes, accounting for 75% of the participants, whereas Degree students constituted 25% of the sample. These findings suggest that the study involved participants from diverse academic backgrounds, with a greater representation of diploma-level students and female respondents.

Descriptive Statistics

Why is there a need to report the mean and standard deviation? According to Vetter (2017), the mean (M) represents the average, or centre of a data set. Standard deviation (SD) indicates the typical distance of individual observations from the mean, which shows the data's variability or spread. A low SD means the data points are clustered close to the mean while a high SD indicates they are more spread out. It is good to have a high SD.

Findings for Teaching Method

This section presents data to answer the research question 1: How do learners perceive teaching methods for reading?

Table 5- Mean and Standard Deviation for Teaching Methods (TM)

ITEM	Mean	SD
TMQ1 It bothers me when the instructor calls on me to read aloud.	2.65	1.02
TMQ2 It worries me when the instructor calls on me to translate a piece of an English text into our first language.	2.94	0.99

TMQ3 When the instructor asks me reading comprehension questions, it is worrying to me.	2.76	0.98
TMQ4 It upsets me when the instructor chooses uninteresting texts to read in class.	2.76	1.08
TMQ5 It makes me feel uneasy when the instructor corrects my pronunciation or translation mistakes.	2.39	1.02
TMQ6 I am nervous when the instructor uses English as a medium of instruction and hardly ever makes use of our first language.	2.67	1.05

The results in Table 5 present the mean and standard deviation scores for students' perceptions of teaching methods. Overall, the mean scores range from 2.39 to 2.49, indicating a generally moderate level of concern across the items. The highest mean score was recorded for TMQ2 ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.99$), showing that students are worried when asked to translate English texts into their first language. This is followed by both TMQ3 and TMQ4 (both $M = 2.76$), suggesting moderate concern when answering reading comprehension questions and when exposed to uninteresting reading materials. The lowest mean score was observed for TMQ5 ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.02$), indicating that students felt uneasy when instructors correct their pronunciation and translation mistakes. In summary, the findings suggest that whilst students experienced degrees of anxiety related to teaching methods, their responses reflected moderate concerns rather than high levels of distress.

Findings for Top-Down Reading Anxiety

This section presents data to answer the research question 2: How do learners perceive top-down reading anxiety? In the context of this study, this is measured by (i) background knowledge and (ii) general reading ability.

Table 6- Mean and Standard Deviation for Background and Cultural Knowledge (BCK)

ITEM	Mean	SD
BCKQ1 I do not feel at ease when the title of the text is unfamiliar to me.	3.24	0.88
BCKQ2 It is worrying to me when the ideas expressed in the text are culturally unclear	3.41	0.93
BCKQ3 I get upset when I lack the previous knowledge about the ideas expressed in the text.	3.59	0.99

Table 6 presents the findings for Background and Cultural Knowledge (BCK), which indicate that learners generally experienced moderate concern when coping with unfamiliar or culturally unclear texts. Based on the three items, BCKQ3 recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.99$), indicating that learners tended to feel upset when lacking prior knowledge of the ideas expressed in the text. This was followed by BCKQ2 ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.93$) that learners were also worried when the ideas expressed were culturally unclear. In the meantime, BCKQ1 recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.88$), suggesting a comparatively lower level of discomfort when encountering unfamiliar text titles. All in all, the findings indicate that insufficient background and cultural knowledge moderately affected respondents' comfort and understanding while engaging with texts.

Table 7- Mean and Standard Deviation for General Reading Ability (GRA)

ITEM	Mean	SD
GRAQ1 I worry when I cannot get the gist of the text, although no new vocabulary items or grammatical points exist in the text.	3.40	1.02
GRAQ2 When I cannot recognize minor ideas (details) of the text, it is worrying to me.	3.51	0.97
GRAQ3 I am nervous when I cannot spot the main idea of a paragraph.	3.59	0.89
GRAQ4 It bothers me when I cannot express my opinions or feelings about the text.	3.44	1.06

Table 7 presents the mean and standard deviation scores for students' perceptions of general reading ability as a

dimension of top-down reading anxiety. Overall, the mean scores range from 3.40 to 3.59, indicating a moderately high level of anxiety across all four items. The highest mean score was recorded for GRAQ3 ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.89$), suggesting that students feel most anxious when they are unable to identify the main idea of a paragraph. This was followed closely by GRAQ2 ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.97$), which reveals that students experience considerable worry when they cannot recognise the minor details of a text. The third highest mean was observed for GRAQ4 ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.06$), indicating that an inability to express opinions or feelings about a text is also a notable source of anxiety among learners. The lowest mean score was recorded for GRAQ1 ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.02$), which reflects students' worry when they cannot grasp the overall meaning of a text despite the absence of unfamiliar vocabulary or grammar. Notwithstanding this being the lowest score among the four items, a mean of 3.40 still indicates a moderate to high level of concern. In summary, the findings suggest that students experience considerable anxiety related to their general reading ability, particularly in situations that require higher-order reading skills such as identifying main ideas and recognising supporting details, which are fundamental competencies in academic reading comprehension.

Findings for Bottom-Up Reading Anxiety

This section presents data to answer Research Question 3- How do learners perceive bottom-up reading anxiety?

In the context of this study, this is measured by (i) Vocabulary and (ii) Grammar.

Table 8- Mean and Standard Deviation for Vocabulary(V)

ITEM	Mean	SD
VQ1I feel uneasy when I cannot figure out the meanings of unknown words.	3.67	0.93
VQ2 It bothers me when I encounter a lot of words whose meanings are unclear	3.64	0.90
VQ3I get upset when I cannot figure out the meaning of a word that I feel I have seen before	3.68	1.02
VQ4 It bothers me when I feel unable to look up a word in the dictionary.	3.33	0.94
VQ5 I get confused when the word that I know has a different meaning in the sentence.	3.59	0.92
VQ6 I get upset when I come across idioms that are unfamiliar to me.	3.28	0.96
VQ7 It makes me feel uneasy when an unfamiliar word is made up of several parts or syllables.	3.50	0.87
VQ8 I feel worried when the unknown word is difficult to pronounce.	3.28	1.08

Table 8 presents the mean and standard deviation scores for the Vocabulary construct of bottom-up reading anxiety. The mean scores across all eight items ranged from 3.28 to 3.68, indicating a moderately high level of anxiety related to vocabulary challenges among the respondents. The highest mean was recorded for VQ3 ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.02$), which reflects students' distress upon encountering words they feel they have seen before but cannot recall the meaning. This suggests that partial vocabulary knowledge can be a particular source of frustration. This was closely followed by VQ1 ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.93$) and VQ2 ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.90$), both of which relate to the anxiety of encountering unfamiliar or unclear words during reading. The lowest means were recorded for VQ6 and VQ8 (both $M = 3.28$), pertaining to unfamiliar idioms and difficulty in pronouncing unknown words, respectively, though these scores still indicate moderate anxiety. Overall, the findings suggest that vocabulary-related challenges are a significant contributor to bottom-up reading anxiety among learners, with unfamiliar and partially recognised words being the most anxiety-inducing elements.

Table 9- Mean and Standard Deviation for Grammar(G)

ITEM	Mean	SD
GQ1 I am nervous when a certain sentence is long and has a complex structure	3.02	1.09
GQ2 When a certain sentence is grammatically unfamiliar, is worrying to me.	3.40	0.86
GQ3 It bothers me when a passive voice is used in a sentence.	2.99	0.98
GQ4 I feel upset when the tense of a certain sentence is unclear to me.	3.27	0.97

GQ5 I worry when I am unable to recognize different parts of speech such as adjectives, adverbs, or connective words.	3.48	0.90
GQ6 I get confused when what I know about a grammatical point does not make any sense.	3.49	0.94

Table 9 presents the mean and standard deviation scores for grammar-related reading anxiety among the respondents. The findings indicate that respondents experienced moderate levels of anxiety related to grammatical aspects during reading activities. Among the items, GQ6 (“I get confused when what I know about a grammatical point does not make any sense”) recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.94$), followed closely by GQ5 (“I worry when I am unable to recognize different parts of speech such as adjectives, adverbs, or connective words”) with a mean score of 3.48 ($SD = 0.90$). This suggests that grammatical confusion and difficulties in identifying parts of speech were major sources of anxiety among students. In contrast, GQ3 (“It bothers me when a passive voice is used in a sentence”) recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.98$), indicating comparatively lower anxiety toward passive sentence structures. Overall, the findings suggest that unfamiliar grammatical structures and limited grammatical understanding contribute to students’ reading anxiety in higher education contexts.

Exploratory Statistics

According to He (2024), correlation is a statistical technique that shows how strongly two variables are related to each other or the degree of association between the two. It's a common tool for describing simple relationships without making a statement about cause and effect. This section presents data to answer the research question on correlation.

Findings for Relationship between teaching methods and reading anxiety

This section presents data to answer research question 4: Is there a significant relationship between teaching methods and reading anxiety?

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between teaching methods and reading anxiety

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between teaching methods and reading anxiety, the data are analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in Table 10 below.

Table 10- Correlation between teaching methods and reading anxiety

		Teaching Methods	Top-Down	Bottom-Up
Teaching Methods	Pearson (Correlation)	1	.313**	.385**
	Sig (2-tailed)		0.003	<.001
	N	88	88	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 11 shows there is an association between teaching methods and reading anxiety. According to He (2024), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level, and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. A weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0.

Teaching Methods and Top-Down Reading Anxiety

Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate, significant association between teaching methods and top-down reading anxiety ($r=.313^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). This means that there is also a moderate positive relationship between teaching methods and top-down reading anxiety.

Teaching Methods and Bottom-Up Reading Anxiety

Correlation analysis shows that there is a moderate significant association between teaching methods and bottom-up reading anxiety ($r=.385^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). This means that there is also a moderate positive relationship between teaching methods and bottom-up reading anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings and Discussions

This study examined the relationship between teaching methods and reading anxiety amongst students in a higher education institution, focusing on top-down and bottom-up dimensions of reading anxiety. The findings revealed that teaching methods were significantly associated with reading anxiety. These moderate positive correlations indicate that the instructional approaches employed by the lecturers may influence students' emotional responses to reading activities. The stronger relationship observed in bottom-up reading anxiety further suggests that students may experience heightened anxiety when they encounter difficulties related to vocabulary, language structures, pronunciation, and decoding processes during reading tasks. This finding is consistent with recent studies which emphasise that students' reading experiences and emotional engagement are strongly shaped by classroom teaching practices and pedagogical support systems in higher education contexts (Mason and Warmington, 2024; Dang, 2024).

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

The findings also reinforce the theoretical assumptions of relational pedagogy, which emphasize that learning occurs through meaningful teacher–student interactions, emotional support, and responsive teaching practices. The conceptual framework suggests that teaching methods can either alleviate or intensify students' fear of reading depending on how instruction, questioning techniques, and classroom interactions are carried out. This supports Rahmat et al.'s (2020) view that fear of reading develops as a cyclical process in which negative classroom experiences may hinder learners' confidence and engagement, eventually reinforcing reading anxiety over time.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the theoretical understanding of reading anxiety by integrating affective, social, and pedagogical dimensions into the reading process. Traditional theories of reading anxiety have primarily emphasized learners' comprehension difficulties, vocabulary limitations, and linguistic competence as major contributors to anxiety during reading activities (Zoghi, 2012; Milao & Vibulphol, 2020). However, the present framework highlights that reading anxiety may also emerge from unsupportive instructional approaches, negative classroom interactions, and emotionally distant learning environments. This perspective aligns with relational pedagogy, which emphasizes that meaningful teacher–student relationships, empathy, and supportive classroom engagement significantly influence learners' emotional and academic experiences (Gravett & Winstone, 2021; Owusu-Agyeman & Pillay, 2023). Therefore, the study positions relational pedagogy as an important theoretical lens for understanding how teaching practices shape students' emotional responses toward reading, particularly within higher education contexts.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings also suggest that lecturers should provide adequate scaffolding to help students manage linguistic challenges related to vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. Strategies such as guided reading activities, collaborative learning, peer discussions, and constructive feedback can help students gradually build confidence

in reading academic texts (Owusu-Agyeman & Pillay, 2023). In addition, integrating interactive and dialogic teaching approaches may help reduce students' anxiety by promoting active participation and supportive classroom communication.

Furthermore, lecturers should be aware of students' emotional responses during reading instruction and recognize that anxiety may negatively affect students' comprehension, motivation, and academic performance. By applying relational pedagogical practices, educators can strengthen students' emotional engagement and encourage positive attitudes toward reading. This supports the view that effective teaching is not solely focused on content delivery but also on nurturing students' emotional well-being and confidence in the learning process.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should further explore the relationship between teaching methods and reading anxiety by examining the role of relational pedagogy in different higher education contexts and disciplines. Since this study employed a correlational design, future studies could utilize longitudinal or experimental approaches to determine the causal effects of specific teaching practices on students' top-down and bottom-up reading anxiety over time. Researchers may also investigate how relational factors such as teacher empathy, classroom interaction, emotional support, and student engagement mediate the relationship between teaching methods and reading anxiety.

Finally, qualitative studies involving interviews, reflective journals, or classroom observations could provide deeper insights into students' lived experiences of reading anxiety and their perceptions of instructional practices. Future research may also expand the sample to include students from different educational levels, cultural backgrounds, and institutions to enhance the generalizability of the findings and contribute to a broader understanding of relational pedagogy and reading anxiety in academic settings.

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APPENDIX

READING ANXIETY

(Instrument adapted from Milao & Vibulphol,2021) and Zoghi, 2012)

SECT	TYPE OF ANXIETY	CONSTRUCT	No Of Items Indicator	
B	TOP-DOWN READING	Background and Cultural Knowledge	3	7
		General Reading Ability	4	
C	BOTTOM-UP READING	Vocabulary	8	14
		Grammar	6	
D	CLASSROOM READING	Teaching Methods	6	6
		TOTAL		27

SURVEY

SECTION B- TOP-DOWN READING ANXIETY

Background and Cultural Knowledge (BCK)

NO	ITEM
1	BCKQ1 I do not feel at ease when the title of the text is unfamiliar to me.
2	BCKQ2 It is worrying to me when the ideas expressed in the text are culturally unclear
3	BCKQ3 I get upset when I lack the previous knowledge about the ideas expressed in the text.

General Reading Ability (GRA)

NO	ITEM
1	GRAQ1 I worry when I cannot get the gist of the text although no new vocabulary items or grammatical points exist in the text.
2	GRAQ2 When I cannot recognize minor ideas (details) of the text, it is worrying to me.
3	GRAQ3 I am nervous when I cannot spot the main idea of a paragraph.
4	GRAQ4 It bothers me when I cannot express my opinions or feelings about the text.

SECTION C- BOTTOM-UP READING ANXIETY

Vocabulary(V)

NO	ITEM
1	VQ1I feel uneasy when I cannot figure out the meanings of unknown words.
2	VQ2 It bothers me when I encounter a lot of words whose meanings are unclear
3	VQ3I get upset when I cannot figure out the meaning of a word that I feel I have seen before
4	VQ4 It bothers me when I feel unable to look up a word in the dictionary.
5	VQ5 I get confused when the word that I know has a different meaning in the sentence.
6	VQ6 I get upset when I come across idioms that are unfamiliar to me.
7	VQ7 It makes me feel uneasy when an unfamiliar word is made up of several parts or syllables.
8	VQ8 I feel worried when the unknown word is difficult to pronounce.

Grammar(G)

NO	ITEM
1	GQ1 I am nervous when a certain sentence is long and has a complex structure
2	GQ2 When a certain sentence is grammatically unfamiliar is worrying to me.
3	GQ3 It bothers me when a passive voice is used in a sentence.
4	GQ4 I feel upset when the tense of a certain sentence is unclear to me.
5	GQ5 I worry when I am unable to recognize different parts of speech such as adjectives, adverbs, or connective words.
6	GQ6 I get confused when what I know about a grammatical point does not make any sense.

SECTION D- CLASSROOM READING ANXIETY

Teaching Methods (TM)

NO	ITEM
1	TMQ1 It bothers me when the instructor calls on me to read out.
2	TMQ2 It worries me when the instructor calls on me to translate a piece of an English text into our first language.
3	TMQ3 When the instructor asks me reading comprehension questions, it is worrying to me.

4	TMQ4 It upsets me when the instructor chooses uninteresting texts to read in class.
5	TMQ5 It makes me feel uneasy when the instructor corrects my pronunciation or translation mistakes.
6	TMQ6 I am nervous when the instructor uses English as a medium of instruction and hardly ever makes use of our first language.