JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
School of Education and Communication

Investigation Games as Teaching Material:

A study into the potential of investigation games for teaching reading

COURSE: *English for Secondary School Subject Teachers IIIb, Degree project, 15 credits*

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the use of investigation games to teach reading skills in the EFL classroom. The research questions focus on the potential of investigation games by comparing them to current teaching techniques. A comparative textbook analysis was done through the use of the Analytical Hierarchy Process.

The results were then analysed with the help of the sociocultural perspective as a theoretical framework. The study found that investigation games have some compelling advantages compared to current techniques in the facilitation of reading subskills, student interest, and student-to-student interaction but that they lack obvious ways of assessing the learner's reading ability during the execution of the technique. Questions were raised if investigation games could be easier to assess if the focus lay on speaking skills and whether the strengths of skill training outweigh the weaknesses in assessment.

Keywords: Investigation games, Analytical Hierarchy Process, Reading skills

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction....1
2. Background....2
2.1 Definitions....2
2.2 Task-based learning....3
2.3 Role-play and simulation techniques....4
2.4 Current research on reading....5
3. Aim and research questions....8
4. Method and material....9
4.1 The Analytical Hierarchy Process....9
4.2 The investigation game....12
4.3 The control technique....13
5. Theoretical framework....14
6. Results and analysis....15
6.1 Comparison using AHP....15
6.1.1 Defining the criteria and subcriteria....15
6.1.2 Weighing the alternatives against the subcriteria....16
6.1.3 Priority....24
7. Discussion....25
7.1 Method discussion....25
7.2 Results discussion....25
8. Conclusion....28
9. References....29
Appendix – Tables and figures....32

1. Introduction

The English syllabus for the Swedish upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2025, p. 2) requires teachers to work with students' receptive skills using many different genres. Traditionally, reading skills are often trained and assessed through the use of static reading exercises accompanied with comprehension questions. However, alternatives exist within the realm of role-playing and simulation techniques, both of which offer dynamic approaches to learning. *Investigation games* (IGs) as a newer technique but with many elements in common with role-play and simulation show promise through their use of multiple text types and genres in a gamified package that requires students to analyse and synthesise information.

Furthermore, the focus on interactivity in IGs addresses student motivation by having students not just passively absorbing text but actively participate in and being driven through an exercise by a narrative goal. Interaction between students then facilitates natural language usage and collaboration. Consequently, utilising IGs in the classroom may offer a justifiable investment of a teacher's time.

This essay first presents the definitions that serve as the basis for the study. Then research in task-based learning, role-play and reading are outlined, followed by the essay's aim and specific research questions. Then the study's methodological approach, the Analytical Hierarchy Process, and material are presented followed by the theoretical framework, the sociocultural perspective. Finally, the results of the empirical study and conclusions drawn are presented.

2. Background

The background will start with the definitions of the terms *investigation games* (IGs) and *technique* because of their central nature to this study. After the definitions, an overview of the research into task-based learning and the teaching techniques of role-play and simulation will be given because of their similarity to IGs. Lastly, a brief introduction will be given to the current research in teaching reading skills.

2.1 Definitions

The term investigation game has been used sparingly in prior research and in those cases it has been used in the realm of video games. In video games I have found two different definitions of IGs. Marques et al. (2024, p. 7) propose that gameplay in IGs can be defined by iterative cycles of exploration, elicitation, experimentation and evaluation, which they call the 4E model. The 4E model is meant to be a tool to analyse IGs as products of game design. Carmosino et al. (2017, p. 2), however, present the following simpler definition: "… investigation games, where players have to search for clues, select the most promising ones, annotate facts, face trials (typically implemented as mini-games) and finally identify the final solution." This definition is more useful to this study; however, it uses the concept of trials, which are not applicable to board games. Marques et al.'s (2024, p. 10) 4E model, on the other hand, is believed to be useful in capturing key elements of investigative board games.

Investigative board games or IGs are exemplified by Marques et al. (2024, pp. 7–8) with Cluedo, also known as Clue in North America. In the same genre there is a subset of investigative board games that focus on co-operative narrative investigations. In these IGs the players are presented with a dossier of documents pertaining to the investigation (most often in the style of a police report). These documents can consist of newspaper articles, filled in police forms, photographs, transcriptions of interviews, witness statements, detective write-ups of the investigation, etc. Therefore, this study will use the definition presented by Carmosino et al. (2017, p. 2), except for trials, when referring to IGs throughout this study.

This study will make many references to the term *technique*. The term technique is used as a superordinate term referring to most activities that the teacher or the students in a classroom engage in that are meant to encourage learning (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 220).

2.2 Task-based learning

While IGs do not have a presence in research literature, similarities can be drawn to other practices that do. Task-based learning is one practice that has more than a passing similarity if one applies an IG as one of its tasks.

Task-based learning is an approach that prioritises conveying meaning between students, meaning that it prioritises students understanding each other and fulfilling communicative goals in a way that cannot be done by employing rote memorisation of aspects of language such as phonology and grammar (Nunan, 2014, p. 457; Prasad Bhandari, 2020, p. 3). This is done by giving the students tasks that create opportunities to make and convey meaning from the material they are given and the learning that they have done in the classroom for the task. The tasks and techniques used in task-based learning are meant to have a connection to the real world and to be directly tied to reaching a communicative goal to achieve the desired learning outcome (Nunan, 2014, pp. 457–459; Prasad Bhandari, 2020, p. 3).

Nunan (2014, p. 459) presents the following list of the key characteristics of a pedagogical task within the task-based learning approach:

- Meaning is primary.
- Learners are not given other people's meanings to simply repeat.
- There is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities.
- Task completion has some priority.
- The assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.

By positioning IGs as a technique that can be used in the task-based learning approach and evaluating them according to these characteristics, they may be considered as appropriate teaching material even without a direct presence in research.

The use of task-based learning and interactive language tasks in the classroom has been shown to have a positive impact on students' motivation to learn a second language (L2) (Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018, p. 730; Ulla, 2020, pp. 685–686). Positive perception towards

using language tasks was also increased with a more interactive and engaging task structure. Students also learn more if tasks are performed in groups that encourage and facilitate active interaction (Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018, p. 730; Ulla, 2020, p. 686). Some students may still feel discomfort speaking in group settings, though this may be lessened through exposure and practice. Clear task guidance is also a very important aspect of task-based learning outcomes. With clear guidance and detailed criteria for success a more difficult task can be perceived as easier than a more difficult task without (Jung & Yang, 2024, p. 20). It can also enhance incidental learning of L2 features during a task and boost a student's confidence, which also increases their learning.

2.3 Role-play and simulation techniques

Based on the similarities between IGs and the techniques of role-play and simulation there will be a brief introduction to these terms and their usefulness in the EFL classroom.

Brown and Lee (2015, p. 227) define roleplaying as a "relatively open-ended acting out of specified roles and functions. Role-play is distinguished from cued dialogues by the fact that cueing is provided only minimally at the beginning, and not during the activity", and they define simulation as an "activity involving complex interaction between groups and individuals based on simulation of real-life actions and experiences." Both definitions circle the meaning of IGs but from different angles. IGs, like roleplaying, rely on an open-ended activity with specified roles, investigators, and minimal cueing while using the material and questions to be asked of the material (Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018, p. 727). The definition of simulations fits into the meaning of IGs because they feature complex interaction between **individuals**, the conveying and utilisation of knowledge and clues, and are somewhat based on real-life actions of police investigators (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 227).

Salim Keezhatta (2020, p. 564) has through a quasi-experimental study provided evidence that role- play as a method in the EFL classroom tends to improve the students' scores compared to using what they perceive as the traditional method. Salim Keezhatta also concludes that roleplaying helps in increasing student motivation and creativity. Increasing student motivation and creativity is also supported by Rojas and Villafuerte (2018, p. 730) through role-play as a teaching method. Salim Keezhatta (2020, p. 564) also argues in

favour of studies that point towards role-play increasing students' self-confidence, empathy, critical thinking abilities, vocabulary and language skills.

2.4 Current research on reading

Celce-Murcia (2014, pp. 10–11) highlights that we now live in a post-method era of learning because there is currently no empirical way of proving one method superior to any other unless one makes the test favour one type of learning over another. Methods are useful in that they can and should guide the teacher in how to handle students' learning but they are not blueprints to execute but to apply and adapt to any given learning situation (Celce-Murcia, 2014, pp. 11–12).

One way of navigating this post-method era of learning is to work with principles of learning instead of rigid methodologies. Kumaravadivelu (2003, pp. 38–40), and Brown and Lee (2015, pp. 66–85) have developed principles that can help guide teachers in this new era.

Brown and Lee's and Kumaravadivelu's approaches convey a form of generality to all teaching methods regardless of whether the teacher is using a specified method or using their own expertise to conduct lessons. The approaches differ from each other in that Kumaravadivelu writes more from the teacher's view while Brown and Lee write more from a learner's view. Otherwise, both approaches are similar in their focus on how to help learners acquire the language by integrating all parts of the language, making learners aware of their own learning, making the learners aware of and use the cultural knowledge inherent in the L2 but also in themselves, promoting learner autonomy and automaticity that promotes continued language development.

The post-method thinking has come under some scrutiny for being too idealistic and not being applicable in all classrooms (Celce-Murcia, 2014, p. 11). Most of the criticism stems from it not being applicable in educational environments where the syllabus and teaching materials are fixed by an external authority. Such an educational environment may not provide the teacher with sufficient autonomy to implement a post-method era approach to learning.

Educational environments such as Sweden's have embraced a post-method tradition in using a communicative language teaching approach and afford their teachers a high degree of autonomy in their profession. Communicative language teaching is a very open and loosely defined method with an emphasis given to interaction through the L2 (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 258). Both Kumaravadivelu (2003, pp. 225–226), and Brown and Lee (2015, p. 114) put emphasis on the need to combine the use of multiple skills to achieve better learning. Brown and Lee (2015, pp. 409–410) however, add that even in integrated tasks there should be focus given to specific skills so that we do not just assume that learning is happening.

One area of teaching reading that has been studied and made relevant during the last decade is the use of gamification as elements of learning. This area seems to have mostly been constrained to the realm of digital gamifications but some parts of this gamification are clearly applicable to IGs. Julita (2024, pp. 139–140) has through a meta study of ten empirical studies on the subject of gamification in teaching reading skills been able to pinpoint aspects that can enhance a student's engagement, motivation and reading skills. The identified aspects were challenges, points, levels, badges, rankings, and feedback (Julita, 2024, pp. 143, 147). IGs in the form they take in this study leverage the aspect of challenges and feedback directly through the presented problem. In gamification, feedback sometimes has a characteristic of being instant, facilitated by technology, but this is only an added benefit and not integral. The aspect of rankings is also leveraged but in an indirect manner. Rankings are informal between students by the nature of a challenge presented to individuals or groups.

Chan and Lo (2024, p. 18) take a more zoomed out approach to the field of gamification for teaching English skills and they present three broad categories that make up effective gamified teaching: dynamics, mechanics and components. Dynamics include the motivational aspects of gamification such as extrinsic motivation through status and rewards but also intrinsic motivation through opportunities for personal expression, the engagement of regulated competition and the drive to better oneself. Mechanics defines how the game works and can include such things as leveling systems and an evolving narrative beyond the main activity. Components are the parts that the students interact with directly and can include many elements of visual design and presentation of, for instance, points and feedback. These more broadly defined categories are easier to apply to IGs since

they are not exclusive to the digital realm. Chan and Lo (2024, p. 18) point towards learning experiences that use gamification elements needing to be balanced between gaming elements and educational content so that they can not only motivate students but also align with educational objectives and students' language level.

3. Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to explore whether investigation games could be of use in the upper secondary EFL classroom. The focus lies in exploring their potential usage as material for teaching reading skills specifically. To be able to explore investigation games in the classroom two research questions form the basis of the study:

What potential do investigation games offer as a technique for reading instruction?

How do investigation games compare to a current technique for reading instruction?

4. Method and material

This study uses the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) to perform the comparative textbook analysis. This section will present the AHP and its use in this study and then there will be a short presentation of the IG that constitutes the explored material.

4.1 The Analytical Hierarchy Process

As stated, this study uses the AHP to perform a comparative textbook analysis between an IG and a current technique for teaching reading. AHP is a structured method for organising and analysing complex decisions with multiple alternatives. The process originated in business but has been adapted to an educational context by Kato (2014), through combining Saaty's (1980) AHP and Tucker's (1975, as cited in Kato, 2014, p. 680) framework for textbook evaluation. The method was chosen based on its ability to make the user achieve a higher level of reflection and a greater measure of objectivity. The method was executed in its entirety by me with the study supervisor's sign-off on the criteria and subcriteria used, which can be found in Figure 2 in the Appendix.

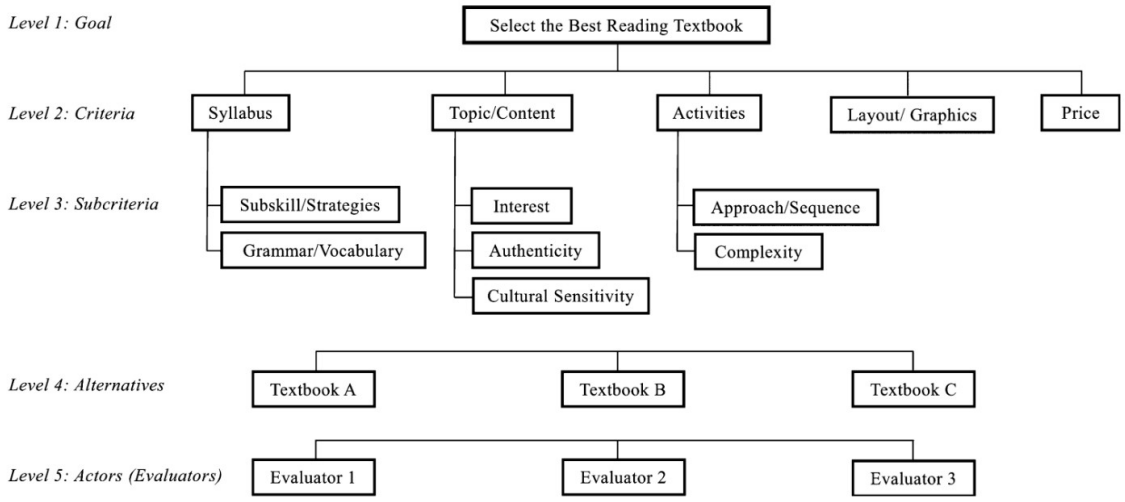
The method consists of six steps (Kato, 2014, pp. 683–684). This study will only utilise the first five steps, as the sixth is designed for group evaluation, which is beyond the study's scope. The steps are:

a. Defining the problem or task and designing the decision hierarchy
b. Conducting pairwise comparisons of and constructing comparison matrices for all criteria and subcriteria
c. Conducting pairwise comparisons of and constructing comparison matrices for alternatives corresponding to each criterion and subcriterion
d. Calculating the relative values to obtain the priority criteria, subcriteria, and alternatives
e. Determining the priority alternatives

The criteria and subcriteria used to evaluate *VICTIM: Madeline Deparde. Case #001-08172006* (MD) *(Unsolved Case Files, n.d.)* and *READING TWO: Laughter and the Brain* (LaB) (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421) were decided by adapting Kato's (2014, pp. 684–685) criteria, Brown and Lee's (2015) writings about how to construct and teach reading, the syllabus for the Swedish upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2022;

Skolverket, 2025) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020).

Figure 1:
Tree diagram of criteria, subcriteria and alternatives by Kato (2014, p. 684)



Note: This figure visualises step a.

When all criteria and subcriteria have been defined, we proceed with step b. The criteria need to be weighed against each other to figure out their relative importance to the goal (Kato, 2014, pp. 686–687). The scale used is the same as the one used by Kato (2014, p. 686):

1 Equal importance (preference) of i and j
2 Weak or slight importance (preference) of i over j
3 Moderate importance (preference) of i over j
4 Moderate plus
5 Strong importance (preference) of i over j
6 Strong plus
7 Very strong or demonstrated importance (preference) of i over j
8 Very, very strong
9 Extreme importance (preference) of i over j

The weighing is done by applying an integer from 1 to 9 and a corresponding fraction to every criteria match-up as seen in Table 1.

Table 1:
Sample criteria matrix by Kato (2014, p. 686)

	Syllabus	Topic/ content	Activities	Layout/ graphics	Price
Syllabus	1	3	1/2	7	5
Topic/content	1/3	1	1/3	5	4
Activities	2	3	1	5	4
Layout/graphics	1/7	1/5	1/5	1	1/2
Price	1/5	1/4	1/4	2	1

After weighing the criteria against each other, a consistency rating (CR) is calculated for the table to make sure it is internally consistent. For a breakdown of how to calculate CR see Kato (2014, p. 687). A CR below 0,1 is considered acceptable when using AHP. The CR values of the tables in this study were calculated with the help of Microsoft Excel.

Step c involves constructing matrices where the alternatives are compared to each other in every criterion and subcriterion. However, since this study only compares two alternatives to each other, the CR values are always internally consistent. Table 2 shows an example of how the comparison is done.

Table 2:
Sample alternative comparison matrix by Kato (2013, p. 689)

	Textbook A	Textbook B	Textbook C
Textbook A	1	3	2
Textbook B	1/3	1	1/2
Textbook C	1/2	2	1

Step d is where the priority values for every criteria, subcriteria, and alternatives are calculated by calculating their geometric means and normalizing those values to get the priority. For an explanation of how these two numbers are calculated see Kato (2014, p. 688).

In step e the priority of the alternatives, with respect to the priority of all the criteria and subcriteria, is calculated. This is done by dividing up the calculated criteria for every level onto the level below. This is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3:
Sample summary of values and priorities for each criterion, subcriterion, and alternatives by Kato (2014, p. 691).

Level 1: Goal	Level 2: Criteria	Level 3: Subcriteria	Level 4: Alternatives		
			Textbook A	Textbook B	Textbook C
Select the best reading textbook	*Syllabus* 0.326	*Subskill/ strategies* 0.217	0.110	0.082	0.025
		Grammar/ vocabulary 0.109	0.065	0.017	0.027
	Topic/ content 0.173	*Interest* 0.112	0.061	0.018	0.033
		Authenticity 0.040	0.023	0.008	0.009
		Cultural sensitivity 0.021	0.004	0.005	0.012
	Activities 0.384	*Approach/ sequence* 0.096	0.060	0.024	0.012
		Complexity 0.288	0.158	0.054	0.076
	Layout/ graphics 0.046		0.015	0.023	0.008
	Price 0.071		0.018	0.035	0.018
	Overall priority 1.000		0.514	0.266	0.220

4.2 The investigation game

The material by Unsolved Case Files (n.d.) was chosen based on the convenience criteria and because it is open access. The file is easy to access by anyone and is therefore possible for both researchers and teachers to work with. It is material that follows the criteria set forth in the definition of IGs and it is typical for its genre, except for being smaller in scope.

The material will be referred to, and has been referred to, as *MD (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.)* or the IG from here on to make it easier to read.

MD (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.) is an IG that involves solving and finding evidence against a perpetrator in a police report that involves documents such as a newspaper article, a transcribed interview with the perpetrator, a police issued accident report, and a guide to how police fill in such an accident report. *MD* contains instructions for the players to find discrepancies in the testified report and present logical reasoning for why Scott Zion, the perpetrator, committed the deed that led to the death of Madeline, the victim. *MD (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.)* does not include further instructions beyond stating "Your objective: Prove Scott lied about the accident … and [that] Madeline's death was not an accident" (p. 1).

4.3 The control technique

To compare the efficacy of IGs there needs to be a technique that has known value to the teaching of the skill that is being evaluated. The technique *Reading Two: Laughter and the Brain* (LaB) (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421) is meant to train reading skills, but it also includes speaking as part of the exercise. This is similar to IGs that have both aspects of reading and speaking as part of their construction.

LaB (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421) consists of, in order, a warm-up exercise, an explanation of the reading strategy of predicting the text from the title, a text about the interactions between our brains and our ability to laugh, a word list connected to the article, exercises meant for the individual focused on comprehension and vocabulary, an exercise in critical thinking meant for group work, post-reading activities consisting of writing and self-assessment, and an exercise in using the dictionary in combination with the text.

5. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework chosen to analyse the data of this study is the sociocultural perspective (Masuda & Arnett, 2015, p. 10; Säljö, 2014, p. 18). It was chosen based upon the very social nature of the material and because of its prevalence in the Swedish curriculum (Säljö, 2014, p. 46; Skolverket, 2022, p. 19). The sociocultural perspective is reflected in the AHP (Figure 1) as the criterion Interaction.

The sociocultural perspective argues that humans are not solely defined by our physical capacity but that our cognition is mediated through cultural tools (Säljö, 2014, pp. 17–18). *Tools* that help us learn, construct and communicate have allowed humanity to create things and cultures that far exceed what genetics alone could predict (Säljö, 2014, p. 20). *Tools* are a central concept within the sociocultural perspective. Language, in both spoken and written form, is a tool for mediation because it is not only a tool for communication and thought but also a tool that is used to grasp conceptual thinking which in turn leads to improvements in higher mental functioning (Masuda & Arnett, 2015, p. 12; Säljö, 2014, pp. 20–21). To be able to unlock these improvements there needs to be more than the learner having the basic skills of reading and listening. To use the tools of language when reading and listening effectively there needs to be an understanding of the cultural context and the communicative rules that govern them (Säljö, 2014, pp. 186–187). A language's cultural context can be learned by ingesting cultural artefacts and interacting with others (Masuda & Arnett, 2015, p. 10).

The *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) is a concept within the sociocultural perspective that explains the zone where a student learns from someone more experienced and where their instruction is at a level appropriate to induce learning (Masuda & Arnett, 2015, p. 11; Säljö, 2014, p. 122). Säljö (2014, p. 124) describes the road to mastery of tools as a student going through a phase of not knowing, a phase of usage under the tutelage of a competent user, a phase of increasing complexity and less support, and a final phase where the student has mastered the tool.

The concepts from the sociocultural perspective are used to help weigh parts of the material when using the AHP. In section 6.1.1 I describe how the sociocultural perspective is considered in defining the criteria for the AHP.

6. Results and analysis

In this section there will be a presentation of the findings and the subsequent analysis.

6.1 Comparison using AHP

Defining a problem or goal for the AHP has already been done through the aim and the first research question of this study but here we restate it as ”choose the better technique for learning reading”. This is done so that we are able to compare *MD* (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.) and *LaB* (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421) against a common goal. To be able to compare the two techniques we will define the criteria, weigh said criteria and show which technique is prioritised for the goal.

6.1.1 Defining the criteria and subcriteria

Continuing with Kato’s (2014) step a, we need to define the criteria and subcriteria used. In Figure 2 (Appendix) the criteria and subcriteria used to evaluate the tested material are presented. The criterion Syllabus refers to the material’s adherence to the syllabus and the didactic evaluation of the material. The subcriteria of Syllabus: Core Content, Aim and Grading Criteria represent the three main sections in the syllabus (Skolverket, 2025). Assessment considers if a way to assess is present in the technique and the ease of assessment (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 414). The sub-criterion Subskills represent the materials ability to engage the different subskills involved when teaching reading (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 401–407; Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 60–63; Skolverket, 2022, p. 9).

The criterion Content considers the text itself and its appropriateness to the goal. The sub-criterion to Content: Authenticity represents how important it is that the material feels like it has a place and a use in the world outside of the classroom (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 410–411; Skolverket, 2022, p. 8). Student Interest considers the interest the student will have in the material based on relatability, interactivity and fun factor (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 410). Appropriate Language Level is evaluated because it is important that the text is appropriately challenging for the students (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 410–411). Cultural Context situates the content in its cultural context and lets the teacher evaluate the appropriateness for the goal (Skolverket, 2022, pp. 9–10).

The criterion Interaction considers the usage of the material in interaction with other speakers. Both subcriteria of Interaction refer to different forms of interaction that the student can be part of during the execution of a technique. Interaction is a cornerstone of L2 learning and by interacting with other people students can put themselves in the *ZPD* (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 79–80). The criterion also reflects sociocultural theory by taking into consideration situations where either the students or teacher can act as a mentor and put students into the *ZPD*. *Tools,* on the other hand, are considered more in the subcriteria Subskills, Authenticity, Cultural Context and Layout/Clarity.

The criterion Layout/Clarity refers to if the material is easy to read and understand the purpose of. It also refers to a subjective appeal that influences a student's willingness to work with the material (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 190).

Table 4:
Comparison matrix for the criteria

	Syllabus	Content	Interaction	Layout/ Clarity	Geometric means	Normalised Values
Syllabus	1	3	3	7	2.817	0.519
Content	1/3	1	2	5	1.351	0.249
Interaction	1/3	1/2	1	6	1.000	0.184
Layout/Clarity	1/7	1/5	1/6	1	0.2626	0.048
Total					5.430	1.0

CR value for this table = 0.064

Table 4 shows the weighing of the criteria made in this study. Syllabus is deemed to have the highest priority, followed by Content, followed by Interaction, and the least priority is given to Layout/Clarity. This weighing is based on the factors a language teacher needs to take into consideration when choosing a technique to use, such as the specific abilities presented by Skolverket (2025) in the curriculum.

Weighing of the subcriteria and their internal consistency can be found in Tables 7–9 in the Appendix.

6.1.2 Weighing the alternatives against the subcriteria

The techniques *MD (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.)* and *LaB* (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421) were compared to each other with every subcriterion and the difference was quantified with the same scale 1–9 as was used when weighing the different criteria and subcriteria in section 4.1. The comparison of the alternatives is presented in Table 5.

Table 5:
Comparison chart between alternatives

	MD	*LaB*	Priority
Subskills	4	1/4	0.8 / 0.2
Core Content	3	1/3	0.75 / 0.25
Aim	1/2	2	0.333 / 0.667
Grading Criteria	2	1/2	0.667 / 0.333
Assessment	1/5	5	0.167 / 0.833
Authenticity	5	1/5	0.833 / 0.167
Student Interest	5	1/5	0.833 / 0.167
Appropriate Language Level	1/4	4	0.2 / 0.8
Cultural Context	1	1	0.5 / 0.5
Student to Student	6	1/6	0.857 / 0.143
Teacher to Student	1/5	5	0.167 / 0.833
Layout/ Clarity	3	1/3	0.75 / 0.25

Note: This table is contracted for easier overview. Every row represents a full table comparison between the two alternatives similar to Table 2. All comparison tables can be found in Tables 10–21 in Appendix – Tables and figures.

Note that large differences in priority do not mean that there is no merit in the alternative with the lower priority, only that there is a lower priority given to said alternative.

6.1.2.1 Subskills

The IG's higher rating in the subcriterion Subskills stems from its facilitation of a wider range of reading skills.

LaB uses the reading skills: prediction, scanning, guessing the meaning from context, inferring of context, activating schemata for interpretation and the identification of discourse markers. Prediction is used directly through the specified pre-reading activity "B Reading Strategy" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 417). Scanning is encouraged as a reading skill through, for instance, the use of bold on the name "A.K." that encourages the reader to scan the text for the explanation. The section "Close reading" also encourages the reader to scan for the called for information (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 419). *LaB* accomplishes the use of guessing the meaning from context by using words and expressions that are of a higher language level than a student is expected to know. They may know some but are unlikely to know all. The student then needs to guess the meaning from the context until the technique

makes the student check a dictionary in the exercise ”C Dictionary”, which also gives an unspoken encouragement to check the dictionary for more definitions (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 421). *LaB* lets the student exercise the skill of inference of context by utilising a known subject, laughter, but elevating it with a scientific angle. Students at upper secondary are not likely to know the intricacies of scientific procedure but can infer the context through their surface level knowledge. *LaB* tries to activate the students' schemata for interpretation through the use of the exercises "A Warm-Up" and "B Reading Strategy" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 417). These exercises prime the student to think of laughter and subjects surrounding the main topic. *LaB* uses only a few discourse markers, those being of the type logical sequencing. Examples such as the expressions: ”due to”, ”then” and ”caused” (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–418). *LaB* could have had explicative discourse markers such as ”namely” or ”in other words” but the text instead has parentheses to indicate restatements and explanations. Inferring links and connections between ideas is lightly done in *LaB* through the use of ideas on different levels of complexity and emphasis is put directly on this through the exercises under the title "Comprehension" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 419).

In *MD,* skimming is encouraged because the student needs to skim through the different document types to be able to understand what parts of the texts could be relevant for the investigation. The text also requires scanning for information when the student tries to confirm or falsify a theory they have come up with or when they are trying to answer other questions that are posed by themselves or their study partners. *MD* uses inferring of context through the use of a police investigation as the model. Students often have a surface level understanding of what can be involved. Students are also used to reading media articles through other school subjects at upper secondary. Driving and biking are also common activities in society that come with their own contexts. *MD* utilises quite a few technical words such as "pedestrian", "reference marker" and "lacerations". From the context of a police report and the surrounding text a student can guess the meaning of the words. However, there are more technical words in *MD* with no explicit explanation of them as there are in *LaB,* which could become a problem for a student. *MD* tries to activate the students schemata for interpretation through the use of the starting article. The article sets the scene and kickstarts the students schemata. However, *MD* does not explicitly activate any schemata and this therefore relies on the teacher to activate a student's schemata. When it comes to discourse markers *MD* utilises enumerating, such as "first" and "then"; additive,

such as "at this time", "coincidentally" and "one more thing"; logical sequence, such as "as a result"; and contrastive markers, such as "don't usually" and "not really".

Both techniques facilitate the use of the reading skills scanning, inferring of context, guessing meaning from context, the identification of discourse markers and inferring links and connections. The IG however also facilitates the use of the skills skimming and distinguishing between literal and implied meaning, while the current technique incorporates prediction with the pre-reading activity.

Tools as cultural artefacts in the sociocultural perspective help learners grasp conceptual thinking and improvements come more easily than without this connection (Masuda & Arnett, 2015, p. 12; Säljö, 2014, pp. 20–21). *LaB* has a weaker cultural connection than the IG here because it uses an academic and scientific connection to the subject matter. Laughter is a universal action that learners have direct experience with and is therefore a good starting point. Beyond this surface level the researched technique only relies on the learners' interest and familiarity with the way academic and scientific explanations are formulated. The IG on the other hand uses multiple tools as cultural artefacts by using multiple text genres that the learner is familiar with. This familiarity and knowledge of the rules that govern this form of communication make learning easier (Säljö, 2014, pp. 186–187). Furthermore, the IG leverages a thrilling theme and uses curiosity to push the learner forward, utilising genres that are themselves cultural artefacts.

6.1.2.2 Core Content

The subcriterion Core Content is valued as being moderately stronger in the investigation game than in the researched technique based on the amount of the syllabus (Skolverket, 2025) that is represented. These formulations from the syllabus are represented in the IG, but not in the current technique:

> händelser och händelseförlopp.
>
> Åsikter, tankar och erfarenheter samt relationer. Värdering av källornas relevans och trovärdighet. …
>
> Hur struktur och sammanhang, i den engelska som eleverna möter, skapas genom ord och fraser som markerar till exempel orsakssammanhang, kontrast, talarens inställning, tidsaspekt. … [At a higher level] genom sambandsmarkörer som uttrycker till exempel orsakssammanhang och jämförelse. (Skolverket, 2025, pp. 2–4)

The following formulations from the syllabus (Skolverket, 2025) are represented by both techniques at similar levels:

> aktuella och bekanta ämnesområden, även med anknytning till samhälls- och arbetsliv. …
> Texter [of varying degrees of complexity] …, från olika medier. …
> Texter som är berättande, förklarande, diskuterande, argumenterande och rapporterande, till exempel intervjuer, reportage, manualer och [varying levels of] … populärvetenskapliga texter.
>
> Strategier för att uppfatta detaljer och dra slutsatser om innehåll och budskap, till exempel genom att associera, återberätta, … och ställa sig frågor.
>
> Sökning av innehåll i källor av olika slag och utifrån olika syften. (Skolverket, 2025, pp. 2–4)

There is a more than moderate difference between the two techniques, with more of the syllabus (Skolverket, 2025) represented by the IG. However, most of the difference comes from *MD's* use of multiple text types, which many current techniques also incorporate, and therefore the difference has been evaluated as less severe.

6.1.2.3 Aim

Table 5 shows that the current technique was evaluated higher than the IG in the subcriterion Aim. This is because it gives more opportunities to engage with the text in the technique through prompting the students with multiple stated questions and ways of thinking about the text. In the syllabus this can be seen to strengthen the part: "undervisningen ska stimulera elevernas nyfikenhet på språk" (Skolverket, 2025, p. 1). The IG also gives multiple opportunities to engage with the text, but it does not prompt the student in an equally direct way. In other aspects, the techniques are comparable in the evaluation of aim.

6.1.2.4 Grading Criteria

The subcriterion Grading Criteria gives a slight advantage to *MD (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.)*. This slight advantage comes from that it can be argued that the grading criteria, "eleven väljer med källkritisk medvetenhet innehåll från … skriftliga källor av olika slag och använder på ett **relevant** [original emphasis] sätt det valda materialet i sin egen produktion och interaktion" (Skolverket, 2025, p. 6), also encompasses some reading skill. Otherwise, both alternatives fulfil the grading criteria related to reading. "Eleven läser samt förstår och tolkar **huvudsakligt innehåll och tydliga detaljer** [original emphasis] i texter av olika slag" (Skolverket, 2025, p. 6).

6.1.2.5 Assessment

LaB (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421) has a strong advantage over the IG when it comes to assessment. This is because it provides multiple opportunities for a teacher to assess a student's performance using smaller performative parts in the technique. These performative parts also make it easier for the teacher to assess different forms of reading performance. For example, the technique starts with a predictive exercise that the teacher can use to assess the use of the reading skill prediction (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 417). *MD (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.)* does not give the same opportunities through its nature as one large exercise that the teacher must assess through observation of multiple students in one or more larger groups. It also does not include any written exercises to confirm reading skills as *LaB* (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 419) does.

6.1.2.6 Authenticity

Authenticity is a measure of how close the material is to a use of the L2 that is not designed for the classroom but for an audience of native speakers. *MD (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.)* is not designed for the classroom but primarily for native speakers and is therefore a highly authentic text in that regard. It can however be argued that its texts are not as authentic as they could be because they are written specifically for the IG and therefore not for the authentic audiences and purposes that the included text genres are normally written for. *LaB* (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421) on the other hand, is a text rewritten for a classroom setting and therefore it is no longer a highly authentic text.

6.1.2.7 Student Interest

Both the IG and the current technique use multiple elements that should help increase student interest. They are both task-based which has been shown to increase student motivation along with interactive elements which both techniques utilise (Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018, p. 730; Ulla, 2020, pp. 685–686).

The IG is however given the advantage in the subcriterion Student Interest based on that its structure encourages role-play as a police investigator and it uses the gamification element of challenge, through a clearly stated goal of proving that Zion is lying, which both adds to the interest and motivation of students (Chan & Lo, 2024, p. 18; Julita, 2024, pp. 139–140). Both the IG and the current technique use the gamification element of feedback but in different

forms. Where the IG uses direct feedback by giving the students a clear outcome if they have solved the case or not, the current technique instead leverages indirect feedback through limited discussions with other students and through classroom discussions. A game-like structure can also be a strong point of interest for students since it is most often not part of the normal curriculum but is more common in their private lives. Appealing to such interests and lives outside of the classroom can benefit the students' interest in the technique significantly (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 357). Curiosity and mystery are closely linked to each other and to motivation, and leveraging this motivation is highly beneficial for learning (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 91–92).

6.1.2.8 Appropriate Language Level

The subcriterion of Appropriate Language Level was weighed in favour of *LaB* (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421) based on that it is designed with the classroom in mind. Complex words are also put into a word list and explained to the reader which helps widen the language level it is a appropriate for. *MD (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.)* does not have any such tools, while it still uses a variety of technical and context specific terms.

6.1.2.9 Cultural Context

Cultural Context is here considered equal because it is dependent on the teacher's own evaluation of their classroom's cultural context and the appropriateness for their students. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for this study to comment on it.

6.1.2.10 Student to Student and Teacher to Student

Interaction as a criterion, divided into Student to Student and Teacher to Student in Table 5, was split almost evenly between *MD (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.)* and *LaB* (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421) in the sense that they were each preferred to the other almost equally in one of the subcriteria. *MD* is preferred when looking at student to student interaction since it is designed to have participants interacting with each other to solve the mystery in front of them with minimal input from any outside source. *LaB*, however, gives many more opportunities for teacher led parts and parts where the teacher interacts directly with individual students. There are parts where the students interact with each other in *LaB,* but these are more limited. *MD* lets the students seamlessly slip between the roles of the

competent user and the learner, therefore keeping more students in the *ZPD*. It also lets the learner restate and become the competent user as soon as they understand a concept.

6.1.2.11 Layout/ Clarity

A slight advantage was given to *MD* (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.) in the subcriterion of Layout/ Clarity. This advantage was given because the stated objective is simpler to understand, and the material is easy to get an overview of. However, there are aspects of the IG that are not as clear, the accident report and its guide. This is both a familiarity and an information density problem that hurts clarity. *MD* is also designed to be visually interesting, while *LaB* (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421) does not seem to be with all parts being stacked on top of each other.

Table 6:
Summary of Values and Priorities for Each Criterion, Subcriterion, and Alternatives

Level 1: Goal	Level 2: Criteria	Level 3: Subcriteria	Level 4: Alternatives *MD*	*LaB*
Choose the better technique for learning reading	Syllabus 0.519	Subskills 0.235	0.188	0.047
		Core Content 0.06	0.045	0.015
		Aim 0.031	0.010	0.021
		Grading Criteria 0.11	0.073	0.037
		Assessment 0.083	0.014	0.069
	Content 0.249	Authenticity 0.037	0.031	0.006
		Student Interest 0.129	0.107	0.022
		Appropriate Language Level 0.068	0.014	0.054
		Cultural Context 0.014	0.007	0.007
	Interaction 0.184	Student to Student 0.166	0.142	0.024
		Teacher to Student 0.018	0.003	0.015
	Layout/ Clarity 0.048		0.036	0.012
Overall priority	1.0	1.0	0.67	0.329

6.1.3 Priority

Table 6 shows the priority of every criterion and subcriterion compared to the goal. Note that every level in its entirety adds up to one and that the level below always adds up to the sum presented at the closest upper level. For example, on level 3 subcriterion Subskills equals 0.235 which on level 4 is the added numbers of *MD* 0.188 and *LaB* 0.047. The level 3 subcriteria of Subskills 0.235, Core Content 0.06, Aim 0.031, Grading Criteria 0.11, and Assessment 0.083 sum to 0.519 which is the Syllabus weight.

Combining all the priorities for a given alternative gives the total priority given to that alternative. In this instance *MD (Unsolved Case Files, n.d.)* is given a priority of 0.67, equalling 67%, over *LaB* (Brown & Lee, 2015, pp. 417–421). *MD* is preferred in many of the categories looked at but is especially strengthened by its strong performance in heavily weighted criteria such as Syllabus/Subskills, Content/Student Interest, and Interaction/Student to Student. These three criteria represent over 0.5, or 50% of the priority given to an alternative.

7. Discussion

This study has the aim of studying whether there is any merit to using IGs in the classroom or if they are a form of media that teachers should pass by for more tried and tested techniques. What follows will be a discussion of the methods used and, lastly, a discussion of the results and the study's conclusion.

7.1 Method discussion

The AHP, as discussed in the method section, is a process that aims to make choices more objective by breaking down the important components of a decision. However, a degree of subjectivity remains in the AHP by its very nature as a comparison tool where people make the ultimate comparison between the alternatives. This combined with the amount of maths involved can lead to the method being harder to grasp and can be seen to be a way of legitimising a predetermined result. By showing the work and the reasoning for the choices, I mitigate this aspect. It is a process that, used correctly, does move decisions towards objectivity in what can be highly subjective choices.

Another aspect of the AHP that can be seen as being problematic is the transformation of an assessment into a number. Kato (2014, p. 694) points out that this can be difficult and a point of contention for some, but that the absolute values given are of less importance than the relative preference given to an alternative. If a given number grade is off by a little, it matters less than if the preference is given to an alternative that is not the actual preference

7.2 Results discussion

The primary results of this study seem to point towards IGs being a useful technique to utilise in the L2 classroom when teaching reading skills. This is supported in the results by the AHP showing a preference for IGs in a couple of key areas. The areas of Student to Student interaction and Student Interest are two such areas. These areas are linked to good learning outcomes by Rojas and Villafuerte (2018, p. 730) and Ulla (2020, pp. 685–686) who all point toward better learning outcomes among students who engage in techniques that emphasise interaction between learners. This emphasis on interaction also strengthens the learner’s motivation to engage and learn. Motivation and student interest are also strengthened through the IG’s use of narrative engagement, regulated competition and presented challenges (Chan & Lo, 2024, p. 18; Julita, 2024, pp. 139–140). There is,

however, a danger that Chan and Lo introduce when optimising for student motivation and interest when using gamified elements and in some classrooms an IG may be out of balance with the educational goals of training reading skills.

The training of reading subskills also seems to be positive when trained using IGs. The number of subskills that were able to be trained using IGs were seen as positive. Unfamiliarity with the material from either the teacher or the student point of view is not something that the AHP takes into consideration and is a blind spot in the data. However, unfamiliarity can be mitigated greatly through clear guidance and detailed criteria which Jung and Yang (2024, p. 20) show can make a task feel easier, despite a higher difficulty, and boost student confidence. Unfamiliarity therefore does not invalidate the results since familiarity with a new technique will be found through use, and the interactive nature and motivational benefits should help this process. Ulla (2020, p. 686), and Rojas and Villafuerte (2018, p. 730) point to some students being uncomfortable when speaking in group settings but that it can be lessened through exposure and practice. The same can be said for the unfamiliarity of new techniques. If the potential of a new technique is high, there is a benefit to working through this unfamiliarity. Salim Keezhatta (2020, p. 564) argues that role-play can increase learners' performance in multiple areas, one being self-confidence. Likewise, this study suggests that the familiarising process should be shorter and still effective in those same areas based on the learners' motivation and increased self-confidence.

Assessment is one of IGs larger weak spots compared to the current technique. Assessment is a constant part of a teacher's job and using a technique that does not present a well-defined way of assessing areas such as grammar and vocabulary may create a problem when integrating IGs in a classroom. However IGs still provide a form of assessment through the clear goal of the task which is in line with Nunan's (2014, p. 459) key characteristics that state that assessment of the task is in terms of outcome. The task can therefore be assessed simply through completion. This is backed up by both Brown and Lee's (2015, pp. 66–85) principles of teaching and Kumaravadivelu's (2003, pp. 38–40) macrostrategies that focus on learner autonomy and automaticity over rote assessment. Assessment does not improve learning directly even if it is an important part of a teacher's job.

When viewed through the lens of the sociocultural perspective and the concepts of *tools* and the *ZPD* there are some patterns that stand out. The *ZPD* is as stated earlier inherently part of the criterion Interaction and its subcriteria. Here the substantially higher priority afforded the student-to-student interaction gives IGs an advantage based on their much more prevalent instances of students in the *ZPD*. However, this does not mean that the quality time in the *ZPD* that a teacher can provide with teacher-to-student interaction is to be underestimated. A point of discussion could then be which of the two interactions has a higher level of quality but that is not something that can be answered in this study. We can, however, speculate that a student's motivation could be higher in a task where they are given the opportunity to take the role of the more knowledgeable player in an interaction and that this motivation could lead to higher quality time in the *ZPD*. Highly interactive tasks are linked to higher motivation (Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018, p. 730; Salim Keezhatta, 2020, p. 564; Ulla, 2020, pp. 685–686).

The breadth of text types and material that IGs utilise also translates to the number of cultural artefacts that exist in the technique. Said artefacts and the interaction that happens in the execution of an IG mean that a student will encounter *tools* that they can use to understand the cultural context that they are at that moment navigating. The use and mastery of those *tools* are used by a student to grasp conceptual thinking (Masuda & Arnett, 2015, p. 12; Säljö, 2014, pp. 20–21). This also happens in other techniques but often, as is the case with *LaB*, it is more limited based on a more singular focus on one text and one form of interaction. The *tools* that IGs offer can still be limited based on their own current more narrow focus on crime narratives.

IGs may be at this moment a technique that has not yet proven itself in classroom studies, but it does not hinder a Swedish EFL teacher from utilising them in their classroom. The Swedish educational system provides teachers with autonomy that Celce-Murcia (2014, pp. 10–12) highlights as necessary to adapt to shifting learning environments and students in a post-method world. In such an environment innovative techniques, such as IGs, could be implemented and find success, whereas a more restrictive environment could limit them.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has looked at the potential of IGs as teaching material for teaching reading in the L2 classroom by comparing them as a technique to a current researched technique through a comparative analysis done with an Analytical Hierarchical Process method. This has shown that IGs carry a lot of potential in certain areas but also some drawbacks. The potential is primarily found in areas such as applicable reading subskills, where IGs incorporate a greater number of relevant reading subskills in a task form that makes the use of multiple reading subskills necessary and natural for solving the task. IGs also carry a lot of potential in the amount of student interaction and student interest that the technique fosters. The greatest weakness of IGs found in this study was the difficulty of assessing reading skills. This weakness may however not be as severe when looking at other language skills such as speaking skills.

Further study of IGs relating to other language skills would be a natural next step. Looking at speaking skills seems to be the most natural fit for this type of teaching material but there could be potential in the skills of writing and listening as well. Another area of study that could yield much valuable data would be to use an experimental method and put IGs in the hands of students. Through that we could observe what is now mostly speculated about.

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Appendix – Tables and figures

Figure 2:

The Criteria and subcriteria used with AHP in this study.

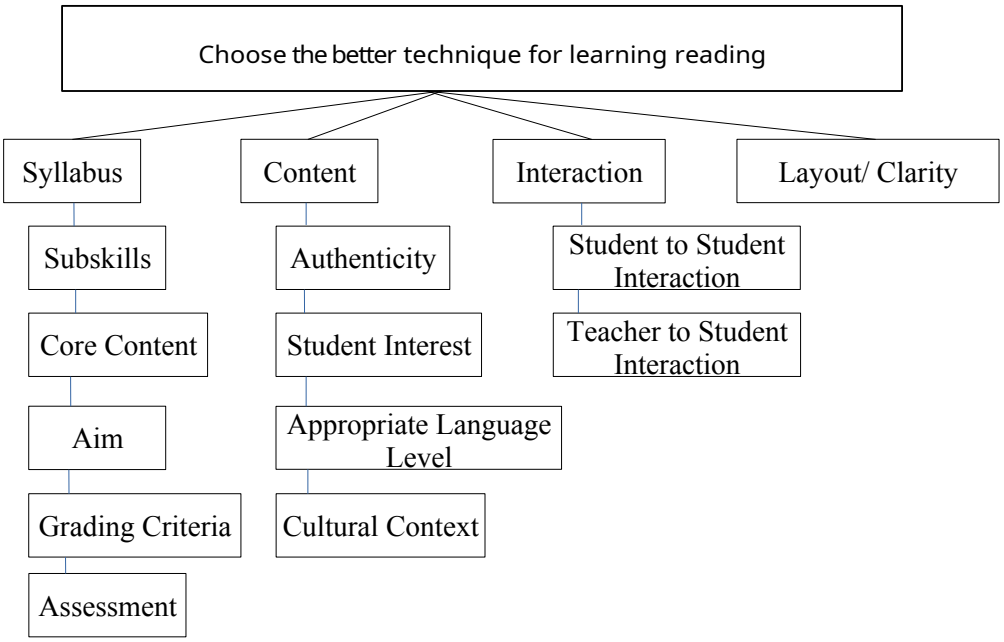

Table 7:

Comparison matrix for subcriteria to Syllabus

	Subskills	Core Content	Aim	Grading Criteria	Assessment	Geometric means	Normalised Values
Subskills	1	4	5	3	3	2.825	0.453
Core Content	1/4	1	3	1/2	1/2	0.715	0.115
Aim	1/5	1/3	1	1/3	1/3	0.375	0.060
Grading criteria	1/3	2	3	1	2	1.319	0.212
Assessment	1/3	2	3	1/2	1	1	0.160
Total						6.234	1.0

Note: CR value for this table = 0,038

Table 8:

Comparison matrix for subcriteria to Content

	Authenticity	Student Interest	Appropriate Language Level	Cultural Context	Geometric means	Normalised Values
Authenticity	1	1/3	1/3	4	0.816	0.15
Student interest	3	1	3	7	2.817	0.518
Appropriate language level	3	1/3	1	5	1.495	0.275
Cultural context	1/4	1/7	1/5	1	0.312	0.057

Total	5.44	1.0

Note: CR value for this table = 0,066

Table 9:
Comparison matrix for subcriteria to Interaction

	Student to Student	Teacher to Student	Geometric means	Normalised values
Student to Student	1	2	1.414	0.9
Teacher to Student	1/2	1	0.707	0.1

CR value for this table = 0,00

Table 10:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Subskills

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	4	2.0	0.8
LaB	1/4	1	0.5	0.2

Table 11:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Core Content

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	3	1.732	0.750
LaB	1/3	1	0.577	0.250

Table 12:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Aim

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	1/2	0.707	0.333
LaB	2	1	1.414	0.667

Table 13:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Grading Criteria

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	2	1.414	0.667
LaB	1/2	1	0.707	0.333

Table 14:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Assessment

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	1/5	0.447	0.167
LaB	5	1	2.236	0.833

Table 15:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Authenticity

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	5	2.236	0.833
LaB	1/5	1	0.447	0.167

Table 16:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Student Interest

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	5	2.236	0.833
LaB	1/5	1	0.447	0.167

Table 17:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Appropriate Language Level

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	1/4	0.5	0.2
LaB	4	1	2.0	0.8

Table 18:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Cultural Context

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	1	1	0.5
LaB	1	1	1	0.5

Table 19:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Student to Student

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	6	2.449	0.857
LaB	1/6	1	0.408	0.143

Table 20:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Teacher to Student

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	1/5	0.447	0.167
LaB	5	1	2.236	0.833

Table 21:
Comparison table for the subcriteria Layout / Clarity

	MD	*LaB*	Geometric means	Normalised values
MD	1	3	1.732	0.750
LaB	1/3	1	0.577	0.250