



# Exploring the Relationship between Idiomatic Expression Mastery and Reading Comprehension among Students

Melina Ayu Pratiwi<sup>1</sup>, Istiqomah Nur Rahmawati<sup>2</sup>, Yulan Puspita Rini<sup>3</sup>  
UIN Raden Intan Lampung<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Alamat: Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, UIN Raden Intan Lampung, JL. Letkol Endro Suratmin, Sukarame, Bandar Lampung<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Istiqomah Nur Rahmawati : [istiqomahnurrahmawati@radenintan.ac.id](mailto:istiqomahnurrahmawati@radenintan.ac.id)

**Abstract.** *This research investigates the correlation between mastery of idiomatic expressions and reading comprehension among tenth-grade students at one of high schools in Way Pengubuan during the second semester of the 2022/2023 academic year. Mastery of idiomatic expressions, which improves through childhood and adolescence into adulthood, is essential for accurate comprehension. Reading comprehension is the ability to extract specific information from texts. The study involved 138 students, with a sample of 64 selected through cluster random sampling. Data were collected via tests comprising 20 items each for idiomatic expression and reading comprehension, ensuring the validity of the test items. Analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.0. The findings revealed a high correlation between students' idiomatic expression mastery and their reading comprehension, with a correlation coefficient of 0.986, indicating a strong relationship. This suggests that proficiency in understanding idiomatic expressions significantly enhances reading comprehension.*

**Keywords:** *Correlation Research, Idiomatic Expression, Reading Comprehension.*

**Abstrak.** Penelitian ini menginvestigasi korelasi antara penguasaan ekspresi idiomatik dan pemahaman membaca di antara siswa kelas sepuluh di salah satu sekolah menengah atas di Way Pengubuan pada semester kedua tahun ajaran 2022/2023. Penguasaan ekspresi idiomatik, yang meningkat selama masa kanak-kanak dan remaja hingga dewasa, sangat penting untuk pemahaman yang akurat. Pemahaman membaca adalah kemampuan untuk mengekstrak informasi spesifik dari teks. Penelitian ini melibatkan 138 siswa, dengan sampel 64 siswa yang dipilih melalui cluster random sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes yang terdiri dari 20 butir soal untuk ekspresi idiomatik dan pemahaman membaca, untuk memastikan validitas butir soal. Analisis dilakukan dengan menggunakan SPSS 25.0. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan korelasi yang tinggi antara penguasaan ekspresi idiomatik siswa dan pemahaman membaca mereka, dengan koefisien korelasi sebesar 0,986, yang menunjukkan hubungan yang kuat. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa kemahiran dalam memahami ekspresi idiomatik secara signifikan meningkatkan pemahaman membaca.

**Kata kunci:** Ekspresi Idiomatik, Pemahaman Membaca, Penelitian Korelasi.

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Reading comprehension is crucial in language acquisition, especially for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Idiomatic expressions, ubiquitous in English with around 25,000 in common use, present a significant challenge. These expressions

frequently appear in recount texts, which narrate events or experiences using informal language. For Indonesian students, idioms often obstruct comprehension due to their metaphorical nature, which differs from the literal meanings of individual words. Indonesian students often translate idioms word-by-word, leading to misunderstandings. For example, idioms like "keep in touch" or "down to earth" are commonly misinterpreted. Mastering idiomatic expressions is essential for achieving fluency and effective communication, as lexical errors can be more disruptive than grammatical ones. Research at one of high schools in Way Pengubuan highlights the challenges of idiomatic comprehension. Interviews with students and teacher Ibu M, S.Pd., (her name is being anonymous), revealed frequent misinterpretations of idioms, resulting in lower comprehension scores. The mean reading comprehension scores in the tenth grade were below the competence threshold of 70, indicating a need for intervention. Students who understand idioms tend to have better overall comprehension. This research aims to explore this correlation. By focusing on recount texts rich in idioms, the study seeks to provide insights into improving reading comprehension through idiom mastery. This research will inform language teachers, practitioners, and curriculum developers, offering strategies to enhance ESL instruction and support comprehensive language development for ESL students. By providing a foundational understanding and demonstrating the importance of this correlation, the research encourages additional studies and innovative approaches to teaching and understanding idiomatic language, allowing future researchers to explore new methodologies and educational tools that can further enhance language learning.

This study distinguishes itself from previous research in several key ways. While in 2005 Cain, Oakhill, and Lemmon focused on young children, this research targets senior high school students, offering insights specific to this age group. Moreover, Cateliana's study (2011) explored the benefits of idioms for speaking skills, whereas this research centers on reading comprehension. Then when Andriani (2014) examined idiomatic mastery and reading achievement but utilized different methodologies and participant demographics. Her research on recount texts aligns closely with this study but addresses a broader age range. The significance of this research lies in its specific focus on the correlation between idiomatic mastery and reading comprehension among senior high school students, an underrepresented demographic in existing studies. By addressing this gap, the research provides valuable insights that can enhance teaching strategies and

improve reading comprehension outcomes for this group. The novelty of the study is reflected in its methodological approach and its potential to influence curriculum development and instructional practices in ESL education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is considered a foundational skill that must be learned before other skills. This is because in real life, students encounter various reading materials such as newspapers, magazines, booklets, and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. In the context of school subjects, written texts are often used as vehicles for introducing new vocabulary and structures. Anderson and Pearson (1984) state that reading comprehension is a multifaceted process that involves decoding symbols, understanding meanings, and interpreting the text in context. Reading is not merely the act of recognizing words; it requires comprehension to understand the message the writer intends to convey. According to Snow (2002), reading comprehension is a process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. This process necessitates a range of skills including the ability to analyze text structure, grammar, and word knowledge. As Perfetti, Landi, and Oakhill (2005) suggest, successful reading comprehension involves integrating these elements to form coherent understanding.

A significant aspect of vocabulary encountered in reading passages is idiomatic expressions. Idioms are phrases consisting of two or more words that collectively have a different meaning from the literal meanings of the individual words (Fernando, 1996). For example, idiomatic expressions like "kick the bucket" or "spill the beans" cannot be understood by translating each word literally. Instead, idioms require holistic translation and contextual guessing to grasp their meanings (Gibbs, 1987). This makes idioms particularly challenging for students learning English as a second language. When students read, they often attempt to translate word by word to understand the text. However, this method falls short when dealing with idioms. Understanding idioms requires recognizing them as units and understanding their meanings within context. Cooper (1999) emphasizes that idioms should be taught and practiced within contextualized settings to help learners grasp their meanings more effectively. As students become more familiar with idioms, their reading comprehension improves because idioms frequently appear in English texts. Therefore, students must be aware of and familiar with idiomatic expressions to aid their comprehension.

The more students master idioms, the better they become at reading comprehension. Idioms appear in almost every English text, so being adept at understanding idioms can significantly enhance students' ability to comprehend written material. This connection between idiomatic expression mastery and reading comprehension underscores the importance of teaching idioms as part of language instruction. As stated by Cain, Oakhill, and Lemmon (2005), there is a direct relationship between a child's comprehension level and their understanding of idioms, highlighting the importance of idiom instruction in language learning curricula.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research design for this study is a descriptive quantitative approach utilizing a correlational design. Creswell (2012) stated correlation is a statistical test used to determine the tendency or pattern for two or more variables to vary consistently. In the context of two variables, this means that they share common variance or co-vary together. This study employed this approach to examine and measure the relationship between two variables: idiomatic expression mastery (independent variable) and reading comprehension (dependent variable) among tenth-grade students at the school. Data collection was achieved through testing, and the research followed these procedures: obtained permission from the Headmaster and English teachers at the school; selected the research sample; explained the research purpose to the students; administered idiomatic expression and reading comprehension tests to the students; collected the research data; analyzed the data using SPSS version 25; and concluded the results would be the last step.

The population comprised the entire group of subjects relevant to the research. As in line with Sugiyono in 2018, a population is a generalization area consisting of objects and subjects with specific qualities and characteristics to be studied and concluded. The population includes not only people but also objects and other natural phenomena. In this study, the population consisted of 128 tenth-grade students from four classes. This research employed cluster random sampling to select the sample. In 2012, Fraenkel and Wallen mention that cluster random sampling involves selecting groups or clusters of subjects rather than individuals. A sample is a subset of the population selected to represent the population in the research. For a correlation study, at least 64 participants are recommended to ensure the accuracy of the relationship among variables. This study selected a sample of 64 students to provide reliable and generalizable results. Data were

collected using tests, which included tests on idiomatic expressions and reading comprehension. The reading comprehension test consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions, and the idiomatic expression test also had 20 multiple-choice questions. The following tables provide the blueprints for these tests:

**Table 1.**  
**Blue Print of Reading Comprehension After Validity**

No	Aspect	Indicator	Item Number
1	Main idea /Topic Sentence	Students can find the main idea of the passage	10, 16
2	Expression/Idiom/ Phrases in context	Students can find idiom/phrases in context	11, 36, 42
3	Inference	Students can find what is inferred in the passage	41, 43
4	Grammatical features	Students can match between the pronoun and what or who it stands for	13, 19, 39, 44
5	Detail (scanning for a specially stated detail)	Students can scan for a specially stated detail	12, 17, 38
6	Excluding facts not written (unstated details)	Students can scan for unstated detail	20, 40
7	Supporting idea	Students can find the supporting idea to support the main idea	18, 37
8	Vocabulary in context	Students can guess the meaning of difficult vocabulary from context provided.	14, 15
<b>Total</b>			20

**Table 2.**  
**Blue Print of Idiomatic Expression After Validity**

No	Aspect	Indicator	Item Number
1	Ordinary Grammatical usage	The students are able to understand idiomatic expression of ordinary grammatical usage	3,7,17
2	Deviation from strict grammar	The students are able to understand idiomatic expression of deviation from strict grammar	6,11,20
3	Allusive expression	The students are able to understand idiomatic expression of allusive expression	2,12,16
4	Conventional phrase	The students are able to understand idiomatic expression of conventional phrase	4,8,13
5	Phrasal verb	The students are able to understand idiomatic expression of phrasal verb	5,10,18
6	Metaphorical idiom	The students are able to understand idiomatic expression of metaphorical idiom	1,9,14,15,19
<b>Total</b>			20

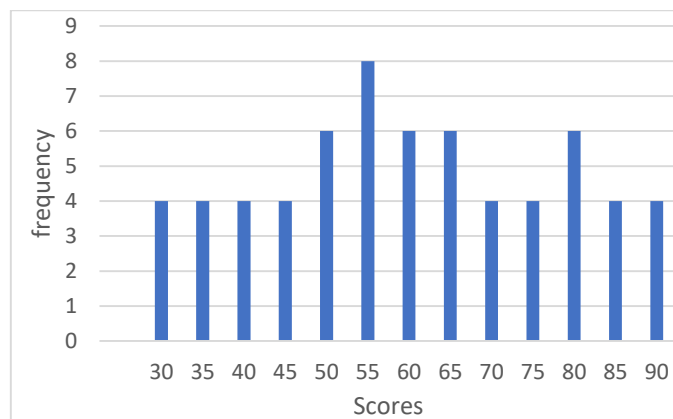
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study investigated the correlation between students' idiomatic expression and their reading comprehension among tenth-grade students at this school. Here were the key findings and interpretations: There were two kinds of scoring in this research. Firstly, the score was taken from idiomatic expression and the second one was reading test. The result of statistical computation by using SPSS 25.0 as follows:

**Table 3. Idiomatic Expression Score**

N	Valid	64
	Missing	0
Mean		60.16
Median		60.00
Mode		55
Sum		3850

Based on statistical computation by using SPSS above, it can be seen that the mean of idiomatic expression was 60.16, median was 60.00, mode was 55 and sum was 3850. The researcher describes the result of idiomatic expression score in form of figure as follows:



*Figure 1*  
*Students' Score of Idiomatic expression*

Based on the figure above, it can be seen that there were 4 students who got score 30, 4 students who got score 35, 4 students who got score 40, 4 students who got score 45, 6 students who got score 50, 8 students who got score 55, 6 students who got score 60, 6 students who got 65, 4 students who got score 70, 4 students who got score 75, 6 students who got score 80, 4 students who got score 85 and 4 students who got score 90. Meanwhile, the second test was students' reading comprehension). The researcher described the result of writing test in the table and figure as follows:

### Reading Comprehension Score

N	Valid	64
	Missing	0
Mean		72.50
Median		72.50
Mode		60
Sum		4640

Based on statistical computation by using SPSS above, it can be seen that the mean for students' reading comprehension test was 72.50, median 72.50, mode as 60 and sum was 4640. The researcher describes the result of reading comprehension in form of figure as follows:

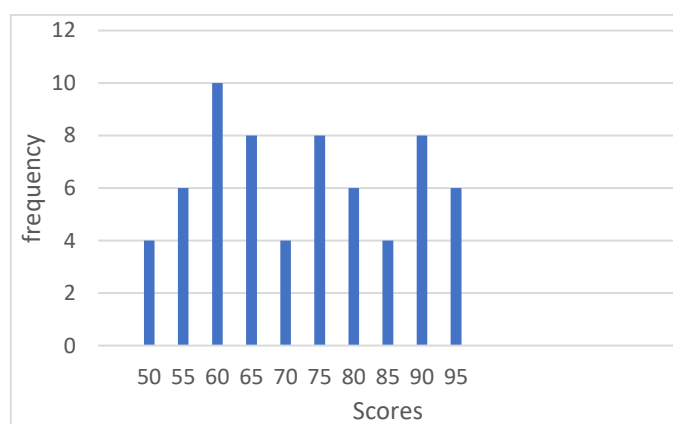


Figure 2  
Students' Score of Reading Comprehension

Based on figure above, it can be seen that there were 4 students who got score 50, 6 students who got score 55, 10 students who got score 60, 8 students who got score 65, 4 students who got score 70, 8 students who got score 75, 6 students who got score 80, 4 students who got score 85, 8 students who got score 90 and 6 student who got score 95.

### 1. Normality Test

In this research, the researcher used SPSS (*Statistical Package for Social Science*) to count the data of research. Normality test aimed to know whether or not the data have normal distribution. The researcher analyzed the data from the score of idiomatic expression and reading comprehension.

With the criteria as follows:

$H_0$  = the data have normal distribution.

$H_1$  = the data do not have normal distribution.

The criteria of acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses for normality test were:

$H_0$  is accepted if *Sig.* (Pvalue)  $> \alpha = 0.05$

$H_1$  is accepted if *Sig.* (Pvalue)  $< \alpha = 0.05$

**Tabel 4**  
**Normality Test Data**

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Df	Sig
Normality Test	.090	64	0.200

- Test distribution normal
- Calculated from data
- Lilliefors significance correction

Based on the output data from SPSS (*Statistical Package for Social Science*)

by using One Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, it showed that the data have normal distribution because  $\text{sig} > \alpha = 0.05$  ( $0.200 > 0.05$ ).

## 2. Linearity Test

Linearity test aimed to know if there was any relation between X (Idiomatic Expression) and Y (Reading comprehension) variable. In the research, the researcher used the statistical computation by using SPSS (*Statistical Package for Social Science*). The test of linearity and the criteria as follows:

The variables have linear relation if  $\text{sig} > \alpha = 0.05$

The variables have no linear relation if  $\text{sig} < \alpha = 0.05$

**Table 5**  
**The Linearity Data**

Anova Table				
Idiomatic Expression * Reading Comprehension	df	Mean square	F	Sig
	1	12059.146	3280.088	.142

Based on the data above, it can be seen that the result of linearity was 0.142 it was higher than significance 0.05. Therefore, the variables have linear relationship.

## 3. The Correlation between idiomatic expression and reading comprehension

This research aimed to find whether there was correlation between students' idiomatic expression and their students' reading comprehension. The data was obtained by using SPSS version 25.0. The researchers used Product Moment formula to find the result of correlation. The result can be described as follows:

**Table 6**  
**SPSS IBM Correlation between Idiomatic Expression**



and Students' Reading comprehension

		Idiomatic Expression (x)	Reading Comprehension (y)
<b>Students' idiomatic expression</b>	Pearson correlation	1	.986
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	64	64
<b>Students' reading comprehension</b>	Pearson correlation	.986	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	64	64
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

From the calculation about the correlation between the students' idiomatic expression and the students' reading comprehension at the tenth grade of a high school in Way Pengubuan obtained the result that  $r_{xy}$  0.986, significant (2-tailed) 0.000 and the number of subjects was 64.

However, the statistical hypothesis on this research:

$H_1$  : sig.2 tailed < 0.05 (there was a correlation between the students' idiomatic expression and the students' reading comprehension at the tenth grade.

$H_0$  : sig. 2 tailed > 0.05 (there was no correlation between the students' idiomatic expression and the students' reading comprehension at the tenth grade.

The result of the computation showed that the coefficient of correlation between students' idiomatic expression (X) and students' reading comprehension (Y) was 0.986. Then the significant was 0.000 lower than 0.05 (sig. 2 tailed 0.000 < 0.05). Therefore,  $H_1$  was accepted. It can be concluded that there was correlation between students' idiomatic expression and the students' reading comprehension at the tenth grade of a high school in Way Pengubuan. The interpretation about the rate of the correlation coefficient was formed by certain rule, were as follows:

Table 7  
The Index of Correlation

No	Coefficient Interval	Level of Correlation
1	0.800-1.000	High Correlation
2	0.600-0.800	Sufficient Correlation
3	0.400-0.600	High correlation
4	0.200-0.400	Low Correlation
5	0.000-0.200	Very Low Correlation

Based on the computation, it was known that the value of  $r_{xy} = 0.986$ . It was categorized by using coefficient correlation criteria above. It was obtained that 0.986 and classified interval 0.800 – 1.000 on the **high correlation**.

Idioms refer to expressions or phrases which are peculiar to a given language and which carry either a literal meaning or a non-literal meaning depending on the intent of the writer. In other words, idioms as the term are used here, are ambiguous, and to be understood must either be known as a unit or deduced from the context. That is, the intended meaning cannot be arrived at by literal analysis. *'He kicked the bucket'* can literally mean just that, but it usually conveys its idiomatic meaning: *'he died'*.

Students tend to take longer to finish the test of idiomatic expression questions because they interpret one by one the word at a time so that in the end they are confused about the meaning of these words, even though students should not interpret one by one the word at a time but must understand the context of the text they are reading. It is supported by Cain *et al* that if students understand the context of a story, they will be able to interpret the idioms contained in the text. It is clear that idiomatic expression has relation to reading comprehension.

There are several texts in the idiomatic expression questions and the researcher provided questions regarding idiomatic expressions such as *hit the sack, a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush, like fish out of water, make a long story short*, and so on. It can be seen that the students took longer to finish on idiomatic expression questions than reading comprehension. The researchers monitored and asked the students a little why they looked confused. Students answered that they had never worked on specific idiom questions like this because usually there were only one or two questions in English regarding idiomatic expressions, so they were not used to working on this many questions. That was why they need more time than usual.

This research was about finding the answer whether there was correlation between the students' idiomatic expression and students' reading comprehension. The researcher took the data of research in two classes which consisted of 64 students. First, the researchers gave research permission to the school, then conducted research in a not so long period of time, approximately one week. The

researchers gave 20 questions about idiomatic expressions and 20 questions about reading comprehension as well.

After carrying out both idiomatic expression and reading comprehension tests, the researcher then analyzed the scores obtained by the students. It can be seen that scores on idiomatic expressions tend to be lower than reading comprehension scores. It can be seen that the highest score obtained by students on the idiomatic expression test was 90. Although it was not too different from the reading comprehension score, which was 95, in order to understand idiomatic expressions students looked very confused and often asked different questions to the researcher than when they were working on reading comprehension questions.

This research was completed with two types of completion. The first test was about reading comprehension. The first test was given directly to students at school and the second was through the Google form. This was because the school does not allow the researchers to linger on research at school due to limitation of time. The school does not want students to be disturbed by the researchers. When the students did idiomatic test, they could no longer control the situation since they had no idea whether they cheated to look for the answers on internet or not.

The researchers could not control the students while the test online, but when viewed from the range between the scores between students who took the test using the Google form, they got almost similar score to students who took the test directly in class. It can be concluded from these factors that if students are able to take the idiomatic expression test, it will automatically be easy for them to take the reading comprehension test.

These factors imply that the students' activity and frequency in students' idiomatic expression gave a useful contribution to enlarge their students' reading comprehension. It means that if the student understands idiomatic expression, it could increase their reading comprehension skill to be better. From the findings and the discussion above, the researchers concluded that there was high correlation between students' idiomatic expression and their students' reading comprehension at the second semester at the tenth grade in that school. Therefore, the null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) could be accepted.

In other words, the more students deepen their knowledge of idiomatic expressions the easier it will be for them to learn reading comprehension questions

because idiomatic expression questions are considered difficult for students, so if the most difficult questions can be solved it will be easy for students to work on normal level questions. Even though idioms are not often found in a text, they can interfere with understanding if students do not understand their meaning. Therefore, to understand the meaning of idioms, the reader cannot translate or separate the words into a single part of semantic unit because the meaning of the idiom can be interpreted by interrelate of its words.

Based on the results of the research which showed that students took longer to complete the idiom test than reading comprehension, the students should be taught to recognize idioms. It is the same as theory stated by Titone *et al* that in mastering idiomatic, the students not only study about the meaning of words, but they also study the interpret the specific meaning of each idiom (2020). In other words, mastering idiomatic expression means complete knowledge or great skill of a list of words for a particular language including the meaning, phrasal and compound idioms.

Is it possible to train students to discern idioms by the use of 'context clues', or through an understanding of metaphorical language. Students can also learn idiomatic expressions from various sources. The best source for learning idiomatic expression is by watching foreign talk shows such as Ellen Talk Show and western films such as Harry Potter, Spiderman, Batman etc where all actors and actress are native speakers. Therefore, the students will get used to hearing and remembering the idioms they have watched.

In the end, the researchers concluded that one of the factors affecting students' reading comprehension achievement is their ability to express themselves idiomatically. If idiom comprehension is related to general abilities in processing linguistic information, then students who are proficient in text comprehension should also be more adept at comprehensive and idiomatic expression than students who are less proficient. In other words, a student's reading aptitude and understanding abilities should be closely associated. It means the idiom mastery must be directly proportional to the aim of reading comprehension. It can be said that students who master idioms well get better in reading comprehension.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The conclusion drawn from the research indicates a high correlation between students' mastery of idiomatic expressions and their reading comprehension abilities at the tenth grade of the intended high school in the academic year 2023/2024. This conclusion is supported by a correlation coefficient of 0.986, indicating a strong positive correlation between the two variables. This significant finding underscores the importance of idiomatic expression mastery as a critical component of reading comprehension skills among students.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance students' proficiency in idiomatic expressions and improve their overall reading comprehension skills. Students are encouraged to actively engage with idiomatic expressions by watching and understanding content from Western films and talk shows featuring native speakers. This exposure will help them familiarize themselves with idiomatic language and facilitate quicker comprehension during tests. Additionally, students should practice identifying idioms within texts, particularly in genres like recount texts where idiomatic expressions are commonly used. By honing this skill, students can improve their ability to understand and interpret idioms within context.

Teachers should provide ample examples of idiomatic expressions to students, as these expressions are often challenging to encounter in written texts. Incorporating idioms into lesson materials, such as recount texts and talk show scripts, can aid in exposure and understanding. Furthermore, teachers should explore various teaching methods to help students grasp idiomatic expressions, including the use of context clues and real-life examples from talk shows. By employing diverse instructional strategies, teachers can cater to different learning styles and enhance students' comprehension of idiomatic language.

Future research endeavors in this area should take inspiration from this study and further explore the relationship between idiomatic expression and reading comprehension or introduce innovative approaches to studying idioms. The findings of this research can serve as a reference for future investigations into language learning and comprehension. Researchers can build upon these results to deepen our understanding of how idiomatic expression impacts language proficiency. Conducting future research directly in the classroom setting is recommended as it allows for better control over variables and ensures more effective data collection compared to online methods.

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