READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

COST	EVIDENCE	IMPACT	EFFECT
		+6	0.53

Very high impact for very low cost based on extensive evidence.

WHAT IS IT?

Reading comprehension strategies focus on the learners' understanding of written text. Pupils learn a range of techniques which enable them to comprehend the meaning of what they read. These can include: inferring meaning from context; summarising or identifying key points; using graphic or semantic organisers; developing questioning strategies; and monitoring their own comprehension and then identifying and resolving difficulties for themselves (see also metacognition and self-regulation).

Strategies are often taught to a class and then practiced in pairs or small groups (see also collaborative learning approaches).

KEY FINDINGS

1. Reading comprehension strategies are high impact on average (+6 months). Alongside phonics it is a crucial component of early reading instruction.

2. It is important to identify the appropriate level of text difficulty, to provide appropriate context to practice the skills, desire to engage with the text and enough challenge to improve reading comprehension.

3. Effective diagnosis of reading difficulties is important in identifying possible solutions, particularly for older struggling readers. Pupils can struggle with decoding words, understanding the structure of the language used, or understanding particular vocabulary, which may be subject-specific.

4. A wide range of strategies and approaches can be successful, but for many pupils they need to be taught explicitly and consistently.

5. It is crucial to support pupils to apply the comprehension strategies independently to other reading tasks, contexts and subjects.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE APPROACH?

The average impact of reading comprehension strategies is an additional six months' progress over the course of a year. Successful reading comprehension approaches allow activities to be carefully tailored to pupils' reading capabilities, and involve activities and texts that provide an effective, but not overwhelming, challenge.

Many of the approaches can be usefully combined with Collaborative learning techniques and Phonics activities to develop reading skills. The use of techniques such as graphic organisers and drawing pupils' attention to text features are likely to be particularly useful when reading expository or information texts.

There are some indications that approaches involving digital technology can be successful in improving reading comprehension (although there are relatively few studies in this area), particularly when they focus on the application and practice of specific strategies and the use of self-questioning skills.

Supporting struggling readers is likely to require a coordinated effort across the curriculum and a combination of approaches that include phonics, reading comprehension and oral language approaches. No particular strategy should be seen as a panacea, and careful diagnosis of the reasons why an individual pupil is struggling should guide the choice of intervention strategies.

BEHIND THE AVERAGE

More studies have been conducted with primary age pupils, but the teaching of reading comprehension strategies appears effective across both primary (+6 months) and secondary schools (+7 months).

Although the main focus is on reading, comprehension strategies have been successfully used in a number of curriculum subjects where it is important to be able to read and understand text.

Lower attaining pupils appear to benefit in particular from the explicit teaching of strategies to comprehend text.

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Shorter interventions of up to 10 weeks tend to be more successful. However, there are some examples of successful longer interventions.

CLOSING THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

Studies in England have shown that pupils eligible for free school meals may receive additional benefits from being taught how to use reading comprehension strategies. However, the UK evidence base is less extensive than the global average, and UK studies show lower impact for all pupils.

Reading comprehensions strategies involve the teaching of explicit approaches and techniques a pupil can use to improve their comprehension of written text. Many learners will develop these approaches without teacher guidance, adopting the strategies through trial and error as they look to better understand texts that challenge them. However, we know that on average, disadvantaged children are less likely to own a book of their own and read at home with family members, and for these reasons may not acquire the necessary skills for reading and understanding challenging texts.

HOW COULD YOU IMPLEMENT IN YOUR SETTING?

Reading comprehension strategies work through a number of different mechanisms – all focused on improving the understanding of meaning of text effectively. Common elements include:

- explicit teaching of strategies;
- teachers questioning pupils to apply key steps;
- summarising or identifying key points;
- metacognitive talk to model strategies;
- using graphic or semantic organisers;
- using peer and self-questioning strategies to practice the strategies (such as reciprocal questioning); and
- pupils monitoring their own comprehension and identifying difficulties themselves.

Reading comprehension strategy interventions are typically delivered between one to three terms of a school year, either by teachers within class settings, or by teaching assistants with smaller groups.

Evidence suggests that reading comprehension approaches need to be tailored to pupils' current reading capabilities, so it is important that teachers receive

professional development in effective diagnosis as well as training in the use of particular techniques and materials.

When introducing new approaches, schools should consider implementation. For more information see **Putting Evidence to Work – A School's Guide to Implementation.**

WHAT DOES IT COST?

The average cost of reading comprehension strategies is estimated as very low. The cost to schools is largely based on training and professional development, books and learning resources, the majority of which are initial start-up costs paid during the first year of delivery. Whilst the median cost estimate for reading comprehension programmes is very low, the range of prices between available programmes and the option to purchase additional ongoing training and support for teaching staff means that costs can range from very low to low.

Effective teaching of reading comprehension strategies will also require a moderate amount of staff time, compared with other approaches. Alongside time and cost, school leaders should consider how to develop teachers' ability to use specific techniques for particular pupils' needs and ensure they use texts that provide an effective challenge to readers.

HOW SECURE IS THE EVIDENCE?

The security of the evidence around reading comprehension strategies is rated as high. 141 studies were identified that met the inclusion criteria for the Toolkit. Overall, the topic lost one padlock because a large percentage of the studies were not independently evaluated. Evaluations conducted by organisations connected with the approach – for example, commercial providers, typically have larger impacts, which may influence the overall impact of the strand.

As with any evidence review, the Toolkit summarises the average impact of approaches when researched in academic studies. It is important to consider your context and apply your professional judgement when implementing an approach in your setting.

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