ORAL LANGUAGE INTERVENTIONS

COST	EVIDENCE	IMPACT	EFFECT
		+6	0.49

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

WHAT IS IT?

Oral language interventions (also known as oracy or speaking and listening interventions) refer to approaches that emphasise the importance of spoken language and verbal interaction in the classroom. They include dialogic activities.

Oral language interventions are based on the idea that comprehension and reading skills benefit from explicit discussion of either content or processes of learning, or both, oral language interventions aim to support learners' use of vocabulary, articulation of ideas and spoken expression.

Oral language approaches might include:

- targeted reading aloud and book discussion with young children;
- explicitly extending pupils' spoken vocabulary;
- the use of structured questioning to develop reading comprehension; and
- the use of purposeful, curriculum-focused, dialogue and interaction.

Oral language interventions have some similarity to approaches based on Metacognition (which make talk about learning explicit in classrooms), and to Collaborative learning approaches which promote pupils' interaction in groups.

KEY FINDINGS

1. On average, oral language approaches have a high impact on pupil outcomes of 6 months' additional progress.

2. It is important that spoken language activities are matched to learners' current stage of development, so that it extends their learning and connects with the curriculum.

3. Training can support adults to ensure they model and develop pupils' oral language skills and vocabulary development.

4. Some pupils may struggle specifically with spoken language. Schools should consider how they will identify pupils that need additional support around oral language and articulation. It may be helpful to focus on speaking and listening activities separately where needed to meet particular needs.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE APPROACH?

The average impact of Oral language interventions is approximately an additional six months' progress over the course of a year. Some studies also often report improved classroom climate and fewer behavioural issues following work on oral language.

Approaches that focus on speaking, listening and a combination of the two all show positive impacts on attainment.

Most of the studies focus on reading outcomes. The small amount of studies that do study maths and science show small positive effects. Language approaches in these subjects may be used to explicitly practice subject specific vocabulary.

The studies in the Toolkit indicate that language interventions with frequent sessions over a sustained period may have a larger impact, overall. Approaches that are delivered one-to-one also have larger impacts.

BEHIND THE AVERAGE

Impact in early years (+7 months) and primary schools (+6 months) tends to be higher than that secondary schools (+5 months.)

By far the majority of studies have looked at the impact on reading. Where studies have investigated other subjects such as mathematics and science the effects are substantially lower (+1 month), though the number of studies is very small.

Oral language interventions supported or led by trained teaching assistants have broadly similar impact (+6 months) as those by teachers.

Oral language interventions with frequent sessions (3 times a week or more) over a sustained period appear to be most successful.

CLOSING THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

There is evidence to suggest that pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be behind their more advantaged counterparts in developing early language and speech skills, which may affect their school experience and learning later in their school lives.

Given that Oral language interventions can be used to provide additional support to pupils who are behind their peers in oral language development, the targeted use of approaches may support some disadvantaged pupils to catch up with peers, particularly when this is provided one-to-one.

HOW COULD YOU IMPLEMENT IN YOUR SETTING?

Evidence suggests that Oral language interventions that explicitly aim to develop spoken vocabulary work best when they are related to current content being studied in school, and when they involve active and meaningful use of any new vocabulary. Some examples of approaches that have been shown to be effective include:

- encouraging pupils to read aloud and then have conversations about book content with teachers and peers
- modelling inference through the use of structured questioning
- group or paired work that allow pupils to share thought processes
- implicit and explicit activities that extend pupils

With any of these activities is it crucial to ensure that oral language activities are linked to the wider curriculum (e.g., using oral language activities to model technical language in science).

Oral language interventions can be delivered intensively over the course of a few weeks, but may also be developed over the course of an academic year. Frequent sessions (3 times a week or more) over a sustained period (half a term to a term) appear to be most successful.

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?

Overall, the median costs of implementing Oral language interventions are estimated

as very low. The costs associated with Oral Language Interventions largely arise from books, resources, and training, the majority of which are start-up costs.

Whilst the median cost estimate for Oral language interventions is very low, the option to provide training for staff means that costs can range from very low to moderate.

HOW SECURE IS THE EVIDENCE?

The security of the evidence around oral language interventions is rated as high. 154 studies were identified. 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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