

Reading for Comprehension, Retention and Building Knowledge: What the Research says about how to Enhance and Build Student Knowledge Across Curriculum Areas

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Abstract: The present study investigated research into reading skills, developing skills as a reader, and lifelong literacy. Reading across curricular areas and the value of developing depth skills as a reader formed the foundation for inquiry into how skills are and can be improved across school years and beyond. The content of current research was analyzed with a view to discovering key themes and processes integral to reading development and ongoing as well as long term improvement. The main thrust of the study was fourfold: elements and skills that create a competent reader, developing life-long reading skills in students, building reading knowledge across curriculum areas and developing a lifetime love of reading.

Keywords: literacy; decoding; print awareness; cross curricular reading; lifelong readers.

Introduction

There is widespread acknowledgement that reading is a foundational skill for all types of life goals or pursuits. It is difficult to think of a more essential academic skill. Literacy is essential to the building of virtually any skill that one might consider. Social Studies requires the student to read widely across disparate subject areas;

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history, geography and economics likewise engage us in the need for developing literacy even as students engage in their internal learning processes. Mathematics word problems and processes, even though mostly related to numeracy skills, still have a large reading component embedded within. Even if the longer-term goal of programming computers or something is seemingly unrelated to reading as pursuit or a sport or athletic objective, still there is the need to read manuals or training program materials. As such, it is accepted that reading sits underneath, or as a base, for every other type of skill a student may seek to develop over the course of their lifetime, not only in, but also far beyond the school walls.

Yet even given this awareness, there is nonetheless a dilemma in the field of education: Too many students are graduating from grade school without sufficient reading competency to develop and build the type of knowledgebase in their chosen profession that will be a key element of their success.

Given this challenge, the current research can be viewed with reference to these key questions, which will help in the finding of solutions to the current reading challenges in schools:

1. What are the key elements and skills that create a competent reader?
2. How can schools develop life-long reading skills in students?
3. What are the keys to building reading knowledge across curriculum areas?
4. How can key reading skills and a love of reading that will last a lifetime, be developed in students?

The answers to these questions will be of value to educators in developing and implementing program approaches that will help to ensure lifelong learning and student success.

Now to turn to the first of these questions: **1. What are the key elements and skills that create a competent reader?**

Lee (2021) has posited six essential elements that make for a competent reader, all of which go together and complement each other as a skill development set for reading competency:

1. Decoding: A crucial phase in the reading process is decoding. Children use this ability to decode words they have heard but never seen written out. The basis for all other reading abilities is the capacity to do that. Phonemic awareness, a foundational language skill, is necessary for decoding. (This talent is a component of a much bigger talent called phonological awareness.) The ability to hear distinct phonemes in words allows children to develop phonemic awareness. Additionally, it enables students to "experiment" about word and syllable-level sounds.

2. Fluency: Children must be able to detect words without having to sound them out to read proficiently. The rate at which they can read and comprehend text is accelerated by fluency. Additionally, it's crucial when young children come across irregular words like of, and that cannot be sounded out. Every word can be difficult to sound out or decode. Word recognition is the skill of being able to instantaneously recognize full words by sight without having to sound them out.

3. Vocabulary: You must comprehend most the text's terms to comprehend what you are reading. A crucial aspect of reading comprehension is having a robust vocabulary. Vocabulary can be taught to students through instruction. However, they normally pick up on word meaning from reading and everyday experience.

4. Sentence construction and cohesion: It may look like a writing skill to comprehend how sentences are constructed. Cohesion, the linking of concepts within and between sentences, may also be used. But reading comprehension also depends on these abilities. Kids are better able to understand passages and full books when they are aware of how concepts connect at the sentence level. It also promotes coherence, or the capacity to link ideas to one another in a larger body of writing.

5. Reasoning and background knowledge: Most readers connect what they have read to what they already know. Therefore, it's crucial for kids to read with background or past knowledge of the world. Additionally, they must have the ability to "read between the lines" and decipher meaning even when it is not explicitly stated.

6. Working memory and attention: Both abilities are categorized as executive function capabilities. They are distinct but connected. When children read, their focus enables them to absorb the text's information. They can keep that information in working memory and use it to make sense of what they're reading and expand their knowledge. That is also related to the capability of self-monitoring when reading. Children must be able to identify when they don't comprehend something. Then, to clear up any uncertainty, they must pause, return, and reread (Lee, 2021).

To comment on some of these, with decoding, it is clear that knowledge of sound groupings and phonemic awareness should probably be taught directly, especially in the early years, to ensure mastery. Building a base of words for fluency, using lists, is important to build competency. Vocabulary and sentence structure are at the heart of working with the language on a technical and functional level. Reasoning and background knowledge twin with working memory and attention in that once you build background knowledge in an area, it can form a base that will be called into working memory to combine with the text one is reading to form the basis of comprehension.

In the first few school years, there is a focus on forming a base for learning print awareness: young children should be taught some fundamental concepts about how books function. For instance, the marks on the page denote spoken words, which are read from top to bottom and left to right. Learning the alphabetic letters is a fundamental ability for young children getting ready to read. This entails becoming familiar with letter names and shapes, typically starting with the letters in one's own name (Culbert, 2023).

As readers develop and progress in skill, developing depth related areas such as scanning ability, guessing meaning of words from context, and reflecting at key points, become important. Activities in a class can help build these skills. Get students to search for words in a contest to improve scanning abilities. To score points, partners compete with one another to find a word or piece of information. Students should be paired appropriately, with consideration given to their reading

levels, and then given a text. Prior to asking them to discover a certain word quickly, instruct them to count the instances of a word of your choosing in the text.

By providing synonyms for terms, you can up the difficulty level. In this competitive and teamwork activity, assist students in identifying important details about unknown words that can help them make more accurate assumptions about their meaning. Give text to students at first with some words blanked out. Groups race against time to come up with as many solutions as they can for each gap. They must defend their proposals, making sure that they are grammatically correct and make sense, and then assign points in accordance. Good readers reflect on what they read and take note of unfamiliar words. Readers can better understand material by thinking back on what they liked, learned, and want to learn more about. This stimulates their curiosity and encourages them to read more (Thorn, 2021).

Reading is a skill that can and should be grown as life progresses. Forming a base for longer term skill development and reading competency, making the text visible by visualizing the words, is another effective method for improving comprehension. After reading the sentences, try to visualize what the author is attempting to communicate. Scientific research has shown that images have a greater psychological influence than words: Make a mental image using the brain to increase the quantity of knowledge learned. Make educated guesses about what will happen next when reading a narrative or an opinion piece (Escar, 2022).

Developing expertise in reading over time has several key components, starting with activating: Students use their prior knowledge and/or experiences with the material to better understand it. (For instance, text connections.) Next is monitoring and clarifying: Learners assess their comprehension of the text. They make clarifications and corrections, if necessary, both during and after reading a text if there are any ambiguities. This is then followed by searching and selecting: Students obtain data from a range of sources and choose what will help them define important terms, respond to inquiries, or resolve issues. For instance, a claim, supporting data, and logic. A good way to go deeper is questioning: Students ask themselves questions

while reading the book, formulate questions about the text, and respond to various levels of inquiries about the text posed by their classmates and/or teachers. For instance, a question-and-answer exchange. Another depth related activity is inferring, where students analyze the material and make deductive inferences (Hilliard, 2025).

In terms of skill connection, it isn't really a surprise that skilled readers also develop writing skills: According to recent research, mastering the component abilities of spelling and writing improves written composition, just as mastering fluent word recognition improves reading comprehension. The production of longer and better-organized works by kids is correlated with their accurate, fluid letter formation and spelling. The essential norms of written expression—word usage, handwriting, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling—must be taught along with compositional techniques. When spelling and handwriting are explicitly taught beginning in the first grade and used in the context of frequent, meaningful writing projects, students are more likely to learn them (Learning First Alliance, 2000).

A young reader's ultimate goal in reading is to be able to concentrate on understanding rather than fast reading. Eventually, a young reader will understand the book as a whole rather than concentrating on specific words (Weber, 2022). This matches with the concept of extensive reading. A lot of reading places less emphasis on correctness and more on flow. It typically involves leisure reading and is more of an extracurricular activity. It is quite unusual that readers will read the material they dislike extensively. (Planet Spark, 2021) Relating these ideas back to comprehension, it can be seen that cognitive process readers utilize to comprehend what they have read are greatly aided by education in and growth using (as per above) a range of strategies, including answering questions (quizzes) and summarizing (retelling the story), help young readers enhance text comprehension (Mehta, 2005).

How can schools develop life-long reading skills in students?

The traditional classroom is being turned upside down, with many teachers now placing more emphasis on students' independent learning. Building your

students' autonomy will provide them with the tools and confidence needed for lifelong learning.

An effective way of doing this is by reducing 'teacher talk'. It is common for teachers to stand at the front of the class and give feedback and reflection on the day's learning. Yet this can sometimes encourage students to sit back and not engage with the class. (Stace, 2020)

This clearly relates back to reading skills and the issue of lifelong learning; because reading is one of the few activities done in the classroom that can transfer directly into an independent learning opportunity with little to no teacher input. It also furnishes abundant opportunities for student reflection. Thus, encouraging students to read and then reflect independently is critical to building lifelong reading competency.

Encouragement of reading over the long term comes in part from reducing fear. Make reading in class less terrifying: Although the fear factor and shame cause many kids to shut down, teachers need to hear students read and for students to develop confidence in reading aloud. The traditional round-robin and popcorn reading sessions that are common in elementary classrooms should be rethought in favor of methods that remove the anxiety related to reading. Students might develop confidence and enjoy reading once the fear is gone. When the teacher and all the pupils read aloud at the same time, this is known as choral reading. Students can practice reading aloud during choral reading, but the anxiety is removed because there is less pressure because no one is being heard individually. (EdCuration, 2022). Schedule daily independent reading time in your school, even if it is only for ten minutes. Discuss with your pupils all the special times they can "sneak in" some reading. Encourage enjoyment reading throughout these times (Lipshaw, 2020).

Libraries both in and out of the school form an integral component in encouraging/developing life-long readers. The school librarians' book discussions are critical in visits, these can encourage children to practice the skills necessary to look for books on their own. Teachers must provide enough time to look at preferred

books. Library time can be used to develop previewing skills. To decide whether to check out the book, students can practice this ability during their time in the school library. Prioritizing a text can be practiced with a library media professional or a peer, to help every student to be able to preview and select books on their own (Durkin, 2021). Get children their own library cards to introduce them to the reading culture. Celebrate the occasion and then let the card-carrying readers choose the books they want to read at home. Give kids treasured books as gifts for holidays and birthdays rather than another toy (Harper Collins, 2023).

Turning for a moment to the pace of reading change, at the rate technology is taking over many aspects of life, it's inevitable it will affect our reading habits as well. There are challenges with online reading. When reading online as opposed to in print, college students and high school students claimed they are far more likely to multitask—read numerous texts, respond to email or social media, watch videos, and so on. In part because they believe they are understanding what they read more thoroughly than they are, according to an examination of more than a decade's worth of data, pupils grasp less when reading online (Sparks 2022).

Guidelines can be offered for developing the desire to read that can lead to lifelong habits: When reading, don't stress about performing dramatically. Give children enough time to discuss the story's characters, storyline, and purpose. Take a break, a child asks questions or discuss what has been read together; try asking, "What occurred in the story? How did it affect how you felt? What did you think of the resolution?" This type of conversation also helps understand what the child is thinking and envisioning. Additionally, it aids in the child's learning about people, locations, and problem-solving (Jaffee, 2016).

With all these ideas flowing, it is critical that teachers and parents not lose sight of the enjoyment of reading, which is critical if we want it to become a lifelong habit:

It's easy to lose sight of the fact that reading should be something that we enjoy. Books should make us laugh and smile, transport us to faraway places or

transform us momentarily into something different. We need to treat books like they are magical so that children will grow up believing that they are. If we simply make sure reading is fun, rather than frustrating, our children are more likely to develop a love of reading, encouraging better reading habits and making learning easier. (Dickinson, 2021)

What are the keys to building reading knowledge across curriculum areas?

Nabors (2023) suggests four tenets for developing reading across curricular areas: First, teach reading in all subjects, second, have students write about content, third, make time for listening practices, and fourth, drive student collaboration to share learning.

Texts that advance knowledge across curricular areas include the following: texts that explain or provide knowledge about the social and natural worlds. Persuasive texts, which frequently use knowledge to support an argument, can present compelling opportunities to examine and assess the material being presented. Procedural documents, which give directions and demonstrate a process. Nonfiction stories that can increase awareness of real-life experiences and events. Autobiographies and biographies are books that provide information about a person's life, including their historical background and events. Literary texts, which tend to be produced more to share experiences than to teach, can also transfer knowledge by illuminating aspects of human nature, a character's line of work, or the historical setting in which they lived. (ASCD, 2023) Any combination of or all these types may be used to engage students across curricular areas, building a range of background knowledge in the process.

Related research connects reading directly to the building of content knowledge and mastery development in cross curricular directions:

Embed social studies and science into literacy-informed inquiry units. Often, in elementary schools, we have literacy blocks that range from 30 to 100 minutes of instruction. The suggestion is to incorporate the direct teaching of science and social

studies within those blocks by doing the following: Conducting interactive read-aloud that embed content syntactically a few grade levels ahead. The teacher reads the passage, students reread, and brief summaries are discussed in think-pair-shares. Building academic vocabulary with students and incorporating the use of that vocabulary when previewing texts, reading text, and discussing the text after reading a passage. Providing students with content-rich books in which to read and write about (McDowell, 2023).

Students will often need background knowledge to access and make sense of texts in varied curricular areas. Why is background information so crucial? It seems instinctual that readers would need a certain level of background knowledge on the subject to understand a tale or text. It is sometimes referred to as topical knowledge or domain-specific knowledge. Without this information, it is challenging to create a useful mental representation of the text's subject matter. (Neuman, Kaefer & Pinkham, 2021) Professional development for teachers is also key in this area. According to research, professional development for teachers is most effective when it is based on precise curricular material. But since the emphasis is on comprehension "skills," the typical elementary curriculum either doesn't describe content or has very little substance. Therefore, it's plausible that the PD was better in schools which focused PD on developing a core of knowledge related to student reading, because those schools were utilizing a curriculum with clearly defined rich material (Wexler, 2019).

How to go about the development of knowledge related to reading in areas across the curriculum?

Make the most of every instructional minute by using knowledge-rich titles for learning to read. This helps by actively building students' knowledge of history, geography, science, arts, and so much more at the same time they're learning reading skills. When you integrate other content areas and topics into what you teach, you're helping your kids make connections and beef up their internal filing systems. We can't improve reading by drilling students with generic comprehension strategies.

Knowledge is central to developing comprehension skills. Some studies even suggest that knowledge matters more than explicit instruction when building reading comprehension skills. (Braatz, 2022)

Children and young people must possess the abilities to comprehend, analyze, and create texts from a variety of disciplinary perspectives to achieve literacy across the curriculum. (DOE, State government of Victoria, 2018) This entails instruction that stimulates learning that creates a sense of how discipline knowledge is organized (for example, in science, history, or geography) and embeds an understanding of how different language choices and patterns reflect and document ideas and views of the world through a variety of genres (Christie & Derewianka, 2008). According to a recent study each subject or discipline, like science or history, has certain literacy requirements. Use of a toolkit encourages a thorough comprehension of texts that are common to many disciplines, including English, which improves teachers' ability to support students' interpretation and writing of a variety of print-based and multimodal texts (Myhill, Jones & Watson, 2013).

How can key reading skills and a love of reading that will last a lifetime be developed in students?

Helly Douglas, in her work with students in the UK, has come up with seven concepts, which, when implemented, can help drive a love of reading in students,

1. Be a reading role model
2. Encourage parental involvement
3. Help them find books they'll love
4. Raise the profile of reading
5. Teach them to read fluently
6. Make reading enjoyable
7. Reading doesn't have to mean books (Douglas, 2020)

Every elementary school teacher serves as a reading instructor and is crucial to assisting each student in developing their reading skills. Students and instructors

will feel competent and confident in teaching and learning to read if we provide the resources to satisfy our students' literacy needs as early as prekindergarten. It's crucial to foster a love of reading in addition to helping pupils learn to read. Compared to students who are compelled to read, those who choose to read show fewer negative attitudes toward reading (Starke, 2020).

Teachers also play a key role in motivating students to develop an enjoyment of reading: Let children see the teacher read. Make sure to set a good example for students to encourage them to read. Before talking about a book, let the students read it completely. Bring in a local writer to lecture. Organize a book club. Students can interact with one another and share ideas in book clubs and reading groups. Ensure that the books are their choice. Create an e-book using technology. Nothing is better than using technology to encourage pupils to love reading. Give pupils the freedom to shun or like books using a thumbs up or down system, as with Facebook. Assist pupils in understanding the value of reading. Sometimes, just being aware of the facts about how reading is a lifetime success skill might inspire someone to change how they perceive the world through reading (Cox, 2014).

Janessa Fletcher espouses the concept of narrative creation to help foster a love of reading:

Another way to make reading fun, and to bring us back to the importance of imagination, is to let them create their narrative. For my little ones that can't read it means ignoring the words on the page and letting them tell me what's happening in the story based on the illustrations. For older children, you could print off a paragraph or two from a story, and make them write what happens next. This is a great way to instill reading comprehension, to make them think about what they read, and form an idea of what could happen next. It's also a great way to combine reading and writing in a fun way. Anytime they are using their imaginations, and having fun will create a positive experience with reading. (Fletcher, 2020)

There's a variety of other strategies that have also been looked at as ways to get students to love reading. Making the classroom a welcoming place for reading is

one of the finest methods to encourage children to read. This can be achieved by creating a comfortable reading area complete with pillows and blankets, hanging eye-catching books and story-related posters, and showcasing student favorites all over the classroom. Make reading a part of your daily routine by giving aside time each day for kids to read individually or with a companion. Another method for encouraging children to read is to provide incentives. If the teacher wants to motivate pupils to read more, provide incentives like choosing a book from the classroom library or wearing a special "reading ribbon" for the day. (Paige, 2023)

The teacher can create a classroom library in addition to using the school's library. Children who are exposed to books are more likely to read. Make sure the school library offers a wide range of genres from which pupils can select. At budget bookstores, yard sales, or by asking coworkers and friends to give books they've already read, teachers can find excellent books and magazines. (McKinley, 2022).

Point to Point Education (2019) have developed a process designed to inculcate a love of reading in students:

Repeated reading is designed to increase reading confidence by having students read the same passage over and over until no errors. While the process sounds repetitive and dull, it can be turned into a fun activity. It can be done in a group setting, one-on-one with a student, or by pairing students together. It can be kept interesting by incorporating word walls, bingo, flashcards, and speed drills into the process. Analytic phonics has been around for over 100 years, and it really works analyzing the relationship between letters and sounds, to decode words based upon spelling. Multisensory instruction involves using multiple senses to engage in different areas of the brain. multisensory activities can help teach complex reading skills faster with higher rate of retention (Point to Point, 2019).

The documents and research data analyzed and vetted above allow for a reasoned conclusion relating back to the four questions, now giving rise to four objectives:

1. Provide a clear vision of key elements and skills that create a competent reader.
2. Determine ways for schools to develop life-long reading skills in students.
3. Provide a pathway to building reading knowledge across curriculum areas.
4. Set out ways to develop a love of reading that will last a lifetime in students.

Taking a look at the four areas below, one can derive a table looking at each of the four objectives in terms of both the pathways or processes that lead to the desired outcome, and the outcome itself. The result of the research is summarized below, in Table 1.

Table 1: Objectives, Pathways or Processes, and Desired Outcomes of Reading Development

Objective	Pathway or Process	Desired Outcomes
Provide a clear vision of key elements and skills that create a competent reader.	Decoding, phonemic awareness, hearing distinct phonemes, fluency, detect words, comprehend text, word recognition, robust vocabulary, understand passages and concepts, coherence, link ideas, connect to known, "read between the lines," decipher meaning, use working memory.	Scanning ability, guessing meaning of words from context, reflecting, search for words in a context, find information, discover words quickly, synonyms for terms, identifying important details, accurate assumptions, solutions, visualizing the words, mental image formation,

		monitoring and clarifying, make clarifications and corrections, searching and selecting, obtain data from a range of sources, define important terms, respond to inquiries, supporting data, logic, while reading the book, formulate questions.
Determine ways for schools to develop life-long reading skills in students.	Independent learning, student autonomy, reduced 'teacher talk,' engagement, choral reading, low anxiety, less pressure, daily independent reading, discussion, enjoyment reading, libraries as an integral component, book discussions, preferred books, previewing skills, practice with library media professional, reading culture, treasured books as gifts.	Online read numerous texts, When reading, don't stress about performing, time to discuss the story's characters, storyline, and purpose, asking, "What occurred in the story? How did it affect how you felt? What did you think of the resolution?" - enjoyment of reading, laugh and smile,

		transform, books are magical, fun, rather than frustrating, encouraging better reading, learning easier.
Provide a pathway to building reading knowledge across curriculum areas.	Teach reading in all subjects, students write about content, time for listening practice, student collaboration, shared learning, texts explain or provide knowledge about the social and natural worlds, persuasive texts, procedural documents, give directions, increase awareness of real-life experiences, autobiographies and biographies, historical background, transfer knowledge by illuminating, building a range of background knowledge in the process.	Building students' knowledge of history, geography, science, arts, integrated content areas, and developing internal filing systems, knowledge central to developing comprehension skills, explicit instruction of comprehension skills, abilities to comprehend, analyze, and create texts from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, literacy across the curriculum. stimulate learning, embed understanding

		of different language choices, reflect/document ideas, subject or discipline, like science or history, has certain literacy requirements, a toolkit encourages comprehension.
Set out ways to develop a love of reading that will last a lifetime in students.	Encourage parental involvement, find books they love, raise the profile of reading, teach them to read fluently, make reading enjoyable, reading doesn't have to mean books, elementary school teacher as a reading instructor, provide the resources to satisfy our students' literacy needs, helping pupils learn to read, choose to read.	Classroom a welcoming place for reading, comfortable reading area, pillows and blankets, hanging eye-catching book and story-related posters, and showcasing student favorites all over the classroom, incentives, "reading ribbon" for the day, classroom library, using the school's library, exposed to books, range of genres-pupils select, repeated reading, reading the

		<p>same passage over and over until no errors, incorporating word walls, bingo, flashcards, and speed drills into the process, analytic phonics, analyzing the relationship between letters and sounds, to decode words based upon spelling, multisensory instruction, engage different areas of the brain.</p>
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The above research was conducted by reviewing documents and as summarized and charted out in figure 1, above, provides a pathway to improving reading across all four of the critical areas looked at in this study. Selecting a representative sample of these ideas and working towards their implementation provides a path well-supported by research conducted up to present day contexts for improvement and reading growth in schools and beyond. This is critically important in today's world of fast-paced knowledge growth and the demand for flexible responses to ideas.

Further research and implementation work along any of these four areas or the detailed prescriptions within, will provide rewards for the researcher and improvement in schools and student learning.

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