



Overall, studies of oral language interventions consistently show positive impact on learning

Cost

£££££

Evidence strength



Impact (months)

+5

Effect size

0.37

What is it?

Oral language interventions emphasise the importance of spoken language and verbal interaction in the classroom. They are based on the idea that comprehension and reading skills benefit from explicit discussion of either the content or processes of learning, or both. Oral language approaches 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 aim to support learners' articulation of ideas and spoken expression. Oral language interventions therefore have some similarity to approaches based on [Metacognition](#) which make talk about learning explicit in classrooms (such as Philosophy for Children), and to [Collaborative learning](#) approaches which promote pupils' talk and interaction in groups (such as Thinking Together).

How effective is it?

Overall, studies of oral language interventions consistently show positive impact on learning, including on oral language skills and reading comprehension. On average, pupils who participate in oral language interventions make approximately five months' additional progress over the course of a year.

All pupils appear to benefit from oral language interventions, but some studies show slightly larger effects for younger children and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (up to six months'

additional progress).

Some types of oral language interventions appear to be more effective than others, on average. Interventions which are directly related to text comprehension or problem-solving appear to have greater impact. There is also consistent evidence supporting reading to young children and encouraging them to answer questions and to talk about the story with a trained adult. A number of studies show the benefits of trained teaching assistants effectively supporting both oral language skills and reading outcomes.

In contrast, more general 'whole language' approaches, which focus on meaning and personal understanding, do not appear to be as successful as those involving more interactive and dialogic activities.

For all oral language interventions, certain factors are associated with higher learning gains, suggesting that careful implementation is important. For example, approaches which 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. Similarly, approaches that use technology are most effective when the technology is used as a medium to encourage collaborative work and interaction between pupils, rather than in a direct teaching or tutoring role. Most studies comment on the importance of training and teacher development or support with implementation.

The diglossic nature of the Arabic language on one side and the limited exposure of Arabic language learners to the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) on the other side are challenging in the development of pre-literacy skills for children in the Arab world. In fact, Arabic speaking students struggle in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehending the MSA. To date, research in developing oral language interventions in this region is limited and mostly focused on extending the vocabulary learning as an approach to improve students oral and verbal literacy skills.

Interventions like creating book clubs for older students and story reading to early years students or even implementing technology in Arabic instruction appear to have been effective on extending their vocabulary and improving their oral language skills. There is evidence that designing structured questioning to develop reading comprehension can enhance students reading fluency and Arabic vocabulary and can improve students' oral language skills. Teachers might also consider introducing students to MSA at an early stage or strengthening young children's phonological awareness skills to improve oral and verbal literacy skills.

How secure is the evidence?

There is an extensive evidence base on the impact of oral language interventions, including a substantial number of meta-analyses and systematic reviews. The evidence is relatively consistent, suggesting that oral language interventions can be successful in a variety of environments. Although the majority of the evidence relates to younger children, there is also clear evidence that

older learners, and particularly disadvantaged pupils, can benefit.

Additional evidence about matching specific programmes or approaches to particular learners' needs, either by age or by attainment, would also be useful.

What are the costs?

Overall, the costs are estimated as very low: typically around 40.0 GBP (51.5 USD, 36.5 JOD) per pupil. Direct financial costs are limited to additional resources, such as books for discussion and professional development for teachers, which is likely to enhance the benefits for learning. For a number of recent UK evaluations, the median per pupil cost per year was also about 40.0 GBP.

Costs originally calculated in GBP; USD and JOD calculated via oanda.com on 22/09/20.

As yet there is no information about local costs

What should I consider?

How can you help pupils to make their learning explicit through verbal expression?

How will you match the oral language activities to learners' current stage of development, so that it extends their learning and connects with the curriculum?

What training should the adults involved receive to ensure they model and develop pupils' oral language skills?

If you are using technology, how will you ensure that pupils talk about their learning and interact with each other effectively?

Copyright © [The Education Endowment Foundation](#). All rights reserved.