



PETAA

PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHING
ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIA

National Teaching of Reading Survey 2024



01

Introduction, Methodology, Executive Summary and Key Findings



Introduction

In 2024, PETAA conducted its first national survey on the teaching of reading. The topic of reading instruction is extensively researched, debated, and often contentious. Media headlines frequently suggest teachers lack the requisite knowledge, yet public discourse rarely includes teachers' own voices. PETAA sought direct insights from teachers about classroom practices—examining the skills, knowledge, approaches, and strategies used daily.



Methodology and Limitations

This survey was designed to capture the perspectives and practices of teachers regarding reading instruction in Australian schools. The survey was distributed through PETAA email networks and social media, employing a convenience sampling approach. A total of 500 responses were collected from teachers across various educational contexts and systems.

Survey Design

The survey included both closed-ended questions (multiple choice, Likert scale) and open-ended questions allowing for detailed text responses. The survey was modified and expanded on from the work of Gawne (2020) in her doctoral study *Principles, Practices and Priorities of Teaching Reading in the Early Years of Schooling*. Questions were organised into sections addressing key aspects of reading instruction, including time allocation, instructional approaches, text selection, differentiation strategies, and professional development.

Limitations

While this survey provides valuable insights into teacher practices and perspectives, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results:

- **Sample Representation:** With 64% of respondents over 50 years of age, the sample skews toward more experienced teachers. The perspectives of early-career teachers may be under-represented.
- **Self-Selection Bias:** As participation was voluntary and distributed through PETAA networks, respondents may not represent the full range of Australian teachers. Those with a strong interest in literacy instruction or an affiliation with PETAA may be over-represented.

- **Self-Reported Data:** The survey relies on self-reported practices rather than observed classroom behaviours. Research suggests self-reports may sometimes differ from actual practice.
- **Definition Variability:** Despite providing a glossary of terms, teachers may interpret certain concepts (e.g., "explicit instruction" or "decodable texts") differently based on their training and experience.
- **Regional Distribution:** The survey did not analyse responses by geographical region, which may mask important differences between states and metropolitan, rural, and remote educational contexts.
- **School Context:** Limited information was collected about specific school contexts (e.g., socioeconomic status, cultural diversity) which may influence instructional approaches.
- **What not Why:** The data tells about what teachers do, but it doesn't tell us about why they do it. It was beyond the scope of this survey to gather detailed, systematic information about their rationale for particular pedagogical choices.

These limitations should be considered when interpreting findings and attempting to generalise to the broader population of Australian teachers.

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a comprehensive survey of 500 Australian teachers focused on reading instruction practices. Overall, teachers report strong confidence in their knowledge and pedagogical skills, with over 75% indicating they feel well-equipped to teach reading. They demonstrate a clear understanding of reading development, effectively shifting emphasis from foundational code-based instruction in early years to comprehension in later stages. Instructionally, the majority of teachers (82%) deliver teacher-led reading lessons multiple times per week, aligning with evidence-based practices. The literacy block remains a foundational structure, with 98% of early years teachers addressing all five pillars of reading during this time, though there is notable variation in how these blocks are implemented.

Overall, teachers show a nuanced approach to text selection, balancing decodable and authentic texts in the early years, and progressing appropriately in text complexity as students' reading skills advance. However, differentiation remains a significant challenge with variability in student ability, time constraints, and limited resources as major hurdles.

Professional learning is largely self-directed, with many teachers turning to online resources and social media over formal training. Few teachers engage in regular professional dialogue about reading instruction, and most (65%) do not use department-provided instructional materials, instead relying on third-party sourced, self-made or school-based resources. Finally, only half of surveyed teachers report operating within a whole-school reading approach, highlighting inconsistencies in instructional practices both within and between schools.



Key Findings

- Survey respondents demonstrate strong professional knowledge in reading instruction, with widespread implementation of evidence-based practices.
- Teachers effectively adjust instructional focus according to developmental needs, transitioning from code-based emphases in early years to greater comprehension focus in upper primary. However, this does not mean comprehension and meaning-making are neglected in the early years.
- Most teachers (82% of respondents) implement teacher-led reading instruction at least 3–4 days a week.
- Teachers employ effective strategies for differentiation instruction, including flexible and ability based grouping. However, time constraints, wide ability ranges, and resource limitations represent the primary challenges in differentiating reading instruction.
- 35% of respondents believe their schools do not have a whole-school approach to the teaching of reading.
- Most teachers integrate reading instruction across the curriculum, particularly focusing on vocabulary and comprehension beyond dedicated literacy blocks.
- The majority of teachers are using a wide range of evidence-informed strategies to support and extend EAL/D students in their classrooms.
- Most teachers have limited interactions with staff either in their schools or elsewhere in their professional networks around their knowledge of the teaching of reading.



Key Conclusions

Based on the comprehensive survey of 500 Australian teachers regarding reading instruction practices, and acknowledging the limitations noted above, several significant conclusions emerge:

1

Teacher Expertise and Confidence

- The majority of teachers (over 75%) express high confidence in their pedagogical practices and knowledge related to teaching reading.
- Teachers effectively adjust instructional focus according to developmental needs, transitioning from code-based emphases in early years to greater comprehension focus in upper primary. However, this does not mean comprehension and meaning-making are neglected in the early years.

2

Instructional Practices

- Most teachers (82%) employ teacher-led reading instruction at least 3–4 days per week, indicating strong alignment with evidence-based approaches.
- The literacy block remains a cornerstone of reading instruction, with 98% of early years teachers addressing all five pillars of reading within this dedicated time.
- There is significant variety in how literacy blocks are structured and implemented across schools, reflecting both teacher autonomy but also potentially some inconsistent practices.

3

Text Selection and Use

- Teachers demonstrate nuanced understanding of appropriate types of text, with early years teachers appropriately emphasising decodable texts while maintaining exposure to authentic texts.
- There is evidence of appropriate progression in text complexity as students develop reading proficiency.

4

Differentiation Challenges

- Teachers consistently identify the wide range of student abilities within a single classroom as their greatest challenge in reading instruction.
- Time constraints and resource limitations create significant barriers to effective differentiation.
- There is substantial reliance on learning support staff (70%) for differentiation, potentially creating inequities between well-resourced and under-resourced schools.

Key Conclusions

5

Professional Development and Collaboration

- Teachers primarily rely on self-directed learning through online resources, blogs, and social media rather than formal professional development opportunities.
- Only a small percentage of teachers engage in regular collaborative discussions about reading instruction with colleagues.
- Most teachers (65%) are not utilising department/government-provided instructional materials, instead creating their own or school-based resources.

6

Whole-school Approaches

- Only 50% of teachers reported working within a whole-school approach to reading instruction, with 41% having school-created approaches and 9% using commercial programs.
- This suggests potential inconsistency in reading instruction approaches both within and across schools, as well as a lack of guidance or structure for early career teachers.



Recommendations

Based on these findings, and informed by current research evidence in reading instruction (Castles et al., 2018; Duke et al., 2021) we recommend the following actions to further strengthen the teaching of reading in Australian schools:

1. Develop and Implement Consistent Whole-School Approaches

- Government and systems: Continue to provide foundational training in evidence-informed reading instruction to all school leaders, focusing on how to craft and implement coherent whole-school reading approaches that respect teacher knowledge and maintain autonomy. Support the inclusion of literacy leaders in schools who can employ a model of coaching thereby supporting early career teachers and embedding a whole school approach to reading.
- Schools: Establish clear whole-school reading frameworks that maintain teacher autonomy while ensuring instructional coherence and continuity across year levels. Ensure schools are committed to professional learning, in line with the whole school approach to the teaching of reading. Schools should ensure teachers have both a knowledge of the essential elements of teaching reading, including the foundational element of oral language and the skills to teach reading effectively.

2. Address Time and Resource Constraints

- Government and systems: Reduce administrative burdens on teachers to provide additional time for professional development in reading instruction and lesson preparation.
- Government: Consider creating freely available, quality phonics programs that extend current Literacy Hub resources, reducing financial burdens on schools. Victoria has produced one such program.
- Schools: Allocate protected time for collaborative planning and discussion of reading instruction.

3. Enhance Professional Development and Collaboration

- Systems: Create opportunities for cross-school teacher visits and observation of exemplary reading instruction.
- Schools: Establish structured professional learning communities, which support teachers to engage in collaborative practice such as peer classroom observations, reflection and feedback, focused specifically on reading instruction.

4. Strengthen Support for Differentiation

- Government and systems: Review and potentially increase funding for learning support staff, particularly in schools with high needs.
- Schools: Ensure clear support processes and structures between the varied teams within a school, to understand student needs, including those that require extension as well as those that require extra support, aligning the expertise of classroom teachers, learning support staff and pedagogy coaches or leaders, in planning for differentiation.

5. Diversify Reading Materials and Approaches

- Schools: Review classroom and library collections to ensure they include diverse authors and perspectives. Support professional learning for teachers which includes how to engage with diverse texts where students see themselves and others represented, developing understanding and empathy through critical reflection.
- Government: Provide funding for schools to expand their collections of diverse reading materials.

6. Support Early Career Teachers

- Schools: Implement structured mentoring programs pairing experienced and early career teachers specifically focused on reading instruction.
- Systems: Reduce teaching loads for beginning teachers to allow more time for planning and professional learning about reading instruction.

By implementing these recommendations, Australian education systems can build on the strong foundation of teacher expertise evident in this survey while addressing key challenges and inconsistencies in reading instruction approaches. The ultimate goal is to ensure all students receive high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction that enables them to become proficient, engaged readers.



PETAA extends sincere thanks to the many teachers who generously contributed their time, experience and professional insights to this landmark survey.

Your voices have shaped a clearer national picture of how reading is taught in Australian classrooms today—and how it can be strengthened for the future.



Teacher voices: the final word

"Responsive, differentiated teaching based on teacher judgement works better than commercial programs."

"It is amazing to be part of a child's reading journey, it makes you keep trying new things to help it click!"

"Schools and teachers need to be provided with the tools and resources to do their job consistently across all schools, without the need for schools and teachers themselves to spend money in order to ensure that decent reading instruction is happening."

"Reading is not a stand alone. It is the backbone of everything we do."

"It is important for the public to know that teachers do and always have taught reading explicitly. The false narrative out there that we don't is damaging and unfair. The child has to be at the centre of my decisions, so every day I ask myself what do they want to read and why? How can I help them achieve that?"

"The many varied "views" on teaching reading and the discussion of different approaches to teaching reading is vastly different from school to school, system to system and pedagogically between teachers. And that's ok. We are mandated to teach the syllabus! Not a particular program. Personally after 20+ years of being a Literacy specialist teacher I can honestly say there isn't ONE way to teach reading. There just isn't. Not every approach, pedagogy, text, grouping, activity is suitable for every child. As the standards say, we have to know the content and how to teach it and we have to know our students and how they learn."

"Perfecting how you teach reading is a continuous process of learning, implementing and reflecting."

"I am sick of the reading wars and political football that reading is in our country. Why can't evidence be used to show that it is not one approach or another but a combination of approaches that students need to learn to read. We also need to alter approaches according to the individual student's needs. It is not a one size suits all approach."

"In implementing SOR [Science of Reading approaches] (which in many ways is returning to a form of teaching from the past), many leaders are failing to see that some staff are experienced in many of the key areas being presented. Many think it is all 'new' - when it's not. There is the possibility of many evidence-based teaching practices not identified as SOR are being ignored in this transition phase, and the baby is being thrown out with the water..."

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We thank you for reading this critical report.



Questions, comments and feedback

PETAA has created and shared this survey report in the spirit of transparency and honesty. If you have any questions about the contents of this report or feedback you would like to provide, please contact us by emailing info@petaa.edu.au.

Media and interviews

If you would like to arrange interviews or media coverage, please contact Cassie Tongue, PETAA's Head of Marketing and Communications. cassie.tongue@petaa.edu.au | (02) 8020 3914

About PETAA

The Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA) is the national professional association supporting primary educators to deliver best-practice and evidence-informed English and literacy instruction. A trusted not-for-profit, PETAA provides professional learning, research-based resources, and national advocacy to ensure every child has access to high-quality teaching in reading and writing.

petaa.edu.au info@petaa.edu.au 1300 307 382



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