



Research overview: Supporting young people to read for pleasure

Research shows that teenagers' levels of reading enjoyment and engagement are at an all-time low. A range of approaches for supporting teenagers' reading motivation have been explored, yet research on the different types of approaches available has not yet been brought together in a way that makes it easy to navigate.

As part of the **Young People's Reading Project**, we carried out a review of 1,032 academic papers to find those which have evaluated approaches for supporting teenagers' (12-16 years old) reading motivation. We synthesized the findings and categorised the approaches into 5 types: reading and literacy skills programmes, whole-school reading cultures, book clubs, technology-supported approaches, and performance and theater.

In this summary, we provide an overview of these 5 types of approach, outline what is missing from the current research, and give recommendations for practice.



Young People's Reading Project

The Young People's Reading Project is a collaboration between the Universities of Edinburgh and Dundee and Scottish Book Trust. Working with a young people's advisory panel, we are researching young people's experiences with reading for pleasure.

Reviewing the research: our process

To find relevant research, we used a narrative review framework. This involved searching 3 research databases to find publications which have evaluated literacy interventions for supporting teen reading motivation. We used search terms such as 'adolescent', 'reading motivation' and 'intervention' to find publications which might be relevant and reviewed these to make sure they fit our inclusion criteria (e.g., that the participants were aged between 12 and 16 years old).

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Research trends: what approaches for supporting young peoples' reading motivation have been tried before?

Of the 1,032 publications we reviewed, 38 fit the inclusion criteria. The approaches they evaluated could be broadly grouped into 5 different types, which are outlined below. These are not exhaustive of the approaches which are being used in practice, merely what has been formally evaluated in research so far.



This review is based on an article which is currently available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) at osf.io/4mxvt/



Reading and literacy skills programmes

The most common approach for supporting young peoples' reading motivation has been through programmes which also support their reading and literacy skills. These have often been large-scale approaches which are implemented across the curriculum to support:

- Reading comprehension
- Reading fluency
- Engagement with texts
- Self-confidence and sense of agency

These approaches are often based on the assumption that improving reading skill will automatically increase motivation to read. However, research has shown that this will not necessarily be the case, especially over a short period. It is also not clear how this approach affects pupils with strong reading skills who are not motivated to read.

Whole-school reading culture

Some research has evaluated the approach of embedding reading culture across a school. This means extending reading beyond the curriculum and including things like:



- Celebrating reading across the school
- Sharing recommendations with others
- All staff promoting reading
- Book clubs
- Involving pupils in lesson planning
- Encouraging pupils to select books
- Reading in public spaces
- Book displays

These approaches promote an inclusive atmosphere where reading is normalised across the school. They also allow schools to tailor their approaches based on the needs of their pupils. However, they often require a large amount of time, energy, funding, and knowledge. It is also often not possible to work out why a particular activity is effective (or not!).

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Book clubs

Book clubs can take many different forms, focusing on different groups of students, genres, and outcomes. They provide opportunities for young people to build connections with one another, engage with texts in new ways, and make and receive recommendations.

While book clubs have been shown to support teenagers' reading motivation in some studies, there are many variables which could contribute towards their effectiveness. (e.g., group dynamics, genre, quality of discussion, environment), meaning it is difficult to establish a theory of change.

Technology-supported approaches

With advances in digital reading technologies, there are more opportunities for technology to be used in the classroom. Previous research has explored the use of e-readers to engage 'reluctant' readers through novelty, convenience, escape, and privacy. Other approaches have used video book summaries to engage pupils with texts in a visual format.



Research into how to incorporate young peoples' everyday digital literacy practices (e.g., social media, fanfiction) is still lacking and is essential for linking in-school reading with young peoples' lives.



Performance & Theatre

A less well-explored approach for motivating young people to engage with reading has been using performance and theatre. Performance approaches aim to support pupils reading fluency and confidence and help them view reading beyond 'words on a page'.

Some research has found performance and theatre approaches to support pupils reading motivation, but there is no clear theory underpinning this change. Furthermore, not all pupils will feel comfortable engaging with texts in this way, meaning other approaches may have to be adopted alongside these.

Stop and think!

- Have you used any of these approaches in your classroom?
- What might work well about each of these approaches? What might not work as well?
- Have you found a technique for supporting teen readers which isn't mentioned here? Why do you think it works?

What are the gaps and issues with the current research?

Reading motivation can be defined and measured in different ways

There is no consensus on how to define or measure reading motivation, making it difficult to draw conclusions on the most effective approaches.

Most research focuses on readers with below-average skills

Skilled, reluctant readers should be an important focus to better understand the link between motivation and skill.

Most research focuses on young people's in-school reading

It is important to also connect young people's in-school reading practices to their lives and experiences outside of school.

In addition, the majority of research we reviewed had taken place in the U.K., U.S., and Europe, illustrating a gap in collective knowledge regarding approaches which have been used elsewhere.

What should our future directions be?

Adopt a flexible and multifaceted approach

Approaches should be selected based on theory and research evidence, be adapted to the needs of particular pupils and contexts, and be flexible to change over time.

Deepen connections between research and practice

Co-designing and evaluating programmes, building relationships, and having ongoing dialogues between researchers and teachers are essential.

Centre the voices of young people themselves

Involve young people themselves in the design, implementation, and evaluation of approaches to ensure they fit their needs and are relevant to their lives.

For more information:



Updates on the Young People's Reading Project

blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/current-projects/yprp



Blog post: Motivating teenagers to read – how you can encourage reading for pleasure at school

www.scottishbooktrust.com/our-research

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