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## Objectives

This study sought to explore the use of literacy instruction, intervention and assessment by Special Education Teachers (SET) in a sample of Irish schools. The goal of this study was to better understand their experiences of literacy practices. A plethora of guidance exist, which means that there is significant variance in approaches in schools. Therefore, it is important to chart the most favoured and widely used literacy methods of assessment and intervention in Irish primary schools. The findings provide an up-to-date picture on literacy practice, which has implications for Educational Psychological and SET practice.

## Introduction

Acquiring the ability to read is one of the most important skills that is developed in education (Griffin & Murtagh, 2015; Mehigan, 2020). It is a necessary skill to complete schooling, since the majority of information transfer occurs through reading (Tiernan & Casserly, 2018). Literacy competence impacts quality of life as it is essential for social and personal fulfilment (Mehigan, 2020). Locating and operationalising appropriate assessment, instructional and intervention procedures for struggling readers in schools is therefore vital to ensure that this population are facilitated to achieve their within-school and post-school potential (Jacob, 2017; Kennedy, 2018). It can be challenging for schools to select evidence-based, affordable, and effective literacy intervention and assessment from an ever-growing list of options. It is important to ensure that appropriate assessment, instructional and intervention methods are put in place, that such measures are targeting the specific area of literacy difficulty, and that they are effective in assisting the young person with their literacy difficulties (McPhillips et al., 2009). It is also vital to ensure that school-based literacy instruction and intervention are delivered with a thorough understanding of their effectiveness by consulting the evidence base pertaining to these (McPhillips et al., 2009; O'Callaghan et al., 2016; Snowling & Hulme, 2011).

## Methodology

The current study took place in two phases.

1. The first phase involved a systematic review of the research literature. This was done to provide an up-to-date picture of literacy interventions that have been trialled and evaluated in Irish primary schools, and to familiarise with the literature in this area to inform the second phase of the research.
2. The second phase of this study involved the design and dissemination of a survey for SETs. This survey was comprised of three sections which explored SET practice in the following areas:
  - a) Literacy Instruction
  - b) Literacy Intervention
  - c) Literacy Assessment

## Systematic Review Findings

- Motivation to read, reading fluency, enjoyment of reading and self-efficacy in reading influence each other cyclically (see fig. 1).
- Motivation needs to be considered in any effective reading intervention.
- Motivation to engage with an intervention can be enhanced through offering choice of reading materials, discussing read materials with kids and valuing their contributions.
- Social reading interventions (paired reading, small group reading, cross-age tutoring) resulted in improved reading fluency, decreased perceived difficulty and enhanced reading enjoyment.
- Effective reading interventions at each level of the NEPS continuum of support are summarised in table 1.

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| School Support Plus   | School Support for Some   | Classroom Support for All   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Precision Teaching</li> <li>• Guided Oral Reading</li> <li>• Toe-by-Toe</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suas Paired Reading Intervention</li> <li>• Cross-age tutoring intervention</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy Lift-Off</li> </ul> |

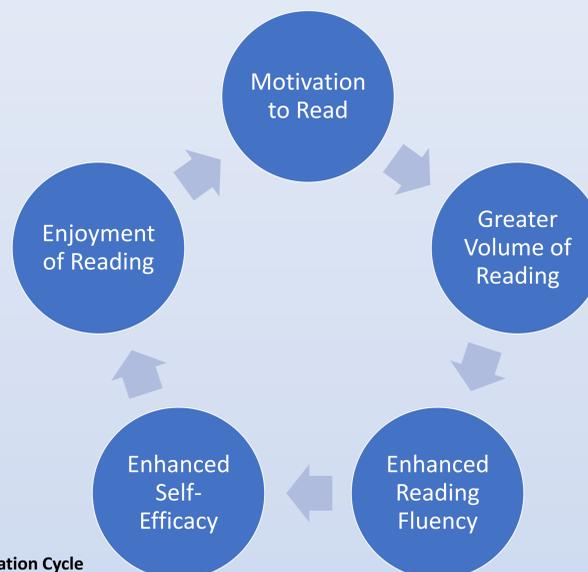


Fig 1: Reading Motivation Cycle

## Survey Findings

- In total, 31 SETs accessed this survey.
- Approx. 1 in 3 (n=31) were aware of both the 'Balanced Approach' and 'Effective Intervention' Literacy Documents.
- SETs report that they are completing components of effective literacy instruction
- SETs hear about literacy interventions by 'word of mouth' rather than through NEPS documents or reviewing the evidence-base.
- Paired Reading, Precision Teaching, Toe by Toe and Guided Oral Reading are the most widely used intervention approaches.
- 80% of literacy interventions are delivered at the support for some or support for few level.
- SETs, class teachers and others (e.g. SNAs) complete this interventions work
- 68% of SETs report that they are not trained to deliver standardised literacy assessments
- Word Reading, Spelling and Reading Comprehension are the most completed attainment assessments
- 96% of SETs would like further training in literacy assessment and intervention practices including:

*"Training in WIAT III, advice on diagnostic and screening tests and interventions for different age groups."*

*"When & how long to use a specific intervention. How to assess the effectiveness of a specific intervention."*

## Implications for Practice

### EP Practice:

- Continued signposting and training for SETs on the 'Effective Interventions' and 'Balanced Approach' documents.
- Training for SETs in attainment assessment/interpretation
- NEPS literacy guiding documents/research to be progressed to a publishable/peer-reviewed standard to ensure that SETs locate them when consulting the evidence base.
- Use supervision models to structure and guide SET literacy instruction and intervention implementation.

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