

Review of autism and reading comprehension

Emerging research in the field of autism and reading comprehension has led to the use of single case experimental design methodology. Put simply, this methodology involves collecting information about whether interventions make a difference, using a less traditional research approach and fewer participants. Given the unique differences between students with autism, this approach is an increasingly recognised way of conducting research.

Thirteen studies were included in the current review that focused on reading comprehension strategies to support students with autism. Based on this research approach, the strategies below show strong promise. However, to be recognised as evidence-based practices, further research is needed. In particular, replication of these studies with much larger sample sizes, is required.

Supporting reading comprehension

Visuals

Graphic organisers (for example: story maps and Venn diagrams) can help students record, track and ultimately recall key information in text.

Strategies for thinking and learning

Support students to think about and track their understanding of texts and identify strategies when a breakdown occurs. For example, talk about what might happen in a story, re-read sections and summarise.

Behavioural strategies

Using reinforcers such as tokens and reward time as part of an intervention approach can increase engagement, which in turn improves reading comprehension.

Make changes to text

Help students focus on important information by shortening the length of passages, simplifying text, and including visual supports (e.g. velcro images).

Collaborative strategies

Working in a small group, or with a peer, students can take turns reading passages, providing feedback and/or answering before, during and after reading questions. This strategy can increase reading comprehension, social interaction and behaviour.

Computer-assisted instruction

Using digital applications (e.g. ipad applications) can support students identify the main idea.

References

Singh, B. D., Moore, D. W., Furlonger, B. E., Anderson, A., Fall, R., & Howorth, S. (2021). Reading comprehension and autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review of interventions involving single-case experimental designs. *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 8(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40489-020-00200-3>;

