



PETAA

PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHING
ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIA

National Teaching of Reading Survey 2024



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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.



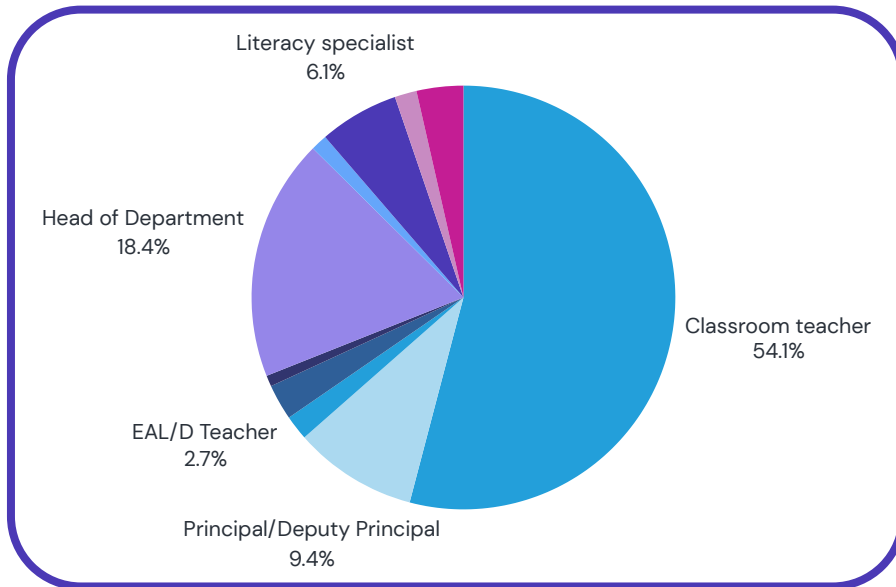
02

Demographics of Respondents

Five hundred teachers from across Australia responded to our survey, representing all three school systems (Government, Catholic, and Independent) and diverse professional roles. Classroom teachers constituted 54% of respondents.

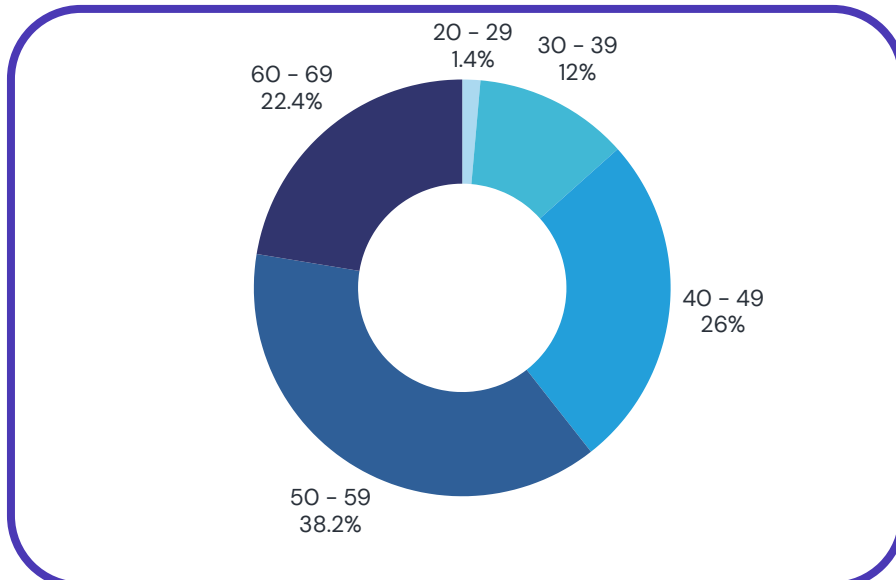
Notably, 87% of our survey respondents were aged 40+. According to AITSL data, in 2020, 78% of registered teachers were aged over 40 (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2023).

Figure 1: Job Titles/Functions of Respondents



54%
of respondents were classroom teachers

Figure 2: Age of Respondents



50%
of respondents taught or lead literacy in Foundation

61%
of respondents were 50+

03

Teaching reading skills and knowledge within and beyond the literacy block

Background

Effective instruction is essential for the development of students' reading proficiency. Research by Shanahan and other scholars emphasises both instructional time and quality as critical factors in children's reading development (Shanahan, 2020; Allington, 2014; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Children's instructional needs evolve throughout their schooling, with different components requiring emphasis at various developmental stages (Paris, 2005; Castles et al., 2018).

Research identifies five key components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (National Reading Panel, 2000), with oral language often added as a sixth element (Konza, 2016). These components remain central to effective reading instruction according to contemporary research (Castles et al., 2018).

Most reading frameworks incorporate these elements. Two prominent models, the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990) and Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001), illustrate how decoding (accurate word recognition) and language comprehension together determine reading success. These models continue to receive support from current research (Nation, 2019; Cabell & Hwang, 2020).

Most Australian classrooms feature a daily literacy block: dedicated time for teaching reading, writing and speaking skills applicable across all curriculum areas.

Research evidence firmly establishes that constrained skills underpinning word-level reading are most effectively taught through systematic, explicit and cumulative instructional approaches (Buckingham et al., 2019; Castles et al., 2018). The targeted development of these finite, measurable components—specifically oral language, phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge, systematic decoding and fluency—provides children with the essential toolkit for successful word recognition (Castles et al., 2019). Teachers understand that these constrained skills, whilst requiring intensive initial focus, serve as the crucial foundation upon which deeper comprehension of authentic texts is built, highlighting the complementary rather than competitive relationship between code-based and meaning-based aspects of reading instruction.

Reading comprehension relies on unconstrained skills that continually develop throughout life (Paris, 2005). Numerous studies demonstrate the effectiveness of explicit comprehension instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000; Duke et al., 2021), with meta-analyses showing moderate to large effects (Elleman, 2017; Okkinga et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2021).

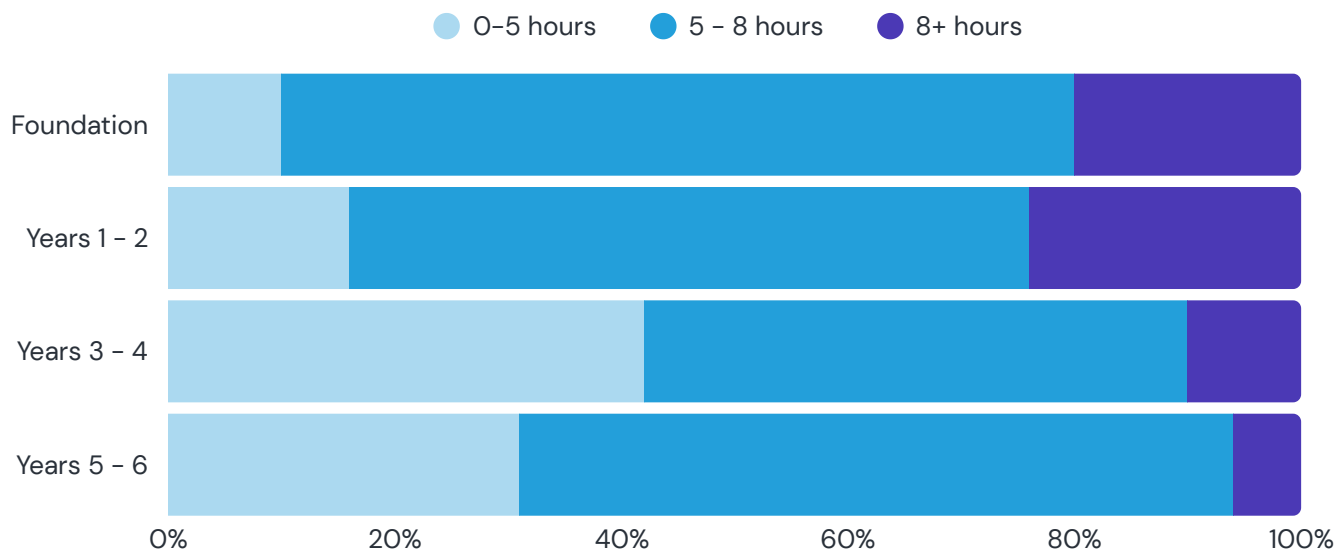
Survey Results

This section of the survey explored the amount of class time each week dedicated to teaching reading; how time is proportioned for specific reading knowledge or skills; and finally how teachers adapt instruction as students progress. We analysed results by key stages (Foundation; Years 1-2; Years 3-4; Years 5-6) to accurately capture classroom practices across different levels.

Instructional Time for Reading

Primary classroom teachers in our study dedicated approximately 6 hours weekly to reading instruction. Reported time was slightly higher among school leaders and significantly among EAL/D specialists, who reported around 9 hours weekly.

Figure 3: Teacher Time Spent on Reading Skills Per Week



As shown in Figure 3, some clear patterns emerged across year levels. Foundation teachers typically allocated 5-8 hours weekly to reading instruction. This increased in Years 1-2, with 24% of teachers dedicating over 8 hours weekly—compared to just 20% of Foundation teachers allocating this amount of time.

A notable shift occurred in Years 3-4, with 42% of teachers reporting 5 or fewer hours weekly of explicit reading instruction, likely reflecting a system and curriculum focus which emphasises the explicit teaching of foundational word reading skills in Years F-2. Years 5-6 teachers reported the fewest, spending over 8 hours a week – just 6%.

The Structure of the Literacy/English Block

Teachers described considerable variation in literacy block implementation across classrooms, schools, and year levels. Some reported highly structured approaches while others described more flexible frameworks. Some organised instruction around quality texts, others followed commercial programmes, and others focused on discrete skills development.



Teacher voice: how educators described their literacy block

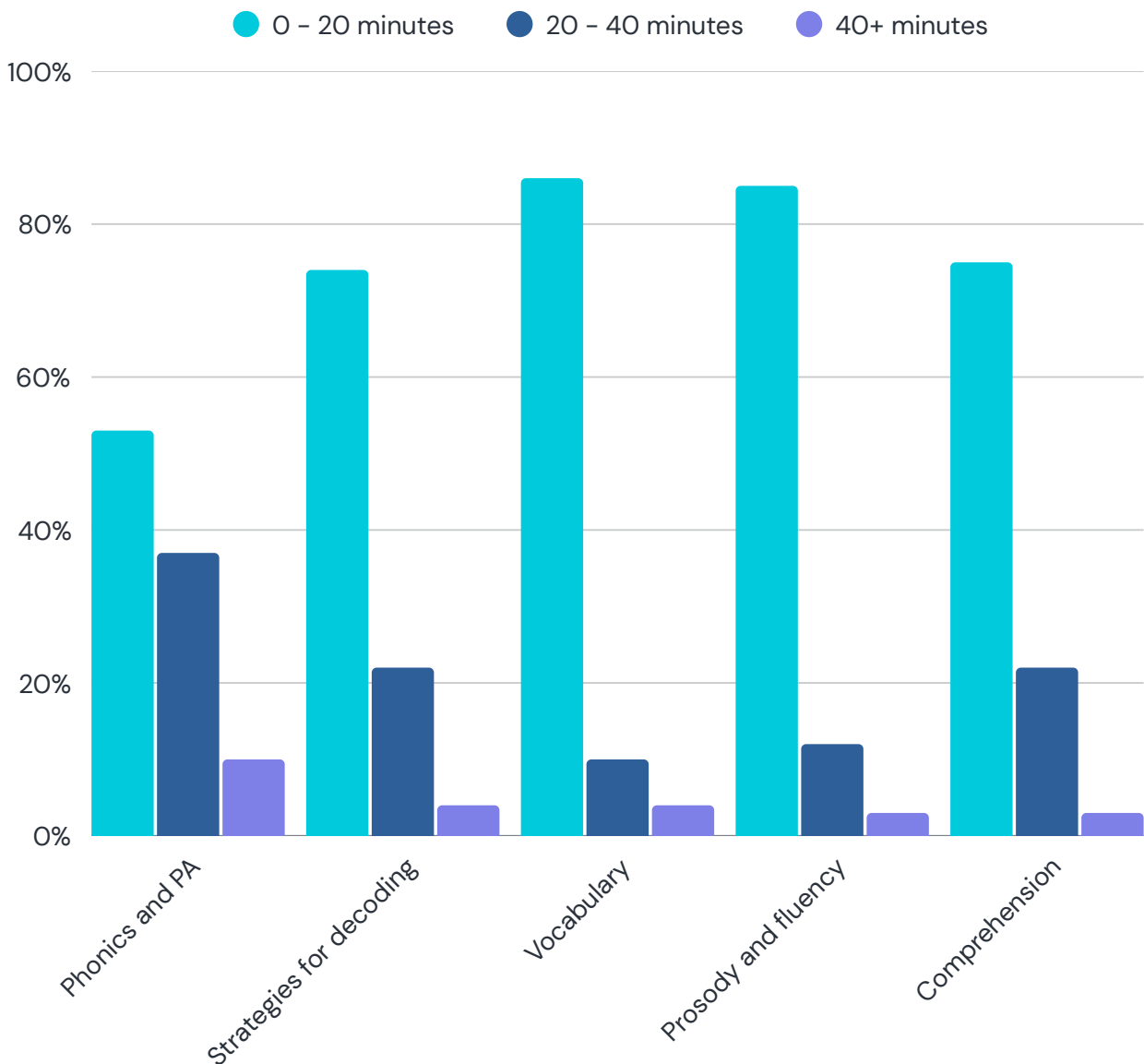
- *Daily Review, explicit teaching of the concept, followed by gradual release of responsibility towards independent work, and independent fluency practice while I run Tier 2 intervention. Then daily review, handwriting, explicit teaching in writing followed by gradual release of responsibility to independent work.*
- *Grammar, spelling, sentence structure, reading, daily review, writing.*
- *Independent reading, teacher guided, reading activities: comprehension, cloze passages, etc.*
- *Whole-part-whole; Mini-lesson; Read aloud/Shared reading/Interactive reading; Differentiated learning – flexible groups; Reading/writing connection; Reflection.*
- *Heggerty's phonemic awareness, daily review, introduction/consolidation of new phoneme, choral or paired reading, writing, literature (focusing on a particular text).*
- *80% Letters and Sounds synthetic phonics program 10% writing 10% reading comprehension.*
- *Have reciprocal reading groups, teacher guided reading groups, paired reading of phonological texts, independent reading and online reading comprehension.*
- *I have hardly any time to teach reading in my upper years class due to a huge number of specialist subjects my students take. I cannot influence this context. I teach comprehension skills, word analysis and some literature response work.*
- *It involves the 5 pillars of reading aligned to evidence based practices. I incorporate the outcomes and content of the syllabus into my literacy block. I integrate to ensure I get the most out of time. It is explicit and focused with students actively participating.*
- *Daily review, fluency, grammar, spelling/phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, oral language and writing. All taught explicitly and reinforced within a text based unit.*
- *A mixture of vocabulary, spelling, fluency practice, grammar & punctuation and reading and interpreting quality texts.*
- *2 hours uninterrupted time. Reading, spelling (phonemic awareness/phonics/spelling) and writing overlaid with substantive talk.*
- *We don't have literacy blocks due to timetabling. 1-2 literacy lessons every day plus integration of HASS and Geography texts.*
- *Explicitly taught whole class lesson with a phonics focus, reading strategy modelling, either decoding or comprehension, modelled reading, vocabulary focus. Group work based on intervention needs—not group numbers or actual "reading level". TA support by trained reading support TAs.*
- *Shared reading, creating written text, spelling or phonics, Decodable reading, games which focus on a specific skill.*

Our data revealed that 98% of early years teachers (Foundation or equivalent) address all five key components of literacy instruction within their literacy blocks. This comprehensive approach continues throughout primary years, with most teachers dedicating up to 20 minutes daily to each component. However, we note that our survey did not explicitly measure inclusion of Konza's sixth component of Oral Language.

98%

of early years teachers address **all 5** reading pillars within their literacy blocks.

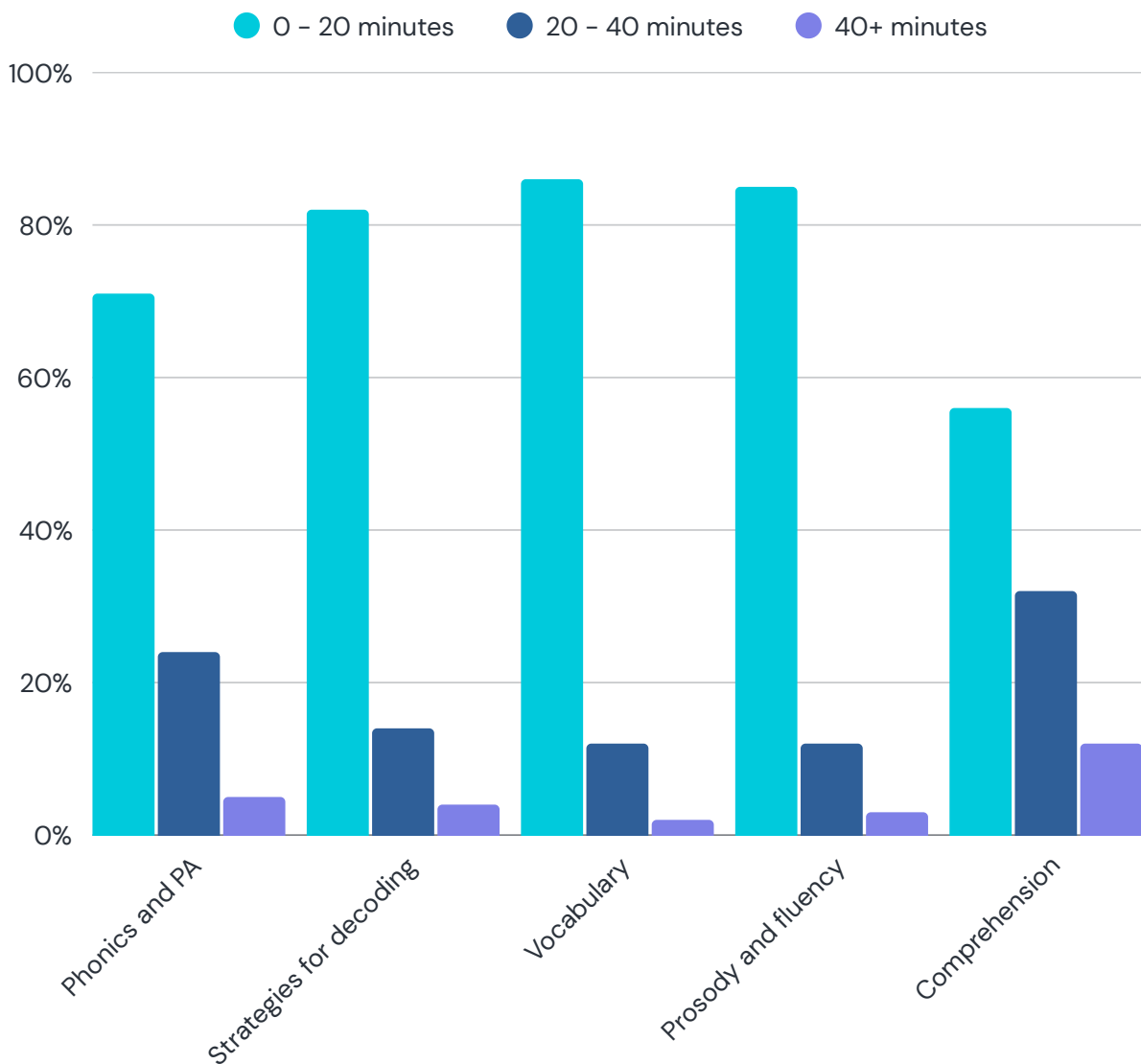
Figure 4: F-2 Teachers' Time Spent within the Literacy Block on Specific Reading Skills Per Day



Teachers strategically shift their instructional emphasis as students progress through year levels. Time allocated to phonics decreases after the early years, with greater attention given to word knowledge (orthography, morphology, etymology) and spelling in upper primary. Conversely, comprehension instruction increases in later years: only 25% of F-2 teachers spend more than 20 minutes daily on comprehension, compared to 44% of teachers in Years 3-6.

18% of Years 3-6 educators selected N/A for teaching strategies for decoding, and 17% for teaching phonics. Approximately 9% selected N/A for each of the other three reading knowledge areas.

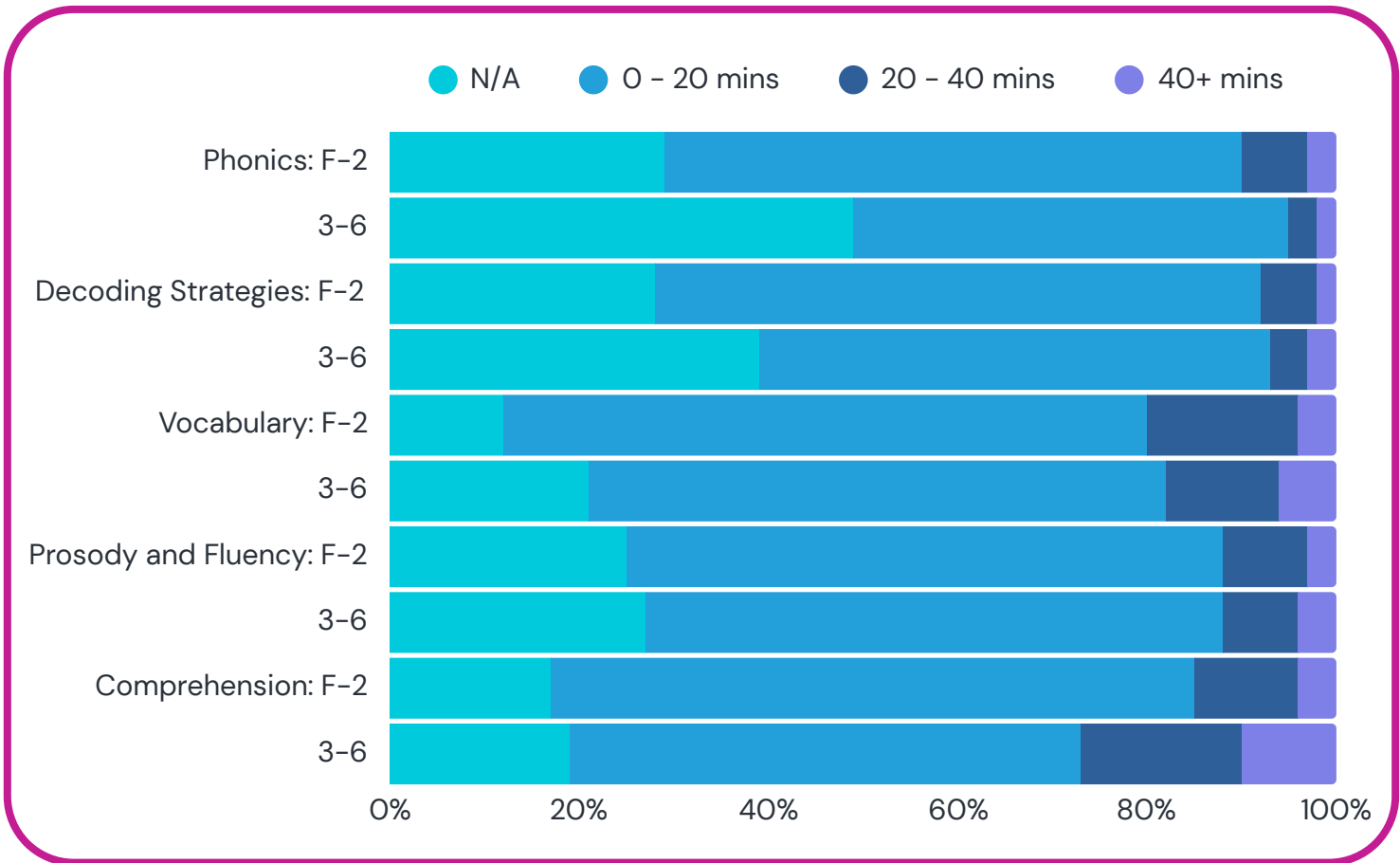
Figure 5: Years 3-6 Teachers' Time Spent within the Literacy Block on Reading Skills Per Day



For most teachers in both F-2 and 3-6, literacy extends beyond the literacy block or English time. This most likely reflects that literacy as a General Capability, whilst predominantly taught through English, is an important aspect in other key learning areas. The variation between phonics and decoding skills in the year level groupings most likely reflects the growing capability of readers who will by Years 3-6 require less time on these elements.

Teachers dedicate considerable time to the unconstrained skills of comprehension and vocabulary, as well as taking the opportunity to further develop fluency. These choices reinforce the importance of meaning making and vocabulary development as an essential component of the knowledge and understanding needed in other learning areas.

Figure 6: F-6 Educators' Time Spent *Beyond* the Literacy Block on Reading Skills Per Day



We note some limitations in how we phrased questions about time spent on reading skills. Our 0-20 minute category may have confused teachers who spend no time on certain skills—should they choose N/A or 0-20? Also, this broad grouping does not distinguish between very brief teaching (2 minutes of comprehension modelling) and more substantial time investment (18 minutes), which represents a meaningful difference in classroom practice that our data does not capture.

Commercial Phonics Programs

The survey explored teachers' use of commercial phonics programs and different types of text in early reading instruction. Sixty-three percent of respondents reported using commercial phonics programs, mentioning over 20 different products. It is important to note that an absence of a commercial phonics program does not mean a teacher or school is not systematically and explicitly teaching phonics: they could be using a freely available program or a school-created program.

63%

of respondents use a commercial phonics program in their school

Reading Comprehension Instruction

Most respondents teach a range of comprehension strategies at least weekly and often more frequently. We could surmise due to the range of strategies explicitly taught that teachers are drawing upon evidence informed practice, where the goal of strategy instruction in comprehension is for students to flexibly apply these strategies as needed to make meaning when reading.

We conducted analysis of F-2 vs. 3-6 responses, but found negligible differences in the range of strategies being taught.

Even though teachers of all year levels modelled the multiple comprehension strategies shown below in Figure 7, Figures 4-6 showed that on average F-2 teachers spend less time per day on teaching comprehension, suggesting the *depth* of teaching these strategies varies between years F-2 and 3-6.

Figure 7: Frequency of Instruction of Comprehension Strategies F-6

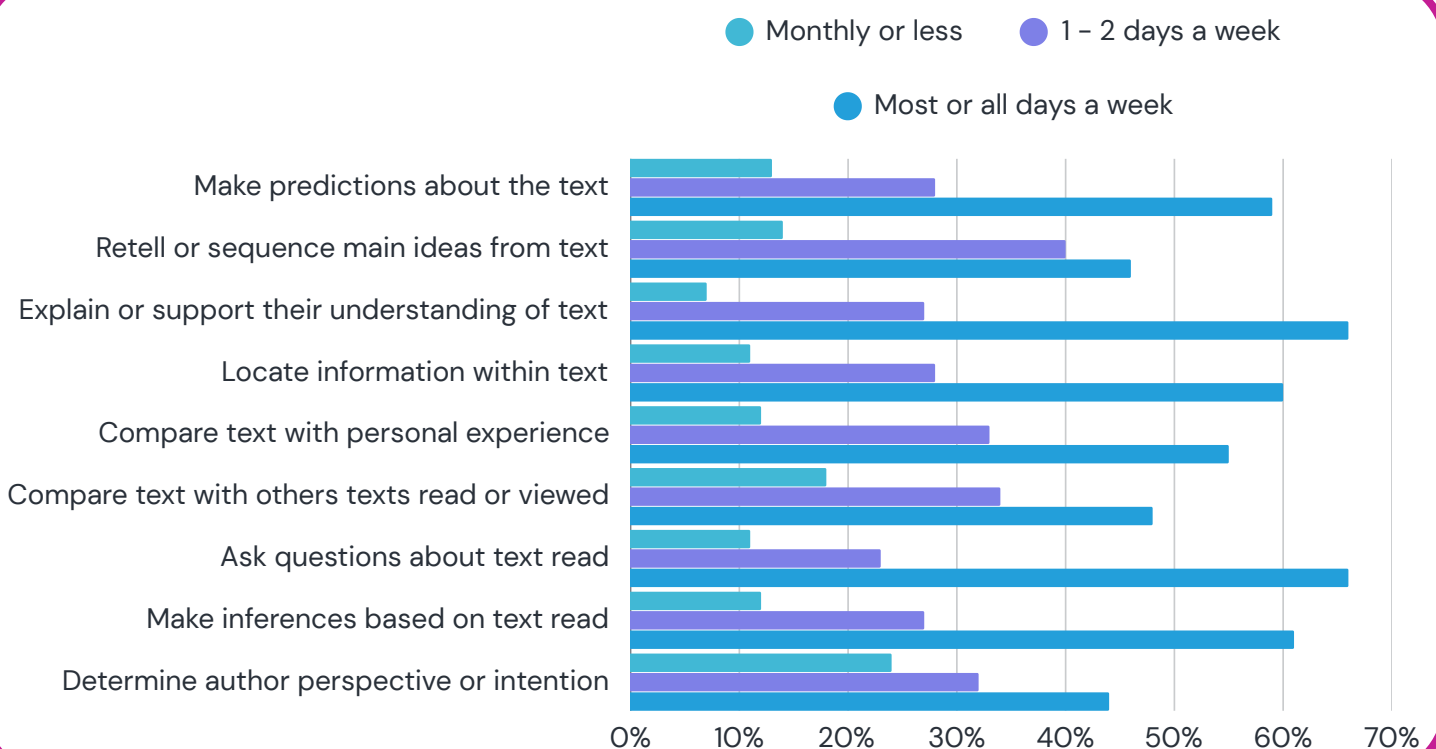
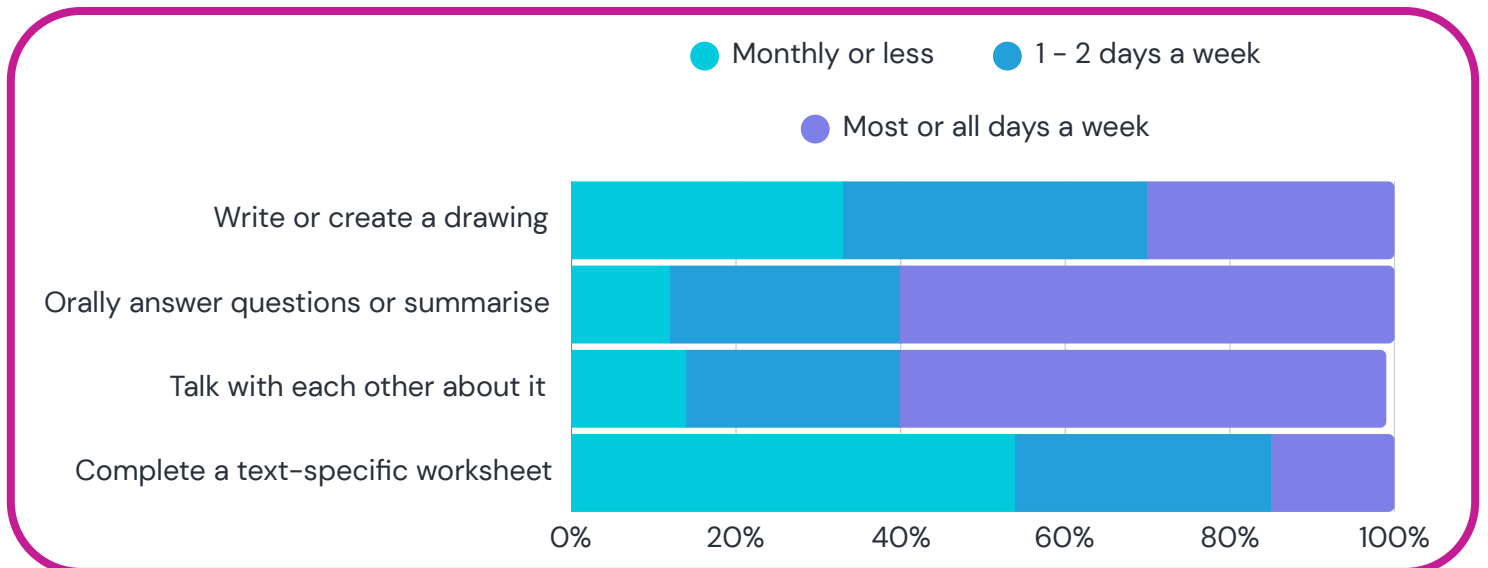


Figure 8: Post-Reading Activities in Response to What Students have Read or Viewed



Our findings highlight the close relationship between the three modes: oral language, reading and writing. Oral language is interactive and reciprocal, involving turn-taking as part of brief or extended conversations. Meaning in oral interactions is negotiated in real time between the speaker and the listener, not just through language choices, but also with the use of intonation, physical gestures and facial expressions.

However, the language choices are critical when it comes to the connections between oral language, reading and writing, encompassing shared linguistic foundations such as vocabulary, grammar and audience awareness. Spoken and written grammar is often quite different, and therefore the reading/writing connection becomes even more critical in relation to grammar. Effective practice leverages this connection—teachers guide students to analyse texts, then apply these insights when creating their own responses. This reading-writing relationship forms a fundamental element of Australian curriculum frameworks.

Teachers predominantly favoured authentic comprehension tasks over traditional worksheets, indicating a preference for meaningful application of comprehension skills beyond more decontextualised practice or assessment activities.

Key Conclusions and Observations

- Nearly all teachers explicitly teach and model the essential components of reading development: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary.
- Literacy block structures vary but the dedicated time for teaching literacy within English and across learning areas is strongly evident. While the literacy block structures were evident, some individual responses suggest that a review of timetabling structures in schools may be required to ensure dedicated literacy time daily, especially in the upper years where time demands were described as a challenge.

- In the early years 98% of teachers address all five elements of reading, with more time spent on the constrained skills of phonics and phonemic awareness in F-2 than 3-6. This represents that once these skills are mastered more time is allocated to the other elements of reading.
- In Years 3-6 the unconstrained skills of reading, vocabulary and comprehension receive a stronger focus through time allocation. Vocabulary instruction represents the growing complexity required for reading and is inclusive of elements of spelling such as orthography, morphology and etymology. This shift is reflected in the curriculum and supports teachers' awareness of the importance of this knowledge. It also reflects the importance of vocabulary which plays a vital role in comprehension.
- The inclusion of fluency teaching in both the F-2 and 3-6 data, indicates teachers' recognition of the evidence base which describes fluency as the bridge between decoding and comprehension (Rasinski, 2014) and therefore an essential element in building confident and capable readers.
- Commercial phonics programs feature in many classrooms.



04

Instructional Practices and Approaches to Teaching Reading

For this section of this report, we have analysed only the answers of those respondents who identified as a classroom teacher or school leader, as questions about whole class vs. small groups became redundant with respondents in job roles who only ever work with small groups of students, e.g., in an intervention approach.

Background

Research consistently identifies explicit, teacher-led instruction as essential for effective reading development (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Rosenshine, 2012). This instructional approach encompasses clear explanations, precise definitions, teacher modelling, purposeful dialogue, systematic skill progression, guided practice with feedback, and opportunities for independent application. These elements create the instructional scaffolding that most children require to develop strong foundational reading skills (Foorman et al., 2016; Castles et al., 2018).

Teachers implement reading instruction across various classroom configurations—whole-class, small-group, and individual settings. Research indicates that each approach offers distinct advantages depending on instructional goals, student needs, and implementation quality (Shanahan, 2024). While some studies suggest benefits of small-group instruction for certain reading skills (Slavin, 2014), effective teachers typically employ a strategic combination of approaches (Duke et al., 2021).

Implementing these instructional configurations presents substantial challenges. When working with one group, teachers must ensure other students remain productively engaged in meaningful learning. This requires thoughtful planning, classroom management expertise, and appropriate resources.

The benefits of small group work are typically evident – the learning is tailored, focused, and allows for more responsiveness and monitoring by the teacher. However, this leaves the remainder of the class learning on their own. Shanahan recommends minimising – but not totally excluding – small group work (2024).

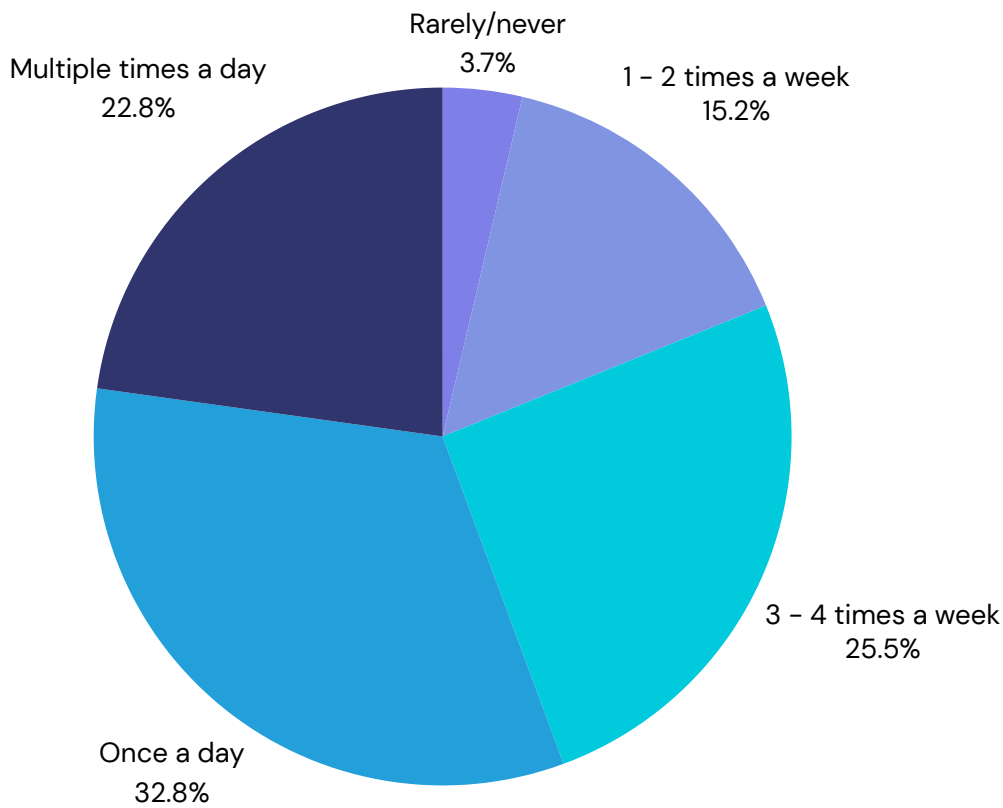
Teachers in our survey reported making instructional decisions by considering both their specific learning objectives and the diverse needs of their students, reflecting the complex decision-making involved in effective reading instruction (Tomlinson, 2017).



Survey Results

The survey data reveal widespread use of teacher-led reading instruction across primary education. As illustrated in Figure 9, 56% of teachers across all year levels implement teacher-led reading instruction daily, with this figure rising to 82% when including those who use it at least 3-4 days weekly.

Figure 9: Frequency of Teacher-Led Reading Instruction



When examining the responses of Foundation teachers in particular, noting that Foundation is a critical period for establishing reading skills and practices, the pattern remains largely similar (although those those using it multiple times per day increases to 30%). However, it is notable that 16% of Foundation teachers report using teacher-led reading instruction only twice weekly or less (compared to 18% across all year levels). This finding raises important questions about instructional consistency during this formative stage of reading development.

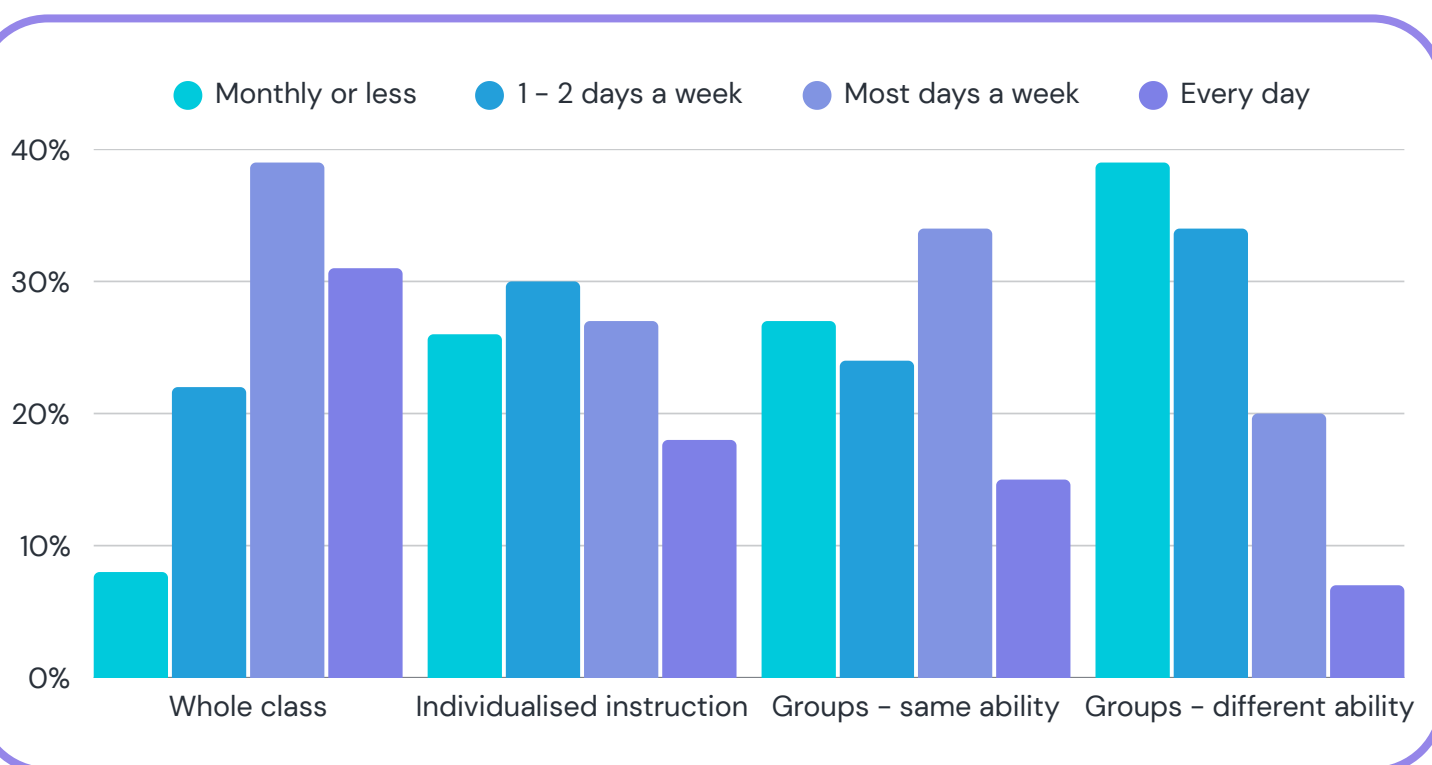
84%

Foundation teachers use teacher-led reading instruction most or every day

Instructional Groupings

Our data revealed clear patterns in how teachers organise reading instruction. As illustrated in Figure 10, most teachers across F-6 employ whole-class instruction as their primary approach to reading instruction. Groups of same-ability students represent the second most frequently used configuration, while mixed-ability groupings are utilised least often.

Figure 10: Frequency of Instructional Grouping Approaches



Year-level comparisons revealed significant differences in grouping practices. Foundation teachers are most likely to provide individualised instruction regularly (77% do so at least once weekly). Lower year levels tend to organise students into same-ability groups (75% of F-2 teachers use this approach at least weekly, compared to 66% of Years 3-6 teachers). Conversely, upper primary teachers more frequently implement mixed-ability groupings (61% of Years 3-6 teachers do so at least weekly, compared to 53% of F-2 teachers). Notably, 11% of teachers across F-6 rarely or never use small groups of any kind, with 7% relying almost exclusively on whole-class instruction.

Beyond these basic organisational structures, primary teachers employ a diverse range of pedagogical strategies in their reading instruction, both teacher-led and student-centred approaches.

For clarity around the terminology used in the below figure, please see [this online glossary](#) provided by PETAA to our respondents.

Figure 11: Frequency of Use of Instructional Strategies

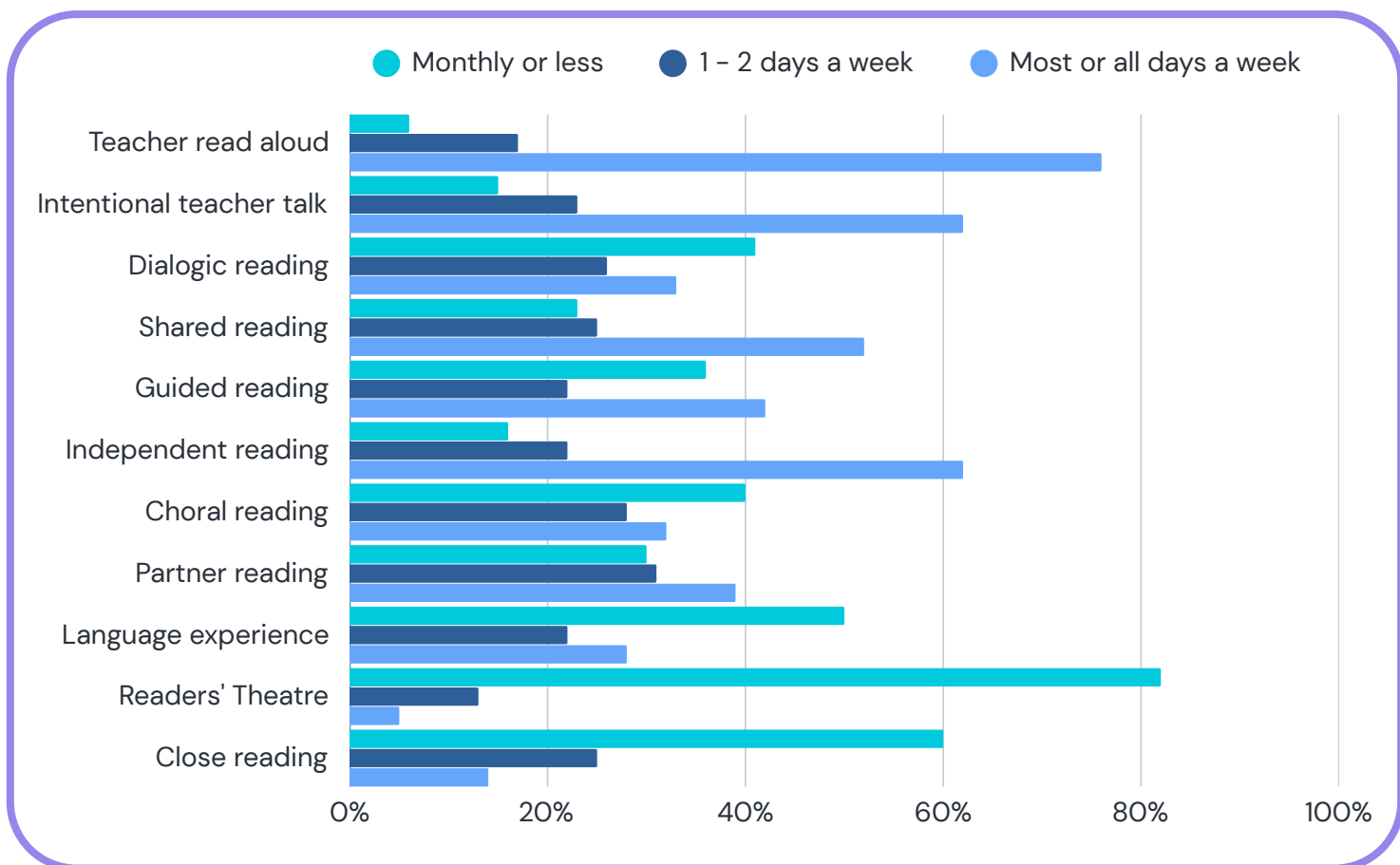


Figure 11 demonstrates that read-alouds represent the most prevalent teaching strategy (76% of respondents use this approach daily or most days), followed by intentional teacher talk, independent reading, and shared reading. Readers' Theatre, close reading, and language experience activities appear least frequently in teachers' repertoires. Some systems discourage the use of Language Experience, due to questions of rigour and this may be why it has scored lower than others. Readers' Theatre requires a significant teacher time investment and use of authentic texts. It is a recommended strategy for fluency instruction/practice. Close reading supports a cognitive approach to teaching reading, but it is still a newer practice for many; it is teacher-led, and therefore higher on teacher responsibility and explicit teaching. The use of this approach may be likely to increase in the future as more jurisdictions focus on explicit teaching.

84%
provide opportunities for independent reading at least once a week

When asked how they adapt their reading instruction throughout the school year, teachers identified several common practices:

- Using formative and summative assessment data to guide adjustments
- Responding to student engagement and motivation levels
- Modifying student groupings, including fluency partnerships
- Progressively increasing text complexity
- Adjusting instructional time allocated to specific reading components
- Gradually increasing opportunities for independent reading, following the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (I do → We do → You do)
- Differentiating for individual student goals and needs



As one respondent explained:

"A good teacher will adapt to the needs of the students! I will change what I need to support their growth. I am open to trying new techniques—but it always needs to be responsive to the students and based on individualised data and engagement ."

Key Conclusions and Observations

- Most teachers utilise varied instructional groupings, demonstrating awareness of research-informed reading instruction practices.
- Teacher-led instruction remains fundamental to reading instruction across Australian classrooms, but there may be a need to increase awareness of the importance of this with a minority of teachers using it only a couple of times or less per a week.
- Teachers demonstrate responsiveness by adapting their instructional approaches throughout the year based primarily on student needs and progress.
- A small percentage (7%) of teachers rely almost exclusively on whole-class instruction, potentially limiting differentiation opportunities. Both NSW and VIC Departments of Education have steered away from the use of reading groups in the last 12 months, which could be reflective of this particular finding. This may also be reflective of the recommendations by those such as Shanahan who encourage maximising teacher-led whole class instruction wherever possible. We speculate there remains potential contention around the purposes and use of grouping and believe this would benefit from further research.

05

Materials and Texts for Teaching Reading

Background

Early reading instruction typically employs three types of text: decodable (specifically designed for practising phonics skills), predictable (featuring repetitive patterns), and authentic (regular children's literature). Decodable texts serve a valuable purpose in early reading development (Castles et al., 2018; Shanahan, 2024), though research indicates the importance of transitioning to authentic texts at appropriate times (Castles et al., 2018) and including exposure to diverse literature throughout to support motivation and self-teaching (Duke et al., 2021).

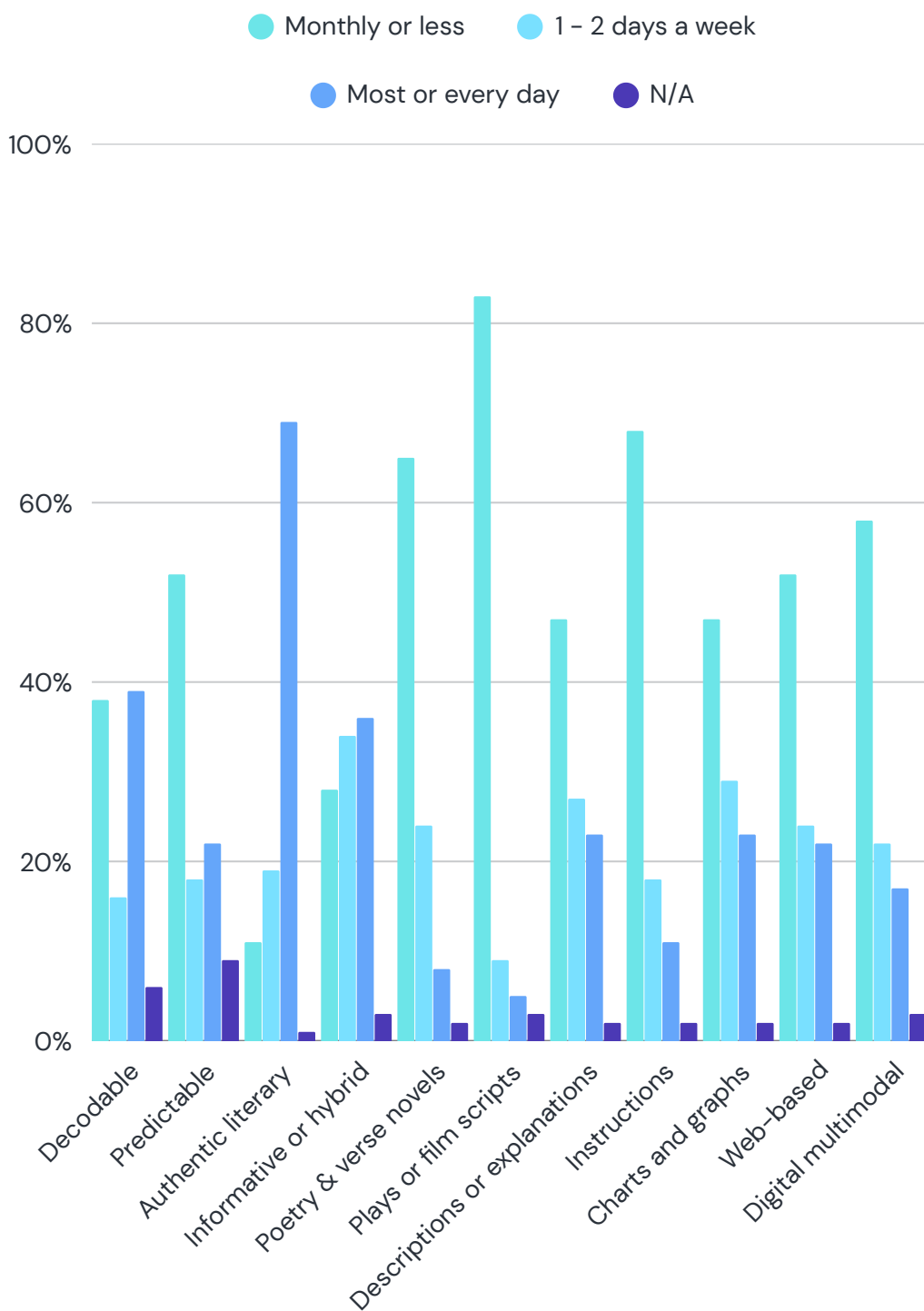
While the use of predictable texts for beginning readers is questionable, once students can decode, predictable texts may provide grade level appropriate reading content for comprehension instruction, fluency development (Shanahan, 2019) vocabulary development and content knowledge. However, Shanahan cautions this should only take place once or twice a week, as overuse of predictable texts can discourage students from actually looking closely at the words (2019).



Survey Results

Our survey investigated how frequently teachers and students used different types of text. While teacher and student usage patterns generally aligned, some differences emerged regarding predictable texts.

Figure 12: Types of Text Used by F-6 Educators in Teacher-led Instruction or Modelling



69%

use authentic literary texts every day or most days

65%

use poetry or verse novels once a month or less

69%

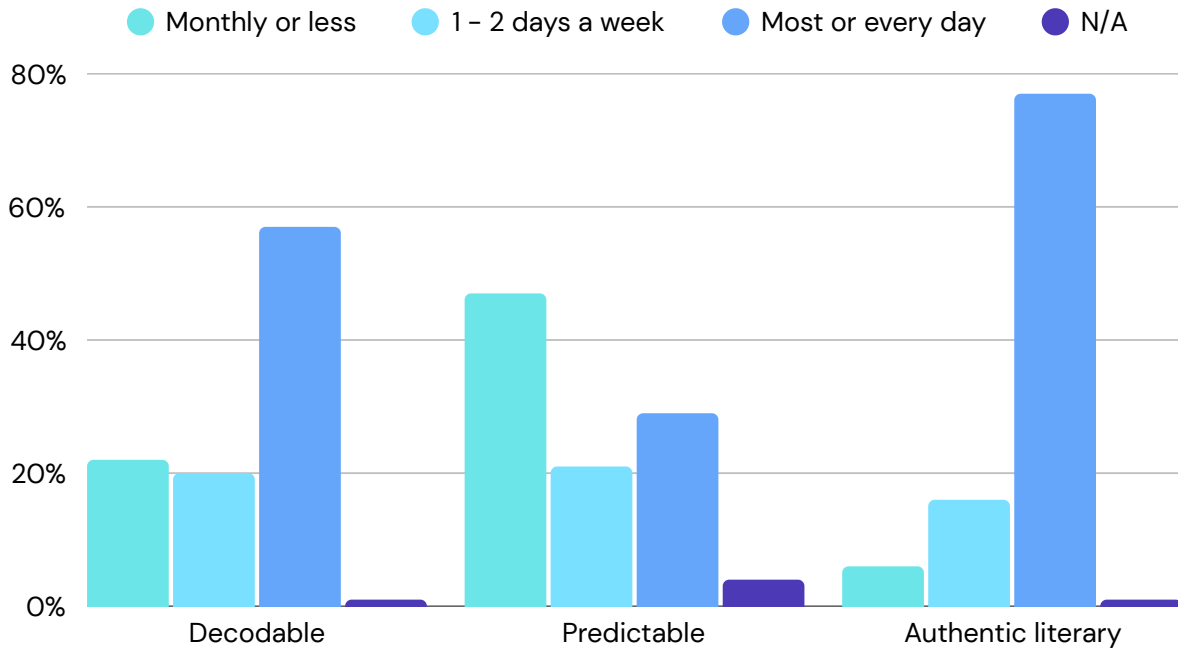
use informative or hybrid texts at least once a week

58%

use digital multimodal texts once a month or less

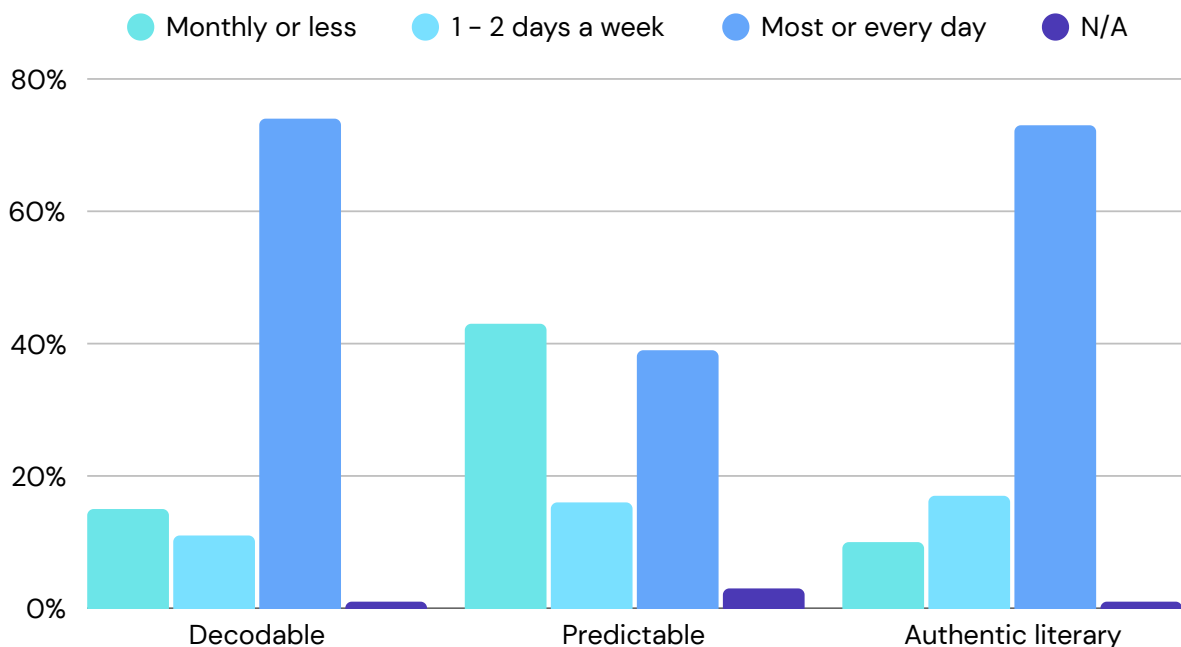
With the focus in the early years on teaching students to learn the alphabetic principle we wanted to explore more specifically the types of texts used by educators and students in F-2 classrooms and wider school settings.

Figure 13: Types of Text Used by F-2 Educators in Teacher-led Instruction or Modelling



Konza (2014) discusses predictable text: "It is very clear that children should be using their newly developing phonic skills in the context of motivating texts as soon as possible, but not those that incorporate such repetitive patterns that reading is not required". There can be a role for predictable text (Shanahan, 2019), but after decoding is established. They may also be used for students who are struggling readers, to supplement their learning.

Figure 14: Types of Text Used by Students in F-2 Classrooms

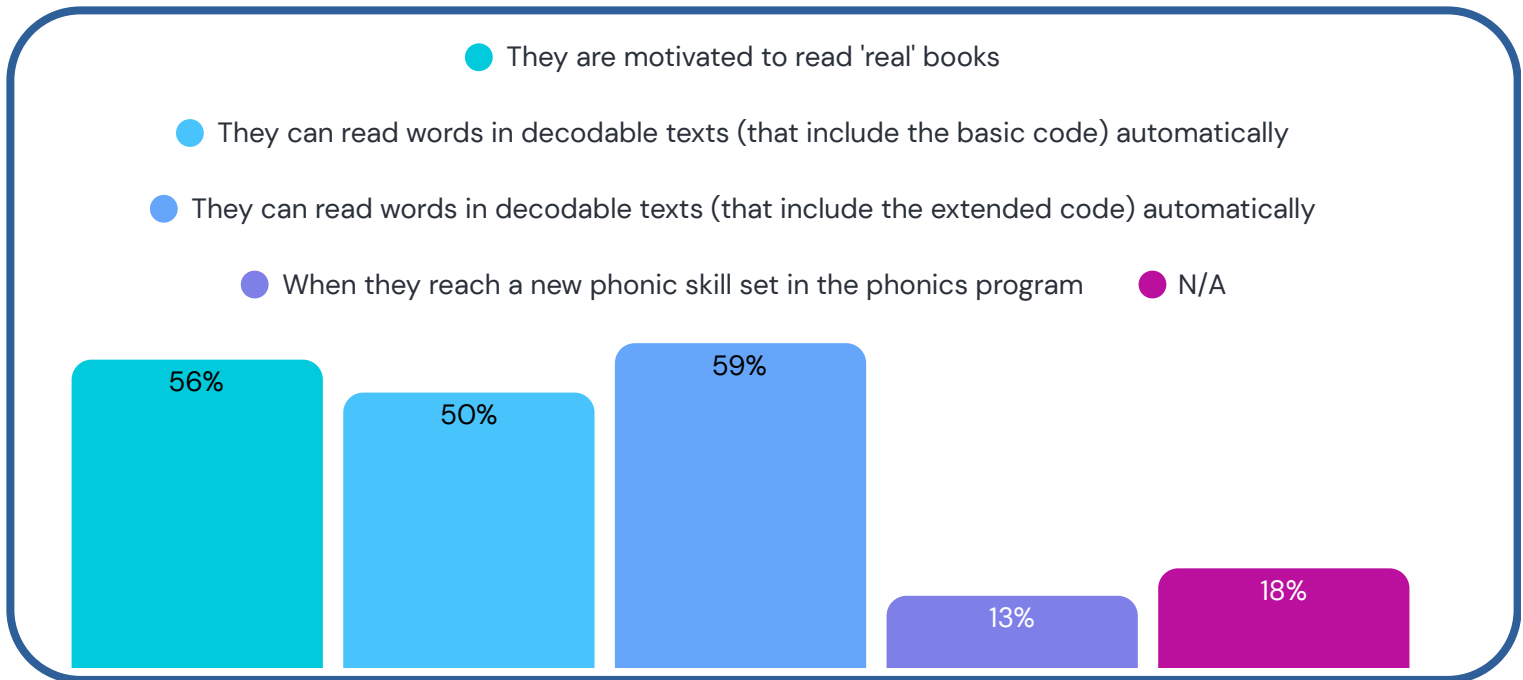


Considering when to transition students from decodable to authentic texts, teachers reported similar rates of transitioning students upon mastery of the basic code versus waiting for extended code mastery. This variation suggests a need for clearer evidence-based guidelines while preserving teachers' professional judgement based on individual student needs.

For example, Victoria's Department of Education and Training's new Phonics Plus recommends "Building fluency and making meaning is a lesson stage. It uses decodable texts in Foundation and Level 1 and authentic texts in Level 2. *Teachers may determine that some students are ready to use authentic texts earlier than Level 2 based on individual progress on the scope and sequence*".

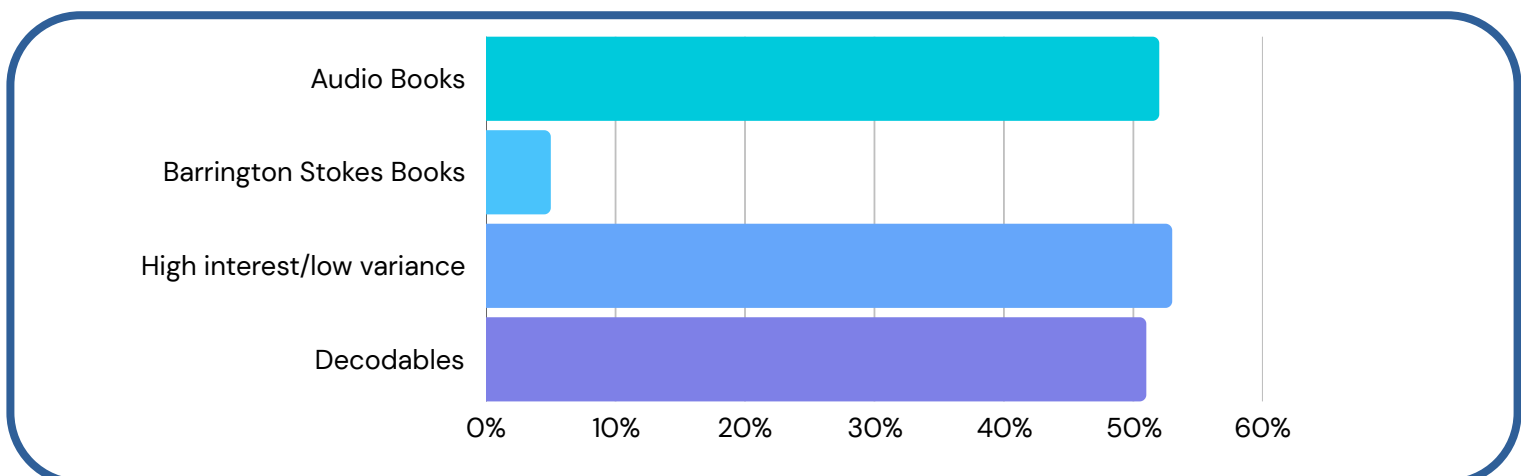
It is worth noting that this question allowed teachers to select more than one answer. Half of those who selected N/A were classroom teachers of older year levels (3-6 and Secondary).

Figure 15: When Teachers Transition Students from Decodables to Authentic Texts



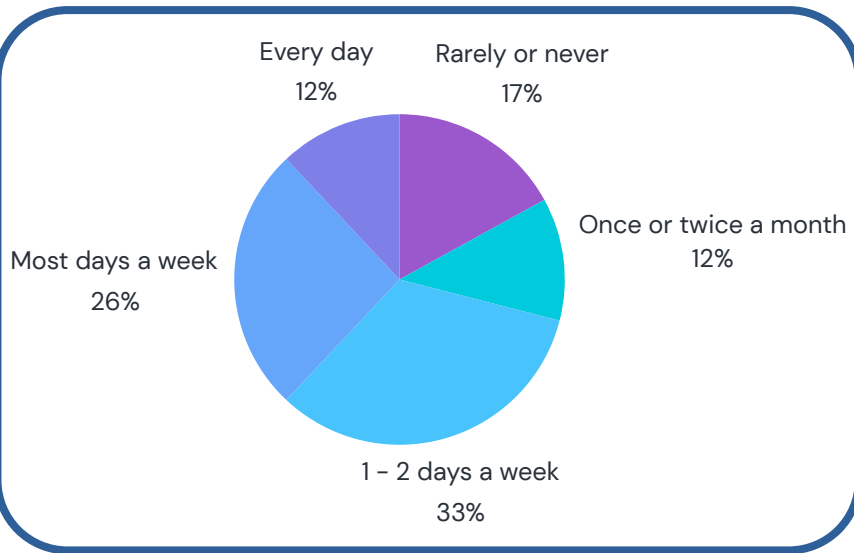
Educators were also asked about the use of alternative types of text for older, struggling readers.

Figure 16: Use of Alternative Types of Text with Older, Struggling Readers



Next, our survey examined how frequently students are given opportunities to select their own reading materials, a practice research associates with enhanced reading motivation and engagement (Cremin, 2024). The results remained reasonably consistent across year levels, with negligible difference from F-2 and 3-6.

Figure 17: Student Text Selection Frequency

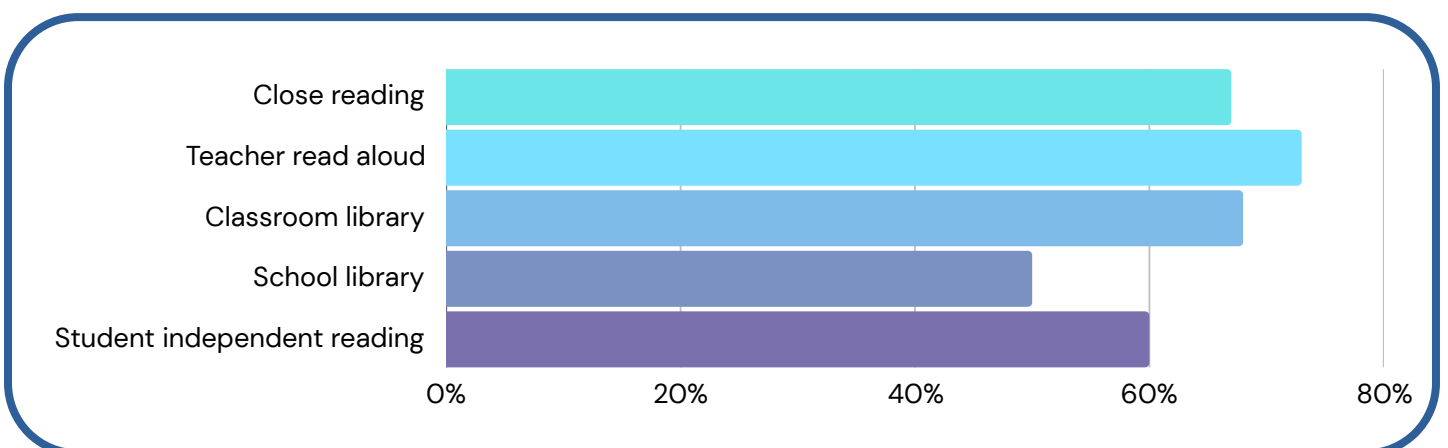


As Figure 17 shows, most educators (71%) offer students autonomy in selecting reading materials more than once a week. 29% provide minimal student choice opportunities, with the majority of these respondents identifying as classroom teachers, across all year levels.

The Use of Diverse Texts

Our survey also examined teachers' use of diverse texts—those featuring varied authors, illustrators, and characters of different genders, races, cultures and abilities.

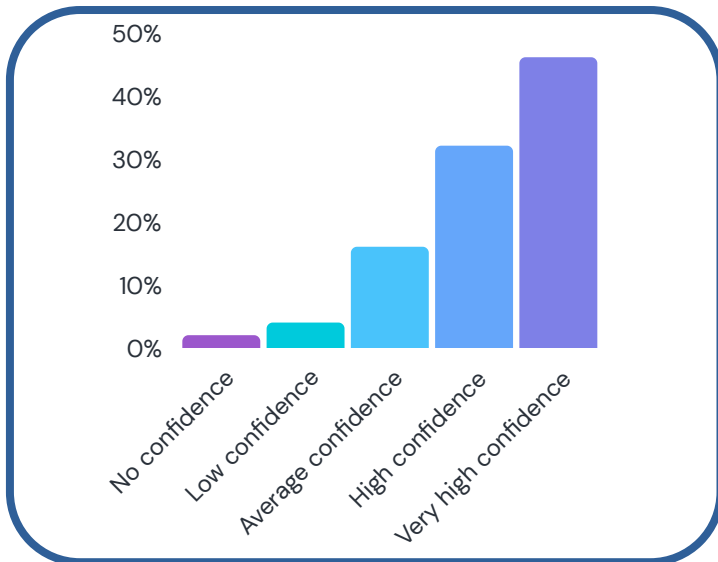
Figure 18: Teacher Intentional Use or Recommendation of Diverse Authored Texts



As shown in Figure 18, while most teachers reported strategies for incorporating such texts through a range of approaches, 10% indicated they either don't consider or don't include diverse books in their teaching. It is worth noting that Librarians formed only a small cohort of our respondents (Fig. 1) so we cannot be sure the analysis of school libraries' diverse book collections as reflected in Figure 18 are accurate.

Regarding confidence levels in using diverse texts, most respondents expressed strong or very strong confidence. Among teachers reporting low confidence (rating themselves 1 or 2 on the scale), 50% indicated they don't incorporate diverse books into their teaching—suggesting a direct relationship between confidence levels and instructional practice.

Figure 19: Teacher Confidence in Using Diverse Books



When asked what would enhance their confidence in this area, teachers most frequently mentioned:

- Lesson plans and instructional resources for teaching with diverse texts
- Recommended text lists
- Collegial discussions
- Targeted professional learning opportunities

Key Conclusions and Observations

- Most teachers employ a range of types of texts, including various formats and genres.
- Our data clearly indicates that most teachers use decodable texts as the primary resource for early readers. However, the data regarding predictable text usage requires careful interpretation. We cannot determine whether some teachers may be overreliant on predictable texts because our survey did not explore their decision-making rationale. This usage might reflect appropriate professional judgement—for example, transitioning students with strong grapheme-phoneme correspondence (GPC) knowledge beyond decodables—or could represent strategic alignment where schools map grapheme frequency across text types to provide additional decoding practice. Without this contextual information, definitive conclusions about text selection appropriateness remain limited.
- Most teachers offer students autonomy in selecting their own reading materials more than once a week.
- Students in classrooms where diverse texts are not utilised (10%) may miss critical opportunities to see themselves represented in literature and develop understanding of diverse perspectives.
- Additional professional development focused on using diverse texts could benefit the significant minority of teachers lacking confidence in this area, to support them in meeting diverse text curriculum requirements.

Differentiation

Background

Australian classrooms have never been more diverse in terms of learning abilities, language backgrounds, and cultural contexts. This diversity creates rich learning opportunities whilst presenting significant instructional challenges for teachers (Tomlinson, 2017; Graham et al., 2020). Research indicates that effective differentiation is essential for addressing diverse student needs but requires substantial teacher expertise and resources (Deunk et al., 2018; Puzio et al., 2020). The Australian Council of TESOL Associations notes that "601,046 EAL/D learners in schools compris[e] some 15.4 per cent of the total student population." Furthermore, studies highlight the importance of culturally responsive literacy instruction that builds upon students' diverse backgrounds and experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017; Adam & Barrett-Pugh, 2021).

Survey Results

The diversity of contemporary Australian classrooms creates challenges across planning, resources, and instructional delivery. When asked about their greatest challenges in differentiating reading instruction, teachers identified several consistent themes:

1. **Range of abilities:** Managing the wide spectrum of reading proficiencies within a single classroom—from significantly below year level to well above
2. **Time constraints:** Insufficient time for planning, resource preparation, and providing individualised attention
3. **Resource limitations:** Inadequate quality materials to support diverse reading levels and needs
4. **Engagement challenges:** Maintaining active participation when reading levels and interests vary substantially
5. **Behaviour management:** Ensuring all students remain focused and on-task during differentiated activities
6. **Staffing limitations:** Insufficient support from learning assistance staff for small-group and individual instruction

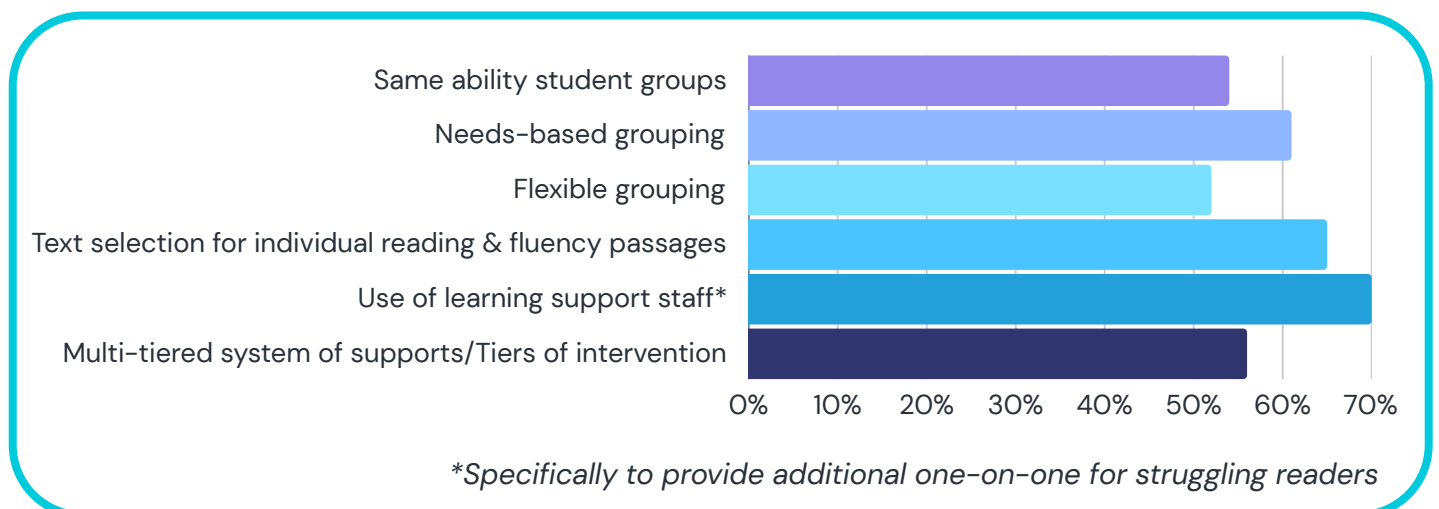
- 7. **Parental engagement:** Varying levels of home support for reading development
- 8. **Assessment challenges:** Managing time-consuming assessments and effectively using resulting data
- 9. **Professional learning gaps:** Limited access to quality professional development on evidence-based reading practices



Our survey explored specific strategies teachers employ to differentiate for students with diverse learning needs. Respondents could select multiple approaches from provided options. As Figure 20 illustrates, utilising learning support staff for additional one-to-one instruction emerged as the most frequently employed strategy, followed by individualised text selection and needs-based grouping.

Most respondents implement **at least two different** differentiation strategies—only 6% selected a single approach for supporting diverse learners.

Figure 20: Educator Use of Differentiation Strategies



Regarding EAL/D student support specifically, analysis of open-ended responses revealed ten key strategies:

- **Scaffolded instruction:** Providing structured support, repeated reading opportunities, and breaking tasks into manageable components
- **Background knowledge development:** Discussing context, building field knowledge, and connecting texts to students' experiences
- **Oral language emphasis:** Prioritising oral language rehearsal, discussions, and modelling
- **Explicit vocabulary instruction:** Pre-teaching key vocabulary, employing tools like the Frayer model, and emphasising vocabulary development
- **Peer collaboration:** Pairing EAL/D students with proficient English speakers for modelling and support
- **Specialist collaboration:** Working with EAL/D teachers to implement appropriate strategies and programmes
- **Visual supports:** Incorporating supportive images, visual prompts, and picture cues to enhance comprehension
- **Small-group/individual support:** Providing targeted instruction through small-group interventions and one-to-one teaching
- **Strategic text selection:** Choosing accessible texts appropriate to students' language proficiency, including decodable texts and culturally relevant materials
- **Technology integration:** Utilising translation tools, and other technologies to support language learning

Key Conclusions and Observations

- The heavy reliance on learning support staff (70%) suggests a potential for inequities between well-resourced and under-resourced schools. It also reflects the lack of time available to classroom teachers and school leaders to provide this one-to-one support themselves.
- Most teachers employ multiple differentiation strategies, demonstrating awareness of diverse learning needs.
- Respondents use a variety of strategies to support EAL/D students, encompassing strengthening their own professional knowledge, with use of diverse texts and an understanding of the critical role of oral language with EAL/D students learning to read English.

Professional Skills and Knowledge in the Teaching of Reading

Background

Teaching is inherently responsive and developmental. Teachers make multiple decisions in their daily practice which require contextualised judgement and carry instructional impact. Teachers continuously develop their practice throughout their careers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Teaching quality represents an ongoing professional journey requiring intellectual engagement and commitment (Gore & Rosser, 2020). Effective teaching builds knowledge cumulatively through personal learning and collaborative professional engagement (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

Teacher expertise in reading instruction develops through initial teacher education, ongoing professional learning, and classroom experience (International Literacy Association, 2018; Snow et al., 2005). Research indicates that effective professional learning for literacy teaching is sustained, collaborative, and connected to classroom practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2016). As noted by AERO in their 2024 report on Peer Mentoring, "Professional learning is a key driver for improving the use of evidence-based practices in education. However, participating in high-quality external professional learning requires a significant investment of time and resources, which can be challenging for under-resourced or minimally staffed educational settings." (p. 9).

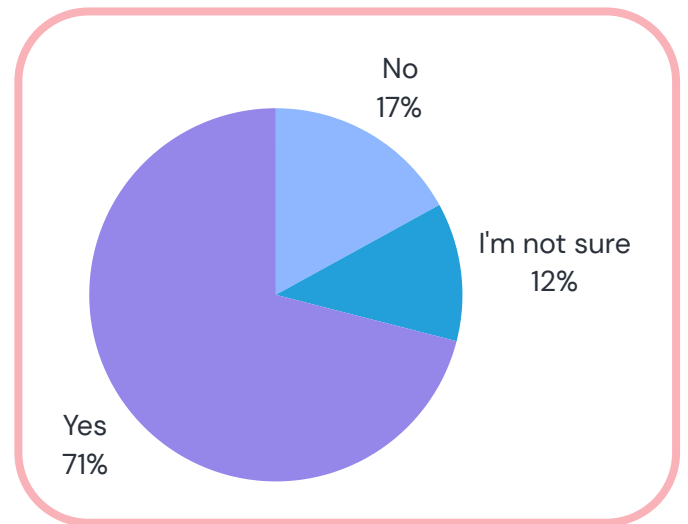
Survey Results

Our first question in this section explored whether teachers drew on reading models to inform their instructional practice. Examples provided included the Simple View of Reading, Scarborough's Reading Rope, and The Active View. While 71% responded affirmatively, many respondents in the follow-up question identified programs or instructional approaches rather than theoretical models (e.g., Science of Reading, Balanced Literacy, Fountas & Pinnell). See research which supports this finding such as Polesel et al., 2014, p. 643; Freebody 2000.

Among the 350 respondents who answered "Yes" to the question "Are there any key models of the teaching of reading that you base your teaching of reading on?" and went on to provide further detail, the most frequently mentioned frameworks were:

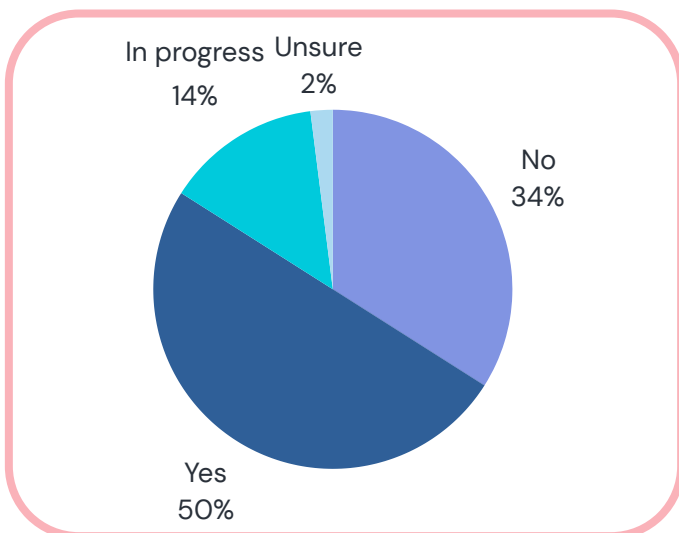
- Scarborough's Rope — 178 mentions
- Simple View of Reading — 89 mentions
- Science of Reading — 44 mentions
- Active Model — 31 mentions
- Big 6 — 22 mentions
- Balanced approach — 10 mentions
- Whole language — 1 mention
- 15–20 responses indicating "a variety/combination"

Figure 21: Use of a Reading Model to Inform Instruction



We then investigated whether respondents' schools had established whole-school approaches to reading instruction (Figure 22). Among 478 responses, 50% indicated their school had such an approach—of these 41% described school-created frameworks and 9% identified commercial programmes or products.

Figure 22: Whole School Approaches to Reading Instruction

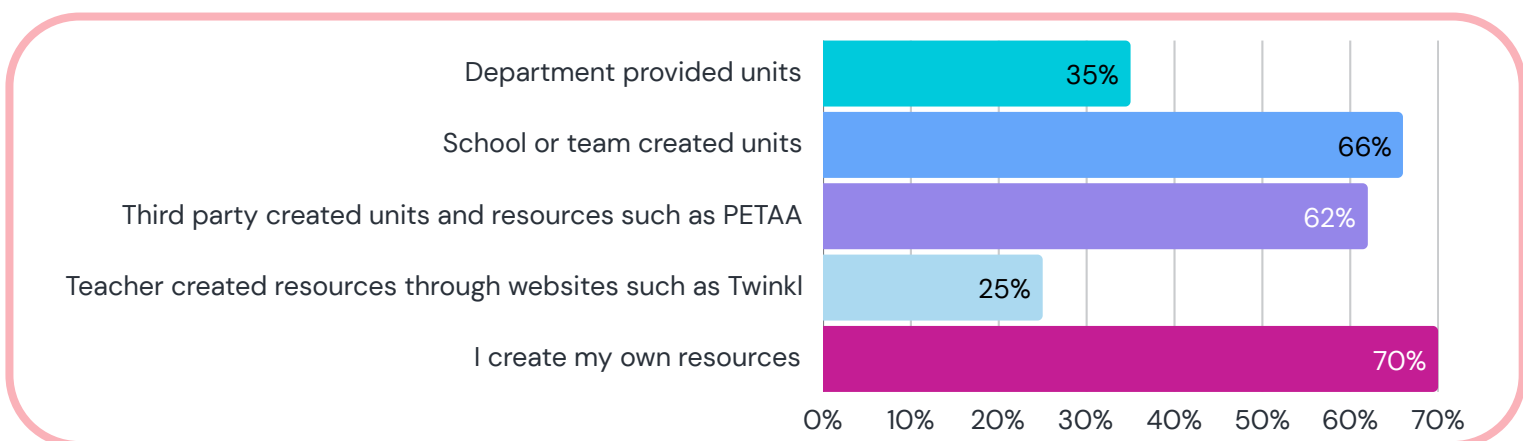


71%
use a reading model to inform their teaching of reading

34%
do not have a whole school approach to teaching reading

Next, we examined the materials and resources teachers use in their reading instruction, with respondents selecting all applicable options.

Figure 23: Instructional Materials Used by Teachers



Among the three most frequent responses, two involved teacher-created materials (either individually or collaboratively), contextualised for their specific students. The third most common response was materials from independent organisations like PETAA. Department-provided units (35%) and commercially-produced resources (25%) were used less frequently.

Our survey also explored teachers' professional development practices and their sources of instructional guidance. The data shows that online blogs, newsletters, and journals represent teachers' most frequently accessed resources on a weekly basis, closely followed by social media. Department or system-wide professional learning events were least commonly reported.

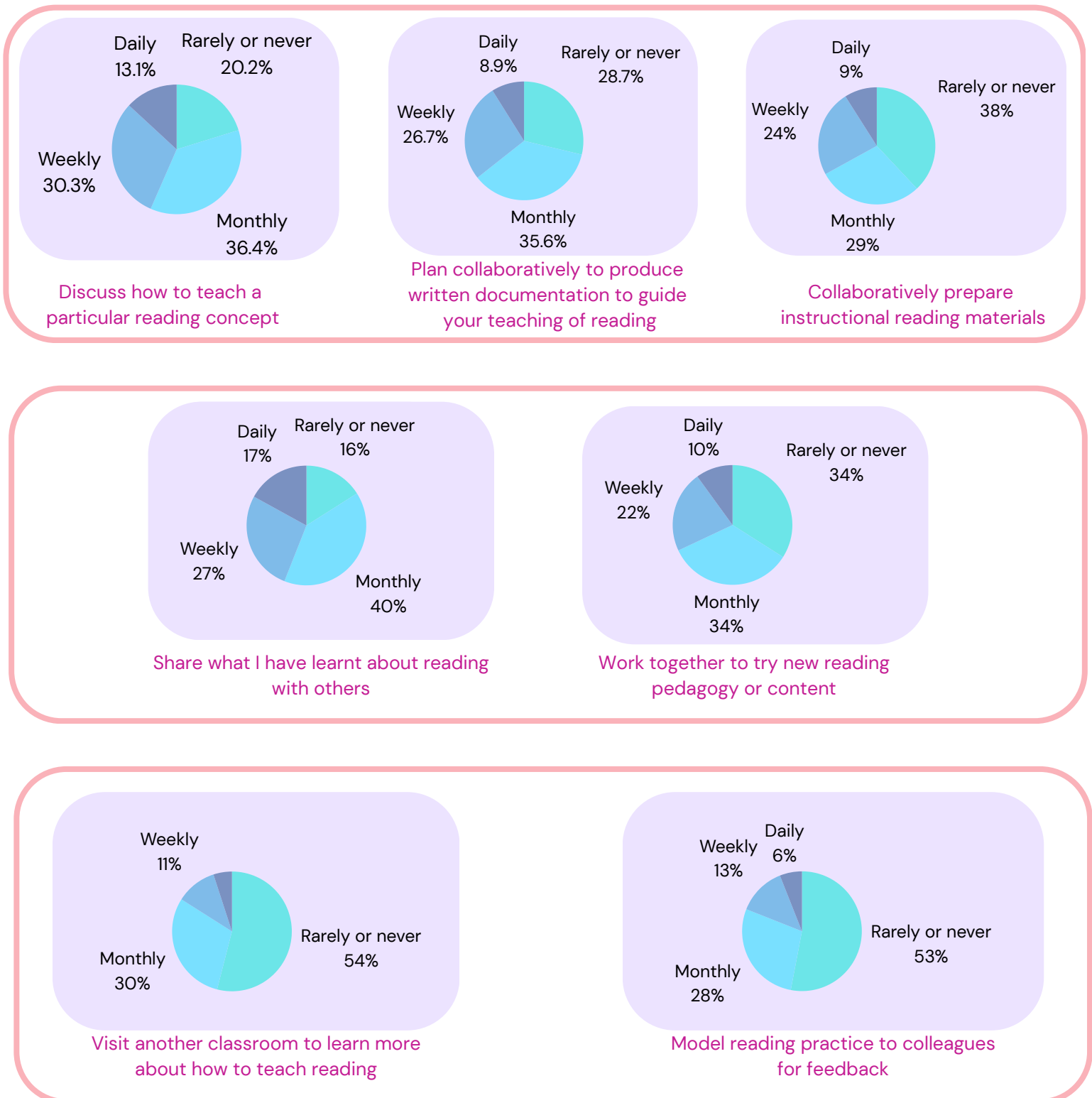
Table 1: Frequency of Teacher Professional Development Practices

	Monthly or less	Weekly or more
Attend school-based professional development on reading	93%	7%
Participate in external professional development on reading	92%	8%
Participate in department/system-provided professional development	96%	4%
Refer to state/territory curriculum documents	42%	58%
Refer to published teacher textbooks	68%	32%
Refer to reading scheme/program documentation	68%	32%
Refer to reliable online blogs/newsletters/journals	60%	40%
Consult social media groups for advice	63%	37%

We also investigated teachers' collaborative practices regarding reading instruction. The most common weekly collaborative activities included: discussing how to teach specific reading concepts (44%); collaboratively planning and documenting reading instruction (45%); and sharing reading instruction knowledge with colleagues (44%).

Conversely, the least common practices (reported as rarely or never occurring) were: visiting colleagues' classrooms (54%) and modelling reading practices for feedback (53%).

Figure 24: Frequency of Collaborative Practices



Teacher confidence represents a critical component of effective instruction. Our survey revealed that over 75% of respondents felt confident or very confident in both their pedagogical approaches and content knowledge related to reading instruction (e.g. phonemic awareness, morphological knowledge, comprehension strategies and skills, etc.).

There was some correlation between teacher experience and confidence, e.g. a teacher with only 0–2 years' experience was only 50% likely to be confident or very confident, as opposed to 75% likely.

Figure 25: Teacher Confidence in their Instructional Teaching Practices

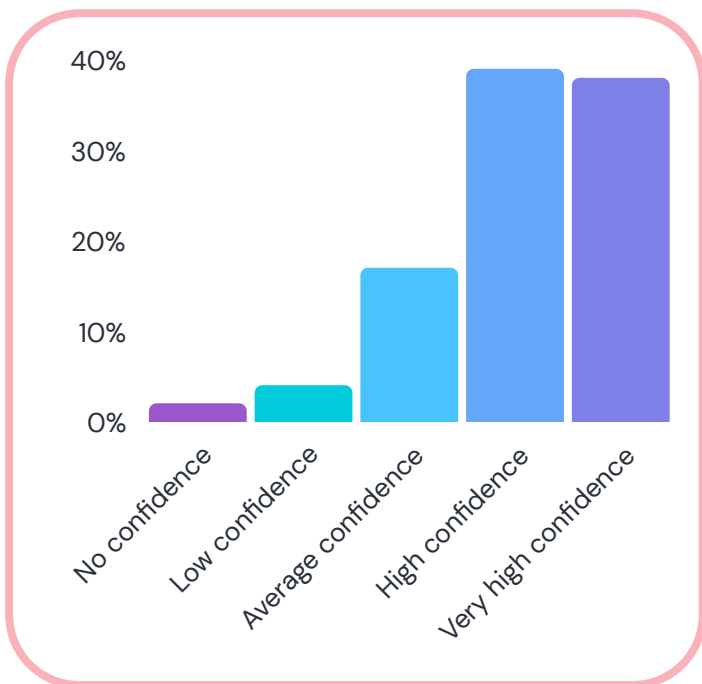
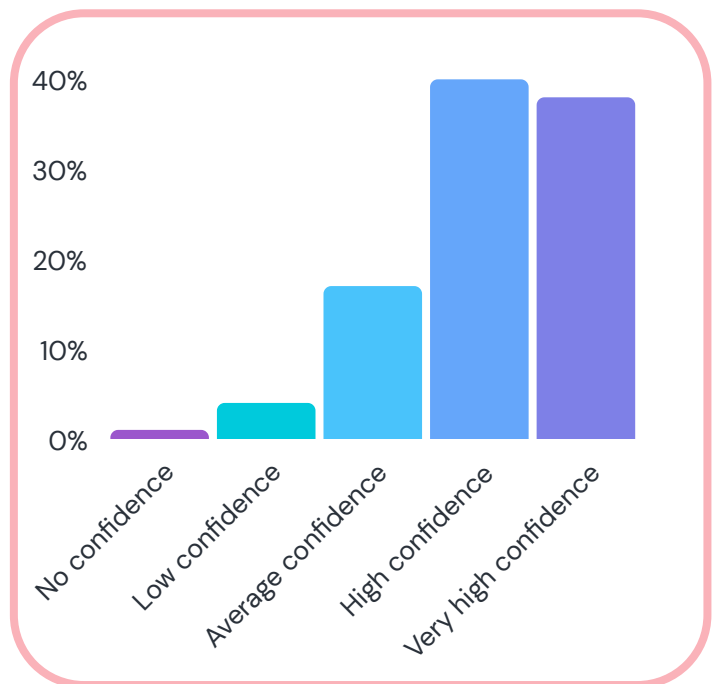


Figure 26: Teacher Confidence in their Knowledge of the Teaching of Reading



Our final question asked what would enhance teachers' confidence in reading instruction. The most common responses included:

- Additional professional development
- Access to model lessons and exemplar teaching
- Mentoring opportunities
- Increased planning and preparation time
- Enhanced collegial collaboration

Key Conclusions and Observations

- The limited use of department/system created instructional materials (35%) raises questions about the perceived, or actual, value of system-created resources. The predominance of teacher-created materials demonstrates confidence in professional knowledge and expertise, although it bears noting once again at this point that 64% of respondents were over the age of 50 with substantial teaching experience.
- Teachers' substantial reliance on online professional resources and social media underscores the importance of these channels for communicating evidence-based practices. However, given the surface-level nature of many online resources, a teacher would require a level of professional knowledge to critically examine and evaluate these.
- Only 13 of 500 respondents (2.6%) reported daily collegial discussions about reading instruction, with 67 (13.4%) engaging in such discussions most days weekly. Despite research supporting professional learning communities, most respondents—even those with substantial experience and expertise—reported limited regular engagement in collaborative professional learning.
- Responses regarding reading models suggest that while most teachers are familiar with evidence-based frameworks, some confusion exists between theoretical models and instructional programs or approaches.



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.

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