Reading fluency: what it is, why it matters and how to improve it

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What is reading fluency

Why does it matter

How can it be developed?

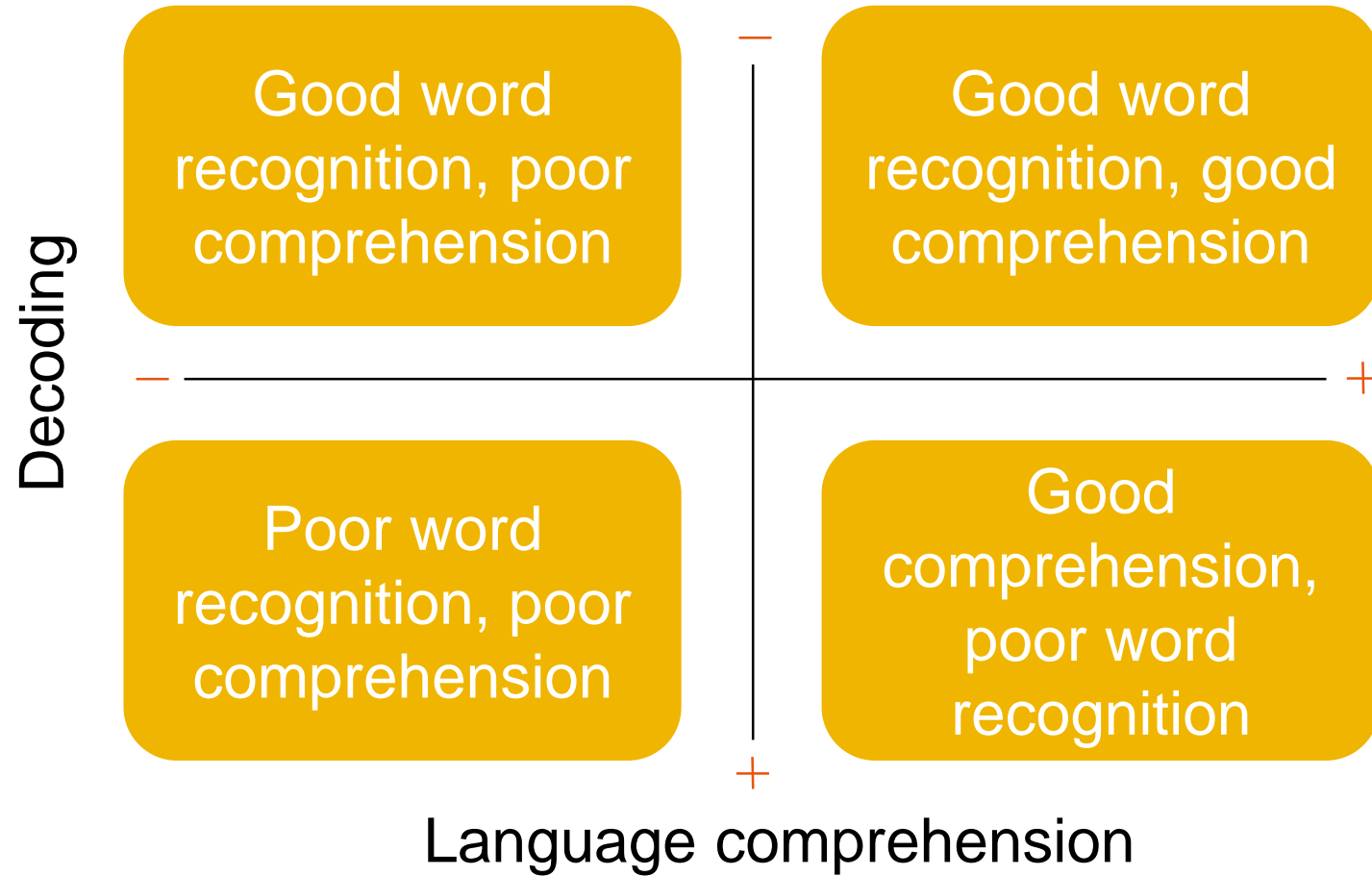What is reading fluency?

Why does it matter?

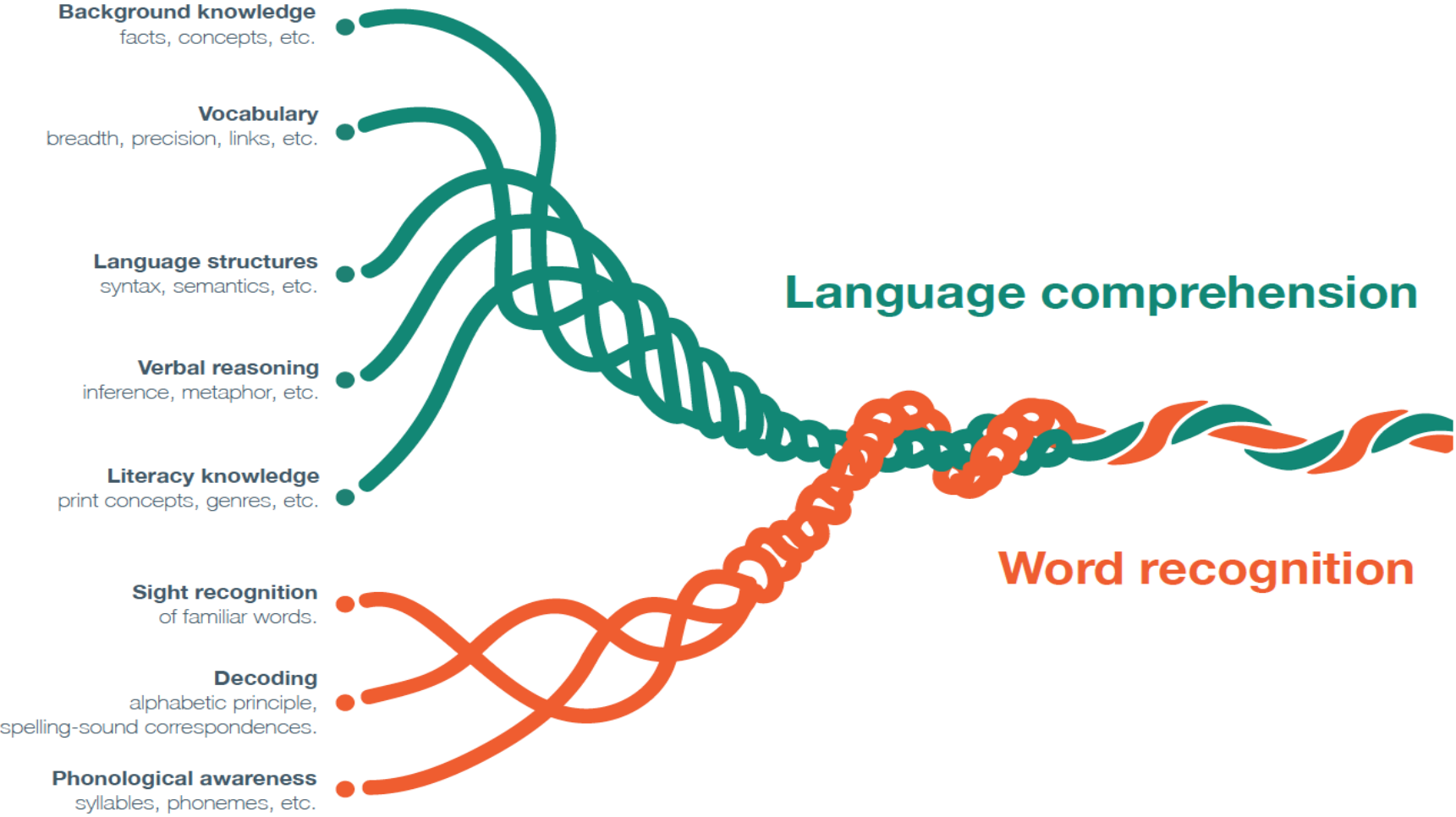How do you currently develop fluency?

Decoding

− Good word recognition, poor comprehension

Good word recognition, good comprehension

− +

Poor word recognition, poor comprehension

Good comprehension, poor word recognition

+

Language comprehension

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Balanced approach to reading

Background knowledge
facts, concepts, etc.

Vocabulary
breadth, precision, links, etc.

Language structures
syntax, semantics, etc.

Verbal reasoning
inference, metaphor, etc.

Literacy knowledge
print concepts, genres, etc.

Language comprehension

Sight recognition
of familiar words.

Decoding
alphabetic principle,
spelling-sound correspondences.

Phonological awareness
syllables, phonemes, etc.

Word recognition

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	1	2	3	4
Expression and volume	Reads in a quiet voice as if to get words out. The reading does not sound natural like talking to a friend.	Reads in a quiet voice. The reading sounds natural in part of the text, but the reader does not always sound like they are talking to a friend.	Reads with volume and expression. However, sometimes the reader slips into expressionless reading and does not sound like they are talking to a friend.	Reads with varied volume and expression. The reader sounds like they are talking to a friend with their voice matching the interpretation of the passage.
Phrasing	Reads word-by-word in a monotone voice.	Reads in two or three word phrases, not adhering to punctuation, stress and intonation.	Reads with a mixture of run-ons, mid-sentence pauses for breath, and some choppiness. There is reasonable stress and intonation.	Reads with good phrasing; adhering to punctuation, stress and intonation.
Smoothness	Frequently hesitates while reading, sounds out words, and repeats words or phrases. The reader makes multiple attempts to read the same passage.	Reads with extended pauses or hesitations. The reader has many "rough spots."	Reads with occasional breaks in rhythm. The reader has difficulty with specific words and/or sentence structures.	Reads smoothly with some breaks, but self-corrects with difficult words and/ or sentence structures.
Pace	Reads slowly and laboriously.	Reads moderately slowly.	Reads fast and slow throughout reading.	Reads at a conversational pace throughout the reading.

Schools today are in a better position to judge what is most likely to work in their classrooms than they were 10 years ago. We have access to more robust evidence about which teaching and learning strategies have been shown to be effective - and, as the evidence base has grown, so too has teachers' appetites for it.

But generating evidence can only take us so far. Ultimately, it doesn't matter how great an educational idea or intervention is on paper; what really matters is how it manifests itself in the day-to-day lived reality of schools.

That is why we are publishing this latest EEF guidance report, Putting Evidence to Work: A School's Guide to Implementation.

Its aim is to support senior leaders looking to put in place new programmes and practices to think through what you need to do to achieve successful outcomes in your context, whether that's a school, or an early years or post-16 setting. We hope it will help you develop a better understanding of how to make changes to teaching practice by offering practical and evidence-informed recommendations for effective implementation.

How could this tool be used?

What challenges might there be?

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Diagnostic assessments should inform, not replace professional judgement

They should not become overly burdensome and there is no requirement to keep formal records

There is no requirement to complete them at certain intervals or with all students

At first, diagnostic assessments can be slow, but once practiced it is likely that many of the assessments can be done very quickly.

Overall, limited high-quality evidence

Requires extensive high-quality practice

Modelling is very helpful

Repeated reading

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FOUNDATIONS FOR GOOD IMPLEMENTATION

1 Treat implementation as a process, not an event; plan and execute it in stages.

- Allow enough time for effective implementation, particularly in the preparation stage; prioritise appropriately.

2 Create a leadership environment and school climate that is conducive to good implementation.

- Set the stage for implementation through school policies, routines, and practices.
- Identify and cultivate leaders of implementation throughout the school.
- Build leadership capacity through implementation teams.

EXPLORE

3 Define the problem you want to solve and identify appropriate programmes or practices to implement.

- Specify a tight area of focus for improvement that is amenable to change.

- Determine a programme of activity based on existing evidence of what has – and hasn't – worked before.

- Examine the fit and feasibility of possible interventions to the school context.

- Make an adoption decision.

PREPARE

4 Create a clear implementation plan, judge the readiness of the school to deliver that plan, then prepare staff and resources.

- Develop a clear, logical, and well-specified implementation plan:

  a. Specify the active ingredients of the intervention clearly: know where to be 'tight' and where to be 'loose'.

  b. Develop a targeted, yet multi-stranded, package of implementation strategies.

  c. Define clear implementation outcomes and monitor them using robust and pragmatic measures.

- Thoroughly assess the degree to which the school is ready to implement the innovation.

- Once ready to implement an intervention, practically prepare for its use:

  a. Create a shared understanding of the implementation process and provide appropriate support and incentives.

  b. Introduce new skills, knowledge, and strategies with explicit up-front training.

  c. Prepare the implementation infrastructure.

DELIVER

5 Support staff, monitor progress, solve problems, and adapt strategies as the approach is used for the first time.

- Adopt a flexible and motivating leadership approach during the initial attempts at implementation.

- Reinforce initial training with follow-on coaching within the school.

- Use highly skilled coaches.

- Complement expert coaching and mentoring with structured peer-to-peer collaboration.

- Use implementation data to actively tailor and improve the approach.

- Make thoughtful adaptations only when the active ingredients are securely understood and implemented.

SUSTAIN

6 Plan for sustaining and scaling an intervention from the outset and continuously acknowledge and nurture its use.

- Plan for sustaining and scaling an innovation from the outset.

- Treat scale-up as a new implementation process.

- Ensure the implementation data remains fit for purpose.

- Continuously acknowledge, support, and reward good implementation practices.

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