

The Role of Interactive Reading Strategies in Enhancing Reading Comprehension of Lower Primary Students

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a critical skill for young learners, laying the foundation for academic success and lifelong learning. This paper explores the role of interactive reading strategies in enhancing the reading comprehension of lower primary students in the United Kingdom. These strategies, which emphasize active participation, collaboration, and critical engagement with texts, have demonstrated significant potential in addressing the cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions of literacy development. The study examines key components such as questioning, predicting, visualizing, and group reading, highlighting their impact on critical thinking, vocabulary acquisition, and peer collaboration. It also discusses the challenges of implementing these strategies, including resource limitations, time constraints, and variability in teacher expertise, and offers targeted recommendations for overcoming these barriers. Using a multi-dimensional analysis supported by data visualization, the paper underscores the effectiveness of interactive reading strategies in fostering equitable literacy outcomes and narrowing educational disparities. The findings suggest that integrating these strategies into classroom practices can empower students to achieve deeper comprehension, greater confidence, and a lifelong passion for reading, contributing to the overall literacy goals outlined in the UK's National Curriculum.

Keywords: reading comprehension, interactive reading strategies, lower primary students

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is a foundational skill that serves as the cornerstone of academic success and lifelong learning. It extends beyond the ability to decode words; it requires students to extract meaning, make connections, and critically evaluate the content of a text. The early years of primary education are pivotal for developing this skill, as they lay the groundwork for all future learning. In the United Kingdom, educational policies and frameworks, such as the National Curriculum for English, place a strong emphasis on cultivating literacy from a young age, particularly in lower primary education. This focus is underscored by the recognition that reading proficiency directly impacts performance across subjects and fosters essential life skills such as problem-solving, empathy, and communication.

However, achieving reading comprehension proficiency among lower primary students can be challenging due to factors such as developmental differences, varying exposure to language, and socio-economic disparities. Many young learners struggle with transitioning from phonics and basic decoding to the deeper understanding of text that is required for effective comprehension. To address these challenges, interactive reading strategies have emerged as a transformative approach. These strategies actively engage students in the reading process, making it more meaningful and accessible. They encourage participation, collaboration, and reflection, helping young readers not only decode text but also connect with it emotionally and intellectually.

The role of interactive reading strategies is particularly relevant in the UK's diverse classrooms, where teachers often encounter students with a wide range of abilities and backgrounds. By integrating methods such as

questioning, predicting, and group discussions, educators can create inclusive environments that cater to individual learning needs while fostering a love for reading. This paper explores the importance of interactive reading strategies in enhancing comprehension among lower primary students in the UK, highlighting their potential to transform the learning experience and empower young readers.

2. Reading Comprehension in Lower Primary Education

Reading comprehension involves far more than the mechanical process of decoding words—it is a cognitive, emotional, and interpretive skill that enables individuals to derive meaning from text, make connections to prior knowledge, and critically evaluate the ideas presented. For lower primary students, this developmental stage marks a critical transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn,” as they begin to engage with more complex narratives and informational texts. However, achieving proficiency in reading comprehension at this stage is not without its challenges. Factors such as limited vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, a lack of motivation, and varying learning needs often act as barriers, making comprehension a daunting task for many young learners.

In the United Kingdom, where literacy is recognized as a cornerstone of the educational system, the National Curriculum for English provides structured goals for developing literacy during Key Stages 1 and 2. These objectives emphasize the importance of ensuring students become fluent, confident, and enthusiastic readers who can navigate and interpret a wide variety of texts. The focus is not only on reading fluency but also on fostering a deeper understanding of what is read, as comprehension is an essential skill that underpins learning across all other subjects. Despite these objectives, a significant proportion of lower primary students struggle with transitioning from decoding to comprehension. For these learners, the inability to make connections between words and meaning can lead to disengagement and underachievement. Socio-economic disparities, such as a lack of access to books or limited parental involvement in reading activities at home, can exacerbate the gap in reading proficiency among young learners in the UK. To address these challenges, there is a growing emphasis on employing innovative and inclusive teaching approaches that actively engage students and make reading a participatory and collaborative process.

Interactive reading strategies have proven to be a particularly effective framework for addressing the diverse needs of lower primary students. These strategies not only support comprehension but also engage students in a meaningful way by fostering critical thinking, dialogue, and a personal connection to the text. By integrating methods such as questioning, predicting, and collaborative discussions, educators can create inclusive learning environments that not only improve comprehension but also nurture a love of reading. These approaches align well with the goals of the UK’s National Curriculum, making them indispensable tools for modern classrooms.

3. What Are Interactive Reading Strategies?

Interactive reading strategies are a collection of dynamic, learner-centered approaches that actively involve students in the reading process, transforming passive consumption of text into an engaging and collaborative activity. These strategies go beyond traditional methods, such as “read-and-recall,” by focusing on meaningful interactions between the reader, the text, and their peers. The goal is to foster deeper comprehension, critical thinking, and a more personal connection with the material. For young learners in lower primary schools, particularly in the United Kingdom, these strategies are essential tools for overcoming comprehension challenges and fostering a love for reading.

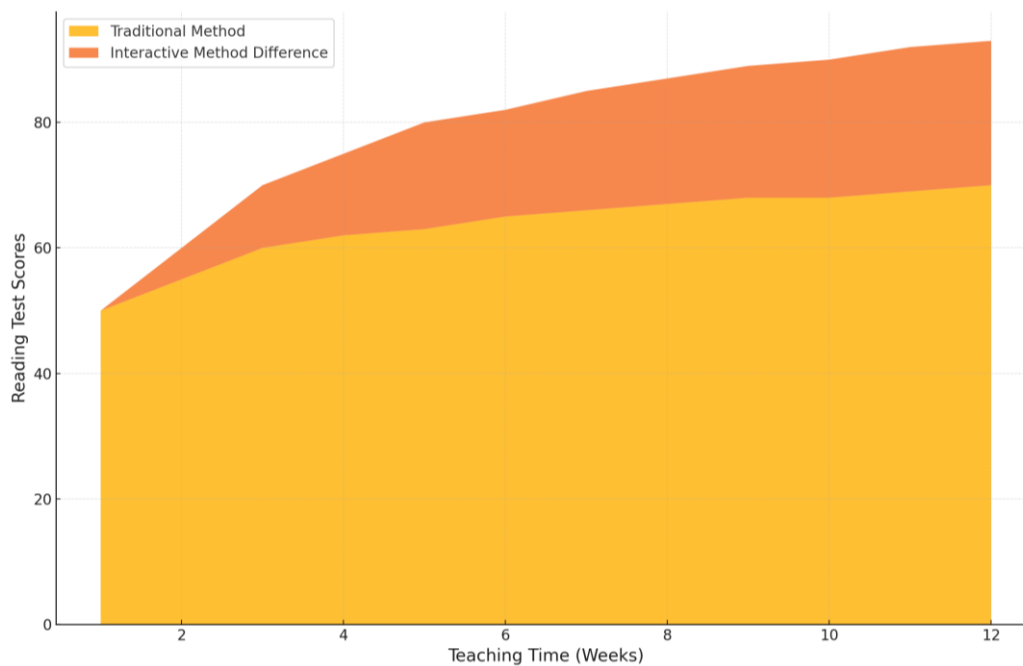


Figure 1. Improvement in reading comprehension over time

3.1 Key Components of Interactive Reading Strategies

Questioning: Questioning lies at the heart of interactive reading strategies. It involves posing and answering questions at various stages of the reading process—before, during, and after reading. Teachers may guide students to ask predictive questions, such as “What might happen next?” or reflective questions like “Why did the character make that decision?” This encourages learners to think critically about the text and engage with its themes, characters, and plot on a deeper level. Self-questioning techniques empower students to take ownership of their comprehension journey, enabling them to identify areas of confusion and seek clarification.

Predicting: Predicting engages students by encouraging them to anticipate outcomes based on textual clues, prior knowledge, or illustrations. For example, before reading a story, students may predict what the narrative will be about based on the title or images. During reading, they might pause to guess how a problem in the story will be resolved. This process not only maintains their interest but also helps them develop inferencing skills, a critical component of reading comprehension.

Summarizing: Summarizing requires learners to condense the main ideas or events of a text into their own words, thereby reinforcing their understanding. It helps students distinguish between essential and non-essential details, sharpening their ability to identify key themes and messages. In the classroom, summarizing can take many forms, from verbal recaps in pairs or groups to written reflections. For lower primary students, teachers often scaffold this activity by providing prompts or graphic organizers to guide their thinking.

Visualizing: Visualization transforms abstract ideas or descriptions into concrete mental images, making the text more relatable and memorable for young readers. For instance, when reading about a setting or a character, students might be asked to draw what they envision or describe it aloud to their peers. This technique taps into students’ creative and imaginative abilities, helping them connect emotionally with the text while enhancing comprehension.

Paired or Group Reading: Collaborative reading activities, such as paired reading or group discussions, allow students to share their interpretations and learn from one another’s perspectives. These activities are particularly effective for diverse classrooms, where students may bring different cultural or linguistic experiences to the text. Through dialogue, learners can clarify misunderstandings, build confidence in expressing their thoughts, and deepen their overall comprehension.

Use of Multisensory Tools: Incorporating multisensory tools, such as visual aids, gestures, or digital resources, enhances the accessibility and appeal of reading for lower primary students. For instance, interactive storybooks, audio recordings, and apps can provide additional context and support for struggling readers. Gestures and movement-based activities, such as acting out scenes, further engage kinesthetic learners, while visual aids like charts or story maps help students organize their thoughts and visualize narrative structures.

3.2 Integration into Classroom Practice

The success of interactive reading strategies depends on how well they are integrated into everyday classroom routines. Teachers play a crucial role in modeling these strategies, demonstrating how to ask meaningful questions, make predictions, or summarize effectively. For example, during a shared reading session, a teacher might pause to “think aloud,” verbalizing their thought process as they predict a character’s next move or visualize a scene. This modeling helps students internalize the strategies and gradually apply them independently.

Structured activities also provide a framework for implementing these strategies. For example:

Literature Circles: Students take on specific roles, such as “questioner,” “summarizer,” or “illustrator,” fostering collaboration and accountability.

Think-Pair-Share: After silently reflecting on a question or prompt, students discuss their responses with a partner before sharing with the class.

Guided Reading Sessions: Small groups work with the teacher on targeted comprehension skills, using leveled texts that match their reading abilities.

Additionally, the use of age-appropriate and culturally relevant texts is essential for ensuring that students can engage meaningfully with the material. For instance, stories that reflect diverse backgrounds or relatable themes help young readers connect with the content and sustain their interest.

3.3 Benefits of Interactive Reading Strategies

Interactive reading strategies offer numerous benefits for lower primary students. By actively involving learners in the reading process, these strategies: Foster critical thinking and analytical skills, enabling students to engage deeply with text. Improve retention and recall by making reading a meaningful and memorable experience. Boost confidence and motivation, especially for struggling readers, by providing opportunities for success in collaborative settings. Build essential social and communication skills through group discussions and peer interactions. Cater to diverse learning needs, ensuring that every student can access and enjoy the reading process.

Interactive reading strategies are a powerful tool for enhancing reading comprehension in lower primary students. By encouraging active participation, collaboration, and critical thinking, these strategies help young learners move beyond surface-level reading and develop the skills they need to become confident, thoughtful, and independent readers. As educators in the UK seek to meet the ambitious literacy goals of the National Curriculum, these strategies will remain an indispensable part of effective classroom practice.

4. The Impact of Interactive Strategies on Reading Comprehension

Interactive reading strategies have proven to be transformative tools in enhancing reading comprehension among lower primary students, addressing the cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions of literacy development. In the United Kingdom, where classrooms are often characterized by diversity in student abilities, backgrounds, and learning needs, these strategies stand out as critical to fostering meaningful engagement with text. The impact of these strategies goes far beyond helping students understand words on a page; they create opportunities for deep learning, collaborative interaction, and lifelong skills development.

First and foremost, interactive reading strategies significantly improve engagement and motivation among young learners. Reading often feels like a passive activity for many students, particularly for those who struggle with decoding or comprehension. However, when strategies like questioning and predicting are introduced, reading becomes an active, thought-provoking process. For instance, when a teacher pauses during a story to ask, “What do you think will happen next?” or “Why do you think the character acted this way?”, the students are encouraged to connect with the text in personal and meaningful ways. These interactions not only spark curiosity but also maintain attention, making reading enjoyable and accessible to learners who may otherwise find it challenging or monotonous.

The use of interactive strategies also cultivates critical thinking skills, an essential component of academic success and lifelong learning. Activities such as making predictions, identifying main ideas, or evaluating a character’s decisions prompt students to go beyond surface-level reading. For example, when young readers are asked to justify their predictions based on textual evidence, they learn to think analytically and develop reasoning skills. This level of engagement helps children approach reading with a more inquisitive mindset, allowing them to recognize patterns, infer meanings, and draw connections across contexts. These skills not only improve their comprehension of the text at hand but also equip them with the tools to approach future reading tasks with greater confidence and independence.

Vocabulary and language development are other significant benefits of interactive reading strategies. When students engage in paired reading or group discussions, they are exposed to a wider range of vocabulary and sentence structures. For example, during shared reading, teachers may introduce new words in context, discuss

their meanings, and encourage students to use the terms in their own sentences. Similarly, during group discussions, peers may model language use in ways that expand the linguistic repertoire of others. These interactions provide repeated exposure to new language elements, making it easier for students to internalize them. This is particularly important for students who are learning English as an additional language or those who come from language-impooverished environments, as it bridges gaps in their linguistic knowledge and builds fluency.

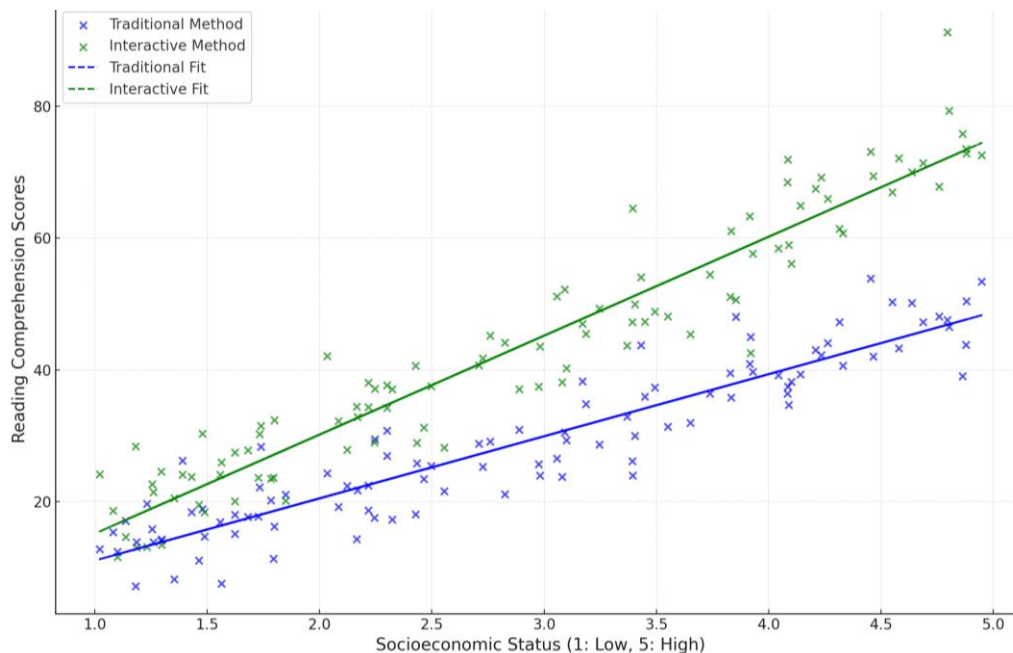


Figure 2. Socioeconomic status vs reading comprehension scores

Interactive reading strategies promote peer learning and collaboration, fostering a classroom culture of shared responsibility for learning. In paired or group reading activities, students have the chance to explain their interpretations, ask questions, and clarify misunderstandings with their peers. These interactions not only deepen their comprehension but also build essential social and communication skills. For example, during a group discussion about a story's theme, one student might share an interpretation that another had not considered, broadening perspectives and encouraging empathy. This collaborative environment boosts the confidence of struggling readers, who may feel more comfortable asking questions or contributing ideas in smaller, supportive groups rather than in front of the entire class.

Another critical advantage of interactive reading strategies is their adaptability to diverse learning needs, making them inclusive for students with varying abilities and challenges. For instance, students with dyslexia or attention deficits often struggle with traditional reading approaches. Interactive strategies, however, can be tailored to meet their needs. Visualizing activities, such as drawing scenes from a story, help these students grasp abstract concepts, while multisensory tools like audiobooks or digital storybooks support their engagement and comprehension. Additionally, teachers can scaffold activities, such as breaking down complex texts into manageable chunks, to ensure that all learners can participate meaningfully.

The emotional and social dimensions of learning are also nurtured through interactive reading. By creating opportunities for discussion and collaboration, these strategies foster a sense of belonging and community in the classroom. Students feel valued when their thoughts and ideas are heard, which builds their self-esteem and motivates them to engage more deeply with reading. The use of age-appropriate and culturally relevant texts in interactive reading activities helps students see themselves reflected in the material, making the experience more relatable and impactful.

In conclusion, interactive reading strategies have a profound and multifaceted impact on the reading comprehension of lower primary students in the United Kingdom. They enhance engagement, critical thinking, vocabulary development, collaboration, and inclusivity, while also addressing the emotional and social aspects of learning. By transforming reading from a solitary activity into a shared, dynamic process, these strategies equip young learners with the skills, confidence, and motivation they need to succeed in literacy and beyond. As the UK continues to emphasize literacy as a cornerstone of education, the integration of interactive reading strategies

in classrooms will remain an essential practice, ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have the opportunity to thrive as readers and learners.

5. Challenges and Recommendations

While interactive reading strategies have demonstrated significant potential for improving reading comprehension among lower primary students, their effective implementation is not without challenges. In many classrooms across the United Kingdom, structural, logistical, and contextual barriers can limit the extent to which these strategies can be integrated into teaching practices. Understanding these challenges and proposing targeted solutions is critical to ensuring that the benefits of interactive reading strategies are fully realized.

One of the most pervasive challenges is the issue of limited classroom resources. Many schools, particularly those in economically disadvantaged areas, may not have access to the diverse range of books, materials, and digital tools required to implement interactive strategies effectively. This scarcity can restrict opportunities for group reading activities, access to multisensory resources, or the use of culturally relevant texts that are critical for engaging students with diverse backgrounds. Overcrowded classrooms compound this issue, as teachers may struggle to provide individual attention or organize collaborative activities effectively within the constraints of a limited budget and space.

Time constraints also present a significant challenge. The demands of the UK National Curriculum, combined with the need to prepare students for standardized assessments, often leave little room for the flexible, exploratory approaches that interactive reading strategies require. Teachers are frequently under pressure to cover a wide range of content within a limited timeframe, which can result in a preference for more traditional, teacher-led methods of instruction over the more time-intensive, student-centered approaches associated with interactive strategies.

Another major hurdle is the variability in teacher expertise and confidence in applying interactive reading strategies. While many educators recognize the value of these approaches, not all are adequately trained to implement them effectively. Some teachers may struggle with adapting strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students or managing the dynamics of group activities. This issue is particularly pronounced for new or early-career teachers who may not yet have had access to comprehensive professional development opportunities focused on interactive literacy instruction.

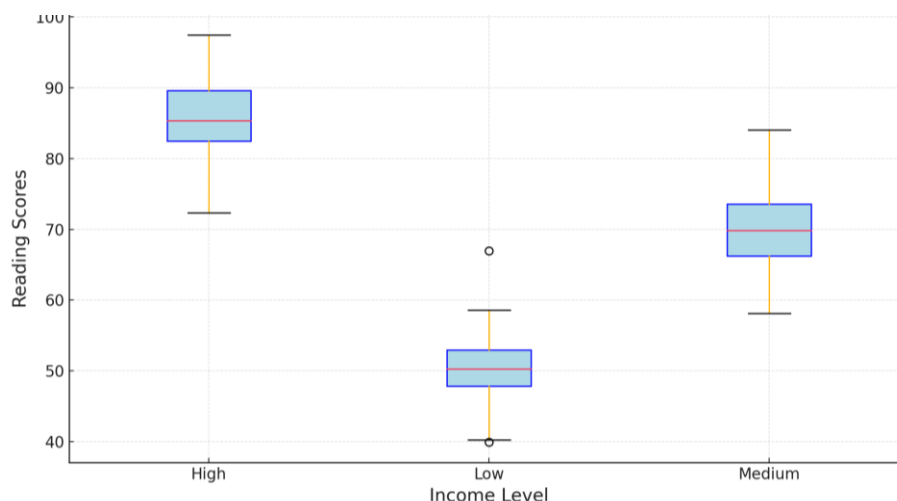


Figure 3. Reading comprehension scores by income level

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often face additional challenges that affect their ability to benefit from interactive reading strategies. For instance, children from low-income families may have limited access to books or literacy-enriching activities at home, reducing their exposure to reading outside the classroom. Parental involvement, which plays a crucial role in reinforcing reading habits, may also be limited due to parents' own literacy levels, work commitments, or lack of awareness of the importance of interactive reading. These barriers can create a gap between students who have robust support systems at home and those who do not, perpetuating inequities in literacy achievement.

To address these challenges, several recommendations can be made. Firstly, investing in professional development for teachers is essential. Ongoing training programs should equip educators with the skills and confidence to implement interactive reading strategies effectively, including adapting these strategies for diverse

learning needs and managing collaborative activities in large or resource-constrained classrooms. Workshops, peer mentoring, and access to practical resources can support teachers in developing their expertise and confidence in this area.

The integration of technology can provide a powerful solution to resource limitations. Digital tools such as interactive storybooks, literacy apps, and multimedia platforms can engage students in multisensory reading experiences, making learning more accessible and enjoyable. These tools are particularly valuable for students with special educational needs or those who struggle with traditional print-based materials. However, to maximize the impact of technology, schools must also address the digital divide by ensuring that all students have access to devices and internet connectivity, both in school and at home.

Parental involvement is another key area that requires attention. Schools can foster partnerships with parents by organizing workshops, providing guidance on shared reading techniques, and distributing resources that parents can use to support their children's literacy development at home. For families with limited literacy skills, offering simple and practical strategies, such as discussing stories or encouraging children to describe pictures, can help build a culture of reading without requiring parents to read fluently themselves.

Targeted support for struggling readers is essential to ensure that all students can benefit from interactive reading strategies. This could include one-on-one tutoring, small group interventions, or after-school literacy clubs designed to provide additional practice and reinforcement. Schools should also prioritize the use of culturally relevant texts and differentiated instruction to ensure that every child can see themselves reflected in the reading material and access content at an appropriate level of difficulty.

In conclusion, while the implementation of interactive reading strategies in lower primary classrooms comes with challenges, these obstacles are not insurmountable. By addressing resource limitations, investing in teacher training, leveraging technology, engaging parents, and providing targeted support for struggling readers, schools in the United Kingdom can create a more inclusive and effective literacy environment. These efforts will not only enhance reading comprehension but also empower young learners with the skills and confidence they need to succeed academically and beyond. Interactive reading strategies have the potential to transform the reading experience, but their success depends on the collective commitment of educators, policymakers, parents, and communities to overcome barriers and prioritize literacy for all.

6. Conclusion

Interactive reading strategies are an indispensable component of literacy development in lower primary education, offering a transformative approach to improving reading comprehension among young learners in the United Kingdom. These strategies, which emphasize active participation, collaboration, and critical engagement with text, address the multifaceted needs of students as they transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Beyond simply decoding words, these methods empower children to think critically, make inferences, and develop an intrinsic connection to reading, fostering skills that extend across academic disciplines and into lifelong learning.

The benefits of interactive reading strategies are particularly evident in their ability to cater to diverse learners. By incorporating questioning, predicting, and visualizing, students develop not only comprehension skills but also the confidence and motivation to engage deeply with text. Collaborative practices, such as paired and group reading, promote peer learning and social development, enabling students to share perspectives and learn from one another. Meanwhile, multisensory tools and culturally relevant materials ensure inclusivity, making reading accessible and enjoyable for children from all backgrounds and abilities.

However, the challenges to implementing these strategies must not be underestimated. Factors such as resource limitations, time constraints, and the variability in teacher expertise can hinder the effectiveness of interactive reading approaches. Addressing these barriers requires a systemic effort, including professional development for educators, investment in technological tools, and fostering partnerships with parents to reinforce reading habits at home. Additionally, targeted interventions for struggling readers can bridge gaps and ensure equitable access to literacy education.

As the UK continues to prioritize literacy as a cornerstone of its educational framework, the integration of interactive reading strategies is essential. By overcoming barriers to implementation, these strategies have the potential to not only improve reading comprehension but also inspire a lifelong passion for learning, empowering young readers to thrive academically, socially, and personally.

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