



An independently analysed impact study of Read On!

Jacqueline Aiello, Ph.D.





Prince Harry at a Read On! event



Donatella Fitzgerald and Nina Prentice, founders of Read On! in Italy

About Read On!

Read On! is an English language extensive reading project organized by Oxford University Press with the patronage of the British Council and the British Embassy in Italy. It started in 2011 and aims to get learners reading for pleasure in order to develop their language, literacy, and life skills. Read On! promotes student-centred learning and trains teachers to build communicative classrooms using an engaging selection of Oxford graded readers.

“
Read On! recruits teachers who are passionate about teaching and learning. It trains and supports them to transform their classrooms into self-starting communities of learners ready to experiment and explore language through reading, research, and presentation.
”

Nina Prentice extensive reading researcher and teacher trainer

The Read On! methodology

1. Participating teachers receive a mobile class library – a selection of carefully chosen Oxford graded readers with audio CDs housed in a trolley. The library belongs to one class for an academic year.
2. Teachers who join the project are given on-going training and online support on how to use the library and get students reading extensively.
3. Students manage their library independently by choosing their own graded readers to read, electing class librarians, and deciding on their borrowing system.
4. Students are challenged to read as many graded readers as they can. They read independently and are not formally tested on their reading.
5. Individually or in groups, students respond to what they have read in a creative way. Throughout the year, they produce anything from posters and blogs to puppet shows and videos.
6. At the end of the year, schools organize Read On! festivals to present students' work and celebrate their reading.

Read On! libraries are now used by over 1,200 teachers and 20,000 students in primary schools, secondary schools, and universities in Italy, as well as juvenile prisons and adult education centres. Because students read independently, Read On! offers a simple solution to the challenge of teaching mixed ability classes, including Special Education Needs (SEN) students. In some regions, the project is supported by local sponsors as part of their social responsibility schemes.

WHAT IS EXTENSIVE READING?

Students are reading extensively when they read texts which are slightly below their language level. They may not know each word or be familiar with all structures and grammar forms, but overall they can understand the text and enjoy what they are reading.

Graded readers are fiction and non-fiction books which have been carefully designed for extensive reading. In a library, they provide students with a choice of story or topic and language difficulty.



A Read On! festival



A Read On! mobile class library

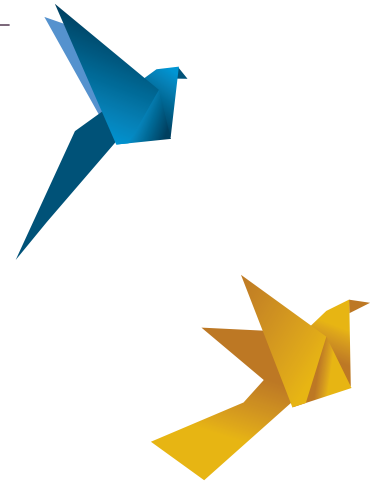


Read On! teacher training

About the impact study

During the 2014–15 academic year, Oxford University Press undertook a study to evaluate the impact of Read On! Over 1200 students (aged 11 to 18) and 77 teachers in secondary schools throughout Italy participated. The research questions were:

1. What is the impact of the Read On! project on students' ability in English?
2. What is the relationship between the number of graded readers students read in the Read On! project and student achievement in English?
3. How do teachers and students perceive the impact of the Read On! project on English learning and skills?
4. How does the Read On! project affect student attitudes towards reading and learning English?
5. How does the Read On! project affect teachers, instruction, and the classroom environment?



To explore these areas, the impact study employed a mixed-methods approach:

METHOD	WHEN?	WHO?	WHY?
Lexile Reading Test (Level 1 or Level 2, depending on the age and level of students)	Pre- and post-Read On! program	1201 students	To determine students' Lexile® measures (i.e. their unique reading abilities). Lexile measures range from below OL for beginners to above 1600L for advanced readers.
Oxford Online Placement Test	Pre- and post-Read On! program	304 students	To measure participants' general English proficiency and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level.
Student reading logs	Completed throughout the Read On! program	374 students	To keep a record of the Read On! graded readers students read over the academic year.
Questionnaires	Pre- and post-Read On! program	248 students, 63 teachers 42 parents	To understand attitudes, opinions, and perceived growth.
Interviews	Pre- and post-Read On! program	23 students, 11 teachers	To understand attitudes and experiences with Read On! at eight Italian schools.

The statistical analysis of the quantitative data was performed by MetaMetrics, a privately held educational research organization. Results were shared by MetaMetrics in a 2015 report entitled *OUP Italy Read On! Impact Study Quantitative Evidence: Post-test Summary Report*, which is cited here as MetaMetrics, 2015.

The analysis of the qualitative data was conducted by an independent researcher. Typewritten interview transcripts and open-ended questionnaire responses were coded and analysed using thematic analysis. The quotations of teacher and student participants that appear in this report capture the themes that emerged in this analysis.



Results of the impact study

Read On! improves students' attainment and achievement

Read On! participants made considerable gains in reading ability and English proficiency. Student scores in the Oxford Online Placement Test increased significantly after participation in the project – on average by 13.22% from the pre-test to the post-test. 81 students (27%) experienced an increase in CEFR level (MetaMetrics, 2015).

Growth in reading ability was also seen among students as measured by the Lexile Reading Test. On average, students' scores increased about 67.5 Lexiles after participating in Read On! In Italy, students' English reading ability is often lower than the level of English materials students are likely to encounter in schools. Read On! therefore can help to close this gap and help students to progress (see Figure 1).

The Lexile measures of students who read more graded readers increased more than those of students who read fewer graded readers. On average, students who read 4 graded readers or fewer experienced nearly a 40 Lexile gain, whereas students who read 15 to 19 graded readers experienced an average Lexile increase of over 100 Lexiles (see Figure 2). These results suggest that the more students read, the more they benefit.

“
Read On! is [a] very beautiful project [...] it helps you a lot in reading, in comprehension, in being yourself.

”
Francesco
Read On! student

Figure 1: Student pre-test and post-test Lexile measures and English reading material Lexile measures

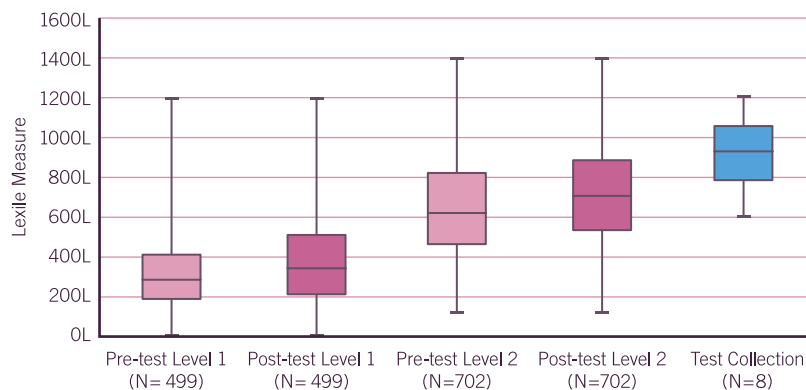


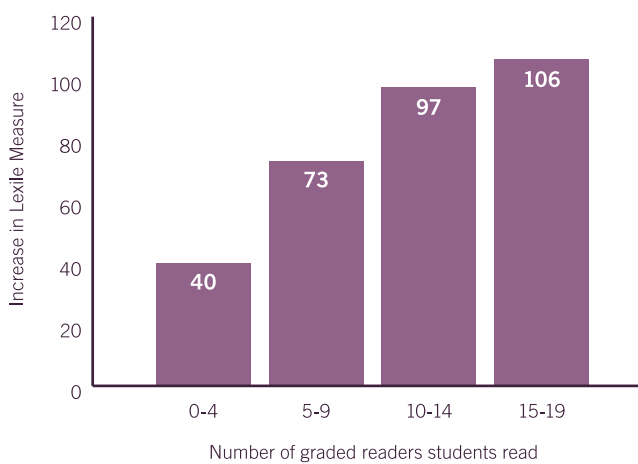
Figure adapted from: MetaMetrics (2015) OUP Italy Read On! Impact Study, p.21

This figure displays the pre-test (light pink) and post-test (dark pink) scores of students divided into groups by the level of Lexile Reading Test that they took (Level 1 or Level 2). It also shows the Lexile measures determined for a sample of texts representing reading material that students are likely to encounter in Italian schools (blue). The figure shows that, on average, post-test scores increased both for Level 1 and Level 2 students. 'Due to the growth in Lexile measures from the pre-test to post-test administrations, the gap decreased between the student reading level and required reading level for further English reading in Italy.' (MetaMetrics, 2015, p.29)





Figure 2: Average student Lexile measures by number of graded readers read



This figure displays the increase in Lexile measure for students who read 0 to 4 graded readers, 5 to 9 graded readers, 10 to 14 graded readers, and 15 to 19 graded readers. It shows that the greater the number of graded readers students read, the greater the change in Lexile measure they experienced. 'These results support the conclusion that as more books are read, student reading ability increases as measured by the Lexile Reading Test.' (MetaMetrics, 2015, p.27)



In interviews, students and teachers echoed these findings. When asked whether Read On! affected students' English skills, participants said that students became faster and better English readers with better vocabulary. For instance, Daniela, a student from the agriculture-focused high school Garibaldi in Rome, suggested that her vocabulary improved: '[Read On!] let me learn new words that I did not know before, new things that I would use Google translator or a dictionary to find, but I wouldn't ever remember them. Now I do.'

Professoressa Corazza, a teacher at the scientific high school Righi in Rome, explained that her students' reading ability in English improved after they participated in Read On! because they 'understand reading texts more quickly and much better. At the same time, they go to the very core of a text, they understand the theme [and] the main idea.' Professoressa Grimaldi at the scientific high school Galilei in Potenza concluded: '[For my students, Read On!] is an opportunity that other classes don't have [...] to improve their English.'

Parents of participating students also agreed. When asked their opinion of Read On! in questionnaires, their responses were overwhelmingly positive. They said that Read On! is 'helpful to learn the English language,' it is 'useful to acquire fluency and competence,' and it is an 'excellent method to improve and refine English language use.'

Half of the parents indicated that they noticed changes in their child from participating in Read On! Two examples of these changes are: 'his way of speaking has become more articulate and every night he reads books' and 'she reads in English very well and she can express herself in the language.'

They further believed that Read On! positively influenced their children's school work in general. One parent explained that Read On! helped their child 'better organize his study habits,' while another stated that the project led their child to 'become interested in expanding her knowledge of other subjects' as well.

Read On! improves students' attitudes to reading and learning English

Interviews revealed that the attitudes of Read On! students towards reading and learning English were almost entirely positive.

Read On! was most effective at positively influencing attitudes among students who already enjoyed reading. One representative example is Alberta, a student in Potenza who said that, thanks to her Read On! experience, she now loves reading in English as much as reading in Italian.

Although students who did not like reading before Read On! were less likely to improve their attitudes toward reading, positive changes in attitudes were seen among some reluctant readers. One example is Emanuele, a student at the scientific high school Righi in Rome. When asked if his attitude towards reading changed as a result of the Read On! project, he said that 'before I don't read so much [...] But, with Read On!, I was more motivated to read and know something about the literatures of other continents.'

Parents of participating students also noted a change in their children's attitudes towards reading. In a questionnaire, one parent wrote: 'my son has changed, now he reads more in Italian but also in English,' and another said: 'she reads much more and she is more interested in reading English books.'

For most students, Read On! was their first opportunity to access a wide range of English graded readers. Professoressa Nardiello, from the technical school Leonardo da Vinci in Potenza, explained that the project gave her students the chance to experience reading in English: '[Read On!] was a very positive experience because many of [my students] are not readers [...] and they had a chance [...] to get in touch with real English, which is something that is quite difficult to do in Italy.' This, in turn, motivated many of her students to read.

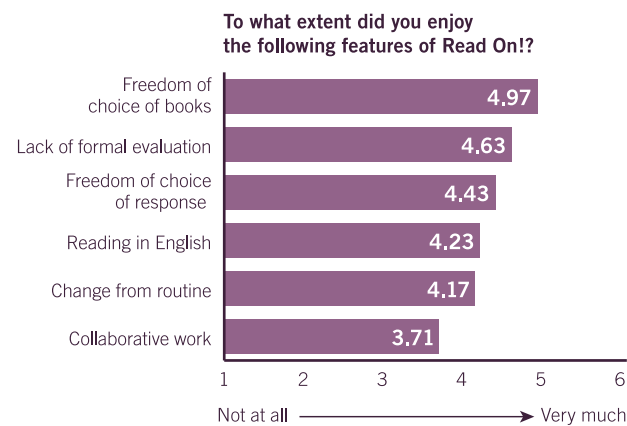
The accessibility of graded readers was often given as a reason for improved attitudes towards reading. One example is Matteo, a student in the scientific high school Galilei in Potenza. When asked whether he views reading more positively, he responded: '[Read On!] books are smaller and [it] is easier to have a passion about them [...] they are more interactive.' The Read On! library was seen as more accessible, engaging, and even reassuring than other English reading materials.

For many students, Read On! graded readers served as a stepping stone to more advanced books in both English and Italian. Liliana, a student at the technical school Da Vinci in Potenza, explained: 'Before [Read On!], when I saw a thick book – even an Italian one – I would think "oh my! I have to read this all?" Instead, having read books in English, it's also easier to read books in Italian.'

Overall, students truly enjoyed all the features of the Read On! experience (see Figure 3). In questionnaires, over 90% of teachers reported that their students enjoyed participating in the Read On! project, and 86% of students expressed willingness to participate in the project again in the future.

“
I believe that [the Read On!] project has helped me learn and develop in a number of ways. It gave me the chance to learn English differently, by having fun. It has also enriched me. Above all it has really improved my English. There isn't a better way to learn!
 ”
Maria
 Read On! student

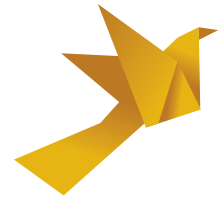
Figure 3: Students' attitudes towards features of Read On!



Students were asked to indicate the extent to which they liked six central features of Read On! on a scale from 1 to 6. This figure displays their responses. As a whole, students enjoyed all features.

Read On! supports teachers

Italian classrooms are usually teacher-centred, whereas Read On! teachers are trained in student-centred learning. This study found that Read On! influenced teachers to change their teaching style and approaches (see Figure 4).



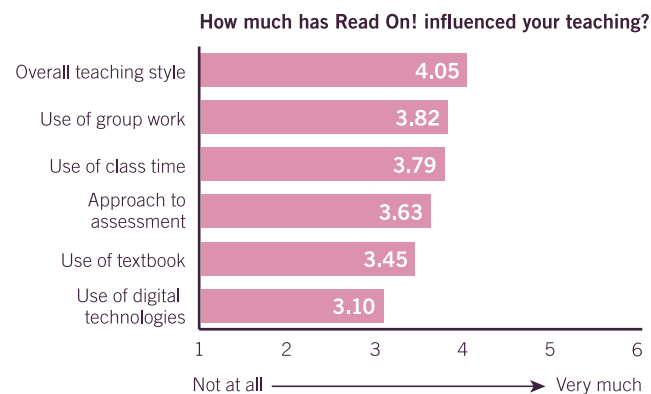
When asked to describe the impact that Read On! has had on her teaching, Professoressa Consolini replied: 'I am enthusiastic because it is a new way of teaching [...] I think it's a great opportunity to vary our way of teaching. Instead of always being on books and on grammatical rules, we teach in another way.'

For many teachers, these changes in instruction resulted in a better use of class time. Professoressa Confetta, from the middle school della Chiesa in Reggio Emilia, said: 'The project obliged me to invest my and my students' energies on other activities outside the normal routines. [This] delivered unexpected outcomes in terms of motivation, learning, and students' self-esteem thereby facilitating lessons even outside the project.'

Interview and questionnaire data also revealed that teachers became more enthusiastic readers after joining the Read On! project. For instance, Professoressa Granieri at the professional high school Racioppi in Potenza said that she 'started reading every day in English' and continued

doing so after experiencing first-hand 'the perks of reading in English' including having 'regained fluency in English.' As a result, teachers became more passionate about teaching reading. Professoressa Corazza said: '[Read On!] increased my interest in reading very much, in reading skills, [and] in developing reading skills.'

Figure 4: The influence of Read On! on teaching and instruction



Questionnaires asked teachers to specify how much they believed Read On! influenced their teaching in six ways on a scale from 1 to 6. As this figure shows, teachers felt that all these elements were influenced, especially overall style, use of group work, and use of class time.

Read On! fosters inclusion in the mixed ability classroom

In interviews, teachers agreed that the Read On! project fosters inclusion in the mixed ability classroom because all students, including SEN students, became active and independent participants.

Students and teachers provided examples of how Read On! helped weaker students to improve and feel more confident. Asked who benefits from Read On!, Professoressa Deporzi, who teaches at the Sant'Apollinare middle school in the Vatican, said: 'I'm convinced that it [...] enhances also the weaker students because they can choose the right level.'

Professoressa Azzaretto added that Read On! is 'precious' because it has created a classroom environment in which her students are not judged for the level of graded reader that they choose. Instead, she explained: 'The moment you choose a book and you read it, you deserve the respect of the others, no matter what book, no matter what level, no matter your skills.'



“Reading for pleasure has been revealed as the most important indicator of the future success of a child (OECD, 2002), and improvements in literacy, at any point in life, can have a profound effect on an individual.”

Dugdale, G. and Clark C. (2008)
Literacy changes lives: An advocacy resource
London: National Literacy Trust.



Read On! has spread throughout Italy because it is appealing and has got a very modern way of presenting itself. Having a library in the class, and the fact that the trolley is in the students' ownership, is something very new in our classes.

The most positive aspect is that people can read in a very easy way. Each student and each teacher can read at his/her own pace and can read as much or as little as he/she likes. Whenever something is adaptable, it is very positive.

With Read On! you can build up a team in the school: a team with teachers, a team with students. Having training in different national or regional contexts means that teachers can get together and share experiences and understand how a project can really change their way of teaching.

A trolley library means mobility. It's something that makes you move; so the trolley is the symbol of teaching moving towards innovation.



Gisella Langé
Foreign Languages Inspector
Ministry of Education
Italy

SUMMARY OF THE READ ON! IMPACT STUDY

During 2014 and 2015, Oxford University Press undertook a study to evaluate the impact of Read On! in schools in Italy. It indicated that Read On!:

- Improves students' attainment and achievement
- Improves students' attitudes to reading and learning English
- Supports teachers
- Fosters inclusion in the mixed ability classroom

This report is a summary of *The Read On! Impact Study Academic Report*. It also summarizes findings described in the *MetaMetrics OUP Italy Read On! Impact Study Quantitative Evidence: Post-test Summary Report*.

Both reports can be downloaded from www.oup.com/elt/readon

The names of the students in this brochure have been changed to protect the identity of participants.



OXFORD ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
TO FIND OUT MORE, VISIT www.oup.com/elt

