

# WORD STUDY IMPACTS COMPREHENSION FOR ALL STUDENTS

## ARTICLE

Zhang, D., Ke, S.E., & Mo, Y. (2023). Morphology in reading comprehension among school-aged readers of English: A synthesis and meta-analytic structural equation modeling study. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 115(5), 683–699.

## WHAT DID THEY FIND?

Morphological awareness is an important factor in reading comprehension. All students benefit from morphological instruction that is focused on meaning, and teachers may incorporate speaking and writing morphology tasks with equal benefit. However, morphological awareness contributes to reading differently as students develop, so instruction should be responsive to students' language status and stage of schooling.

## WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS?

In the whole group and all subgroups, morphological awareness had a large effect on word reading and vocabulary knowledge, which suggests that it indirectly impacts reading comprehension for all students. Morphological awareness also influenced comprehension directly, over and above word reading and vocabulary knowledge, in all groups except for the lower elementary subgroup (grades 2 and below). However, the strength of the indirect effects of morphological awareness differed among the subgroups (see chart below). Within the task modality subgroup, there was no significant effect on reading comprehension between written and spoken morphology tasks.

## WHAT DID THEY DO?

Zhang and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of how reading comprehension is impacted by morphological awareness—the understanding of how words can be broken down into smaller units of meaning. This study aimed to better understand how morphological awareness both directly and indirectly affects comprehension through word reading and vocabulary knowledge. They reviewed 73 studies from 1981 to 2020 that focused on K-12 readers of English, analyzing data from the whole group as well as three subgroups: language status, age/grade, and task modality.

Student Group	Indirect Impact of Morphological Awareness (MA) on Comprehension	Instructional Focus
Grades 2 and below	MA has a greater impact on their word reading skills than vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, MA most benefits their comprehension by improving decoding skills.	Focus on teaching morphemes as a part of word reading, such as strategies for chunking and phonemic decoding
Grades 3-12 and bilingual readers	MA has a greater impact on their vocabulary knowledge than word reading skills. Therefore, MA most benefits their comprehension by providing tools to determine word meaning.	Focus on teaching morphemes as a way to build vocabulary knowledge and determine the meaning of unknown words

