
The Oxford Language Report finds evidence of a significant word gap in UK schools, a problem which is holding back children’s learning and which teachers believe is getting worse.

Oxford University Press research into the word gap

To better understand the word gap, Oxford University Press (OUP) conducted an online survey with over 1,300 primary and secondary school teachers from across the UK. The survey was live between December 2017 and January 2018. It sought to answer the following questions:

1. What proportion of children are affected by the word gap in UK primary and secondary schools?
2. What are the root causes of the word gap?
3. How does the word gap impact on pupils’ academic achievement, as well as their wider life chances?
4. What successful strategies have schools put in place to close the word gap?

The main findings from the survey

- The word gap poses a significant and widespread challenge to UK schools. In the average UK primary school almost half (49%) of Year 1 pupils have a limited vocabulary (word gap) to the extent that it affects their learning. The word gap persists into UK secondary schools where, on average, 43% of Year 7 students are felt to have a limited vocabulary to the extent that it affects their learning.
- Teachers believe the problem is getting worse. 69% of primary school teachers and 60% of secondary school teachers surveyed reported an increase in the number of pupils who have a limited vocabulary compared to previous years.
- The word gap has a profound impact on academic achievement. Over 80% of teachers believe that children with a limited vocabulary find it very or extremely challenging to understand questions in national test papers and that these pupils are therefore likely to get worse results in national tests.
- The word gap also affects pupils’ wider life chances with over 80% of all teachers surveyed reporting that they believe it results in lower self-esteem and 82% of secondary school teachers responding that pupils with a limited vocabulary are less likely to stay in education.

Why Closing the Word Gap Matters: Oxford Language Report offers a summary of key findings from the OUP survey and shares best practice from schools successful in reducing the word gap.

The report also includes articles from academics, experts and practitioners in a bid to shine a light on this problem and find ways to close the word gap.

Take a look online

Visit oxford.ly/wordgap to read the full report and for practical tips and support.