

## ABSTRACT

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Reading comprehension is a foundational academic skill that allows students to further their education in all subject areas. In school, reading is used to gain knowledge through textbooks and articles, and it is used to inform students of directions, rules, and procedures. Students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often tend to exhibit deficits in social communication abilities and may receive special education services in various areas including academics, behavior, and social-communication skills. For students with ASD, these academic and social challenges can often lead to reading comprehension difficulties which can hinder further learning, and which indicate a need for additional support through use of evidence-based strategies. Educators, both in the general education and special education settings, play an integral role in supporting reading comprehension development for students with ASD. This study examined the beliefs of educators teaching reading comprehension to students with ASD, the strategies they used to teach reading comprehension to students with ASD, how effective they found those strategies to be, and the curricula and supplemental materials they are provided for teaching reading. Results indicated a generally low level of self-confidence in local Connecticut special and elementary school educators' abilities to teach reading comprehension to students with ASD, but high confidence in the use of strategies and the efficacy of those strategies. The strategies of direct instruction, story map/structure analysis, pre-reading questions, and activation of background knowledge were the most widely used. Anaphoric cueing, although the least utilized strategy, was rated as effective by all educators who used it in their practice. These gaps between knowledge and practice may indicate a need for additional emphasis on strategy use and for increased availability of modified or supplemental materials to differentiate reading instruction to better accommodate the needs of students with ASD in the area of reading comprehension.