

PRINT IS VITAL FOR THE FUTURE OF READING

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Printed learning materials play a vital role in the future of education in Europe – even for so-called ‘digital natives’. The wide body of independent academic research carried out on this topic clearly demonstrates that urgent action must be taken to ensure students’ reading comprehension and critical thinking skills are not irrevocably damaged by the rapid and unsubstantiated introduction of screen reading in schools.

Intergraf calls on policymakers and education bodies (European and national) to act now without delay. Print reading must be prioritised over digital reading in schools unless there is a proven learning advantage of digital. Inaction risks a degradation of students’ reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, which could hinder the creation of educated, critical thinking citizens in our society for decades.

Between 2014 and 2018 a network of almost 200 academics in Europe carried out four years of empirical research and debates about the effects of digitalisation on reading – particularly on students and young people. According to their wide-ranging meta-analysis of 54 individual experiments, which involved more than 170,000 participants from 19 countries, the **COST Action E-READ¹** initiative proves that “*paper remains the preferred reading medium for longer single texts, especially when reading for deeper comprehension and retention, and that paper best supports long-form reading of informational texts.*” It also clarifies that “*Reading long-form texts is invaluable for a number of cognitive achievements, such as concentration, vocabulary building and memory.*”² Crucially, this also holds true for younger people (sometimes unfittingly described as ‘digital natives’).

Urgent action must be taken at all levels to ensure that education in Europe is not degraded by the rapid and unsubstantiated introduction of screen reading in schools. The development of students’ reading comprehension and critical thinking skills must be immediately safeguarded. A failure to act on the advice given in such studies creates an immediate risk that students’ learning outcomes will be negatively affected by the increasing tendency of schools in Europe to promote reading on digital devices without the necessary tools and strategies to ensure this does not cause a setback in reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. Products which are proven to facilitate comprehension and critical thinking, such as paper books and other printed informational texts, already exist and should not be overlooked. Paper is a technology of proven strengths.

Intergraf calls on the European Commission to:

- Take into account in the European Digital Agenda and all related digital policy initiatives that not all digital progress brings benefits – especially when it comes to education and reading;
- Promote the use of printed materials in schools and other education environments unless there is a proven learning advantage of digital;
- Support more independent academic research on the effect of digitalisation on reading comprehension and critical thinking skills;
- Develop more and better guidelines for the implementation of digital technologies at European level (especially in education, but also in media environments more generally);
- Support national implementation of the recommendations of the European social partners of the graphic industry and the COST Action E-READ initiative;
- Foster more interaction between academics publishing research about reading comprehension and policymakers / schools / education bodies.

¹ For more information, please read COST Action E-READ initiative (www.ereadcost.eu)

² The COST Action E-READ initiative outlines further conclusions and makes its own recommendations in the concluding Stavanger Declaration, which can be accessed in full here in ten languages: <http://ereadcost.eu/stavanger-declaration/>