RESEARCH FOUNDATION

ESSA IV

SCHOLASTIC

Magazines+

Research Foundation Paper

UPDATED AUGUST 2025

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Introduction

Literacy skills play a fundamental role in students' academic achievement and professional opportunities (Adhikari & Shrestha, 2024; Watkins, 2017). Yet, since 2019, average reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have continued to decline for fourth- and eighth-grade students, with 70 percent of eighth graders falling below the proficient level in their ability to comprehend the meaning of text at their grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2025). Magazines+ is an instructional resource developed by Scholastic to improve reading fluency, comprehension, critical thinking, and disciplinary literacy using high-quality informational and literary texts. Magazines+ takes a cross-curricular approach by making connections between subject areas in both print and digital formats to provide educators with flexible, curriculum-aligned resources. Each magazine includes engaging articles, skills-focused lesson plans, and instructional scaffolds that reinforces close reading, vocabulary acquisition, analytical thinking, and student engagement.

Magazines+ meets key standards in reading, writing, and other content areas while offering one of the most engaging and effective ways for students to develop advanced literacy skills. It features clear learning objectives, teacher guides, critical-thinking prompts, skills sheets, standards alignments, and differentiated instruction. Digital editions of the magazines can be used with interactive whiteboards or other devices for whole-class discussions, and accompanying online videos provide essential background knowledge on the topics covered in each print issue. The digital platform also offers specialized features such as text-to-speech, accessible texts, and Spanish versions. Every issue in this extensive collection of teaching resources supports differentiated instruction for all learners. With adoption in over 63,000 schools, Scholastic Magazines+ reaches nearly 53% of schools across the United States.

Logic Model

The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) encourages districts and schools to adopt evidence-based programs with a well-specified logic model that explains how educational programs and interventions will likely improve outcomes for students. This logic model (see Figure 1)[1] provides results to satisfy ESSA evidence requirements for Level IV (Demonstrates a Rationale)[1] and supports future studies to further evaluate the effectiveness of Magazines+.

Fig. 1. Magazines+ Logic Model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes: *Short*	Outcomes: *Medium*	Outcomes: *Long*
Participants • Classroom teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators • Students in PreK to Grade 12 • Technical support and implementation specialists **Materials and Resources** • Grade-specific magazines (print and digital) • Instructional lesson plans and teacher guides • Multimedia tools such as videos, quizzes, and slide decks • Decodable texts, differentiated reading materials, Spanish editions, and accessibility features **Funding and Support** • Budget for subscriptions and program implementation • Professional development funds for educators **Learning Environment** • Classrooms, media centers, and home learning settings • Digital infrastructure such as devices and internet access	**Instructional Methods** • Implementing reading lessons using Magazines+ print and digital content • Engaging students in close reading, vocabulary, and comprehension tasks • Facilitating classroom discussions and collaborative activities • Using multimedia to support diverse learners **Assessment and Feedback** • Collecting student work and teacher observations to evaluate engagement and comprehension • Gathering feedback on usage patterns and instructional needs • Monitoring student progress using formative assessments • Providing feedback to students to support their learning **Professional Development** • Training teachers on best practices for implementing Magazines+ • Providing ongoing support for integrating resources into instruction • Sharing usage strategies across subject areas and grade levels	**Educational Materials** • Number of Magazines+ issues distributed and used • Number of multimedia resources accessed by students • Number of instructional guides and lesson plans delivered to teachers **Student Work** • Completed assignments and assessments linked to Magazines+ content • Evidence of vocabulary growth, comprehension strategies, and content knowledge **Teacher Implementation** • Number of teachers trained on Magazines+ • Frequency of classroom use (by subject, grade, or unit) • Teacher reflections and qualitative feedback on program integration	• Improved vocabulary and reading comprehension • Greater engagement in classroom discussions • Increased confidence in literacy activities • Increased interest and motivation in school • Increased engagement and participation in learning activities • Enhanced digital literacy skills • Early identification of students needing additional support	• Increased ability to analyze texts and use evidence in responses • Reduction in the number of students categorized as at risk for reading failure • Increased reading comprehension and fluency ability • Increased foundational literacy skills • Improved student reasoning	• Enhanced literacy skills that enable academic success • Reading gap reduction for students from diverse backgrounds and those with learning difficulties • Cultural literacy development within schools • Preparedness for advanced literacy skills • Increased overall literacy rates in school districts
Assumptions • Consistent use of Magazines+ by students and teachers enhances motivation and learning outcomes through engaging content and multimodal features.		**External Factors** • Implementation and impact may be influenced by access to technology, instructional capacity, and curriculum or assessment requirements across districts.			

[1] Guidance for Level IV states that an intervention should include a "well-specified logic model that is informed by research or an evaluation that suggests how the intervention is likely to improve relevant outcomes; and an effort to study the effects of the intervention, ideally producing promising evidence or higher, that will happen as part of the intervention or is underway elsewhere . . . " (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p.9).

The following sections review the theoretical and empirical evidence supporting the core components of Magazines+ with a focus on recent developments in reading research and literacy instruction. They are designed to inform educators, administrators, and researchers about the pedagogical underpinnings of Magazines+ and its alignment with current educational standards and learning needs.

Alignment with Best Practices

In response to concerns about literacy development in U.S. schools, national standards have emphasized the need for students to engage with increasingly complex texts at their grade level and beyond. However, Amendum et al. (2018) argue that we are unlikely to see positive outcomes from this policy if students are given more complex texts without scaffolds and instructional support. One solution is to increase instructional support in line with educational expectations at every grade level to nurture the sense of self-efficacy from which motivation may derive (Pearson, 2023). Providing access to texts that are manageable, rather than overwhelming, can play a crucial role in strengthening students' self-perception as readers and increasing their desire to engage with written content. Shims in literacy instruction encourage teachers to balance students' current reading abilities with the complexity of grade-level texts by offering a range of appropriately leveled materials alongside more challenging texts selected to align with curriculum objectives and student interests.

Magazines+ supports these practices through structured scaffolding, grade-appropriate topics, and complex tasks that foster comprehension and critical thinking. The resources provide a portfolio of classroom magazines that are specifically designed to engage students at their reading level while also exposing them to rich, complex ideas. Each issue includes developmentally appropriate articles with built-in scaffolds, such as vocabulary previews, text features, reading comprehension questions, and visuals, that support comprehension.



The accessibility and flexibility of Magazines+ also help teachers meet instructional goals across classroom contexts. A teacher interviewed by Solari and Collins (2017) shared, "I really like using the Upfront [magazine] by Scholastic. It is a social studies-driven current events magazine that is very age appropriate and reading-level appropriate" (p. A1). School administrators see the benefit, too. One principal, reflecting on the use of Choices®, a health and well-being learning magazine for teens, said the resource helps teachers engage in important conversations with students that enable students to process situations they encounter outside of school.

Exposure to a Variety of Texts

To succeed academically and participate meaningfully in the modern workforce, students must develop sophisticated literacy skills, such as critical reading, content comprehension, and the ability to analyze diverse texts (Kamil et al., 2008; Vaughn & Wanzek, 2024). Students should be exposed to a variety of text types, including narratives with characters, settings, events, problems, and resolutions, as well as informational (nonfiction) texts that present facts about the natural and social world (Purcell-Gates et al., 2007). Even the youngest students need to acquire the skills to read and understand these different types of texts, and accessing a variety of such texts can help make reading more interesting to students.

Magazines+ is aligned with the existing science of reading research, which underscores the need for systematic exposure to diverse texts to build domain knowledge and prepare students for reading in different content areas (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Cervetti et al., 2016). Its robust collection of nonfiction articles across such subjects as science, social studies, and current events, ensuring regular engagement with a wide range of informational texts, which can improve students' overall literacy development by expanding vocabulary and content knowledge (Foorman et al., 2016). Informational texts are an important means of building background knowledge, which in turn facilitates the meaning-making processes of reading comprehension (Gabriel et al., 2012). In addition, exposure to informational texts is crucial for students to meet national assessment standards. By incorporating high-interest nonfiction and focusing on comprehension strategies such as summarizing, questioning, and using text evidence, Magazines+ supports both foundational and higher-order reading skills.

Magazines as Instructional Tools

Magazines can be an especially appealing entry point to reading and learning at any skill level. Classroom magazines provide extra support for reading comprehension with color-coding, pictures, repetition of target vocabulary, and other features that can improve accessibility for readers (Morrow et al., 2006). In examining the educational value of children's magazines, Morrow and Lesnick (2001) suggest that magazines are both functional, by providing information and expanding the student's world, and entertaining, by offering a variety of reading topics. Students can choose to read magazine articles on familiar topics for which they already possess some background knowledge and relevant vocabulary to help support their reading comprehension and fluency (Gabriel et al., 2012).

Many teachers across the United States use classroom magazines to increase literacy skills each school year (Anderson, 2022). As instructional tools, magazines can support literacy development by offering high-interest, age-appropriate content that combines engaging visuals with short text. Magazines can enhance reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and background knowledge, particularly for students who struggle with more traditional or lengthy texts (Sithole et al., 2016). Their varied text structures and current-event focus also align with the goals of college- and career-ready standards, which emphasize text complexity and informational reading (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010; Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013). When exploring middle school students' magazine reading habits, researchers found that background and specific vocabulary knowledge were critical for students' reading comprehension and engagement (Gabriel et al., 2012).

Although magazines in general have long been used as supplementary reading material, their value as classroom instructional tools has been underutilized. Magazines+ provides information that is factual, current, and specialized to support specific lessons or overall instructional themes. For example, the grade-specific Scholastic News® magazine focuses on current events that will appeal to students and support classroom curricula; Scholastic MATH® for Grades 6–9 makes the subject more accessible and relatable by connecting it to students' lives outside school; and SuperSTEM for Grades 3–6 utilizes multi-genre texts to build knowledge in science, technology, engineering, and math. These specialty magazines expose students to new topics and expand their knowledge base while serving as a bridge to grade-level text.

Building Literacy Across Content Areas

Literacy development is no longer the sole domain of the language arts classroom; it must extend across all subject areas to prepare students for the specialized demands of academic and professional life. Recent educational research supports literacy instruction across content areas, requiring reading and writing to be taught in subjects beyond English class, such as in social studies, history, math, and science (Capin et al., 2021). Building literacy skills across disciplines is critical for student success, particularly in an information-rich and interdisciplinary world. As students advance in school, literacy becomes increasingly discipline-specific, requiring different reading strategies, vocabulary knowledge, and modes of thinking in different content areas (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Instructional materials that support disciplinary literacy enable students to develop the skills needed to comprehend and analyze texts in science, history, mathematics, and other fields—skills essential for deeper learning and long-term academic success.

Magazines+ is uniquely positioned to support this type of cross-disciplinary literacy development. With a portfolio of more than 30 grade-specific classroom magazines that span subjects such as language arts, math, science, social studies, and current events, Magazines+ provides a flexible and engaging framework for helping students build content knowledge, vocabulary, and discipline-specific reading strategies they need for academic and professional success. From My Big World™ for PreK students, which introduces foundational nonfiction and school-readiness skills, to Junior Scholastic®, Scope®, Scholastic MATH®, and Science World® for middle and high school readers, these magazines embed rich literacy experiences within the context of each discipline.

The design of Magazines+ aligns closely with research on disciplinary literacy. Shanahan & Shanahan (2008) argue that students must learn not just general comprehension strategies but also the specialized approaches that experts in various fields use to read and analyze texts. For example, a historian might attend to sourcing and bias, while a scientist prioritizes precision and structured evidence. Magazines+ supports these distinct literacy practices by offering content-specific tools, such as vocabulary scaffolds, close-reading activities, writing prompts, and multimedia supports, tailored to disciplinary goals.

Building students' knowledge base, particularly in the early and middle grades, is a cornerstone of reading comprehension and critical thinking. Studies show that when students possess strong content knowledge, they are better equipped to make inferences, integrate new information, and retain understanding (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Cervetti & Pearson, 2012; Lupo et al., 2018). Magazines+ helps address this need through current fact-based nonfiction articles that are frequently updated and developmentally appropriate. The instructional resources offer timely content that motivates students and enhances comprehension across subject areas.

Teachers can also use multiple modes of communication to support multimodal literacy development, including informational text, directions, forms, and information displayed in graphs, charts, or maps. Additional supports for magazine articles, such as videos containing background information on a topic, are available through the digital portal. The integration of print and digital texts reflects growing evidence that multimodal literacy experiences enhance comprehension and student engagement, particularly when they include blended formats like text, image, and video (Barzillai et al., 2018; Leu et al., 2017).

Multimodal Literacy Development

A recent literature review found that multimodal teaching practices, such as having students engage with reading, visuals, and video content in combination, support the development of both comprehension and expressive learning, including identity development and critical thinking (Foster et al., 2024). The Magazines+ platform supports these kinds of experiences by providing web-based resources and digital versions of its print magazines that include access to related videos, vocabulary supports, and interactive activities.

Digital versions of the magazine articles offer additional content, such as vocabulary definitions, read-aloud audio, and interactive tools. For example, students can watch videos before, during, or after reading a text to gain or extend background knowledge, improving content comprehension. The read-aloud feature models fluent reading with appropriate speed and intonation, which may support early readers in developing fluency (Roembke et al., 2021).

Magazines+ is designed to support all learners, including multilingual learners and students from historically underserved communities. Vocabulary and background knowledge are supported through scaffolds that help bridge gaps in experience and prior knowledge. Other digital tools enhance accessibility and active engagement. For example, the zoom-in function allows examination of visual details or larger text display, supporting learners who need accommodation. Sticky-note and highlighting features enable students to annotate texts, identify main ideas, and mark evidence—scaffolding key comprehension skills such as argument support and text-based reasoning (Bus et al., 2015). These features reduce cognitive load and provide differentiated supports that meet the needs of early or striving readers.

With Magazines+, educators can curate themed content across issues, topics, and disciplines. Articles are organized and tagged by topic and standard, making it easier for teachers to align resources with learning objectives. This capability allows educators to serve as mixed-media curators, presenting content in relevant and age-appropriate formats. In turn, students can engage with content on smartphones, tablets, or laptops, connecting class concepts to current events while strengthening digital navigation skills, an increasingly essential part of academic success and workplace readiness.

A recent study supports this practice, demonstrating that students who used interactive digital reading platforms saw a 9 percentile point increase in reading growth compared to peers who used traditional print instruction alone (Smith, 2025). Such findings reinforce the importance of incorporating digital and multimodal texts into classroom instruction to drive literacy gains, particularly among students who may need more engaging or differentiated materials.

Finally, Magazines+ contributes to students' development of graphical literacy, a critical aspect of multimodal comprehension. Articles routinely include charts, timelines, and visual representations that students must interpret to understand the content. Despite standards increasingly requiring students to comprehend graphics, few instructional approaches explicitly teach how to understand them (Guo et al., 2020). Magazines+ addresses this gap through age-appropriate scaffolds, such as color-coding and layout formats that clarify the connection between visuals and text. Students also benefit from familiar real-world contexts that help them make sense of complex visuals, such as infographics in science or social studies articles.

By integrating text, audio, video, and graphical elements in a single flexible format, Magazines+ offers a powerful multimodal learning environment that supports student engagement, digital literacy development, and curricular alignment.

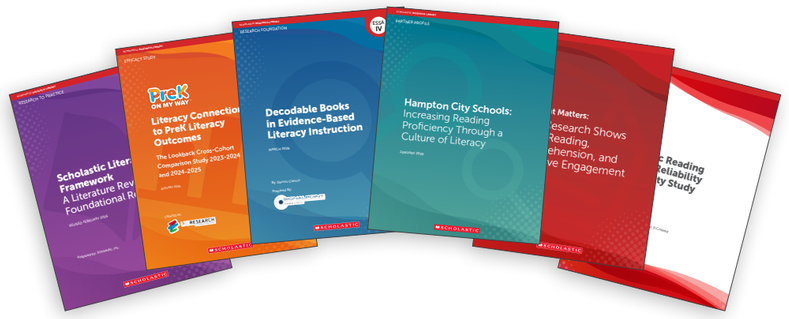
Conclusion

Grounded in strong empirical and theoretical foundations, Magazines+ reflects current research on the science of reading, disciplinary literacy, and effective instructional practice. Research indicates that engaging, content-rich texts paired with explicit instructional supports can improve students' comprehension, stamina, and motivation—key factors for sustained literacy growth (Lupo et al., 2018). By embedding disciplinary literacy practices within developmentally appropriate informational and literary texts, Magazines+ supports students in developing not only foundational reading skills such as identifying central ideas and analyzing text structure, but also the content knowledge and critical thinking abilities required across subject areas.

Through its integration of print and digital formats, multimodal supports, and flexible instructional resources, Magazines+ enables differentiated instruction and helps educators connect reading, writing, and inquiry to broader academic goals. In a time when national reading outcomes signal the need for effective, scalable literacy solutions, Magazines+ offers a comprehensive platform that addresses both skill development and student engagement. By combining authentic content, cross-curricular connections, and accessibility features, Magazines+ equips students with the literacy skills necessary for academic success today and the demands of learning and work beyond the classroom.

Scholastic

Scholastic Education is the educational division of Scholastic Corporation, a global leader in children's literacy and publishing. With over a century of experience, Scholastic Education offers evidence-based print and digital instructional materials, classroom magazines, and professional learning resources designed for PreK–12 students. With a mission to ensure every child has the opportunity to succeed, Scholastic Education develops products that are rooted in research and aligned with state and national standards. Scholastic Education is also committed to advancing research, best practices, and thought leadership on the Science of Reading more broadly.



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