

# Reading to Dogs in Schools: An Exploratory Study of Teacher Perspectives

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## Background & Aims

**Background:** Reading to Dogs (RTD) interventions to support children's literacy and wellbeing have become increasingly popular and prevalent in UK primary schools, and research interest in the field is increasing. Recent systematic reviews have all found benefits, but also identified methodological limitations and the need for more rigorous research. Importantly, while RTD research on reading and social, emotional and behavioural (SEB) outcomes is growing, very little research has sought to prioritise teachers' views of RTD.

**Aim:** This study sought to examine UK primary school teachers' views of RTD in schools, exploring perceived benefits to reading and SEB outcomes, challenges associated with implementation, and their own experience of RTD interventions.

## Methods

### Participants

253 UK teachers (with varying knowledge and experience of RTD)

### Procedure

An online survey was designed with questions focussing on:

**Benefits to reading outcomes** such as reduced anxiety, increased motivation, confidence, attitudes and skills.

**Benefits to social-emotional behavioural outcomes** such as mood elevation, enjoyment, feelings of calm and improved behaviour.

**Challenges** such as paperwork, time commitment, allergies, and child/staff/dog welfare.

In addition, teachers were invited to provide **qualitative insights** regarding benefits and challenges associated with RTD.

## Results

Teachers' perspectives of RTD were generally very positive; perspectives of benefits to SEB outcomes were more positive than those associated with reading outcomes. Furthermore, teachers perceived greater benefits to children's reading affect (e.g., anxiety, confidence) than their reading frequency or skill.

In general, teachers reported low concerns about the challenges associated with RTD; qualitative insights demonstrated that while these challenges were real, they were not seen as insurmountable.

### Reading to Dogs (RTD)

RTD is defined as a child reading to a fully assessed and registered dog selected for this purpose and accompanied by a handler. The rationale behind it is that the dog may be a non-judgemental and comforting listener.

## Discussion & Implications for Education

It is important to seek teacher perspectives of RTD, not only in regard to children's learning outcomes, but in respect to any positive and negative implications for teacher workload and classroom practice. Overall primary school teachers were very positive about RTD suggesting that teachers would be amenable to RTD in their classrooms. Teachers provided useful insights into the benefits and challenges associated with RTD from a practical and pedagogical perspective. This study highlights the importance of gaining teachers' perspectives of interventions that affect them and their pupils to ensure that their professional and pedagogical knowledge feeds into future intervention design and implementation.

To access our website: go to <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/> or scan the QR code



### Academic paper

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