

Reading challenges: How to design and run them to make them work

A review of literature and survey findings

November 2020

Introduction

As a result of generous funding support from the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS), National Literacy Trust has been able to launch a national reading campaign called National Reading Champions, which comprises termly individual reading challenges coupled with a national book quiz. School teams enter the National Reading Champions Quiz which is delivered through a series of regional and national live events. Alongside the quiz, the National Reading Champions Challenges are simple, free, teacher-led reading challenges which aim to support all pupils to read more books, read more widely, and improve stamina and fluency.

Leading up to the launch of the reading challenges in autumn 2020, we conducted research on the benefits of reading challenges and what makes a good reading challenge. This included exploring previous evidence on reading challenges as well as gathering views of teachers and librarians.

The purpose of this report is to explore the extent to which reading challenges have an impact on children's reading enjoyment, behaviours and skills, and the key considerations when developing reading challenges, based on previous evidence as well as surveys of 192 teachers and librarians conducted in summer 2020.

The report will also present some key recommendations for designing reading challenges, based on the data from the teacher surveys. These will be used to inform the development of a new reading challenge created by the National Literacy Trust.

Key recommendations

- Consider how reading challenges utilising rewards and recognition can recognise participation and avoid signifying failure.
- While challenges can be motivating for children because of the competitive nature, careful consideration is needed so that challenges are not too competitive and all children can participate.
- From a practical point of view, reading challenges should be ongoing but one challenge should not be too long. A series of challenges could work better than one long challenge throughout the year.
- A reading challenge should provide optional resources for teachers.
- Reading challenges should have appealing themes and book lists.

Do reading challenges have an impact on reading enjoyment, behaviours and skills?

Findings from both previous research and our survey of teachers and librarians in summer 2020 indicate that reading challenges can have considerable benefits for pupils' reading. This section discusses previous evidence on the impact on reading enjoyment, reading behaviour and skills, and presents findings from our additional surveys of teachers and librarians.

Reading challenges support reading enjoyment

There is some indication that reading challenges can increase children's reading enjoyment and motivation. For example, an evaluation of the Summer Reading Challenge, which encourages children to read as many as six books over the summer holidays and visit their local library¹, found that taking part in the challenge saw an increase in enthusiasm around reading². While it has to be noted that children who took part tended to have positive attitudes towards reading to start with, the programme was successful in retaining levels of reading enjoyment for participating children.

This was supported by teachers' views from the evaluation of the Summer Reading Challenge who noted increases in motivation and focus as readers, and increased enthusiasm surrounding reading for children who took part in the challenge. Furthermore, teachers also saw developing reading for enjoyment as one of the main advantages of the challenge³.

Evidence from the Scottish First Minister's Reading Challenge, which was launched in 2016 and encourages schools to take part in one of six challenges with their pupils, also found that challenges may have a positive impact on reading enjoyment. Some of the pupils spoken to

¹ <https://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk/>

² Kennedy, R., & Bearne, E. (2009). *Summer Reading Challenge 2009: Impact research report*. Retrieved from https://readingagency.org.uk/children/Final_SRC_Impact_research_report_Dec_09%20v2.pdf

³ Kennedy, R., & Bearne, E. (2009). *Summer Reading Challenge 2009: Impact research report*. Retrieved from https://readingagency.org.uk/children/Final_SRC_Impact_research_report_Dec_09%20v2.pdf

in focus groups as part of the evaluation highlighted that they had been uninterested in reading before but after the challenge they now enjoyed reading and chose to engage in reading⁴. Feedback from the challenge found that 79% of teachers from participating schools also felt that it helped their pupils understand the value of reading for pleasure.

Readathon, run by Read for Good, is a sponsored reading challenge where children and young people in schools pledge to read various quantities and types of reading material over a certain time, and are sponsored by friends and family for achieving their targets. Analysis of children who took part in Readathon found that the scheme may increase reading enjoyment. Data from 6,267 participating children showed that more of them enjoyed reading compared with their peers (66.0% vs. 54.3%)⁵. In addition, the data showed that more pupils who participated in Readathon enjoyed reading compared with those who didn't take part, regardless of gender, age group and free school meal status, indicating that this type of challenge may have an impact on all pupils.

Similarly, Accelerated Reader, a tool for schools where pupils read books and complete quizzes based on them, has established that pupils who use it enjoy reading more than their peers who do not. 58.8% of pupils who said they use Accelerated Reader enjoy reading very much or quite a lot compared with 51.9% of their peers⁶. While Accelerated Reader is quite different from traditional reading challenges, it does challenge children to read more books and complete tasks on them, and therefore the findings suggest that all types of challenges can indeed be useful for supporting reading for enjoyment.

Reading for enjoyment was also overwhelmingly commented on by teachers in our surveys when asked what makes a good reading challenge. This indicates that reading for enjoyment is indeed a major intended outcome of reading challenges for teachers and a reason to participate:

“Something that motivates and inspires the children”

“Has a long-term effect on the reading habits of children and gets them excited about reading”

“Genuine focus on reading for its own sake”

“Students being told that all books are valued and being encouraged to do it in their own time as well as being given class time”

⁴ Scottish Book Trust. (2018). *Evaluation of the First Minister's Reading Challenge*. Retrieved from <https://www.readingchallenge.scot/sites/default/files/2019-02/First%20Minister%27s%20Reading%20Challenge%20Evaluation%202017-18.pdf>

⁵ Clark, C. (2018). *Readathon: How children and young people are engaged and the benefits to reading*. Retrieved from https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Readathon_report_2018.pdf

⁶ Clark, C., & Cunningham, A. (2016). *Reading enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes in pupils who use Accelerated Reader*. Retrieved from https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/2016_05_19_free_research_-_reading_enjoyment_behaviour_and_attitudes_in_AR_pup_4180s0V.pdf

“Something that focuses on promoting the enjoyment of reading rather than the 'difficulty level' of a book or just the number of books you read. e.g. trying different genres of books”

“Reinforcing the importance of reading for joy and pleasure. That children have the right to only read half a book, or a chapter, or just read the ending. Too much emphasis on finishing a book rather than enjoying the parts you wish to.”

Reading challenges provide practice and therefore can develop reading stamina

As reading challenges can promote reading enjoyment, they are also likely to have an impact on reading practices and behaviours. Indeed, previous evidence and theoretical considerations suggest that it is important to consider the impact of reading challenges on reading behaviours and therefore increased practice. Ultimately, once pupils engage in reading, their skills are likely to develop and they are then likely to engage again. This rich-get-richer-poor-get-poorer phenomenon is called the Matthew effect⁷.

Previous findings relating directly to the benefits of reading challenges show that they can increase engagement in positive reading behaviours. In fact, evidence from the Summer Reading Challenge shows that one of its main advantages is what it offers in terms of extending the children’s range of reading experience, challenging young readers to extend their scope⁸. Similarly, teachers commented on wider reading repertoire, increased confidence as readers and greater independence as advantages of the programme.

A recent evaluation of the Scottish First Minister’s Reading Challenge showed that almost all pupils said they were reading more books, reading more often and reading in more places as a result of taking part⁹. Some also said they were now choosing to read a book instead of engaging in other activities such as watching TV or playing video games. Some of the pupils had even noticed this difference in their peers¹⁰.

Teachers and parents also commented on more positive reading behaviours after taking part in the challenge. 82% of teachers felt that the challenge had encouraged their pupils to read for pleasure more often. In particular, schools reported they had noticed changes in reading behaviour among certain groups of pupils such as boys, pupils from disadvantaged areas and

⁷ Cunningham, A. E. & Stanovich, K. E. (2001). *What reading does for the mind*. Journal of Direct Instruction, 1(2), 137-149.

⁸ Kennedy, R., & Bearne, E. (2009). *Summer Reading Challenge 2009: Impact research report*. Retrieved from https://readingagency.org.uk/children/Final_SRC_Impact_research_report_Dec_09%20v2.pdf

⁹ Scottish Book Trust. (2018). *Evaluation of the First Minister’s Reading Challenge*. Retrieved from <https://www.readingchallenge.scot/sites/default/files/2019-02/First%20Minister%27s%20Reading%20Challenge%20Evaluation%202017-18.pdf>

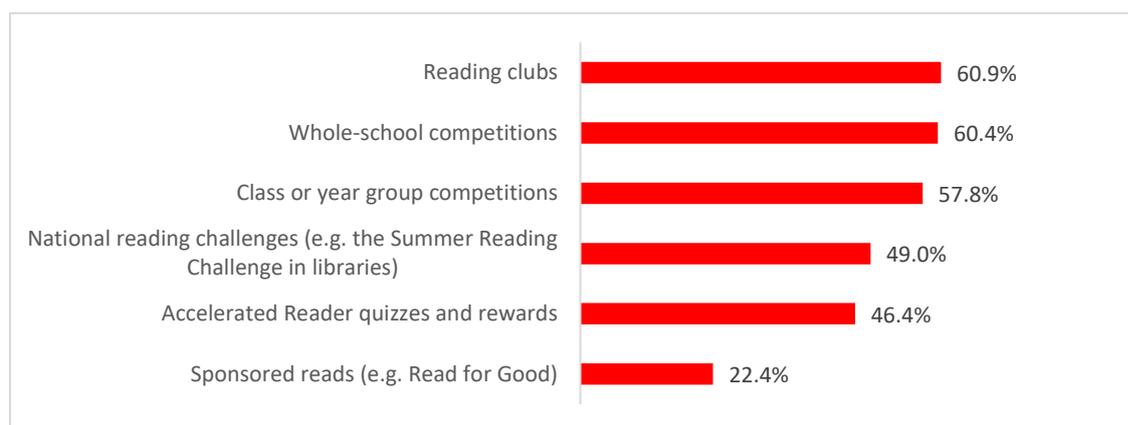
¹⁰ Ibid

EAL pupils¹¹. Similarly, many parents felt that the challenge had encouraged children to read for pleasure more at home¹².

Increased positive reading behaviour has also been documented as part of Readathon and Accelerated Reader. Analysis of data from 6,267 pupils who took part in Readathon in 2017 indicates that taking part in the challenge increased pupils' reading frequency¹³, with 2 in 5 pupils saying that as a result of taking part in Readathon they now read more often. In a similar vein, pupils who took part in Accelerated Reader were more likely to read outside class compared with their peers who didn't take part. 83.6% of pupils who took part in Accelerated Reader said that they read outside class at least once a week, compared with 76.3% of their peers¹⁴.

Data from our own surveys with teachers show that many teachers have indeed used challenges and competitions as a way to get their pupils to read more. As Figure 1 below shows, many practitioners have previously used whole-school competitions (60.4%), class competitions (57.8%) and national reading challenges (49.0%) to encourage their pupils to read more.

Figure 1: Strategies teachers have used to get their pupils to read more



Practice is evidently what is needed to master any skill. Engagement in reading activities has been linked to positive reading outcomes in a number of studies (see e.g., Clark & Teravainen, 2017¹⁵). However, it can be argued that one of the key benefits of practice is developing reading stamina. Reading stamina refers to pupils' ability to focus, engage and cope with more demanding texts, and read independently for periods of time without being distracted.¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Clark, C. (2018). *Readathon: How children and young people are engaged and the benefits to reading*. Retrieved from https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Readathon_report_2018.pdf

¹⁴ Clark, C., & Cunningham, A. (2016). *Reading enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes in pupils who use Accelerated Reader*. Retrieved from https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/2016_05_19_free_research_-_reading_enjoyment_behaviour_and_attitudes_in_AR_pup_4180s0V.pdf

¹⁵ Clark, C., & Teravainen, A. (2017). *What it means to be a reader at age 11: valuing skills, affective components and behavioural processes*. Retrieved from https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/ROGO_model_evidence_base_December_2017_-_final.pdf

¹⁶ Scholastic. (2014). *The joy and power of reading: A summary of research and expert opinion*. Retrieved from <https://www.scholastic.co.uk/assets/a/0e/05/readingresearch-1327386.pdf>

Some professionals¹⁷ have also defined stamina as having the energy and concentration to focus on reading for at least 30 continuous minutes a day.

While other aspects of reading, such as fluency and comprehension, can be developed in various strategies and interventions, practice trains muscle memory and supports increased attention¹⁸, therefore making it key to developing stamina in reading. Stamina on the other hand is also required to read more difficult texts and develop further reading skills such as high-level comprehension. To achieve the stamina to do this, pupils need to increase their capacity to concentrate and contemplate¹⁹. Again, practice and engagement in reading can provide this.

While regular practice was overwhelmingly mentioned as a good way to develop reading stamina in our teacher survey, alongside supporting reading for pleasure, boosting confidence and providing engaging books, many teachers in our survey also commented on challenges and competitions as a way to develop stamina, as they engage pupils in regular reading and therefore provide engaged reading practice:

“Using an online reading log to record progress with points-based outcomes and leaderboards”

“Reading challenges/competitions, e.g. Summer Reading Challenge”

“Termly reading challenges”

“Reading awards for the number of books read. A cup awarded to the class with the most books read.”

“Accelerated Reader is a good way to develop stamina, as it provides a constant personalised challenge.”

“Turning reading into a competition or game has worked well for reluctant readers (low-ability boys in particular).”

“Time for reading for pleasure in class, challenges like how much can they read in 60 seconds.”

“Making reading stamina specific e.g read 2 pages every Monday, then 4 on Wednesday, then 6 on Friday, read a whole book over the weekend. Parents to confirm then reward.”

“Prizes/rewards for reading. Reading in form time and specific reading lessons. Reading challenges in the holidays.”

¹⁷ Robb, L. (2016). *Ten surefire tips for maximizing student reading stamina* [blog post]. Retrieved from <https://edublog.scholastic.com/post/ten-surefire-tips-maximizing-student-reading-stamina>

¹⁸ Ehmer, A. (2012). *Reading stamina* [blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.literacysolutions.com.au/blog/2012/05/07/reading-stamina/>

¹⁹ Jago, C. (2011). *With rigor for all: Meeting common core standards for reading literature*. Portsmouth, NH, USA: Heinemann

Can reading challenges develop children’s reading skills overall?

While reading challenges provide practice and build reading stamina, which are likely to result in improved skills in the long term, their impact on children’s reading attainment is more mixed. For example, findings from the Summer Reading Challenge evaluation show that children’s perception of their own reading skill actually declined over the summer, however this could be attributed to their perception of starting the new school year in a higher class²⁰. Teacher judgements of reading skill on the other hand showed that more children who took part maintained their reading level over the summer or improved their skills.

Interestingly, only a couple of teachers directly commented on reading skills as something they link to successful reading challenges. This indicates that while undeniably many teachers are interested in developing pupils’ reading skills, it is not a key immediate outcome of reading challenges.

What are the key considerations for successful reading challenges?

As the previous section has indicated, reading challenges can be used to support children’s reading enjoyment. They can also provide reading practice for pupils, which might develop stamina and ultimately reading skills overall, but the key outcome of challenges and quizzes seems to be reading enjoyment. This raises a question as to whether extrinsic rewards inherent to challenges can indeed support such intrinsic motivation to read.

This section first discusses what the considerations are for designing reading challenges, considering rewards, competition and inclusivity as well as practical considerations such as resources and length of the challenge.

Extrinsic rewards and competition incentivising reading

Some commentators²¹ have previously highlighted that using rewards to incentivise children to read may not be beneficial for reading enjoyment. In fact, researchers in the field of social psychology have argued for decades that rewarding people for activities may be detrimental and can destroy their intrinsic motivation²² - an argument that needs to be considered when using challenges to incentivise children to read. Indeed, some commentary around reading challenges has specifically highlighted that rather than supporting a love of reading they may simply make children complete the challenges and narrow down the variety of books they read²³.

²⁰ Kennedy, R., & Bearne, E. (2009). *Summer Reading Challenge 2009: Impact research report*. Retrieved from https://readingagency.org.uk/children/Final_SRC_Impact_research_report_Dec_09%20v2.pdf

²¹ See e.g., Miskin, R. (2016). Ruth’s Blog: *Please don’t pay children to read* [blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.ruthmiskin.com/en/about-us/blog-news/article/ruths-blog-please-dont-pay-children-read/>

²² Pierce, W. D., Cameron, J., Banko, K. M., & So, S. (2003). Positive effects of rewards and performance standards of intrinsic motivation. *The Psychological Record*, 53, 561-579.

²³ Cameron, S. (2018). *Why incentivising reading does not work* [blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.tes.com/news/why-incentivising-reading-does-not-work>

Some studies have established a link between extrinsic motivation and lower reading skills²⁴. Similarly, some studies²⁵ have suggested that extrinsic motivation, such as rewards, can hinder intrinsically motivated learners as they are not fully engaged in the activity because they are directing their attention to external values rather than appreciating the activity itself. However, these findings are not straightforward. Certain extrinsic elements of reading motivation, such as receiving recognition for success in reading and grades, can be related to pupils' reading activity alongside more intrinsic reasons for reading²⁶. Furthermore some sources indicate that rewards can also maintain or enhance intrinsic motivation if they are offered for meeting specific criterion but do not signify failure and are loosely tied to performance²⁷. Therefore, the most crucial consideration for reading challenges might not lie on the extrinsic rewards per se, but rather on how these rewards are utilised so that they recognise participation.

Indeed, many teachers in our surveys commented on rewarding participation and giving pupils recognition as a reward as a key element of a good challenge:

“Something that celebrates every student's participation and is differentiated so that the struggling readers are enthused and feel encouraged.”

“Something with recognition outside of the school e.g. published book or acknowledgment on a website. Little participation prizes – certificates too and a final prize but I think recognition is the big thing.”

“Exciting and beneficial but can sometimes be underwhelming at the end – they need an end celebration/acknowledgement.”

Our survey findings also indicate that extrinsic rewards are in fact a commonly used strategy to support pupils' reading in general. As Figure 2 shows, 65.1% of teachers said that they had previously used prizes, stickers or merit points as a strategy to support pupils' reading in general. In addition, a quarter (25.0%) of teachers had used other activities as a reward for reading.

Reflecting this common use of reading rewards, a vast number of teachers in the surveys highlighted that rewards are an important part of a reading challenge and that they are motivating for pupils:

“Incentives and prizes are also very important. To the less-engaged students, these tend to be much more successful if the prize is not necessarily book

²⁴ Becker, M., McElvany, N., & Kortenbruck, M. (2010). Intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation as predictors of reading literacy: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(4), 773–785

²⁵ Valentine, J. C., Dubois, D. L., & Cooper, H. (2004). The relation between self-beliefs and academic achievement: A meta-analytic review. *Educational Psychologist*, 39(2), 111-133.

²⁶ Wigfield, A. & Guthrie, J. T. (1997). Relations of children's motivation for reading to the amount and breadth of their reading. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 420-432.

²⁷ Pierce, W. D., Cameron, J., Banko, K. M., & So, S. (2003). Positive effects of rewards and performance standards of intrinsic motivation. *The Psychological Record*, 53, 561-579.

related. We've offered rewards afternoons and Amazon vouchers this year for the bigger prizes, as well as stationery and sweets more frequently.”

“I have noticed that most children enjoy the rewards and it helps motivation.”

“Achievable goals, with great incentives along the way”

“Motivation to keep them going such as periodical prizes that they care about winning”

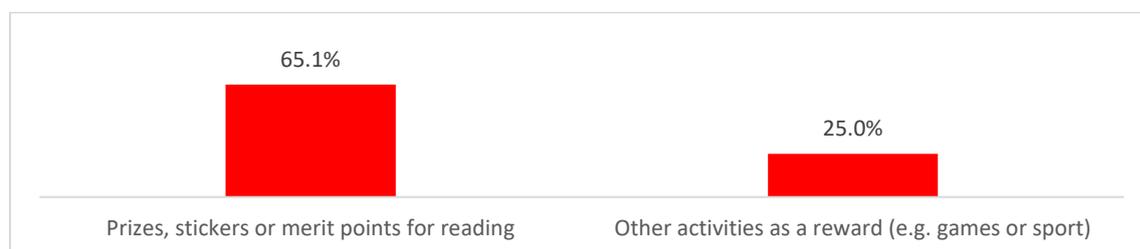
“Prizes always help to get students more interested and enthusiastic”

“Incentives – e.g. book prizes, end of challenge reward”

“For children, rewards such as books and stationery are always much more popular, even pupils who struggle love receiving books.”

Previous evidence similarly suggests that children like reading challenges because of the rewards. For example, the Scottish First Minister’s Challenge found that many pupils were encouraged to read through the element of challenge, certificates, prizes and competition²⁸. Similarly, children who participated in the Summer Reading Challenge identified the incentives or rewards as the best thing about the challenge.

Figure 2: Percentage of teachers who have used extrinsic rewards to support pupils’ reading



At the same time, not all teachers are supportive of rewards:

“A great way to incentivise reading, but prizes unnecessary. We want them to read because they love reading and want to explore more, not to win a pencil.”

“Something that doesn't incentivise students with material rewards and is something that appeals to students of a variety of reading tastes (non-fiction and fiction)”

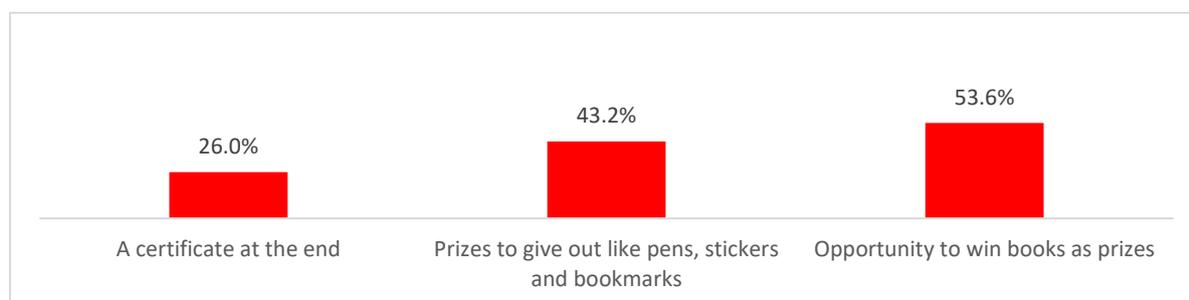
²⁸ Scottish Book Trust. (2018). *Evaluation of the First Minister’s Reading Challenge*. Retrieved from <https://www.readingchallenge.scot/sites/default/files/2019-02/First%20Minister%27s%20Reading%20Challenge%20Evaluation%202017-18.pdf>

However, rather than all treating all rewards as equal, it is possible that careful consideration is needed for deciding what the rewards for challenges are, as one teacher suggests:

“One which promotes a love of reading, rather than one which ‘bribes’ children into reading, through monetary or material prizes (other than books). Small token prizes are absolutely fine.”

Indeed, when teachers were asked to indicate the top three features they would like to see as part of a reading challenge, they rated books more highly than other types of prizes. As Figure 3 shows, over half (53.6%) of teachers would like to award books as prizes, compared with just over 2 in 5 (43.2%). Only just over a quarter of teachers (26.0%) would like to see a certificate included in their top three features.

Figure 3: What rewards would teachers like to see provided in their ideal reading challenge?



Competition as motivation

Alongside extrinsic rewards incentivising reading, competitions emerged as an important consideration for reading challenges and quizzes. For example, teachers highlighted the motivational impact of competitions:

“They are most effective when a high level of competition is involved”

“Competitive element”

“Students should be able to see how they are doing in comparison to others so that there is a competitive element and the prizes should encourage them to participate.”

“An incentive to win and competition between local and national schools”

“Competing with others and knowing there is a possibility of a reward, no matter how small”

“A motivational competition which inspires children to read widely”

“Students should be able to see how they are doing in comparison to others, so that there is a competitive element, and the prizes should encourage them to participate.”

However, caution needs to be exercised in the way a competition is promoted in school. For example, one teacher in our general survey expressed worry about pupils being too competitive:

“I am looking for a way to structure pupils' daily reading, but I worry about pupils becoming competitive with one another or with themselves for the purpose of their image, to the detriment of their understanding and development of reading skills.”

Challenges need to be inclusive

Previous commentators on reading challenges have also highlighted that we should not pit children against each other, children reading across various levels, and with varying home circumstances need to be considered²⁹. Therefore, challenges should be designed so that they work for all children.

Inclusivity as a consideration emerged as a major theme in our teacher surveys. A number of teachers expressed their thoughts on challenges sometimes being beneficial for children who already like reading and worry that they might disadvantage some groups of pupils:

“Something that has the potential to engage even students with low literacy/ those who claim not to enjoy reading “

“The challenges need to be differentiable to allow average/below average children to have a go, and be sufficiently challenging for the most able”

“Something inclusive so that less able children can take part but more able children can stretch and challenge themselves. So something not too prescriptive I suppose.”

“Some students will be okay with a challenge that takes them completely out of their comfort zone but others need something that they can relate to or identify with.”

“Something which provides a challenge to all students regardless of ability and encourages reluctant readers”

“Something that everyone can participate in, regardless of ability. I find that some cater too low or too high - it should be a well-rounded mix.”

“Accessible for all levels especially in a competition format - not a given that the quickest readers of most challenging books will necessarily win.”

“Something which challenges children to read beyond the same authors that are endlessly promoted and to discover brilliant books that they might not have otherwise known about. It should be about engaging a range of readers

²⁹ The Teaching Booth. (2017). *Do reading competitions and challenges kill a love of reading?* [blog post]. Retrieved from <https://theteachingbooth.wordpress.com/2017/08/02/do-reading-competitions-and-challenges-kill-a-love-of-reading/>

from different backgrounds and abilities and giving them the opportunity to discover the type of books that they enjoy.”

In line with ensuring that the challenge is accessible to all pupils, one of the key themes that emerged from teachers’ comments was access to books for all their pupils. Therefore, a successful reading challenge needs to consider how schools are going to access books and does not disadvantage children based on their background or home environment in terms of books and support from parents. This is highlighted by one teacher:

“Can highlight the class divide between children - research suggests middle-class children are much more likely to have parents who have time and money to support children's reading by buying books and reading with them/encouraging their reading at home. Underprivileged children are much less likely to be afforded this encouragement from the parents, due to constraints on time, money and desire for the cultural/social capital that comes with prolific reading. Praising certain children for completing a reading challenge can, in some cases, be praising privilege as the challenge assumes that all children have the same level of access and conducive home environment to read.”

Practical considerations

Our surveys also provided useful information on practical considerations for designing a good-quality reading challenge. These can be summarised as following:

- Reading challenges should be ongoing but one challenge should not be too long, so they don't lose momentum
- A reading challenge should provide optional resources for teachers
- Reading challenges should have an appealing theme and book lists

Reading challenges should be ongoing but one challenge should not be too long, so they don't lose momentum

Many teachers who took part in our surveys felt that they would prefer to have a reading challenge on an ongoing basis. Half (50.3%) of teachers who took part indicated this as their preference for the length (see Figure 4).

Some of the comments from the surveys indicate that the challenge should be ongoing but not last too long as it would lose momentum:

“Clear end time (so it doesn't drag/ lose momentum), good resources, good motivation / prizes!”

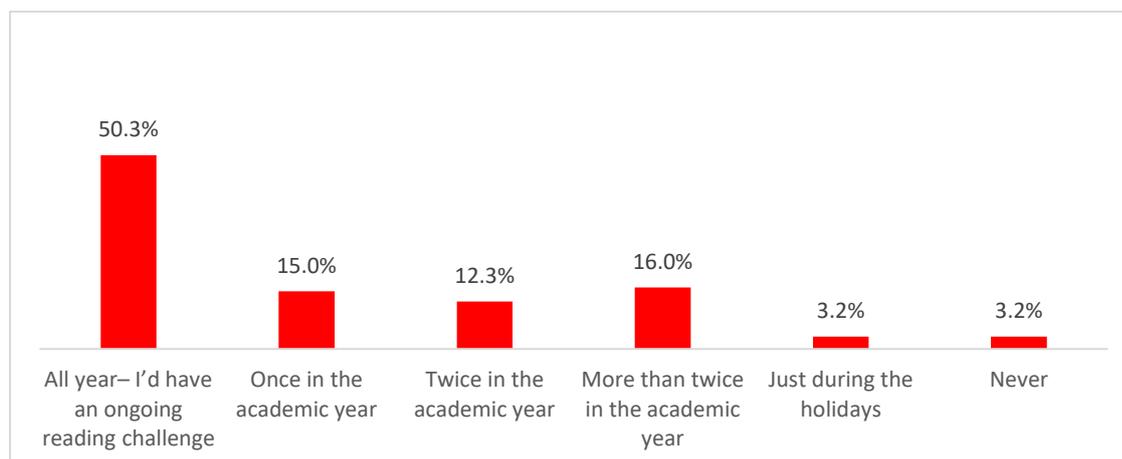
“Ongoing challenges over the whole year to keep children motivated”

“Longer-term length competition as they lose priority otherwise”

“If something goes on for too long it ceases to have the same impact”

Based on these findings, a series of challenges could work better than one long challenge throughout the year.

Figure 4: How often teachers would encourage their pupils to take part in a structured reading challenge if one was available



A reading challenge should provide optional resources for teachers

As Figure 5 below shows, many teachers would like to see resources provided as part of the challenge. Nearly half of the teachers (47.4%) would like to see teaching resources alongside challenges. In addition, many teachers would like to see posters (31.8%) and charts (35.4%) as part of the challenge.

Figure 5: What resources teachers would like to see provided in their ideal reading challenge



Many of the teachers' comments in the surveys also indicate that they would like resources to make running the challenge easier for them. This shows that resources should be provided as part of the challenge for teachers who feel they need them.

“A very good reading challenge would also have a cohesive theme, and ample resources and materials for teachers to fully support students and effectively advertise the challenge.”

“For me, I think resources are key. I'd love to take part in reading challenges, however they can take time to set up. Resources just make it that much easier to do.”

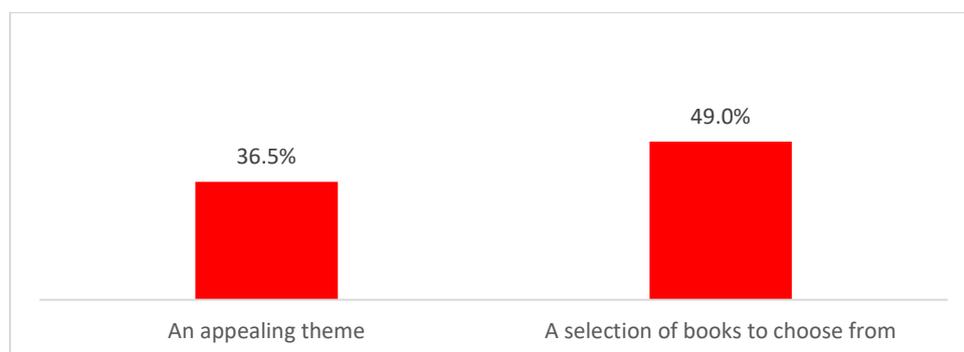
“Resources provided to make it easy for teachers. Easy way to track progress. Some kind of theme/hook to initially entice reluctant readers.”

“As many teachers are time poor, having all of the PowerPoints/resources available would be key- that way teachers can advertise the challenge and run it with little additional work.”

Reading challenge should have an appealing theme and book lists

Our surveys also indicate that teachers would like to see book lists and an appealing theme as part of the challenge. Book lists appear particularly important with half (49.0%) of the teachers indicate they would like to see them as part of a challenge, and just over a third (36.5%) of teachers say the ideal challenge would have an appealing theme.

Figure 6: The percentage of teachers who say an ideal reading challenge includes book lists and an appealing theme



“Carefully selected shortlists of texts so that all pupils can find books of interest to them”

“Appealing theme and books for a wide audience. Access to books for children.”

“Different level/ lengths of books, interesting themes...”

“A variety of books for them to choose from that will meet the interest of most children.”

“A good selection of exciting books.”

“One that is well promoted throughout the school, is based around a theme that motivates and interests the students and includes a range of titles that are accessible, whilst offering a level of challenge.”

Going forward

While this report has shown that reading challenges can be beneficial for pupils, many gaps in the evidence base still exist. For example, while evidence in terms of reading enjoyment and behaviours seems to suggest that reading challenges can have a positive impact, it is not clear whether this works for all children or simply for those who are already somewhat interested in reading. Moreover, more in-depth insight is needed to determine what aspects of reading challenges are particularly beneficial for reading enjoyment and behaviours. Further work is needed to explore the potential impact of reading challenges on skills, whether directly or through developing stamina.

In autumn 2020 we launched a series of reading challenges in the UK. As part of this, we will collect data to evaluate their impact, which will give us a chance to focus on some of these questions in more detail.

With grateful thanks for the financial support of the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society who have enabled this research and the continuation of a national book quiz through their sponsorship of National Literacy Trust's Reading Champions.

The Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) is a not-for-profit organisation started by writers for the benefit of all types of writers that collects money due for secondary uses of writers' work. It supports authors and their creativity, promotes and teaches the principles of copyright and campaigns for a fair deal for writers. ALCS aims to find creative ways to educate young people about the importance of copyright, so they know that when they write or create something, the copyright belongs to them, and it is their choice what happens to their creation. ALCS wants to encourage teachers to help educate young people about copyright and have produced a number of copyright education resources to help with this tricky subject. Visit alcs.co.uk/copyright-education to download these resources.



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Fifth Floor, Shackleton House, 4 Battle Bridge Lane, London SE1 2HX
+44 (0)20 7264 5731, alcs.co.uk