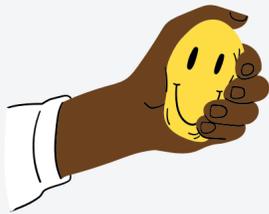


# Listening to teachers: an exploration of teacher's experiences using sensory strategies in mainstream primary classrooms



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## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore how mainstream primary school teachers currently use sensory strategies in their classrooms and their perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies. A systematic literature search revealed a lack of existing research in this area.

### Aims

- To identify how sensory strategies are used in mainstream classrooms.
- To explore teachers' perceptions of sensory strategies and their underlying motivation and confidence in using them.

### Methods

A convergent parallel mixed methods design was used with fifteen eligible participants. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and analysed.

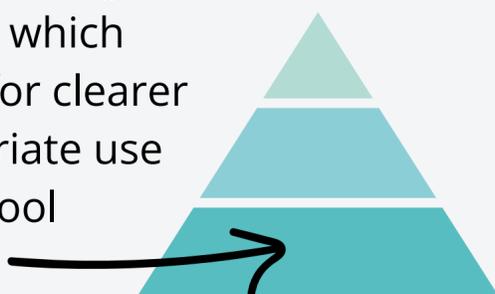
### Results

Teachers selected and implemented a wide range of sensory strategies, both reactively and proactively, often using "trial and error", during transition periods or in response to behaviours of concern. Teachers used the following:

- Resources: fidget toys (100%), ear defenders (93.3%), visual timers (86.7%) and chew toys (60%)
- Activities: movement breaks (86.7%), sensory circuits in the morning (80%) and breathing exercises (53.3%)
- Alternative seating: wobble cushions (100%) and wedge cushions (71.4%)
- Environmental modification: minimising visual clutter (80%), reducing noise levels (53.3%) and regulating temperature (40%).

## Discussion

Teachers select and use a variety of sensory strategies, shaped by "trial and error". Teachers recognise that sensory strategies can both enhance learning and be a distraction, which highlights the need for clearer guidance on appropriate use through a whole school universal approach.



The impact of sensory strategies included: increased attention; engagement in learning and distraction. Barriers to implementing sensory strategies included: lack of "buy in", financial constraints and classroom dynamics.

Teachers attended training and reported high confidence levels in implementing sensory strategies, however acknowledged that further training would also be beneficial.

## Conclusion

Overall, the findings highlight the need for an evidence-informed, whole-school approach to using sensory strategies in mainstream primary schools, due to inconsistencies in implementation largely based on teachers' intuition.

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