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First-Grade Teachers' Perspectives on Children's Oral Reading Fluency and Automaticity

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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Keshia P. Wood

MA, Walden University 2016

BS, Albany State University 2012

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Reading fluency and automaticity are essential components of the first-grade reading curriculum, yet little is known about teachers' perspectives on their role in assisting children in mastering these skills. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore teachers' perspectives of the problem of low reading fluency and low automaticity among their first-grade students. The theory of automatic information processing in reading formed the conceptual framework, augmented by Rasinski's techniques of repeated reading and readers theater to support development of reading fluency and automaticity. Research questions about teachers' perspectives of oral reading fluency and automaticity, their understanding of strategies used to increase these skills, and possible needs for resources related to oral reading fluency and automaticity were investigated. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with 12 first-grade teachers and analyzed using the In Vivo coding process. Results from this study described teacher perspectives that confirm previous findings that oral reading fluency and automaticity are essential to student's literacy success. Teachers described using oral reading, partner reading, and small group differentiation to enhance students' reading fluency and automaticity. Teachers also described a need for more professional development and instructional materials, and support for reading at home. This study contributes to positive social change because increased understanding of teachers' perspectives regarding fluency and automaticity can inform future strategies to increase such skills. Improved fluency and automaticity may translate into stronger student readers.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Stefan, who has been my constant source of strength and encouragement. Stefan, you convinced me to keep working on this study even when I felt like giving up. You acknowledged the fact that this journey was not easy, but you never allowed me to dwell on the challenges. Instead, you encouraged me to keep pushing forward. I am forever thankful for you. Your encouragement carried me through this journey. This is also dedicated to my mama, Paula. I could not have completed this work without the perseverance that you instilled in me at a young age. You have molded me into the independent, goal-drive, and persistent woman I am today. Thank you being a constant in my life and never giving up on me!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study focused on first-grade teachers' perspectives on children's oral reading fluency and automaticity. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, insufficient understanding was available on the perspectives of first-grade teachers regarding children's oral reading fluency and automaticity as essential elements of reading success. Instead, literature has examined the factors that contribute to children's reading mastery. By gaining a better understanding of teachers' perspectives on children's oral reading fluency and automaticity, results of my study may lead to positive social change, in increasing teachers' awareness of the role of fluency and automaticity and addressing first-grade teachers' perspectives as essential elements of reading success. In Chapter 1, I will present the background and conceptual framework of this study, a statement of the study's guiding problem and purpose, and a brief description of the nature of the study and the research questions. The limitations of this study are also included in Chapter 1, as well as the scope and delimitations.

Background

According to Veenendaal, Groen, and Verhoeven (2015), automaticity is an individual's ability to read words with minimal effort or signs of struggle. Reading fluency involves one's ability to read orally at a practical rate, with minimal mistakes and appropriate prosody and expression (Veenendaal et al., 2015). Both oral reading fluency and automaticity are vital components of learning to read (Rasinski, 2014). According to Rasinski (2014), developing and increasing oral reading fluency and automaticity not only affect reading rates and prosody, but also enhance a reader's comprehension of text,

which becomes ever more vital as children move forward from novice, to beginner, and to intermediate readers.

Early childhood educators who work with beginning readers in the primary grades are charged with developing children's skill in decoding text (Veenendaal et al., 2015) and skill in reading with fluency and automaticity sufficient to support comprehension of text (Cummings et al., 2014). Primary grade educators design, develop, and execute curriculum strategies that can be used to increase students skills in decoding text while reading fluently and automatically to support later skills, like reading comprehension of texts in all subject areas. Fisher and Frey (2014) suggested that reading fluency can be developed through techniques of close reading, repeated reading, and solicitation of text responses, and by taking care with selection of the texts to be read. Doing so allows students to build confidence while reading text and continue to develop the necessary skills to maintain oral reading fluency and automaticity. In addition, Rasinski, Rupley, Pagie, and Nichols (2016) advocated using rhyming poetry and other text types to support reading fluency. As students master fluent and automatic reading skills, they ultimately master the ability to read (Swain, Leader-Janssen, & Conley, 2017). The use of various skills and strategies enhances students ability to read fluently and automatically.

Sarris and Dimakos (2015) found that despite the large body of research on reading processes and development, the topic of reading fluency has been systematically neglected by researchers. However, Sarris and Dimakos also noted that there has been growth in evidence to support reading fluency. This may be credited to a greater understanding of the role of oral reading in the development of children's literacy and the

importance of reading fluency in reading comprehension (Sarris & Dimakos, 2015). While there is much research in specific techniques intended to improve reading fluency and automaticity, such as readers' theatre (Young & Nageldinger, 2014) and repeated reading (Swain et al., 2017), few studies, if any, have addressed first-grade teachers' perspectives of fluency and automaticity as essential elements of reading success. In a search of the first five pages of a Google Scholar search for *fluency and automaticity*, published in peer-reviewed journals since 2016 about reading in the child's first language of English, I found 24 studies. Of these, six were general or theoretical, four were about students with learning disabilities, five focused on middle or secondary school students or adults, and nine presented instructional interventions for students in Grades 1, 2, or 3. No studies examined teachers' perspectives on or understanding of reading fluency and automaticity, at any grade level.

Problem Statement

Lack of attention to first-grade teachers' perspectives on reading fluency and automaticity formed the problem at the heart of this study. Grimm, Solari, McIntyre, and Denton (2018) found that oral reading fluency is the strongest predictor of reading comprehension, followed by decoding and listening comprehension. While oral reading fluency denotes the speed in which one reads, reading comprehension represents one's understanding of the text that has been read (Glenberg, 2017). Although oral reading fluency rate and comprehension measure different aspects of reading skill mastery, they often coincide during students' early literacy development (Cadime et al., 2016). Reading fluency and automaticity are essential components of the first-grade reading curriculum,

yet little is known about teachers' experiences in assisting children in mastering these skills (Rasinski, 2014). Despite reading instruction, many first-grade students fail to achieve reading fluency and automaticity (Gibson, Cartledge, Keyes, & Yawn, 2014). According to Gibson et al. (2014), students who do not master needed reading skills in the primary grades have continuing reading difficulties in the later grades.

Low reading fluency and low automaticity have been identified as challenges for first-grade students in a rural U.S. school district in the Southeast. In this district, 51% of first grade students in the 2016-2017 school year scored below expectations on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Next oral reading fluency test (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning, 2018), and were identified as needing targeted support by the organization that maintains the DIBELS database (University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning, 2018). According to Shippen, Miller, Patterson, Houchins, and Darch (2014), teachers in many rural schools face challenges in identifying instructional practices that can meet the needs of struggling readers. Fien et al. (2015) explained that much research has focused on reading difficulties and the need for early intervention, but there is a lack of research on teachers' understanding of the importance of reading fluency and automaticity. In this study, I addressed the gap in practice posed by lack of attention to children's skill in reading fluency and automaticity by exploring first grade teachers' perspectives of these skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of teachers' perspectives of reading fluency and automaticity among first-grade students in rural school districts in

the Southeastern United States. In this basic qualitative study, I used interviews with first-grade teachers to explore their perspectives of fluency and automaticity as essential skills in reading skill development. I followed a constructivist paradigm to create knowledge of teachers' experiences and concerns regarding the development of reading fluency and automaticity in first-grade students.

Research Questions

Three questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do first-grade teachers describe children's challenges with automaticity and reading fluency, particularly in light of novice readers' need to attend to multiple elements of the reading process simultaneously?

RQ2: How do first-grade teachers describe their strategies to increase automaticity and fluency in first grade readers?

RQ3: What are first-grade teachers' perspectives about further support they need to help students increase their reading fluency and automaticity skills?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework for this study included LaBerge and Samuels's (1974) theory of automatic information processing in reading and Rasinski's (2012) ideas around reading fluency and automaticity. LaBerge and Samuels suggested that all readers travel through various stages of information processing that transform written words into meaning. Readers have a limited amount of attention with which to switch processes of decoding and comprehension. If they use too much attention while decoding the words in text, they have little remaining for other tasks, such as understanding what was read.

LaBerge's and Samuels's work foreshadowed later work on neurological delays in attentional shifting (Krause, 2015) and visual processing (Frey & Bosse, 2017; Onochie-Quintanilla, Defioralan, & Simpson, 2017), factors that are now associated with low reading fluency. Rasinski (2012) suggested strategies for deep reading such as repeated readings and readers' theatre. He believed that repeated reading advocated by LaBerge and Samuels could be made more dynamic when combined with whole-group choral reading, small group acting out of a text, and word study. Such strategies, Rasinki proposed, provide an authentic approach to reading fluency that surpasses merely teaching students to read fast.

The work of LaBerge and Samuels (1974) suggested my first research question, about teachers' descriptions of children's challenges with automaticity and reading fluency, particularly in regard to beginning readers' need to focus on multiple elements of the reading process concurrently. LaBerge and Samuels and Rasinski (2012) offered specific methods by which first grade teachers might support children's achievement of reading fluency and automaticity, suggesting that teachers' particular instructional practices may affect children's mastery of these skills, as described in my second research question. Finally, the key role of teachers in recognizing and remediating problems with reading fluency and automaticity indicates that their work may be enhanced with targeted support and suggests my third research question of what supports teachers believe are needed to help children read with minimal mistakes, with appropriate expression, and with greater enjoyment. Because teaching practice is central to support

for reading mastery, interviewing teachers about their practices and perspectives regarding reading fluency and automaticity is aligned with the conceptual framework.

The work of LaBerge and Samuels (1974) supported analysis of teacher responses regarding their basic understanding of mental processes novice readers must master and the ways in which these processes contribute to automatic word identification and fluency. These issues contributed to my analysis of RQ1 on teachers' recognition of factors leading to children's lack of skill in these areas. I applied Rasinski's (2012) suggestions of specific strategies that teachers might employ to develop children's skill in automaticity and fluency in analyzing teacher responses to RQ2 on their own strategies in these areas. Analysis in service to RQ3, on teachers' needs for more support in developing children's skill in automaticity and fluency, was guided by the work of both LaBerge and Samuels and of Rasinski, since teachers named either or both framework elements as their main focus for future professional development.

Nature of the Study

In this study, I followed a basic qualitative design based on participant interviews. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), a primary goal of qualitative interviews is to "explore how individuals' experiences and perspectives relate to other study participants" (p. 146). Interviews worked better in answering my research questions than other qualitative methods, such as observations or focus groups, because interviews provide insight into participants' thoughts and perspectives on topics under study. Focus groups would not have been the best data collection tool for this study because there is an increased risk of participants not sharing their experiences and perspectives in a group

setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Observations would not meet the purpose of this study as I would not be allowed to explore teachers' unique perspectives in an observational setting. I chose a qualitative design because qualitative research is consistent with my purpose of understanding how first grade teachers describe oral reading fluency and automaticity in the context of their teaching. Ravitch and Carl explained that the goal of qualitative research is not to find an objective or immutable truth, but rather explore experiences and perspectives that are subjective. Researchers can use qualitative research methods to "unpack complex challenges and new theories" (Bansal, Smith, & Vaara, 2018, p.1189). A qualitative design was suitable for this study; a quantitative design would not have assisted in answering the problem or fulfilling the purpose of this study.

In this study, I interviewed 12 first-grade teachers. Data used in this study were provided by first grade teachers working in five public elementary schools in several districts in a rural area of the target state. Interviews were professionally transcribed and then analyzed using In Vivo coding. Each interview transcript was read multiple times, and I listened to the recordings three or more times to become familiar with the data. While reading the transcripts, I added comments and pulled out key phrases while retaining the participants' own language. Using In Vivo coding, I explored common patterns among participants' responses and then drew conclusions based on these patterns.

Definitions

Automaticity: Automaticity relates to one's ability to read words with little effort or signs of struggle (Veenendaal et al., 2015).

Oral Reading Fluency: Reading fluency encompasses one's ability to read orally at a practical rate, with minimal mistakes and appropriate prosody and expression (Veenendaal et al., 2015).

Assumptions

While exploring the perspectives of first grade teachers on children's oral reading fluency and automaticity, I assumed that the teachers who were interviewed would be truthful about their perspectives and accurate so that what they tell me closely reflects their actual practice. I also assumed that the teachers are representative of first grade teachers generally, especially first grade teachers who work in a rural area of the United States. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), such assumptions are typical and necessary in a study that relies on informants.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study comprised the perspectives of first grade teachers regarding children's oral reading fluency and automaticity. My study included the perspectives obtained during individual interviews of 12 first grade teachers employed by public elementary schools in several districts in a rural area of the target state in the Southeastern United States. According to Yeong, Ismail, Ismail, and Hamzah (2018), an interview-based study relies on selection of informants who can be expected to understand the phenomenon under examination, and to have had personal experience with it. Delimiting my study as I did was intended to fulfill this necessity. Excluded from this study were teachers of other grades and those working in other locations than the

target districts because these teachers could not be expected to contribute credibly to understanding the phenomenon of focus.

Limitations

Because the data collected in this study were limited to the responses of 12 teachers working in a southeastern region of the United States, the results of this study may not be transferable to other regions or even to other teachers in the same region. In addition, the small sample of 12 teachers generated another limitation, since the perspectives of these teachers may not be representative of teachers in general. The small sample size and geographic limitation were necessary to provide in-depth conversations with each teacher about oral reading fluency and automaticity. As Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted, participants are the experts on their own experiences, and to capture that expertise, a researcher must ask them to share their thoughts. This is the essence and power of the interview-based study. According to DePaulo (2000), a small sample size helps to reduce the chance that a researcher might fail to recognize an idea presented by a participant.

In addition, because I have been a first-grade teacher working in the target area, the results of my study were vulnerable to research bias. To counteract this, I used a reflective journal, as suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016); I will describe this in greater detail in Chapter 3. In addition, it is possible that the personal nature of the interviews may have led to reflexivity, against which I took steps outlined in Chapter 3.

Significance

This study may be beneficial to children and their families because the findings enhance understanding of reading fluency and automaticity and may lead to children's greater literacy success. It filled the gap in practice by exploring teachers' perspectives of these key literacy skills. This study may also benefit first grade teachers in improving their practice and increasing their feelings of agency. In addition, this study may benefit in increasing their awareness of the role of fluency and automaticity and addressing first-grade teachers' perspectives of fluency and automaticity as essential elements of reading success. This study has potential to inspire positive social change by focusing attention on foundational literacy skills and empowering teachers to guide first grade students in becoming successful readers.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the problem and purpose of exploring first grade teachers' perspectives of oral reading fluency and automaticity. I discussed the background of the study, stating specifically the gap in the literature. I presented the research questions and the conceptual framework including LaBerge and Samuels's (1974) theory of automatic information processing in reading, and Rasinski's (2012) ideas around reading fluency and automaticity. The assumptions, limitations, and scope and delimitations that may affect this study, and the possible significance were also provided. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature to better understand oral reading fluency and automaticity, and the need to gain teachers' perspectives regarding low reading fluency and automaticity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Lack of understanding of first-grade teachers' perspectives regarding reading fluency and automaticity formed the problem at the heart of this study. There was a need for more research into teachers' perspectives regarding the challenge of low reading fluency and automaticity among many first-grade students. According to Rasinski et al. (2016), teachers often focus on effective teaching of phonics skills, therefore students can decode but do not make the transition to fluent reading. As students gain mastery of the skills of reading fluently and automatically, they conclusively master the ability to read (Swain et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives of low reading fluency and automaticity among first-grade students in rural school districts in the Southeastern United States. I explored teachers' perspectives of fluency and automaticity, the strategies they use to develop these skills in their students, and the supports they need to be more successful in assisting students to mastery of reading fluency and automaticity. In Chapter 2, I will present the literature search strategy of this study, the conceptual framework, literature review, and conclusions regarding the gap in literature.

Literature Search Strategy

Search terms I used while compiling information regarding this study included *automatic processes*, *automatic processes and reading comprehension, automaticity, early literature development, first-grade teachers*, *multitasking*, *oral reading fluency, reading automaticity and brain, reading and brain development,* and *science of the reading brain*. While searching for information as a basis to form this study and

conceptual framework, I used Google Scholar, ProQuest, and the Walden library database. Search terms used while building the conceptual framework for this study included *authentic reading approaches, decoding and comprehension, information processing, reading fluency and comprehension, readers' theatre, repeated readings,* and *theory of automatic information processing.*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was formed around LaBerge and Samuels's (1974) theory of automatic information processing in reading, and Rasinski's (2012) ideas regarding reading fluency and automaticity. LaBerge and Samuels suggested that the process of reading development involves a sequence of stages of information processing until it is ultimately comprehended. The human mind has a limited capacity to process information; therefore, limited amounts of attention are available throughout the stages of information processing (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).

The concept of automaticity was applied to the reading process by LaBerge and Samuels. Fluent readers can decode and comprehend text concurrently. Less fluent readers must focus most or all their attention on the task of decoding, allowing less attention to be available for comprehension. LaBerge and Samuels explained that the processing which occurs at each stage during literacy development is learned and the degree of this learning is assessed by accuracy and automaticity. While reading accurately, attention is necessary for processing; however, when reading automatically it is not (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). One method suggested by LaBerge and Samuels to support information processing is repeated reading of a text to imprint the sound of the

narrative as it is read and permit attention to visual features needed for word recognition and text comprehension.

Researchers in the past several decades have heightened the importance of fluency instruction because of the connection between efficient oral reading fluency and comprehension. Stevens, Walker, and Vaughn (2017) used the work of LaBerge and Samuels (1974) to illustrate that accurate oral reading fluency is assumed to enable reading comprehension because it allows a reader's cognitive resources, like working memory, to focus on meaning. When readers are using less cognitive resources to complete tasks like decoding or sounding out words, there is more available cognitive space for comprehension of texts. According to Stevens et al. (2017), all necessary attention is occupied when word recognition is slow and not automatic. Therefore, there are no available cognitive resources for other tasks. Stutz, Schaffner, and Schiefele (2016) used the ideas of LaBerge and Samuels to emphasize that with the use of regular practice, "basic reading processes like decoding become automatized, thus freeing cognitive capacities required to process reading material on a deeper level" (p. 103). In addition, Megherbi, Elbro, Oakhill, Segui, and New (2018) used the theory of the development of automaticity of word decoding by LaBerge and Samuels to explain that when words are identified without conscious control, mental resources for other aspects of reading such as text comprehension are still available.

Rasinski (2014) described the link between reading fluency and comprehension as well as the lack of research regarding oral reading fluency. Furthermore, Rasinski (2012) advocated for approaches such as repeated readings and readers' theatre that require

students apply deeper meaning to reading. Students are then able to transfer competencies in reading fluency from one text to another by engaging in repeated reading of the original text. Rasinski (2014) also suggested that a shift in reading fluency using a combination of LaBerge and Samuels's scientific principles and his own artistic approaches, could make a significant impact on the reading achievement and reading dispositions of all readers. Moreover, Rasinski (2014) suggested a shift from traditional repeated readings to a more authentic approach, such as rehearsal to help students develop prosody and enable them to interpret the text more meaningfully. When engaging in a more authentic repeated reading and performance experience through readers' theatre, students make exceptional gains on various extents of reading, including measures of reading fluency (Rasinski, 2014).

Ness (2017) used the work of LaBerge and Samuels (1974) and Rasinski (2014) to suggest that automaticity and reading expression are components that reflect effective and meaningful reading. Ness explained that the most effective strategy to build students' oral reading fluency is the use of repeated readings, as suggested by Rasinski (2012). Lehner and Ziegler (2017) stated that oral reading fluency is positively correlated with reading comprehension, as suggested by LaBerge and Samuels and Rasinski (2016). Lehner and Ziegler also stated that reading fluency has been overlooked as an essential component of reading instruction, and that fluency remains essential for reading success.

LaBerge and Samuels (1974) and Rasinski (2016) offered specific methods by which first grade teachers might support children's achievement of reading fluency and automaticity, suggesting that teachers' specific instructional practices may affect

children's mastery of these skills. With application to this study, the methods described by LaBerge and Samuels and Rasinski can assist with exploring teachers' perspectives of the problem of low reading fluency and low automaticity among their first-grade students. In the following sections, I will present information about developing the brain's ability to read, the teacher's role in developing reading skills, and the importance of fluency and automaticity.

Developing the Brain's Ability to Read

The process of learning to read is quite complex. Reading is not an innate brain function (Chyl et al., 2018). Unlike language, reading is not hardwired into the brain and requires instruction. Much research was conducted about the brain's ability to process reading skills in the early years of this century, as functional magnetic resonance imaging (*f*MRI) became widely used (see Chyl et al., 2018). Much is still unknown about the reading process (Chyl et al., 2018). There are many factors that should accompany the development of the brain's ability to read, like phonological processing skills, which contribute to such reading success. Turkeltaub, Gareau, Flowers, Jeffiro, and Eden. (2003) explained that learning to read is associated with engagement of the left-brain hemisphere while disengaging the posterior right hemisphere. This research was in direct alignment with Orton's (1925) theory of reading acquisition. A subarea of the brain within the left hemisphere, named the visual word form area (VWFA), is particularly useful for reading while being responsible for visual representation and recognition of letters and words (Dehaene & Dehaene-Lambertz, 2016). The VWFA is popularly characterized as a plastic area; therefore, it is explained that various stimuli responses

compete for representation in this malleable area of the brain (Dehaene & Dehaene-Lambertz, 2016). The VFWA area supports a form of visual word recognition that enables quick awareness of visual words into one's own language (Menary, 2014). However, reading also requires connections between orthography, written words, and phonology, speech sounds (Rothbart & Posner, 2015). Each of these functions are in distinct brain regions. The ability to read is therefore distributed within the brain and learning to read requires complex learning of separate skills and coordination among those skills (Stites & Laszlo, 2017).

Miller, Chen, Lee, and Sussman (2015) explained the process of multitasking using the analogy of driving in a car. Individuals can effectively drive a vehicle and speak on the phone at the same time because driving has become an automatic process; however, when the traffic becomes more difficult to navigate, one will halt the conversation to focus on driving, as it is no longer occurring automatically. This shows that multitasking is not possible when the automatic task needs additional cognitive resources (Miller et al., 2015). Rothbart and Posner (2015) further explained that effective use of multitasking can be disrupted if the tasks require attention simultaneously. According to Walczyk (2000), automatic processes happen quickly and without much conscious awareness or effort. For example, MacPherson (2018) demonstrated that multitasking involves an individual's ability to coordinate the completion of several tasks to achieve one goal. The task of multitasking depends on automatic processes and task load (Miller et al., 2015). According to Rothbart and Posner (2015), the executive attention networks of the brain are responsible for triggering the

ability to multitask by allowing an individual to maneuver between tasks, and to attend to a task while avoiding distractions.

Automatic processes such as those involved in multitasking also play a role in developing comprehension of complex text. As supported by LaBerge and Samuels's (1974) theory of automaticity, individuals who read with automaticity can decode and comprehend text simultaneously, while less fluent readers must focus most or all their attention on the task of decoding, allowing less attention to be available for comprehension. Borokhovski, Bernard, Segalowitz, and Sokolovskaya (2018) indicated that automatic and controlled cognitive processes are imperative for successful reading competency. Because many cognitive tasks must happen simultaneously while reading, the development of automaticity allows for the delegation of attention to higher order processes, like comprehension (Protopapas, Katopodi, Altani, & Georgiou, 2018). Cognitive resources are preserved while reading words with accuracy and speed, thus allowing cognitive resources to be used for the building of higher order meaning (Kim, 2015). It is vital that students' read with appropriate oral reading fluency and automaticity to allow for mastery of later skills, like reading comprehension.

Early Factors in Development of Reading Skill

To comprehend written text, one must use various subcomponent reading skills like letter recognition, decoding, and oral reading fluency (Clemens, Simmons, Simmons, Wang, & Kwok, 2017). Prior to beginning to read, children must understand that the lines on the page represent letters, that letters make sounds that form words, and that words make stories (Clemens et al., 2017). During the first-grade year, students learn rules

related to phonics and how to apply these skills to decode unfamiliar words, as well as the sounds of all letters and the sounds that certain letter combinations make. (Ackerman, 2019). Learning to read begins at home, in conversation and reading together, and casual conversations about words, sounds, and the alphabet. Sim and Berthelsen (2014) advocated parent-child shared reading, since "home is where children first start to develop their early literacy skills" (p. 50) as the child gradually learns concepts of print. To the extent that children enjoy these experiences at home, they are advantaged, but not all children and parents share these experiences (Hindman, Skibbe, & Foster, 2014). This means that the teacher must provide remedial instruction and engaging literacy experiences for children who did not have them at home during their earlier years.

When families work at home to ensure children are exposed to literacy activities, students score at higher rates in the academic areas of vocabulary and reading comprehension; this is especially true for students who are lower level readers with strong support at home (Irish & Parsons, 2016). However, not every child comes to first grade with a broad vocabulary base and having had a lot of experiences with books, language, or mastery of the alphabetic principle (Malin, Cabrera, & Rowe, 2014). During this time, many children struggle to learn to read, come unprepared to learn to read, or need remedial instruction in foundational skills. During the first-grade year, not every child is at the same point (Ferrer et al., 2015); therefore, teaching of fluency and automaticity may be deferred in favor of more basic skills.

Teachers must provide experiences by which brain connections can be made and learning can be established. Westermann (2016) explained that "experience-dependent

structural development of the brain circuits supporting language as a core principle of the organization of the language" (p. 446). The brain responds only to experience; therefore, to teach something is to provide experiences consistently over time by which the brain can reorganize itself in new ways (Grossman et al., 2003). According to Westermann, development of a complex skill such as reading requires experience in component tasks to encourage development of neural networks and, therefore, learning. To develop children's ability to read, teachers must offer experiences in key skills necessary to reading to inspire brain development. Successful reading teachers understand how students learn to read and how to provide necessary, differentiated support through meaningful experiences (Mills et al., 2014). Learning is activated as students move through a cycle of "concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation" (Chen, Jones, & Moreland, 2014, p. 47). Early literacy educators meet students where they are as they experience learning in the classroom, and then work to push students' literacy abilities further as the cycle continues.

Knowing how to provide effective literacy instruction is crucial for all educators (Tracey, 2016). Fedora (2014) and Young and Nageldinger (2014) provided information on what reading teachers can do to assist struggling students. Fedora explained that 17% of students will experience reading problems in the first three years of school. Fedora also suggested what strategies and resources can be implemented to help struggling students. Young and Nageldinger described the importance of the strategic and systematic teaching of oral reading fluency and all its elements, like automaticity and

prosody. In addition, Young and Nageldinger explained that by encouraging students to participate in reading performance activities, teachers can create meaningful opportunities for reading fluency instruction.

The Importance of Fluency and Automaticity

According to Veenendaal et al. (2015), reading fluency encompasses one's ability to read orally at a practical rate, with minimal mistakes and appropriate prosody and expression. Oral reading fluency is measured by the number of words that a student reads correctly in one minute. Automaticity relates to one's ability to read words with little effort or signs of struggle (Veenendaal et al., 2015). Fluency and automaticity are important to the development of expert readers as mastery of these skills leads to success of subsequent skills, such as reading comprehension. Being an expert reader is important to later school success. Cummings et al. (2014) presented results from a study investigating the relationship between word reading fluency, passage reading fluency, and reading comprehension. The findings suggested that it is important to consider students' word reading fluency and that increases in fluency should be studied in context based on the initial skill level of the student (Cummings et al., 2014).

Rasinski, Paige, Rupley, and Young (2019) reported that reading for information and pleasure are thought to be different parts of the reading curriculum, separate from comprehension, as they are not viewed as integral to reading achievement. Yet, one of the key purposes to teach children to read is so they can read for pleasure as well as for information. These aims, reading for pleasure and information, are different from simple comprehension and are dependent on skills of reading fluency and automaticity.

According to Jorgensen, Cremin, Harris, and Chamberlain (2018), a two-way relationship exists between the will to read and the skill needed to read. These authors found that reading for enjoyment increases children's reading proficiency, while the increase in reading proficiency also works toward increasing the natural motivation to read (Jorgensen et al., 2018).

Fluent reading includes three key fundamentals: reading accuracy, reading at the rate of ordinary conversation, and use of rhythm and emotion (Rochman, 2017). Fluent readers read text in a conversation like way that flows and requires little effort. Rochman, (2017) suggested it is imperative that early literacy instruction focus on developing fluent reading skill, because of the strong relationship between oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. Effective reading comprehension requires accurate reading skills such as word identification and decoding, and also effective fluency and automaticity. Students who lack key reading skills have difficulty reaching the stage of reading that is required to read texts fluently and automatically, and which in turn allows them to easily comprehend a text (Clemens et al., 2017). Teachers must identify students with deficits related to oral reading fluency and automaticity and remediate these skills to deter later difficulties in reading comprehension (Grimm et al., 2018). Students must decode fluently to leave free the attentional resources that readers require to concentrate fully on the text's meaning.

Prosody, which refers to the ability to apply appropriate expression while reading, is a key component of reading fluency; however, since prosody is often not accentuated in assessments, it is often not taught or emphasized in instructional environments

(Rasinski, 2014). Several authors explained the importance of effective reading prosody to promote reading development and fluency. For example, Calet, Gutierrez-Palma, and Defior (2017) compared the efficacy of automaticity and prosody training programs. Prosody training proved superior to automaticity training in promoting reading development in primary school. In addition, Veenendaal et al. (2015), found that reading prosody is a vital component of oral reading fluency. Sarris and Dimakos (2015), in a study of 27 primary aged students using a variety of computerized tests, found that differences in reading fluency might be attributed to students' automaticity of reading.

Other studies provided information about practices, strategies, and interventions that can be used to improve reading fluency. Kuhn, Rasinski and Zimmerman (2014) outlined three methods to support students in developing appropriate oral reading fluency and automaticity skills. These methods incorporate instructional strategies like teacher modeling of fluent reading, scaffolding the reading of difficult passages, using repetition to increase automaticity, and providing opportunities to organize a reading task into meaning units. Topping (2014) pointed out that asking students to read in dyads can support reading fluency if the students in each pair have different literacy strengths, so they can support each other in addressing weaknesses. Montgomerie, Little, and Akin-Little (2014) suggested that allowing students to video themselves reading aloud could also be used as a form of intervention and support for those struggling with oral reading fluency and automaticity.

While fluency and automaticity are essential to reading comprehension and to development of children's motivation to read for information and for pleasure, reading

instruction tends to focus on commonly assessed skills of word recognition and decoding (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). Although researchers have identified instructional practices to support fluency and automaticity, these techniques may not be used in everyday teaching or used sufficiently to support the brain's development of necessary neural networks. In this study, I will explore first-grade teachers' perspectives regarding fluency and automaticity among their students.

Recent Studies Related to the Research Questions and Approach

Several recent studies have examined the issue of reading automaticity and fluency in ways that are particularly relevant for my study. For example, Vernon-Feagans, Mokrova, Carr, Garrett-Peters, and Burchinal (2019) conducted a study in rural counties in the United States, a setting similar to that of my study. They used classroom observations and literacy achievement tests in pre-kindergarten and third grade to better understand the possible link between the number of years of quality classroom instruction and children's literacy skills by third grade. They defined classroom quality based on a "classroom environment that promotes learning, especially in early literacy, with a focus on how teachers support and scaffold student learning" (Vernon-Feagans, et al., 2019, p.532). Also, they found that rural teachers' sensitivity to children's needs for quality classroom instruction is imperative to children's literacy success.

Tortorelli (2019) reinforced the idea that achievement of oral reading fluency, a main component of my study, is a key early learning milestone and a key goal of early literacy development. Tortorelli also emphasized that screening tools used to measure students' oral reading fluency, by counting the number of correct words read in one

minute, often identify the slow readers, but do not provide teachers with strategies or information that can be used to increase these less than proficient scores. This relates directly to my research question regarding teachers' need for support related to students' oral reading fluency and automaticity. Tortorelli (2019) provided profiles of four slow reading second graders with the intent to help teachers and schools, specifically those in rural areas with low socioeconomic status students, effectively use limited resources to identify the students in the greatest need of additional support and target the skills critical to their success.

In addition, Ates (2019) conducted a study related to the effect of repeated readings, a topic discussed in my study, on a student's oral reading fluency and automaticity. Each student with predetermined literacy difficulties was provided with individualized interventions, consisting of repeated readings, to determine if performance based interventions had an effect on his oral reading fluency and automaticity. Prior to the intervention, the student was asked to "show his best reading" while data were collected about reading miscues and reading level fluency. The intervention consisted of repeated readings with performance based feedback. After the intervention, there were noticeable increases in the students' oral reading fluency and automaticity. Ates (2019) found that repeated and performance based feedback techniques are influential regarding the improvement of literacy skills.

Pletcher and Christensen (2017) completed a study to examine one-to-one reading conferences in two first grade classrooms. Similar to my study, interviews were used as one of the data collection methods. Two first grade teacher participated in this study, and

they were each interviewed once after the two month study period. The interview questions pertained to the teachers' general reflections on their reading conferences as a whole over the past few months. These interviews were also transcribed and printed, much like they will be in my study. After an initial coding process, common categories were found. The authors determined that teachers do not always cover all the major early literacy components like comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary during reading conferences, therefore, some set priorities should be put in place.

These selected, recent studies demonstrate the currency of key elements of my study, including reading automaticity, fluency, and instructional methods, and the usefulness of this study's method of individual teacher interviews. As suggested by Fien et al. (2015), although several studies have examined the issue of reading automaticity and fluency in ways that are particularly relevant for my study, none, not even these most recent studies, have explored first grade teachers' perspectives of oral reading fluency and automaticity.

Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter 2, I described the literature search strategy used to complete the literature review as well as the conceptual framework of the study. Literature was reviewed about developing the brain's ability to read, early factors that influence reading development, and the importance of oral reading fluency and automaticity. In Chapter 3, I will describe the research questions, research design, and rationale of the study. My role as researcher will also be discussed, as well as procedures that were used for selecting and inviting participants, and for conducting the interviews.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of the study was to explore teachers' perspectives of low reading fluency and low automaticity among their first-grade students. Chapter 3 includes information regarding the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, participants in the study and how they were selected, the data collection methods, and the methods for data analysis. A group of first-grade teachers located in a rural area of the Southeastern United States at several schools within a school district provided data in this study.

Research Design and Rationale

Three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do first grade teachers describe children's challenges with automaticity and reading fluency, particularly in light of novice readers' need to attend to multiple elements of the reading process simultaneously?

RQ2: How do first grade teachers describe their strategies to increase automaticity and fluency in first grade readers?

RQ3: What are first grade teachers' perspectives about further support they need to help students increase their reading fluency and automaticity skills?

The central phenomenon of this study was teacher perspectives of oral reading fluency and automaticity. Oral reading fluency is defined as one's ability to read orally at a practical rate, with minimal mistakes and appropriate prosody and expression (Veenendaal et al., 2015). Automaticity is defined as one's ability to read words with little effort or signs of struggle (Veenendaal et al., 2015).

The research tradition is a basic qualitative study, based on interviews. According to Bansal et al. (2018), qualitative data includes text such as words and visuals delivered in written form. Qualitative data must first be interpreted to distinguish patterns and understandings. Qualitative research is consistent with my purpose of understanding how first grade teachers describe oral reading fluency and automaticity in the context of their teaching. A sample of 12 first-grade teachers, working in four public elementary schools from some different districts located in a rural area of the Southeastern United States, provided data used in this study. Study sites and participants were selected through purposeful sampling of schools and teachers in the cities that are the location of this study.

Role of the Researcher

During the research period, I was an early elementary teacher at a school not included as a study site. My roles as a researcher and a first-grade teacher enabled my research. Because I am an early grade elementary school teacher, I understand the challenges teachers encounter and could establish a certain level of trust with study participants. I could use my experiences to establish a level of trust with the teachers I interview, which may encourage teachers to be truthful and to provide a full account of their own experiences (see Quinney, Dwyer, & Chapman, 2016). Truthful data are needed to provide as much understanding as possible to fill the gap in research on practice.

I guarded against injecting bias by using inclusive language while asking each individual question based on a predetermined script; however, different questions were be

used when I probed and responded to each interviewee's replies. To guard against bias during data collection and examination, I kept a reflective journal to ensure reflexivity of the study. Reflexivity refers to the act of a researcher becoming self-aware while deliberately addressing the presumptions brought into the research that might affect the conclusions (Sandvik & McCormack, 2018). Keeping a reflective journal aided in such self-awareness during the research process. According to Case (2017) writing notes helps to externalize feelings and thoughts and encourages a deeper level of self-reflection.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population for this study included first-grade teachers in rural schools in one state in the Southeastern United States. The sample sites that were used during this research study included four elementary schools in two districts in a rural area of the target state. The four study sites (elementary schools) were chosen using purposeful sampling from a list of all schools provided on the website of the target state's board of education. To facilitate in-person interviews, I restricted the pool of possible schools to those located within a 20-mile radius of my home. Then, all first-grade teachers at each of the four study sites were invited to participate in this study. The first three teachers at each school who accepted the invitation to participate were included in this study. Using a purposeful sampling process to choose participants ensured that I did not choose or reject an individual with any preconceptions. I was able to achieve my target number of 12 participants, using the methods I intended.

Before attempting to recruit teachers, I obtained permission to approach teachers from the principals of each school. To gain permission, I set up a face-to-face conference with principals in which I explained the study and answered any questions principals may have had. I asked principals to either share the district email addresses of their first-grade teachers or permit me to distribute a flier about the study in first-grade teachers' school mailboxes. The emailed flier included information about the study and my role as researcher and invited teachers to participate in the study. My contact information was included.

Instrumentation

I used semistructured interviews to collect data. According to Brinkmann (2014), during a semistructured interview, the researcher provides some structure to the interview process based on the research interests and an interview guide, but the researcher also allows room for more unprompted responses and conversations. I used six open-ended interview questions (Appendix A) to allow participants to offer natural responses and descriptions that have potential to provide new information.

Each interview question was applied to one of the research questions and each research question was answered through teachers' responses to one or more interview questions. RQ1, which asked, "How do first grade teachers describe children's challenges with automaticity and reading fluency, particularly in light of novice readers' need to attend to multiple elements of the reading process simultaneously?" was answered by Interview Questions 3 and 4, which asked about teachers' perspectives on challenges that students in general demonstrate regarding mastery of fluency and automaticity and their

concern for novice readers in particular. RQ2, which asked, "How do first grade teachers describe their strategies to increase automaticity and fluency in first grade readers?" was answered by Interview Questions 1 and 2, which asked about teachers' strategy use and selection when assisting students with mastery of fluency and automaticity. RQ3, which asked, "What are first grade teachers' perspectives about further support they need to help students increase their reading fluency and automaticity skills?" was answered by Interview Question 5, which asked teachers about the support they feel is needed. A sixth interview question asked for anything else a teacher wished to add to the conversation that was not already discussed during the interview.

To confirm the validity of my interview questions, I asked one of my framework theorists to evaluate them in the context of my study's problem, purpose, and research questions. According to Rasinski, these are effective interview questions. He stated, "your questions look good. The only other ones I might suggest would be to ask teachers to define both reading fluency and automaticity" (T. Rasinski, personal communication, March 14, 2019). I acted on this suggestion, adding two prequestions to the original list of questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives of the problem of low reading fluency and low automaticity among their first-grade students. To accomplish this purpose, I interviewed 12 first-grade teachers from four schools in the school districts. I sent the consent form to the first three volunteers from each school for their review and set up a mutually convenient date, time, and location for the interview. A

neutral location for the interviews was chosen to ensure that each interviewee was comfortable and at ease. I ensured that each interview location was well-prepared for the process, including providing a recording device and ensuring minimal distractions. Prior to beginning each interview, I explained to each participant that the interview will be audio recorded and that the audio recording will be professionally transcribed. Then, I reviewed the consent form with each participant and asked that they sign it. The interviews were anticipated to run about 45 minutes each. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were reminded that all responses will be kept confidential and that all files will be kept in a password-encrypted folder on my computer. I also explained to each participant that they will receive a copy of their interview transcription and they may make any changes to the transcription that they believe are necessary to portray their thoughts accurately.

Data Analysis Plan

I used the In Vivo process to code the responses from the transcriptions. Saldaña (2016) explained that In Vivo coding is used "to keep the data rooted in the participant's own language" (p. 8). Because this study focused on each teacher's perspective regarding the issue of low reading fluency and low automaticity among their first grade students, keeping the data rooted in the participants' own language allowed for accurate representation of patterns within the transcriptions. Using codes that were the participants' own language assisted in locating and exploring true perspectives of the central phenomenon of this study. By examining and using coded based on the exact

words used, I was able to draw conclusions about participants' feelings, opinions, and thoughts, which allowed for accurate representation of opinions and perspectives.

I read each interview transcript multiple times and listened to the recordings three or more times to become familiar with the data. While reading the transcripts, I added comments and pulled out key phrases while retaining the participants' own language. While coding the transcriptions, I explored common patterns among participants' responses. After having the interview audio tapes professionally transcribed, I began to code the data and explore where the research questions had been answered. I identified themes by highlighting and color coding the statements by the participants. Statements that have similar meanings were coded in the same color. Initially, the data were reviewed from each interview and an initial list made with emerging themes from the data based on the In Vivo codes. Then during the next phase of coding, I reviewed the transcripts of the interviews to discover any possible themes that might have been overlooked and I organized the codes into categories. In the final stage of analysis, I prepared an overall summary of the interviews. This summary was guided by the research questions for this study and used to draw conclusions based on the purpose of the study- to explore teachers' perspectives of the problem of low reading fluency and low automaticity among their first grade students.

Trustworthiness

Researchers must recognize attributes like thoroughness and trustworthiness as relevant components to support the reflexivity and subjectivity of qualitative research (Galdas, 2017). During the conduct of this study, I used several methods to minimize bias

and address validity and trustworthiness. The methods used included triangulation and member checking. According to Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville (2014, p. 545), "Triangulation is a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the merging of information from different sources." In this study, the teacher participants were employed at different schools located within several districts in the Southeastern United States. The use of various data sources to gain multiple perspectives is indicative of triangulation of sources. According to Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016), the occurrence of researcher bias might be reduced by having the participant check and confirm the results; a process known as member checking. Member checking helps determine accuracy of statements and the credibility of findings by allowing participants to review a summary of the major themes that were developed through the inductive process. After the interviews were transcribed, I asked the participants to confirm that the themes represented an accurate record of the interview. The trustworthiness of results is the foundation of high quality qualitative research. According to Birt et al. (2016), "member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a technique for exploring the credibility of results" (p.1802). These themes were linked to the statements that a given participant said. The participant was then be asked to review the information and determine if that is what they meant when they said the statement. This process was completed via email correspondence ensuring that a second meeting with each participant was not required. Keeping a reflective journal worked to ensure reflexivity. According to Finefter-Rosenbluh (2017), reflexivity is "commonly viewed as a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the

researcher's positionality" (p. 2). Keeping a reflective journal aided in such self-awareness during the research process.

Ethical Procedures

I obtained Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (#07-17-19-0610834) before I conducted my study. I also gained permission and received a letter of support from study site principals to conduct the study in their schools. To gain permission, I set up a face-to-face conference with principals in which I explained the study and answered any questions principals may have. I asked principals to either share the district email addresses of their first grade teachers or permit me to distribute a flier about the study in first grade teachers' school mailboxes. Prior to completing the interviews, I asked that each participant review a consent form. The consent form outlined the purpose of the study, study procedures, risks and benefits, and privacy and confidentiality procedures. After reviewing the consent form with the participant, I ensured that they had no questions or concerns and requested that it be signed. Each interview was audio taped and professionally transcribed. I received a signed confidentiality agreement from the transcription service. Throughout the duration of the study, I kept a reflective journal to ensure reflexivity of the study. Doing so promoted self-awareness during the study and assisted in eliminating the insertion of my own bias into the study. I also worked to minimize any tendency to steer the interview conversations by following the interview protocol script (Appendix A) carefully. I was also conscious that the conversation shifted as participants chose to inject more

information while answering some questions. At these times, I was deliberate in following the script.

Only I, my committee members, and the transcription service had access to the study's raw data. Digital data were kept on a password-protected computer and paper files were. kept in a locked drawer in my home. Data will be retained for five years, after which digital files will be first overwritten using the Eraser® file tool and then deleted using Secure Delete. Paper files will be shredded and composted.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the research questions, research design, and rationale of the study. I described my role as researcher, as well as procedures for selecting and inviting participants, and for conducting the interviews. In this chapter, I presented my process for data collection and analysis and measures taken to ensure ethical fitness. In Chapter 4, I will present the results of the study. Chapter 5 will include an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and the potential of social change.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teachers' perspectives of low reading fluency and low automaticity among their first-grade students. The potential significance of this study is to increase all educators' awareness of the role of fluency and automaticity as essential elements of reading success. This study may also be beneficial to children and their families because the findings may enhance understanding of reading fluency and automaticity and lead to children's greater literacy success. It will fill the gap in practice by exploring teachers' perspectives of these key literacy skills. This study has potential to inspire positive social change by focusing attention on foundational literacy skills and empowering teachers to guide first grade students in becoming successful readers. The research questions used to guide this study were:

RQ1: How do first grade teachers describe children's challenges with automaticity and reading fluency, particularly in light of novice readers' need to attend to multiple elements of the reading process simultaneously?

RQ2: How do first grade teachers describe their strategies to increase automaticity and fluency in first grade readers?

RQ3: What are first grade teachers' perspectives about further support they need to help students increase their reading fluency and automaticity skills?

Chapter 4 includes information regarding the setting, methods for data collection, a description of data analysis techniques and results. Evidence of trustworthiness within the study will also be included in Chapter 4.

Setting

A group of first-grade teachers located in a rural area of the Southeastern United States at schools within several school districts provided data in this study. To the best of my knowledge, there were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at the time of study that may have affected collection of the data or interpretation of the study results. The 12 participants were all woman who currently teach first grade in a rural school district in the Southeastern region of the target state. Five different school districts were represented by the participants; however, there were other districts in the region that were not represented.

Data Collection

To complete this study, data were collected from 12 participants through individual interviews. Purposeful sampling was used to select and invite participants for the study. Once approval from IRB was granted, I sent potential participants the invitation to participate and the consent form via email. Once enough participants expressed interest in the study, interview times were scheduled. The participants, who were first grade teachers from a rural area of the Southeastern United States, each completed one face-to-face interview. The interviews took place at a mutually agreed upon location within the district region, conducive to upholding appropriate privacy and security precautions. This process took approximately 20 minutes per participant, a shorter duration than I originally planned. The semistructured interviews consisted of six open-ended type questions. Using this type of questioning allowed for more natural and individualized responses from the participants. I also asked follow-up questions to assist

in continuing the discussion, if needed and appropriate. The data were recorded using a voice recorder and transcribed using a professional transcription service, Same Day Transcriptions. To reach a total of 12 participants, I did have to broaden my plan of originally using four elementary schools to include a fifth school.

Data Analysis

I used the In Vivo process to code the responses from the transcriptions. In doing so, I assigned labels, or codes, to sections of the interview transcripts using a keyword or phrase from each participant's response. Keeping the data rooted in participants' own language allowed for more accurate representation of patterns within the transcriptions (Elliot, 2018). Using codes that are participants' own language assisted in locating and exploring true perspectives of participants, keeping the purpose of this study at the heart of the analysis. To determine codes, and then move inductively to a larger representation of themes, I read each interview transcript multiple times and listened to the recordings several times to become familiar with the data. While coding the transcriptions, I explored common patterns among participants' responses and explored where the research questions had been answered. Initially, the data were reviewed from each interview and the initial list organized into categories based on the In Vivo codes. Coding the data to form categories and themes helped to distinguish priorities and provide focus while analyzing the data (see Vaughn & Turner, 2016)

I then reviewed the categories for themes that might have been overlooked and the codes were organized into categories. In the final stage of analysis, an overall summary of the interviews was prepared. This summary was guided by the research

questions for this study and used to draw conclusions based on the purpose of the study, which was to explore teachers' perspectives of the problem of low reading fluency and low automaticity among their first grade students.

From the data, codes pulled from participant's own words were derived. The following codes were derived and categorized as *repeated reading*: read aloud, echo reading, choral reading, repetitive practice, and repeated reading. Other codes such as familiar words, sight words, and high-frequency words were categorized as *repetitive practice*. The category, *individualized instruction*, was developed from the codes reading groups, ability groups, and differentiation. The category, *reading materials*, was developed from the codes leveled readers and book-in-a bag. Those categories, repeated reading, repetitive practice, individualized instruction, and reading materials, were used to develop the theme of *classroom strategies*. The theme *classroom strategies* was derived from codes connected to participants' remarks regarding the strategies and materials used within the classroom to increase students' oral reading fluency and automaticity.

In addition, the following codes were categorized as *informal assessments:* Individualized Reading Inventory [ID] and running records. A second category, *formal assessments*, was derived from the codes classroom assessments, performance, data, and DIBELS. These categories, formal assessments and informal assessments, were then used to develop the theme *decision makers*. The theme *decision makers* was derived from codes connected to participants' remarks about the assessments and practices that are used to determine what strategies to use within the classroom to provide student support.

Furthermore, the codes attention, lack of word attack skills, technology, novice readers getting left behind, lack of sight word fluency, time constraints, and lack of print in the home were categorized as *challenges*. Finally, the category *support needed* was developed based on the following codes: support at home, pull-out program, technology program, classroom push-in and support, individualized instruction, reading bus, and more help at home. The theme *recognizing the problem and next steps* was a derivative of these categories and from codes related to teachers' explanations about challenges that affect students' oral reading fluency and automaticity, as well as teachers' perspectives on what further supports are needed to increase students' oral reading fluency and automaticity. The codes, categories, and themes I derived from the data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Codes, Categories, and Themes

Code	Category	Theme
Read aloud, Echo reading, Choral reading, Repetitive practice, Repeated reading	Repeated reading	Classroom Strategies
Familiar words, Sight words, High-frequency words,	Repetitive practice	
Reading groups, Ability groups, Strategy groups, Differentiation, Intervention bag	Individualized instruction	
Leveled readers, Book-in-a-bag	Reading materials	
Informal Decoding Inventory, Running records, Lexile	Informal assessment	Decision Makers
Classroom assessments and performance, Data, DIBELS, STAR Reading	Formal assessment	
Attention, Lack of word attack skills, Technology, Novice readers getting left behind, Lack of sight word fluency, Time constraints, Lack of print in the home	Challenges	Recognizing the problem and next steps
Support at home, Pull-out program, Technology program, Classroom push-in and support, Individualized instruction, Reading bus, More help at home	Support needed	

Results

The results of this study have the potential to increase all educators' awareness of the role of fluency and automaticity as essential elements of reading success. The findings may also enhance the understanding of strategies and resources that can be used to lead to children's greater literacy success. Social change through increased emphasis on the importance of building strong foundational literacy skills, like oral reading fluency

and automaticity, can also be implemented from the results of this study. In this section, I will present results by research question.

Results for RQ1

RQ1 asked, "How do first grade teachers describe children's challenges with automaticity and reading fluency, particularly in light of novice readers' need to attend to multiple elements of the reading process simultaneously?" To answer this RQ, I analyzed findings from Interview Questions 3 and 4.

Interview Question 3 asked, "What challenges do you notice that students have with automaticity and reading fluency?" Follow-up Question 3a asked, "What factors create barriers for students who are learning these skills?" Participants remarked how lack of sight word or high-frequency word knowledge and lack of help at home are factors that contribute to challenges that students have with automaticity and reading fluency. Participant 2 explained that "some students come to first grade, and they don't know their sight words or struggle with sounds and decoding." In comparison, Participant 8 explained that "students not recognizing many high frequency words" is a challenge that students have with automaticity and reading fluency. Participant 11 explained that "their challenges with automaticity are sight words, which we focus on because they don't follow the rules." Participant 9 noted that students often try to sound out words that should be known automatically; therefore, students are "taking so long to sound out these words that they lose the meaning too of what they have read." Similarly, Participant 6 noted that "many children can sound out, but it they can't blend and call those words instantly, they're not going to have the automaticity and they can't understand what

they're reading because they're so concerned on sounding out the word." Participants unanimously expressed concern with students' inability to blend and recall words quickly. Without these necessary skills, students cannot appropriately understand or comprehend the text.

Participant 3 mentioned that attention and students' inability to sit still impedes fluency and automaticity, but that the greater challenge is that "students haven't learned quite yet how to put words together. They're trying to figure out every letter or every little sound." Participant 7 also noted that attention is a barrier because "children now want to be entertained and it's hard to keep them entertained with a book sometimes because they get bored so easily." Participant 7 went on to explain that another prevalent challenge is the lack of word attack skills because "if students don't have those word attack skills, it is going to prevent them from being fluent when they spent all their time trying to figure out the words." Several participants expressed concern regarding the lack of mastery of the skills students need to become fluent and automatic readers

Participant 5 explained that a challenge could arise when there is no support at home because "even though we send home practice, if nobody is working with them at home, then they are going to fall farther and farther behind." Participant 4 also noted that students struggle with automaticity and oral reading fluency when "there's no help at home because they don't get as much practice. I send a book in a bag home every day, but if there's not much home involvement, they don't read it." Likewise, Participant 12 stated that a barrier affecting students' automaticity and oral reading fluency is "the fact that the only time they're reading is at school, and no reading at home. In the classroom,

there is very little time to read one on one with them." Participant 10 stated that some factors that create barriers for students who are learning oral reading fluency skills are "home life, social status, choices of parents like drug abuse or actual physical abuse, and that whether or not they get enough food makes a difference too." There seemed to be an overall consensus to conclude that increased support at home would assist in increasing students' oral reading fluency and automaticity.

Interview Question 4 stated, "Tell me about your level of concern about automaticity and reading fluency for novice readers." Follow up Question 4a asked, "Compared to teaching other reading skills, how much time do you devote to improving novice readers' skill in reading fluency and automaticity?" When answering this interview question, participants noted their concerns about students' comprehension and concerns that students are getting left behind while learning gaps are widening. Participant 1 explained a concern about novice readers' comprehension because "when it takes them so long to get through a passage, they are going to become frustrated with themselves and not want to read it again for the comprehension." Participant 4 explained that "with novice readers, sometimes they are monotone. They do not have any expression when they are reading. I feel like they also have trouble with comprehension." In contrast, Participant 2 stated that concerns arise "when students don't know their basic sight words and the struggle with sounds, which gets them behind when the texts get harder" and Participant 7 explained that there are concerns

> when students come to us and they have no word attack skills and they don't know all their letters and sounds. Naturally, you have to start with the letter and

sound recognition and how the letters are working to make words, but that's a major concern.

Participants 9 and 12 expressed concern with novice readers getting left behind. Participant 9 stated that "if students lack in automaticity of words, then they are getting further and further behind those students who are already reading on grade level." Likewise, participant 12 noted that "novice readers are already behind and getting left behind further, and their needs are not always being met." Participant 10 explained that her level of concern consists of "worrying that when they leave my classroom if there is any exposure to books at home or anybody sitting down with them to practice." Similarly, Participant 8 noted that novice readers "struggle just being able to understand what they are reading, and they also don't have a lot of help at home, so they don't have someone to practice with them." These questions and responses are associated with the theme *Recognizing the Problem and Next Steps* as teachers expressed their challenges regarding students' oral reading fluency and automaticity, what barriers may create or increase such challenges, and their concerns about oral reading fluency and automaticity for novice readers.

In answer to RQ1, about how teachers describe the challenges readers who lack fluency and automaticity encounter in reading, the data indicate that teachers recognize basic problems with phonemic awareness, sight word recognition, and word attack skills, and the data suggest teachers fear that students lack attention and commitment to reading necessary to overcome their feelings of inadequacy, and students lack support from home that would provide them with needed reading practice. No teacher attributed reading

difficulty to personal failings of the students themselves. Instead, their remarks suggested sympathy for these students and worry about their future school success.

Results for RQ2

RQ2 asked, “How do first-grade teachers describe their strategies to increase automaticity and fluency in first-grade readers?” To answer this RQ, I analyzed findings from interview questions 1 and 2.

Interview question 1 asked, “What strategies, if any, do you use within your first-grade classroom to assist in increasing students’ automaticity and oral reading fluency?” Two follow up questions were used, as needed to clarify what the participant had said or to keep the conversation going. Follow up question 1a stated, “Tell me about how these strategies work for you." Follow up question 1b asked, “Please describe how these strategies work with different students.” Participants explained that they use various strategies like echo, choral, and partner reading to assist in increasing their students’ automaticity and oral reading fluency, as well as time in reading groups and practicing sight words daily.

Participant 4 noted the use of daily read aloud time to assist students’ automaticity and oral reading fluency stating that “I read aloud every day to model what fluency sounds like. My class participates in paired, echo, and choral reading daily and we do sight word recognition activities.” Participant 2 noted that “we do a read aloud each day. I also give them a turn to read aloud in a round-robin reading and we do small groups where students have more of a chance to express themselves and read automatically at a better rate.” In comparison, Participant 7 explained the importance of daily repeated

reading to help students "build their confidence in themselves to have the automaticity as well and different strategies like using the beginning sound, looking at the word carefully, analyzing the picture, and using context clues." Similarly, Participant 1 explained the use of basal readers and that the "basal reader is something we work on all week, so it becomes very familiar. They read it every night and during the school day so that maybe after they see the text repeatedly, they will be able to read it more accurately with automaticity."

Participant 8 noted that some strategies used in the classroom to assist with increasing students' automaticity and oral reading fluency are "choral reading, echo reading, and partner reading. We have a guided reading group and an independent reading group daily." In contrast to others, Participant 11 explained using Accelerated Reader as a strategy because "students are constantly reading and assessing to see if they are understanding their reading. We also get to read with them, so they can pick up on sight words and then read those faster." Participant 6 described strategies such as a "book-in-a-bag that we send home nightly on student's reading level, and we have reading groups that we work with daily to practice reading this book in class."

Interview Question 2 asked participants to "Describe how you choose which strategy you use to assist with increasing students' automaticity and oral reading fluency." Follow up question 2a asked, "What contributes to how you choose the strategy?" Participants noted the use of assessments like the Informal Decoding Inventory (IDI), DIBELS, running records, and STAR Reading. Participants also acknowledged

that data from classroom performance and observations contribute to decisions on which strategy to use.

Participant 2 explained that "the data from STAR Reading and DIBELS is used to place students in differentiated groups. I rank students' scores from highest to lowest and put them in ability groups." Like Participant 2, participant 1 also uses data to create strategy groups; however, Participant 1 uses "running records and documentation from students' basal reading to create strategy groups to focus on common skills that they need to work on so they can become better readers with more automaticity." Participant 12 also noted the following:

> running records based on how students are scoring and what their comprehension it. I can pull more things to work on based on the data. We use the Bookworms program that provided a summarized assessment used to determine if students are proficient in each skill and what direction to take next.

Participant 5 also noted the use of data to choose which strategy to use to assist in increasing students' oral reading fluency and automaticity. Participant 5 suggested data are gathered at the beginning of the year, saying, "We complete DIBELS and the reading inventory, and this year also completed the MAP assessment. Based on the results of all of our data together, I decide where to start with each student." Use of assessment to group readers or to identify low readers seemed frequently used by these teachers.

Participant 3 explained that strategies are chosen "based on students' level. Some students will be in reading fluency or comprehension groups based on their Lexile level while others may be working on high frequency words." Participant 6 continued

explaining that she decides to use the strategies she uses based on an "Informal Decoding Inventory that pinpoints what specific assistance each student needs." Likewise, participant 4 also uses "a lot of data" to determine what strategies to use. Participant 4 continued explaining that "I go back and look at students' data to see what the child is weak in. I usually use the data to drive what I use with each group or individual students." These interview questions and responses assisted with developing the themes classroom strategies and decision-makers as teachers explained what strategies they use to help with increasing students' oral reading fluency and automaticity, as well as how they decide which strategies to use.

RQ2, about how teachers describe the strategies they use, is answered with the finding that teachers rely on formal assessment and running records to determine specific reading skill needs and to group students of similar ability. The results show also that teachers rely on oral reading practice to increase fluency and automaticity, in round robin reading, readers' theatre sessions, and echo reading, and that teachers model fluent reading by reading aloud to their students.

Results for RQ3

RQ3 asked, "What are first grade teachers' perspectives about further support they need to help students increase their reading fluency and automaticity skills?" To answer this RQ, I analyzed findings from interview question 5. Interview Question 5 asked, "What further support do you feel is needed to help students increase their reading fluency and automaticity skills?" Some follow up questions were available to use as well, as needed, including, "What supports have you used in the past to help you in teaching

reading fluency and automaticity?" and, "What specific types of supports do you feel are necessary or needed?"

Participants noted that more support at home and in the classroom would help students increase their reading fluency and automaticity skills. Participant 10 explained that more support was needed outside the classroom and at home because

> some parents do not have the means to have books or literature in their home, so if there was something like a Reading Bus or a way to get books in their hands maybe they [parents and guardians] would devote more time to reading with their child.

Similarly, Participant 12 would like to have "someone to read with them at home" as well as "someone extra in the classroom just for reading time." Also, Participant 7 noted that "parent support at home is the biggest thing for students to be fluent readers by rereading familiar text and hearing stories read aloud" and Participant 9 explained that "there has to be extra practice at home because it cannot be just left for the teachers to do at school."

In comparison, Participant 5 commented that support within the classroom like "pairing up first grade students with older students that could come in and help" would assist students increase their reading fluency and automaticity skills. Participant 8 explained that "a resource teacher that comes in and works with those particular students who aren't as advanced as other students" would further assist with helping students increase their reading fluency and automaticity skills. In contrast, Participant 11 suggested that further support is needed in the form of "computer programs where students can practice on skills that they may not be working on in small group."

Participant 3 also noted that further support and "practice on the computer could also help students, especially those who may struggle with attention" because "it can better keep them focused while working on necessary skills." Participant 1 stated that "in a perfect world, I would say that should have smaller class sizes, so students can get more support individually, especially struggling readers because as it is now, I am one person and I have 21 students. I can help several students one-on-one in a day, but not all of them each day."

The theme *recognizing the problem and next steps* is demonstrated through participants' responses to question 5 as teachers expressed the need for further specific support as well as what supports they have used. The answer to RQ3, about teacher suggestions of additional support for students who struggle with fluency and automaticity, focuses on more individual attention for these students, at home, with parents who read to and with these students, and in the classroom. These teachers suggested additional staff in the classroom, use of computer-based reading programs, and smaller class sizes as ways to increase individual attention for students.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility was supported in my data analysis by member checking. According to Widodo (2014), member checking occurs when each participant reviews their interview transcript and suggests amendments to increase its accuracy. Widodo suggested member checking increases the credibility of the data. After the interviews were transcribed, the participants were asked to confirm that the themes represented an accurate record of the interview. The participants were then asked to review the information and determine if

that is what they meant when they said the statement. This process was completed via email correspondence.

Transferability, according to Ravitch and Carl (2016), cannot be assumed by the researcher, because the applicability of qualitative findings to a new context can only be assessed by someone familiar with that new context. Ravitch and Carl suggested that a researcher can support transferability by providing thick, rich descriptions of the study setting and procedures, and multiple examples drawn from the raw data. I made an effort to provide to the reader information about the study and participant responses so a reader can decide the extent to which these findings are transferable to their own situation.

Dependability, as described by Carter et al. (2014), was supported in my data analysis through triangulation of sources across the 12 teacher participants and the use of various data sources, represented by participant affiliation with different schools across different school districts, to gain multiple perspectives. Confirmability was maintained in my data analysis by keeping a reflective journal to ensure reflexivity, as suggested by Finefter-Rosenbluh (2017). Keeping a reflective journal aided in such self-awareness during the research process and assisted in eliminated personal bias from filtrating the data.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I described the setting, data collection, and methods for data analysis. I also described the results of the study, as well as evidence of trustworthiness. According to the results, teachers described children's challenges with automaticity and oral reading fluency as key precursors for later challenges with reading comprehension.

Teachers noted that students' need to decode most all of texts impedes their oral reading fluency and automaticity. Teachers use different strategies to support fluency and automaticity, like teacher modeled read aloud opportunities, partner reading, and small group differentiation. Results of this study demonstrated that teachers feel more support is needed in the form of professional development and materials support, as well as engagement and support at home. In Chapter 5, I will present an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and the potential of social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of teachers' perspectives of reading fluency and automaticity among first-grade students in rural school districts in the Southeastern United States. I used basic interviews with first-grade teachers to explore their perspectives of fluency and automaticity as essential skills in reading skill development. Key findings suggested that (a) teachers do not feel that students themselves were at fault for their reading problems, (b) teachers rely on oral reading practice to increase fluency and automaticity, and (c) teachers suggest the need for more individual attention at home and at school. Through this study, I found that accurate and efficient oral reading fluency and automaticity skills are necessary to provide students with the foundational skills needed for later concepts, like reading comprehension. It was also apparent, through the results of this study, that teachers want to provide students with educational experiences to support their greater oral reading fluency and automaticity.

Interpretation of the Findings

I analyzed the interview results from this study to determine the commonality of respondent answers and those results were reported in Chapter 4. In this study I explored first-grade teachers' perspectives of oral reading fluency and automaticity. A student's oral reading fluency is measured by the number of words read correctly in one minute (Veenendaal et al., 2015). Automaticity describes one's ability to read words with little effort or signs of struggle (Veenendaal et al., 2015). Appropriate oral reading fluency and automaticity are vital to the development of proficient readers as mastery of these skills

leads to success of consequent skills, such as reading comprehension (Cummings et al., 2014). The results from this study support the findings in the research. Swain et al. (2017) explained that as students gain mastery of the skills of reading fluently and automatically, they master the ability to read. Results from this study support these findings, because participants noted students' need to attend to developmental and precursor factors prior to mastering effective oral reading fluency. Participant 2 stated that concerns arise "when students don't know their basic sight words and the struggle with sounds, which gets them behind when the texts get harder." The conceptual framework of this study was formed around LaBerge and Samuel's (1974) theory of automatic information processing in reading, and Rasinski's (2012) ideas regarding reading fluency and automaticity. The human brain has a limited capacity to process information (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). During the interview, Participant 3 mentioned that attention and students' inability to sit still impedes fluency and automaticity, but that the greater challenge is that "students haven't learned quite yet how to put words together. They're trying to figure out every letter or every little sound." Participant 7 also noted that attention is a barrier because "children now want to be entertained and it's hard to keep them entertained with a book sometimes because they get bored so easily." These obstacles, in addition to the lack of attention available in each information processing step (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974), are shown to greatly impede students' oral reading fluency and automaticity.

Rasinski et al. (2019) advocated for approaches such as repeated readings and readers' theatre that require students apply deeper meaning to reading. Likewise, Stevens et al. (2017) explained all necessary attention is occupied when word recognition is slow

and not automatic. This shows that multitasking is not possible when the automatic task requires additional cognitive resources (Miller et al., 2015). This was supported by results of the study based on several participant responses. Participant 9 described the way in which students often try to sound out words that should be known automatically; therefore, students are "taking so long to sound out these words that they lose the meaning too of what they have read." In comparison, Participant 6 noted that "many children can sound out, but it they can't blend and call those words instantly, they're not going to have the automaticity and they can't understand what they're reading because they're so concerned on sounding out the word." According to Rasinski (2014), interventions that require students to read a text repeatedly, or listen to a fluent oral rending of the text until able to read the text independently, are effective in improving oral reading fluency. Participant 7 explained the importance of daily repeated reading to help students "build their confidence in themselves to have the automaticity as well and different strategies like using the beginning sound, looking at the word carefully, analyzing the picture, and using context clues." Participants noted that the implementation of various strategies, while using repeated readings, could potentially assist with students' struggles to read fluently and automatically.

In the study, teachers suggested that more support was needed at home to assist in increasing students' oral reading fluency and automaticity. This is supported by the literature as Sim and Berthelsen (2014) advocated parent-child shared reading, since children first begin to develop their literacy skills at home while gradually learning concepts of print. However, it is necessary to point out that support at home must

continue throughout the child's educational experience (Irish & Parsons, 2016). Just as the teacher will have to provide remedial instruction and engaging literacy experiences for children who did not have them at home during their earlier years, teachers will also have to supplement for the lack of continued support and practice at home. The findings from this study support the main findings of previous studies, that oral reading fluency and automaticity are essential for a student's reading comprehension and lifelong literary success.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to trustworthiness that arose from execution of the study. I planned that the setting would be conducive to privacy and few interruptions; however, a few of the interviews were interrupted by visitors or intercom announcements. Because of this, I needed to pause the interview while these multiple interruptions transpired, causing participants to lose their train of thought and the repetition of interview questions, which interfered with the flow and continual progression of the interviews. Also, two participants brought their children to the interview session. While the children did not affect the interview because the children were occupied the entire session, I had planned that myself and the participant would be the only individuals in the room. Conducting the interviews directly after the school day resulted in participants' need to bring their children. Given these events, I would do things differently if given the opportunity to redo the study. It would be essential to plan more appropriate times to conduct the interviews to ensure that interruptions are more efficiently avoided. It would

also be imperative to check in with participants prior to the scheduled time to ensure that it is still the most appropriate time and place.

Recommendations

Based on this study, I recommend several avenues for future research. One recommendation is to expand the sample size to include a larger number of participants. Including a larger number of participants would assist with broadening the range of data and interview responses to form a better picture for analysis. Another recommendation for future research is to better represent various regions to allow for better transferability. This study focused exclusively on rural school districts in the Southeastern United States; therefore, the results may not appropriately transfer or be of use to teachers and school systems in urban areas. The representation of various regions would allow for a greater range of data, and it would also allow for a broad interpretation of teachers' perspectives based on the variance of locations. Additionally, in this study teachers suggested more support is needed at home to assist in improving students' oral reading fluency and automaticity. Based on this finding, future research would be helpful regarding approaches that parents can use at home to assist their children to promote and enhance oral reading fluency and automaticity.

Implications

Implications for practice as a result of this study include developing more techniques to incorporate oral reading fluency and automaticity strategies into the early literacy curriculum. The results of this study revealed that teachers rely on oral reading practice to increase fluency and automaticity, but a range of oral practice options,

including readers theatre, choral reading, and repeated reading, may help students be more engaged in oral reading practice. Rasinski et al. (2019) noted that teaching strategies that require students to read a text repeatedly or listening to a fluent oral rending of the text until able to read the text independently are effective strategies that can be used to improve oral reading fluency. Lack of student engagement was a problem cited by teachers in this study. Gregory (2016) explained that one strategy to increase student engagement is integration of technology and media related strategies with reading lessons; however, Gregory asserted that teachers must be trained to use technology in an efficient manner. Therefore, schools and district administrators could provide teachers with more training and support on how to incorporate a variety of oral reading practice strategies, including technology-based techniques, to increase student engagement.

Another recommendation is that schools seek ways to assist parents in supporting their child's reading practice at home. According to van der Pluijm, van Gelderen, and Kessels (2019), parents should be provided with training in home-based methods to promote literacy and reading. School systems could provide various reading materials for students at locations outside of school, such as a reading bus or community book swap location (Merga, 2016). Because many students cannot afford reading materials and public library access is limited, because of the rural nature of the community, it would benefit the students, the teacher, and the community if schools provided literacy materials for students to use at home.

This study will contribute to positive social change in several ways. This study may increase first-grade teachers' awareness of the role of fluency and automaticity in

students' literary success and enhance recognition of fluency and automaticity as essential elements of reading success. This study will also aid district administrators in providing the needed resources and effective supplies that teachers need to promote oral reading fluency and automaticity. The findings may enhance understanding of reading fluency and automaticity among primary grade-level teachers and lead to children's greater literacy success. It is important that children be able to read fluently and automatically because everything that they do later in life will depend on these skills in some way. Students who struggle to read fluently and with automaticity will not be able to read or comprehend well in later grades. Other content areas, like science and social studies, require that students read and comprehend information to understand the subject and the material presented, so that students who are unable to read fluently and comprehend what they read are primed for failure, in later grades in school and also as adults in the workplace. In addition, these students will not be able to for pleasure if they read without fluency and automaticity. They will be robbed of the experiences that only literature can provide, such as vicarious travel to far-away places, experiencing relationships that are otherwise non-existent, and learning about diverse cultures or ways of living from the comfort of their own home. Students who are unable to read with fluency and automaticity, and who therefore struggle to comprehend what they read will be stunted in their ability to participate in a variety of experiences available to proficient readers, and they will not achieve the educational goals needed to secure a financially sufficient job. This study has potential to inspire positive social change by focusing attention on foundational literacy skills and empowering teachers to guide first grade

students in becoming successful readers, thus ensuring educational and employment success later in life.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that first-grade teachers recognize that oral reading fluency and automaticity are foundational skills necessary for success with ensuing skills like reading comprehension. Lack of fluency and automaticity impedes comprehension because students use their cognitive resources to decode or sound out words. Teachers use different strategies to support fluency and automaticity but indicated that more support is needed in this effort, from professional development and materials support, and from engagement of parents in supporting reading at home. Results of this study demonstrated that it is essential that teachers, especially first-grade teachers, understand how to implement effective strategies to increase students' oral reading fluency and automaticity. Without strong skill in oral reading fluency and automaticity, students will continue to struggle to read and will lack the necessary skills, like comprehension, needed to be successful in the later grades. Attention to oral fluency and automaticity should be a priority of reading instruction in the early years.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Thank you so much for helping me complete this study. I have 6 main questions that I would like to ask, although additional comments, or information you may be willing to contribute regarding answers to questions are welcome. We will be talking about automaticity and oral reading fluency, specifically regarding first grade students.
Question A: When I say "automaticity" in reading, what does that mean to you?
Question B: And what about "oral reading fluency"? What do you think that means? Is it the same or different from automaticity, do you think?

If, after asking questions A and B, an explanation of automaticity or fluency seem needed, I will define these in this way: In this study, automaticity is one's ability to read words with little effort or signs of struggle. Oral reading fluency is one's ability to read at a practical rate with few mistakes while using appropriate prosody and expression.

1. What strategies, if any, do you use within your first grade classroom to assist with increasing students' automaticity and oral reading fluency?

   Possible follow up question 1a: Tell me about how these strategies work for you.

   Possible follow up question 1b: Please describe how these strategies work with different students.

2. Describe how you choose which strategy to use to assist with increasing students' automaticity and oral reading fluency.

   Possible follow up question 2a: What contributes to how you choose the strategy?

3. What challenges do you notice that students have with automaticity and reading fluency?

Possible follow up question 3a: What factors create barriers for students who are learning these skills?

4. Tell me about your level of concern about automaticity and reading fluency for novice readers.

   Possible follow up question 4a: Compared to teaching other reading skills, how much time do you devote to improving novice readers' skill in reading fluency and automaticity?

5. What further support do you feel is needed to help students increase their reading fluency and automaticity skills?

   Possible follow up question 5a: What supports have you used in the past to help you in teaching reading fluency and automaticity?

   Possible follow up question 5b: What specific types of supports do you feel are necessary or needed?

6. Is there anything else about automaticity and oral reading fluency that you would like to mention?

Thank you for participating in this interview. I appreciate your time and cooperation. Your participation will remain confidential. I will email you the transcript in a day or two after the interview has been transcribed and I will be happy to know if you want to clarify anything.