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# Teachers' Perspectives of Preschool Reading Fadeout and Strategies to Prevent It in Low-Performing Schools

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College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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MA, Montclair State University, 2005

BS, Louisiana State University, 1988

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

Third-grade reading scores on some U.S. state tests revealed that children who attended a state-funded preschool program were not proficient readers. Reading gains made in preschool faded by the time the children reached third grade. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine teachers' perspectives regarding the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they used to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low-performing schools. The conceptual framework included the dynamic skill-building theory and skill formation theory to examine the development of reading skills. Nine state-certified teachers who taught reading in preschool through third grade shared their perspectives through semistructured interviews. Interview transcripts were analyzed using open and axial coding. Through thematic analysis, three overarching themes emerged: (a) instability in reading programs and reading curricula, (b) lack of knowledge and confidence in reading instruction, and (c) the use developmentally appropriate practices and engaging activities to help prevent reading fadeout. Participants identified frequent changes in the reading curriculum and reading programs, low confidence in reading instruction and assessment, and inconsistent alignment practices as causes of preschool reading fadeout. Participants used hands-on interactive games, engaging computer software programs, reading programs, and small group reading instruction to help prevent preschool reading fadeout. Early childhood professionals and school administrators may use the results of this study to inform their decisions regarding reading programs, reading curricula, and reading alignment practices from preschool through third grade to meet the needs of all children in low-performing schools.

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# Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all who never let their zip code, socioeconomic status, and family dynamic keep them from reaching their greatest potential. To all of the struggling readers who never gave up. To all of the teachers who found news ways to reach their students. To my beautiful family and friends for their prayers and encouragement. To my husband, John, and two sons, Gyasi and Jahir, my earth, wind, and fire. Your unwavering support meant the world to me. Thank you for taking this journey with me, for giving me the space that I needed, and for believing in me. To my mother, Josephine, for being my rock. Your unconditional love, strength, and sacrifice made this moment possible. Thank you, Mom, for your guidance as I transitioned from caterpillar to a butterfly. All things are possible through God.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

According to the State Department of Education (DOE, 2019) of the research study site, reading gains made in preschool disappeared by third grade in low-performing schools in the study site district. This experience is known as preschool fadeout, which occurs when children enter elementary school with prereading skills and the skills slowly disappear by the time children enter third grade (Ansari, 2018). Lipsey et al. (2018) studied the academic achievement of children who attended a preschool program and those who did not. Lipsey et al. concluded that the academic gains made in preschool disappeared by the end of kindergarten. Another significant finding was that in first through third grades, the nonpreschool group caught up to the preschool group by second grade, and in third grade the nonpreschool group surpassed the preschool group in all achievement tests, including the third-grade state test (Lipsey et al., 2018). Jenkins et al. (2015) found that children's early learning gains in preschool did not persist through the elementary school years. After the first or second grade, the differences between children who attended preschool and those who did not attend preschool had almost disappeared (Jenkins et al., 2015). Examining the issue of preschool reading fadeout is essential to ensure that academic gains made in preschool persist in elementary school.

Preschool programs can boost children's school readiness skills by the time they enter kindergarten (Dickinson et al., 2019). Attending preschool can have a long-term effect on children as well as a positive impact on future earnings and health (Jenkins et al., 2015; Puma et al., 2012; Schweinhart et al., 2005). State-funded preschool programs throughout the United States grew between 2000 and 2015 as many states provided full

funding for many three- and four-year-old children to attend (R. Lee, 2016). Given the increased enrollment rate in preschool programs and the academic advantages, it is essential to study the long-term benefits of early education programs (Jeon et al., 2016).

Understanding why reading skills fade by the time children enter third grade is of interest to policymakers and early childhood professionals who make decisions about funding and reading instructional programs from preschool through third grade (Yoshikawa et al., 2016). Teachers have direct contact with children and have knowledge of reading practices that might be valuable in understanding why some children experience reading fadeout and others do not. Knowledge of the developmental continuum of reading from grade to grade are important for children to be successful readers (Reynolds et al., 2019). Children who experience difficulties with reading during the early elementary grades are more likely to develop behavior problems and experience ongoing challenges that persist throughout their education (Garwood et al., 2017). Reading proficiently by third grade has long-term benefits for school success (Austin et al., 2017).

Researchers found that one of the possible reasons for preschool reading fadeout is the children's elementary schools and the instructional practices they receive in the first few years (Benner et al., 2017; Bierman et al., 2017; O'Connor & McCormick, 2019). Other reasons for preschool fadeout include student absenteeism, summer reading loss, and the lack of transitional activities that align preschool through third (Ansari & Purtell, 2017; L. O. Campbell et al., 2019; Manship et al., 2016). The reasons for preschool fadeout are numerous, yet more research is needed to improve educators'

understanding of the concept. Examining teachers' perspectives of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent it may provide information that could possibly be used to eliminate fadeout. The results of the current study may contribute to positive social change by providing early childhood educational leaders with information they can use to make decisions about reading instruction from preschool through third grade. The results may also provide information that teachers can use to improve instructional practices in reading for children in low-performing schools.

In this chapter, I provide background information from the research literature related to the problem of preschool reading fadeout. The problem statement presents the context to frame the purpose of my study on preschool reading fadeout. I used the conceptual framework to develop the research questions, data collection process, and data analysis plan. This chapter also contains information about the nature of the study, definitions of key terms, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study.

## Background

Researchers examined preschool reading fadeout in three seminal longitudinal studies (F. A. Campbell et al., 2002; Puma et al., 2012; Schweinhart et al., 2005). In the Perry Preschool Study and the Abecedarian Project, researchers found short-term benefits that persisted through kindergarten, but long-term cognitive advantages of preschool declined over time (F. A. Campbell et al., 2002; Schweinhart et al., 2005). The researchers in the Head Start Impact Study found an initial academic impact on children in kindergarten who attended Head Start but no long-term effect after kindergarten (Puma

et al., 2012). Other well-known studies regarding preschool fadeout include studies in Oklahoma, Tennessee, and internationally. Researchers found that the short-term effects of attending preschool did not persist through the first few years of elementary school (Gove et al., 2018; Hill et al., 2015; Hogrebe & Strietholt, 2016; Lipsey et al., 2018).

Dickinson et al. (2019) posited that attending preschool might explain the variations in preschool reading fadeout in some children. Cebolla-Boado et al. (2016) found preschool to be a significant time period because critical prereading skills develop during this time. Children who attended preschool programs had better outcomes in prereading skills when they entered kindergarten (Dorman et al., 2017). Prereading skills obtained in preschool formed the foundation for more advanced reading skills in elementary school (Pyle et al., 2018). Achievement in foundational skills led to increased reading fluency that resulted in proficiency on the state-administered reading accountability assessments (Paige et al., 2019). Mastering prereading skills by the end of kindergarten or the start of first grade predicted later word recognition and reading comprehension (Thompson & Sonnenschein, 2016).

As children move into elementary schools, Stover et al. (2017) posited that teachers have to assess and monitor the ongoing development of children's reading skills to avoid spending time covering material that children already mastered or that was too advanced. The diminished impact of preschool overtime may be the result of teachers who neglected to differentiate instruction for their students (Li et al., 2020). If the teachers in the elementary schools do not support and build on the reading skills developed in preschool, the reading skills might fade over time (O'Connor &

McCormick, 2019). One way for teachers to build on skills from one grade to another is through the coordination and continuity of the curricula and instruction received in the early grades (Neuman & Danielson, 2020). Children need consistent instruction that is coordinated across all the grades in elementary school for reading skills to persist (Aydin et al., 2017). However, there was a persistent gap in the transition between preschool and the other early grades (Cook & Coley, 2019). Children in elementary schools that did not have transitional programs from preschool through third grade experienced higher rates of fadeout (Bierman et al., 2017).

Children in elementary school who were chronically absent scored lower on academic achievement tests (Fuhs et al., 2018). Young children who were chronically absent from one year to the next during the early elementary school years reduced their chances of reading proficiently by third grade because they received fewer hours of instruction (Ansari & Purtell, 2017). Demir-Lira and Levine (2016) posited that reading gains made during the school year might fade during the long summer break if children do not engage in reading activities. Caputo and Estrovitz (2017) found that children learned best when the instruction was continuous. Summer learning loss equaled approximately 1 month of missed school and was damaging to educational outcomes over time (Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017).

Bailey et al. (2017) and Ansari (2018) found that preschool reading fadeout might be the result of two concepts that include the sleeper effect and the catch-up effect. In the sleeper effect, preschool benefits are not seen in the early grades; rather, the benefits manifest in later grades in ways such as low rates of grade retention and higher levels of

completed education (Ansari, 2018). In the catch-up effect, children who enter kindergarten with no preschool experience and low reading skills catch up to their peers who attended preschool (Bailey et al., 2017). It was important to explore reading fadeout, the sleeper effect, and the catch-up effect to determine the possible causes of preschool reading fadeout.

It was essential to examine teachers' perspectives about reading because research showed that teachers' perspectives influence their instruction in the classroom, which impacts the educational attainment of their students (Matsumoto & Tsuneda, 2018). Teachers' perspectives are their personal points of view or accounts of a phenomenon (Boylan et al., 2018). The perspectives of teachers are their thoughts or mental images about themselves, their profession, and their students (Kotaman et al., 2018). Teachers' background knowledge and life experiences help to shape their perspectives (S. K. Clark, 2020), which influences their instructional practices.

My review of the literature included studies on preschool reading fadeout, the possible causes of preschool reading fadeout, factors related to reading fadeout, and the value of examining the perspectives of teachers. The gap in the literature was no studies on early childhood teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. Naturalistic, longitudinal studies on teachers' perspectives might provide valuable insight about reading achievement and sustainability practices through third grade (Benner et al., 2017; Bierman et al., 2017; Schmid, 2018). It was critical to study the causes of preschool reading fadeout because children who do not

read proficiently by third grade experience negative long-term academic consequences (see Brown et al., 2018; Ceran et al., 2018; Lathouras et al., 2019).

## Problem Statement

Reading gains made in preschool disappear by third grade in low-performing schools in the study site district (DOE, 2019). This experience is known as preschool fadeout, which occurs when children enter elementary school with prereading skills and those skills slowly disappear by the time children enter third grade (Ansari, 2018). In the study site district, only 30% of the third-grade students who attended preschool reached the proficiency level on the English Language Arts section of the state test (DOE, 2019). In the study site district, as preschool children move forward in grades, test scores on the Scholastic Reading Inventory drop. Examining teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent it may provide valuable information that could lead to a decrease in preschool reading fadeout for children in low-performing school.

There is a growing body of research on the problem of preschool reading fadeout (Ansari, 2018; Lipsey et al., 2018); however, there is little research on why short-term gains from preschool disappear by the time children enter third grade (Lipsey et al., 2018). The development of adequate reading skills at an early age has an influence on the educational outcomes of children (Gao et al., 2019). By third grade, children are transitioning from learning to read to reading to learn, and children who do not have the skills to become proficient readers can experience negative long-term consequences (Lathouras et al., 2019). The reasons why some children experience reading fadeout are

numerous, and more research is needed to address the problem. The gap in the literature was no studies on early childhood teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine early childhood teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low-performing schools. By exploring teachers' perspectives through the interview process, I wanted to learn about the causes of preschool reading fadeout. My goal was to understand the impact of reading fadeout on early reading achievement of students from low-performing schools.

## Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) guided my qualitative study:

RQ1: What are early childhood teachers' perspectives on the factors causing preschool reading fadeout?

RQ2: What strategies are teachers using to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low performing schools?

## Conceptual Framework

I examined early childhood teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent preschool reading fadeout using Fischer's (1980) dynamic skill-building theory and Cunha and Heckman's (2010) skill formation theory. I used Fischer's dynamic skill-building theory to explore the development of skills over time. Dynamic skill-building theory is a concept of learning

that describes the mind and brain processes that occur when skills develop (Fischer, 1980). A skill is an organized ability that is composed of one or more components under the control of an individual, jointly determined by the person's actions and the environment that supports those actions (Ayoub et al., 2006). Skills are organized into strands that build a developmental web from multiple independent strands that branch and join (Cunha et al., 2006). A major tenet of dynamic skill-building theory is that skills are developed in a step-by-step process over time within the two levels of performance (Fischer, 1980).

Dynamic skill-building theory has two performance levels. The first is the functional level of performance, which represents the student's everyday performance level and is the lowest level of performance (Fischer, 1980). The second is optimal performance, which represents the most developmentally advanced performance that a child shows across a wide range of skills (Fischer, 1980; Geert & Fischer, 2009). The skills that children gain within the optimal performance level will gradually increase in complexity as skills at one level are built directly upon skills from the preceding level.

I used Cunha and Heckman's (2010) skill formation theory to examine the formation of reading skills. A major principle of skill formation theory is that early skills are the foundation for later skills (Cunha & Heckman, 2010). Learning is a cumulative process in which new knowledge depends on previously acquired knowledge (Mandel et al., 2019). The current study was grounded in two relevant constructs of skill formation theory. The first construct is self-productivity, which is a dynamic process in which skills acquired in one stage of the life cycle affect the productivity of learning in the next life

cycle (Ansari et al., 2017; Budinski & Lujic, 2018; Cunha & Heckman, 2007). The second construct is dynamic complementarity in which early investments facilitate the productivity of later investments (Heckman, 2008). Cunha and Heckman (2010) posited that early investments must be followed by later investments for the early investments to be productive. In the skill formation theory, skills are formed over time; therefore, building the skill base of a young child is an economically efficient strategy (Zhang, 2017). The dynamic skill-building and skill formation theories provided a foundation to view the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies teachers use to prevent fadeout from a developmental perspective. I designed the interview questions using the constructs of both theories to assist me with probing for information regarding the development of reading skills over time.

## Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative design for my study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), researchers use qualitative methodology to make meaning of activities, experiences, or phenomena. Researchers use qualitative methodology when they want to provide data from the viewpoint of the participants to gain a comprehensive description of the phenomenon under study (Babbie, 2017). Interviewing participants about their perspectives of a phenomenon can provide researchers with a deep and full understanding of the phenomenon (Park & Park, 2016). Qualitative methods are used to make visible the everyday activities that take place in classrooms that often go unexamined (Kozleski, 2017). Researchers use qualitative methodology to understand phenomena based on the perspectives of individuals in their natural settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Interviewing is one method of data collection used in qualitative research that provides information from participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study (Babbie, 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers use interviews because they provide deep, rich, and individualized data that are central to the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I conducted semistructured interviews by telephone and through Zoom, which is a video conferencing software program. However, only the audio portion was recorded. I used the interviewing process to collect data from knowledgeable teachers on the topic of preschool reading fadeout. My original plan was to use face-to-face interviews; however, due to the unusual health conditions around the world, face-to-face interviews were discouraged. The video part of the Zoom software program assisted me in connecting with the participants, in studying their facial expressions, and in providing a more personal interview experience.

I purposefully selected the participants for the study from three elementary schools that have preschool classes because my study population was preschool through third-grade teachers. I used snowball sampling, which allowed me to ask participants to recommend others who could provide different or confirming perspectives regarding the topic (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Purposeful sampling, including snowball sampling, facilitated an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of teachers on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and strategies they use to prevent it in low-performing schools. Participants included 10 early childhood teachers working in low-performing schools. For qualitative studies, the sample size is not vital because depth is more important than breadth (Burkholder et al., 2016). I collected data through the interview process to

provide opportunities for teachers to elaborate and expand on their answers as necessary. I used Transcribe, which is an online software program, to transcribe the audio part of the interviews into written text. After I interviewed the participants, I recorded my thoughts and views in a journal and used the information during data analysis to keep a check on my biases.

I used open coding to analyze the data from the interviews. Open coding is a process that allows researchers to assign meaning to data in the search for patterns or concepts relative to the framework, phenomenon, and research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Open coding provides opportunities for the researcher to discover ideas, concepts, and theories through the analysis of the written text (Saldana, 2016). Axial coding is the process of examining raw data and open codes for relationships and sub-themes among the codes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used thematic analysis to develop themes and subthemes. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019).

My basic qualitative study met the standards of trustworthiness and transferability. Trustworthiness is essential in ensuring credibility and rigor in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I engaged participants in sustained dialogue for 45 to 60 minutes in a collaborative process to establish credibility (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used member checking as a validity measure. Member checking is a process in which researchers share a two-page summary of their findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I provided a thick description of my data to assist with transferability, which is a way that

qualitative studies can be applicable or transferable to broader contexts (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

## Definitions

The following definitions of key concepts were used throughout the study:

*Early childhood teacher*: Individuals who work with and teach children from preschool through third grade who possess a state teaching credential (Beyazit & Ayhan, 2020).

*Fadeout*: A phenomenon that occurs when children enter elementary school with prereading skills, but those skills slowly disappear by the time children enter third grade (Ansari, 2018).

*Low-performing school*: Schools that perform at the bottom 10% in a state or have significant achievement gaps based on student academic performance in reading and mathematics on the assessments required under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (United States Department of Education, n.d.).

*Perspectives*: Feedback on the perceived impact of teaching and student learning, areas of strength, and areas needing improvement. Perspectives offer insight into ongoing intervention efforts that have cumulative effects on student achievement over several years (O. Lee et al., 2017).

*Skill*: An organized ability that is composed of one or more components under the control of an individual (Ayoub et al., 2006).

## Assumptions

There were several assumptions associated with my study. I assumed that all participants would answer the interview questions truthfully and honestly. I assumed that participants would be familiar with early literacy skills and reading development to answer the interview questions. I assumed that teachers engaged children in prereading and reading skills daily. My employment status in the same district as the study sites did not negatively impact the study. I did not have a personal or professional relationship with the teachers at the study sites. My study was about teachers' perspectives; therefore, I expected teachers to provide responses that were indicative of their experiences, beliefs, and practices. I assumed that teachers would participate in the study because they were interested in the study topic and not for any other motives or gains.

## Scope and Delimitations

I explored early childhood teachers' perspectives by asking them to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they used to prevent preschool reading fadeout. The teachers had the proper license to teach as indicated by the department of education of the research study's state. The scope of this research included preschool through third-grade teachers who taught reading in low-performing schools located in the northeastern part of the United States. The district has three elementary schools that have preschool classes in the buildings, and I included all three in my study. I selected potential participants from the three elementary schools because my study population was preschool through third-grade teachers. Administrators and supervisors from the study site district did not participate

and did not have knowledge of those who participated in the study. During semistructured interviews by telephone or video, I asked teachers questions regarding their perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout to gain an understanding from their viewpoint. I also asked teachers questions about the strategies they used to prevent preschool reading fadeout to understand how teachers addressed the issue.

I considered using the teachers' thought processes theory created by C. Clark and Peterson (1986). Teachers' thought processes can determine and dictate their behaviors in the classroom (C. Clark & Peterson, 1986). Researchers use this theory to assess how teacher behavior, student behavior, and student achievement are connected. I decided not to use the theory because I wanted to focus on the perspectives of teachers, not the behaviors of teachers or the students.

## Limitations

There were several possible limitations to the study. The first was the low number of participants and the use of three elementary schools in the district. The low number of participants and the utilization of three schools limited the perspectives collected. The second possible limitation was participant dropout. The study already had a low number of participants and if participants dropped out, the study could be compromised. The third possible limitation was that teachers would not want to share their honest perspectives with me because I am an administrator in the district. I did not have any personal or professional affiliations with the study site schools or the teachers in the schools.

I ensured that the identity of schools and the participants remained confidential by using numerals and letters to identify each, such as A1, A2, A3, or B1. I reassured

participants that my role was that of a researcher and not an administrator in this study. Participants were not coerced to participate in the study, and job security was not tied to participation or nonparticipation. I reiterated that all responses would be kept confidential and that no one in the district, including the superintendent and principals of the elementary schools, would know the identity of the participants. I informed the participants that I was not acting on behalf of the school district and that this study was not a job requirement. My study was an independent study on preschool reading fadeout, which was prevalent in the district.

To reduce the impact of my biases on the outcome of this study, I did not include anyone in the study whom I worked with or had a personal relationship with. I monitored my vocal expressions and tone of voice during the interviews to help participants feel comfortable. To help participants feel safe and secure in answering the interview questions openly and honestly, I conducted individual interviews by telephone and Zoom. The participation of the teachers was confidential. Reflexivity is the systematic examination of the researcher and his or her relationship to the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used a journal to reflect on my biases, theoretical preferences, research settings, selection of participants, personal experiences, relationships with participants, and data generated and analyzed (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## Significance

A significant number of children experience fadeout in elementary school (Yoshikawa et al., 2016). It was essential to examine the causes of preschool reading fadeout because understanding the causes could assist early childhood professionals with

creating strategies that could prevent fadeout. Learning to read is important, and once children fall behind in reading it is very difficult for them to catch up (Austin et al., 2017). It is important for elementary school teachers to build on the skills that children received in preschool for reading to persist through third grade (Ehrlich et al., 2018). A significant number of students in the United States read below proficiency levels as evidenced by reading achievement tests, and this problem has persisted for decades (National Assessment of Education Progress, 2019). Sustainable reading practices in the early grades can assist children who attend low-performing schools in becoming proficient readers by third grade (Bierman et al., 2017).

Addressing the causes of preschool reading fadeout and strategies to prevent preschool reading fadeout may assist in understanding the problem and may lead to specific reading interventions and an increase in the number of proficient readers by third grade in low-performing schools. The results of the study may provide information about alignment practices from preschool through third grade that would include curricula, reading instruction, and reading assessments that are used in the classrooms. Educational leaders may use the outcomes to examine district practices and inform their decisions regarding reading practices that meet the needs of all students. The ability to read successfully is essential to academic success, and schools supporting high percentages of students from low-performing schools may benefit by addressing the problem of preschool reading fadeout**.**

## Summary

In Chapter 1, I identified a problem with reading sustainability through third grade in some school districts. Reading gains made in preschool fade for some children by the time they reach third grade. I focused my research questions on teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and their experiences in preventing it from occurring. My study included a basic qualitative design in which I used semistructured interviews by telephone or Zoom to collect data on teachers' perspectives. I used Transcribe, which is an online software program, to transcribe the audio part of the interviews into written text. Reading the written text gave me the opportunity to analyze the data line by line to search for emerging themes and categories. I delimited the study to certified early childhood elementary school teachers who taught reading in preschool through third grade. I selected potential participants from the three elementary schools that had preschool classrooms because my study population was preschool through third-grade teachers. I obtained the email addresses of the teachers who met the study criteria from the schools' website. My study may be relevant to early childhood professionals, policymakers, researchers, and school administrators by providing them with information that might be useful when creating policies, strategies, and procedures in reading to reduce preschool reading fadeout.

In Chapter 2, I describe the problem of preschool reading fadeout. I explain the research strategies that I used to become familiar with topic. I describe the conceptual framework of the study, which included the dynamic skill-building and skill formation theories. I review current research including studies documenting the evidence and

possible causes of preschool reading fadeout. Studies related to preschool reading fadeout included the benefits of attending preschool, the development of prereading skills, the importance of assessing reading skills, and instructional strategies to prevent reading fadeout.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I describe existing research relevant to my study topic. The problem is that reading gains made in preschool disappear by third grade in low-performing schools in the research study state (DOE, 2019). A significant number of children experience fadeout in elementary school (Yoshikawa et al., 2016). It is important for elementary schools to build on the skills that children receive in preschool for reading to persist through third grade (Ehrlich et al., 2018). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine early childhood teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout in low-performing schools.

Researchers examined preschool reading fadeout in three seminal longitudinal studies in which the researchers found short-term benefits that persisted through kindergarten; however, long-term cognitive advantages of preschool declined over time (F. A. Campbell et al., 2002; Schweinhart et al., 2005). The researchers in the Head Start Impact Study found an initial academic impact on children in kindergarten who attended Head Start but no long-term effect after kindergarten (Puma et al., 2012). Other well-known studies regarding preschool fadeout included studies conducted in Oklahoma and Tennessee in which researchers found that short-term effects of attending preschool did not persist through the first few years of elementary school (Hill et al., 2015; Lipsey et al., 2018).

This chapter includes a review of the research related to preschool reading fadeout. I describe the search strategies used to conduct the literature review followed by an explanation of the conceptual framework, which included dynamic skill-building

theory and skill formation theory. Next, I describe the themes that emerged from the literature, including evidence of preschool reading fadeout, the possible causes of reading fadeout, factors related to reading fadeout, and the value of examining teachers' perspectives. I gained a better understanding of preschool reading fadeout based on the literature review.

## Literature Search Strategy

For this literature review, I used books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and internet sources to investigate early childhood teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. I used the Walden University library and searched several databases including ERIC, Sage Journals, EBSCO, and Taylor and Francis Online. I used Google Scholar to locate books, articles, and additional scholarly resources. I focused on the topics of reading fadeout, causes of reading fadeout, strategies to prevent fadeout, early literacy, reading development, and teachers' perspectives. The following key words assisted me with searching for relevant articles: *reading fadeout*, *convergence*, *reading development*, *pre-reading skills*, *dynamic skill theory*, *skill formation theory*, *reading instruction*, and *teacher perspectives*. When I came across the same articles and researchers, I discontinued my search because I reached the point of saturation. I focused my search on articles published within the last 5 years except for the seminal works of theorists. After researching various theories, I determined that the dynamic skill-building theory and skill formation theory were the best theories to help me investigate the possible causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies teachers use to prevent fadeout.

## Conceptual Framework

The basic tenets of dynamic skill-building and skill formation theories were used to frame my study. I used both theories to assist me with viewing the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies teachers use to prevent fadeout from a developmental perspective. Important to both theories was the concept of skill. A skill is an organized ability that is composed of one or more components under the control of an individual, jointly determined by the person's actions and the environment that supports those actions (Ayoub et al., 2006). Skills are organized into strands that constitute a developmental web from multiple independent strands that branch and join (Cunha et al., 2006). The development of skills is an important concept in dynamic skill-building theory and skill formation theory.

### Dynamic Skill-Building Theory

I used Fischer's dynamic skill-building theory to understand the development of reading skills over time (Delalibera & Ferreira, 2019; Geert & Fischer, 2009). Dynamic skill-building theory was used to predict and understand the sequence of skills and how they develop over time (Ansari, 2018). In dynamic skill-building theory, cognitive development is explained by a series of sequential steps of gradually increasing complexity, differentiation, and integration within a dynamic system (Fischer, 1980). One of the important tenets of dynamic skill-building theory is that skills at one level are built from skills at the prior level (Delalibera & Ferreira, 2019; Fischer, 1980; Geert & Fischer, 2009). Early academic skills are the foundation for the development of later skills (Bailey et al., 2018). Early mastery of skills makes learning at later ages efficient

and more likely to continue (Fischer, 1980). Mastering skills early also assists students with learning new content in a manner that gives them early skill advantages that persist throughout elementary school (Ansari, 2018; Bailey et al., 2018). The dynamic skill-building theory assisted me in understanding the concept of reading fadeout by providing a framework through which to explore the developmental progression of reading over time. The dynamic skill-building theory also assisted with uncovering strategies that may be used to prevent fadeout from the perspectives of early childhood teachers.

Dynamic skill-building theory has two performance levels. The first is the functional level of performance, which is the lowest level of performance and represents the student's everyday performance level (Fischer, 1980). The second is the optimal performance level, which represents the most developmentally advanced performance that a child demonstrates across a wide range of skills (Fischer, 1980; Geert & Fischer, 2009). The skills that children gain within the optimal performance level gradually increase in complexity as skills at one level are built on skills from the preceding level (Fischer, 1980; Geert & Fischer, 2009). Individuals remain at a functional level of development if their skills are not supported, and individuals who receive more support and encouragement develop skills at an optimal level of development (Fischer, 1980). Fischer posited that lower skills that are not supported hinders the development of advanced skills (Bailey et al., 2018; Fischer, 1980). Bailey et al. (2017) applied functional and optimal levels of performance to reading and found that children need to develop reading skills early for more complex reading skills to develop. As children move from preschool through elementary school, the lower-level reading skills support

more advanced reading skills (Bailey et al., 2017; Fischer, 1980). Early reading skills that are developed in preschool but are not supported through elementary school fade over the years (Bailey et al., 2017; Fischer, 1980).

In three different studies, researchers provided evidence of the range in performance between functional and optimal levels of performance (Duncan et al., 2015; Jenkins et al., 2015; Protzlo, 2015). Jenkins et al. (2015) examined the persistence of the effects of preschool on children's cognitive skills based on the features of the kindergarten and first-grade classrooms they attended. Jenkins et al. found that when elementary school teachers reviewed content that students already mastered in preschool, the students' academic growth was restricted in elementary school. Duncan et al. (2015) investigated whether quality academic instruction in kindergarten and first grade moderated the persistence of preschool advantages through the first years of elementary school. Duncan et al. found that preschool reading fadeout persisted regardless of the quality of academic instruction. Protzlo (2015) investigated whether the increase in intelligence from targeted interventions (preschool) lasted or faded after studying the participants over time. Protzlo found after an intervention raised intelligence, the effects faded when children entered formal school. The authors in all three studies demonstrated that when functional and optimal levels of development were not supported or encouraged, the development of more advanced skills at the optimal level of performance was hindered.

**Skill Formation Theory**

A major principle of skill formation theory is that early skills are the foundation for later skills. Cunha and Heckman (2010) posited that learning is a cumulative process in which new knowledge depends on previously acquired knowledge. Cunha and Heckman (2010, as cited in Bailey et al., 2018) viewed learning from an economic, human capital standpoint. I used skill formation theory to help me understand preschool reading fadeout and strategies teachers use to prevent preschool reading fadeout from a developmental approach.

There are two processes that form the skill formation theory self-productivity and dynamic complementarity. Self-productivity is a term used to describe how more complicated skills developed from lower level skills (Cunha & Heckman, 2010; Heckman, 2008). The advantages of preschool persist if the elementary schools that children attend focus on building skills incrementally (Bailey et al., 2018). The second process in skill formation theory is dynamic complementarity, which means that skills acquired prior to a given human capital investment increase the productivity of that investment (Bailey et al., 2018; Heckman, 2008). In other words, children who enter elementary school with the strongest early reading skills have higher reading test scores in elementary school (Mandel et al., 2019).

My study was grounded in the dynamic skill-building and skill formation theories, which included several basic constructs that reflected the development of skills: (a) skills develop over time and step by step, (b) early reading skills give children an advantage in learning new reading skills that persist in elementary school, (c) lower skills support

higher skills, (d) skills must be supported and encouraged to persist, (e) early mastery of skills makes learning at later stages efficient, (f) reading instruction begin where the child is developmentally, and (g) reading instruction is incremental from grade to grade. The basic constructs of the dynamic skill-building and skill formation theories framed my study by assisting me with examining reading from a developmental perspective. I designed the interview questions using the basic constructs of both theories to assist me with examining information regarding the development of reading skills over time.

## Literature Review Related to Key Concepts in Preschool Reading Fadeout

### Preschool Reading Fadeout

Fadeout occurs when children enter elementary school with prereading skills, but those skills slowly disappear by the time children enter third grade (Ansari, 2018). Duncan et al. (2015) studied the long-term effects of attending preschool and found evidence of fadeout. For many children in low-performing school districts, the early advantages they received from preschool fade by the second or third year of elementary school (Kitchens et al., 2020). Preschool education is viewed as a means of promoting the development of children's cognitive and academic skills and is vital to children who enter low-performing elementary schools (Ansari & Pianta, 2017; Benner et al., 2017).

Evidence of preschool reading fadeout was apparent in three well-known studies (Duncan et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2015; Lipsey et al., 2018). Lipsey et al. (2018) conducted a longitudinal study in Tennessee and explored the effects of prekindergarten on children's academic achievement through third grade. Lipsey et al. found that children who did not attend preschool had higher test scores on the state's third-grade reading test

than those who attended preschool. Duncan et al. (2015) found evidence of reading fadeout when they investigated whether quality academic instruction in kindergarten and first grade impacted children's reading skills in kindergarten and first grade. Duncan et al. found that preschool reading fadeout persisted regardless of the professional development opportunities for teachers and the instructional practices teachers used between preschool and kindergarten. Hill et al. (2015) investigated the persistence of short-term preschool benefits in Oklahoma. Hill et al. analyzed the third-grade reading achievement tests and found that children who attended preschool had lower scores on the third-grade reading assessment compared to children who did not attend preschool.

Researchers in studies conducted over the past 10 years followed children through elementary school and found that impacts on cognitive and academic skills diminished in early elementary school (McCormick et al., 2017). Yoshikawa et al. (2016) reported that preschool's effects on test scores diminished every year, but the decline was steepest in the first 2 years after a preschool program ended. Kang et al. (2019) investigated the impact of forgetting on reading fadeout and found that children who attended preschool could not remember basic reading skills when they entered kindergarten compared to children who did not attend preschool. Forgetting accounted for only part of the fadeout effect because the other part was that most of children in the control group caught up to the children in the experimental group (Kang et al., 2019).

Bassok et al. (2016) and Benner et al. (2017) used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study to explore preschool reading fadeout using prekindergarten through third grade (PK-3) sustainability practices. Sustainability practices included full-day

kindergarten participation, transition practices, exposure to advanced content in elementary school, class size, state-certified teachers, and 90 minutes or more of reading (McCormick et al., 2019). Bassok et al. and Benner et al. found that children who experienced PK-3 sustainability practices had higher reading achievements at the end of kindergarten, but there was no evidence of reading gains after kindergarten.

### *Mixed Evidence of Preschool Reading Fadeout*

Members of The New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee (2016) explored the long-term benefits of reading in preschool for children who participated in their K-3 Plus program, in which the school year was extended for kindergarten through third-grade students. The members of The New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee found that children who participated in the program for two or more years were proficient in reading; however, the difference between those enrolled in the K-3 Plus program and those who were not, was smaller before third grade than it was before kindergarten (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee, 2016). Dodge et al. (2017) evaluated children who attended the North Carolina's Smart Start and More at Four early childhood programs through the end of elementary school and found significant positive impacts on reading test scores in each grade. Bakken et al. (2017) analyzed third-grade standardized state assessment outcomes for reading from children enrolled in The Opportunity Project Early Learning Centers. Bakken et al. found that reading gains made in preschool persisted through third grade, and children's reading scores on the state reading assessment exceeded state standards.

### *Evidence of Preschool Reading Fadeout Internationally*

S. Wolf et al. (2019) conducted a randomized control trial to examine the quality of preschool for children in Ghana. Teachers had one year of training and coaching to improve preschool instruction and child development. S. Wolf et al. found significant, sustained impacts of the teacher training intervention on children's composite school readiness assessments one year after the completion of preschool, but not beyond. Hogrebe and Strietholt (2016) used the Progress in Reading Literacy Study instrument and propensity score matching to estimate the effect of preschool non-participation on reading achievement. Hogrebe and Strietholt found, in several countries (Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, and Sweden), reading achievement at the end of elementary was not significantly lower than the performance of matched children from similar backgrounds who attended preschool.

Gove et al. (2018) used data from the Early Grade Reading Assessment, which is an open-source assessment of students' foundational skills in reading that determines the impact of preschool. Gove et al. found children who did not attend preschool outscored the children who attended preschool on the third-grade reading test scores in some countries. In other countries, there were no significant differences in the third-grade reading scores of children who attended preschool and those who did not (Gove et al., 2018; Hogrebe & Strietholt, 2016). Ansari (2018) found no significant differences in the scores in part because of the catch-up effect, where teachers provided more instructional support to children who did not attend preschool and less to their peers who attended preschool. Children who attended preschool entered kindergarten with more advanced

prereading skills; however, by third grade, the reading skills of the children who did not attend preschool were almost the same as those who attended preschool (McCoy et al., 2017; Richter et al., 2017).

## Possible Causes of Reading Fadeout

### *Reading Assessment and Differentiated Instruction to Prevent Reading Fadeout*

Stover et al. (2017) posited that teachers must assess and monitor the ongoing development of reading skills to avoid children spending time exposed to material they mastered or material that was over their heads. Too much redundancy or lessons that are too advanced inadvertently interrupted educational progress and stalled preschool gains (Phillips et al., 2017). Data-informed instruction was necessary for monitoring reading development in children (Chapman & Tunmer, 2018). Knowing children's specific reading levels allowed teachers to place children in appropriate reading groups and to create lessons that promoted specific skill development, rather than assuming which skills children lacked (Preston et al., 2016). Ongoing assessment data allowed teachers to make adjustments to their instruction for children to make optimal progress (Tunmer & Hoover, 2019). Instructional decisions based on student assessment data assisted teachers in identifying skills that needed further development and skills that children mastered (Stover et al., 2017). Assessment was an essential aspect of education because it impacted the instruction students received, which correlated with reading development (Pellegrino et al., 2016). Daily formative assessments assisted teachers with deciding if they needed to change the curricula, materials, or instructional procedures (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). Summative assessments occurred less frequently and had significant consequences

for children, teachers, and schools if required benchmarks were not achieved (Dolin et al., 2018). DeAngelis (2018) posited that reprimanding or providing incentives to educators based on test scores may have unintended consequences as teachers shift some of their resources and time away from activities that might improve reading.

Differentiation of instruction occurred when teachers intentionally modified curricula, teaching methods, resources, and learning activities to address the diverse needs of individual children (Tomlinson, 2017). Teachers who did not use assessment data to differentiate instruction did not meet the needs of their children (Wan, 2016). Teachers needed a clear understanding of the developmental levels of their children, to build on the skills that they mastered (Kuijk et al., 2016). The diminished impact of preschool overtime may be the result of teachers who neglected to differentiate instruction for their students (Li et al., 2020). Dijkstra et al. (2017) posited that teachers had to differentiate by the content, process, product, or the environment to meet the needs of students. Danish et al. (2016) found that students persevered with learning tasks that were within their zone of proximal development, which was the range of abilities that a child can perform with assistance but cannot yet perform independently. Assessing children's reading levels and differentiating instruction assisted teachers in making informed decisions about reading instruction (Brokamp et al., 2019).

### *Elementary Schools That Children Attend and the Instructional Practices They Receive After Preschool*

The children's elementary schools and the instructional practices they received in the first few years of school were possible reasons for fadeout (Benner et al., 2017).

Instruction in the grades after preschool could alter the persistence of preschool gains (Mantei & Kervin, 2018). Early elementary school teachers may not have adapted their instruction to reflect the growing presence of children who experienced preschool in early childhood programs that focused on academics (Timmermans et al., 2016). Children who attended preschool and had prereading skills when they entered kindergarten, benefitted from teachers that provided academic instruction at the children's current level (Budinski & Lujic, 2018). Children who did not receive reading instruction at their current level experienced skill fadeout because they did not have exposure to advanced content to bolster new skill development (Alatalo et al., 2017). Children who attended preschool programs needed exposure to advanced and challenging instruction for the preschool advantages to persist (Haslip, 2018). Elementary school teachers who taught content that children already learned during preschool, curtailed their academic growth and tempered achievement gains (Bailey et al., 2017).

Reading instruction was communicated through a variety of ways including the engagement with intellectually challenging classroom material and through meaningful peer interactions (Hynds et al., 2017). Maniates (2017) found that children wanted to participate in reading activities as they developed their interest in texts, their identities as readers, and their proficiency with reading; however, children were denied at times by teachers who limited them from full access to the curriculum. For example, a narrow curriculum that assumed an idealized middle-class knowledge base, created barriers to learning by excluding children from under-resourced communities from using their experiences to connect to new concepts (Gershenson et al., 2016). Students' participation

in class was protected or threatened by the content and strategies teachers used (Maniates, 2017). Rubie-Davies and Peterson (2016) found that teachers who had low expectations of students' abilities, provided lower level skill-based activities and slowed the pace of their lessons, which reduced children's opportunities academically. Students in low ability groups, were less likely to engage in reading activities and more likely to dislike reading and developed anxiety for reading (Timmermans et al., 2016).

Reading instruction that excluded the engagement of children in meaningful and relevant reading activities limited children's reading abilities, which could cause reading fadeout, if left unmonitored (Castles et al., 2018). Ramirez et al. (2019) found that children who experienced reading instruction that included reading aloud in front of others in the beginning of the school year while they were acclimating to their teachers, classmates, and learning environment, experienced increased anxiety about their reading ability and performance. Children began kindergarten with a positive attitude about reading, but the positive attitude declined with advancing grade levels (Ramirez et al., 2019). Early setbacks in reading achievement could influence children to adopt a negative personal narrative about their abilities in reading, which could create reading anxiety and reading fadeout (Gao et al., 2020). Children developed anxiety by engaging in different processes and situations in reading that centered around evaluative reading measures like oral fluency and comprehension tasks that were conducted in the presence of peers and teachers (Piccolo et al., 2017).

Gao et al. (2020) found that reading instruction that built children's confidence in their reading ability was important for the persistence of reading skills. Confident readers

engaged in reading more, which was significant for students' reading performance and had an essential impact on reading skills (Weiguo et al., 2019). For children to develop strong reading skills, they had to practice more and engage with increasingly longer and more challenging texts (Mackey, 2019; M. Wolf, 2018). Instruction that promoted reading resiliency, was important in reading development, which led to habitual readers and life-long learners (Douglas et al., 2016; Seaboyer & Barnett, 2019).

### *Curriculum Alignment From Grade to Grade*

Curriculum that was not in alignment in the early grades was a possible cause of reading fadeout (Madondo, 2020). The lack of coordination and continuity in curricula from grade to grade created gaps in the curriculum that hindered children's growth in reading (Neuman & Danielson, 2020). Children needed consistent instruction that was coordinated across all the grades in elementary school for reading skills to persist (Aydin et al., 2017). Baird and Clark (2018) found that some teachers believed that the reading curriculum was not accessible to all children and that the content in the curriculum was hard for some children to connect with, which made it difficult to engage children in the reading process. Madondo (2020) found that teachers exercised a lot of control over the reading curricula and selected what they wanted to teach and disregarded what they did not want to teach regardless of the needs or interests of the children, which limited full access to the curriculum and created gaps in the reading development of some children.

The teachers' abilities to implement the reading curriculum to fidelity influenced the type of instruction children received for reading (Aydin et al., 2017). Goldstein et al. (2017) found that teachers lacked resources to implement the curriculum; therefore,

sections of the curriculum were skipped, or they were taught without the proper resources. Weiland (2016) found that the curriculum and professional development choices of many early childhood programs did not correlate with the science of early childhood education, which affected preschool programs. Teachers were key figures in the implementation and sustainability of classroom-based curricula from grade to grade (Humphries et al., 2018).

### *Transitional Practices From Preschool Through Third Grade*

Transition referred to the process of moving from one program or setting to another (Besi & Sakallariou, 2019). Aligning standards, curriculum, instruction, assessments, environments, and teacher professional development from preschool through third grade had a positive impact on reading skills that persisted through elementary school (Manship et al., 2016). Preschool through third grade transitional programs provided additional and continuous support for students through the early elementary grades to sustain the advantages gained from participating in preschool (Manship et al., 2016). Transitional activities that assisted with sustained learning gains included family involvement, curriculum and assessment continuity, and articulation meetings from preschool through third grade (Ansari & Purtell, 2017). Valentino and Stipek (2016) posited that child development was a continuous process, and that skills developed in one grade must be used to reinforced and build skills in later grades for reading to persist. Bierman et al. (2017) found that as children prepared to move from preschool to elementary school, they did not have a transitional program, which affected the persistence of reading development in the early years.

The transition from the informal learning context of preschool where children spend the majority of their time in play-based activities was difficult for some children (McCormick et al., 2019). In contrast, kindergarten and first-grade contexts emphasized academic achievement and consisted of larger class sizes and structured teacher-directed academic activities (Bassok et al., 2016). Goble et al. (2017) posited that the transition from preschool to formal schooling meant children had to interact successfully with larger groups of peers during structured tasks and devote extended time learning academic concepts and skills. Moving from preschool through third grade without transitional activities was difficult for some children, which hindered academic achievement (Reynolds et al., 2019). Children who attended elementary schools that had a transitional plan, experienced higher reading achievements at the end of kindergarten (Onyango & Gakii, 2017).

### *Student Absenteeism and Preschool Reading Fadeout*

Student absenteeism was another possible cause for reading fadeout. Children in elementary school who were chronically absent scored lower on academic achievement tests (Fuhs et al., 2018). Kindergarten was an important period in development and a large amount of time missed from school during this period of time harmed children's short-and long-term reading achievements (Gottfried, 2019). Chronic absenteeism in kindergarten was associated with lower reading achievement in first grade, which held for students who arrived at kindergarten academically ready to learn but was subsequently chronically absent (Robinson et al., 2018). Young children who were chronically absent from one year to the next during the early elementary school years

reduced their chances of reading proficiently by third grade because they received fewer hours of instruction (Ansari & Purtell, 2017). In addition to missing instructional hours, students who were chronically absent missed the opportunity to develop supportive relationships with their teachers and other students because absenteeism limited interactions (Robinson et al., 2018). Investigating student absenteeism was important because students who were not present in school, did not have skills that persisted from grade to grade (Gottfried & Ehrlich, 2018).

### *Summer Slide and Reading Fadeout*

Summer slide referred to learning gains that children made during the school year that did not continue during the summer (Demir-Lira & Levine, 2016). Children who scored in the lower quartile on state reading assessments during the school year, had a high regression rate in reading when they returned to school with no engagement in reading activities during the summer months (L. O. Campbell et al., 2019). Summer learning loss equaled approximately one month of missed school and was damaging to educational outcomes over time (Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017). Researchers argued that children learn best when instruction was continuous because long periods of time away from school lead to children forgetting important concepts (Caputo & Estrovitz, 2017). As a consequence of summer reading loss, teachers had to spend a significant amount of time reviewing previously learned material when the students returned to school rather than moving ahead from where they left off (McClanahan et al., 2016).

Caputo and Estrovitz (2017) found that children who did not participate in reading experiences over the summer for multiple years had an academic achievement gap that

grew throughout the elementary school years. Cromie et al. (2017) posited that reading programs during the summer break alone were insufficient in raising student reading achievement; instead, the development of a community of readers that included teachers, librarians, and parents was essential to reduce the summer reading fadeout effect. Parents are children's first teachers, and their engagement and collaboration in their child's education impacted students' academic experiences, especially during summer break (Pitcock, 2018). When parents were trained, they ensured that their children maintained their reading levels during the summer months (Parker & Reid, 2017). To become proficient at reading, children needed to read a lot; however, McClanahan et al. (2016) found that children from low-performing schools read less and had less exposure to text. Children were pulled out of class for remedial reading and missed grade-level instruction, which impacted reading achievement (McClanahan et al., 2016). Children who were behind their typically developing peers in reading during the regular school year, were less motivated to read during the summer months, which added to the decline in their reading development (Cantrell et al., 2017).

### *Sleeper and Catch-Up Effects and Preschool Reading Fadeout*

There were two additional possible causes of preschool reading fadeout that included the sleeper effect and the catch-up effect. Sleeper effect occurred when the benefits of preschool were delayed initially but emerged later in ways such as low rates of grade retention and higher levels of completed education (Ansari, 2018). One possible explanation of sleeper effect was that teachers in the early grades focused on foundational reading skills; therefore, the advantages from preschool were not realized until the

children were in later grades, when more advanced skills were introduced (Jenkins et al., 2015). In the Perry Preschool study, long-term gains were evident beyond elementary school as participants in the study who attended preschool had increased high school graduation rates, decreased grade retention, and decreased criminal activity (Schweinhart et al., 2005). The participants in the Abecedarian Project who attended preschool attained more years of education, attended college at a higher rate, and had better health gains (F. A. Campbell et al., 2002).

Catch-up effect occurred when children entered kindergarten with no preschool experience and less developed reading skills and when given extra help from teachers, the children were able to catch-up to their peers who had preschool experience and advanced prereading skills (Mwoma, 2018). One reason for the catch-up effect was that children who did not participate in preschool received twice as much reading instruction in first-grade after being identified as reading below grade level (Bailey et al., 2017). Some teachers used the multi-tiered systems of support framework and identified students who were at-risk for developing later reading difficulties and provided reading intervention as early as first grade. The children who received intervention eventually scored higher than the children who attended preschool on reading assessments by third grade (Grimm et al., 2018).

## Factors Related to Preschool Reading Fadeout

### *Attending Preschool and Reading Fadeout*

Dickinson et al. (2019) posited that preschool might explain the variations in preschool reading fadeout in some children. Cebolla-Boado et al. (2016) found that

preschool was an essential time for significant growth and development because critical prereading skills developed during this time. Children who attended preschool programs had better outcomes in prereading skills when they entered kindergarten (Dorman et al., 2017). Moran and Senseny (2016) found that some children entered kindergarten with preschool experience but were not ready for the academic and demanding kindergarten curriculum. It was important for children to enter kindergarten with strong foundational reading skills to become proficient readers by third grade (Seaboyer & Barnett, 2019). A significant number of students in the United States read below proficiency levels on reading achievement tests, which has persisted for decades (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019). Students were underperforming in reading because of poor foundational reading skills (Paige et al., 2019). Children who struggled to read in first grade were more likely to struggle with reading in third grade (Austin et al., 2017).

The curriculum in preschool was important in the development of reading skills. Joo et al. (2020) found that reading curricula had to emphasize prereading skills, guide teachers' reading instruction, and enable teachers to rely on structured learning activities to scaffold prereading skills that were beneficial for children's reading development. The benefits of early childhood education helped children develop critical school readiness skills needed for long-term academic success (Gol-Guven, 2018). Research showed that children who attended state preschool programs that engaged children in prereading skills, entered elementary schools better prepared for the kindergarten reading curriculum (Brinkman et al., 2017). Children who attended state-funded preschool programs in

Oklahoma, Michigan, New Jersey, South Carolina, and West Virginia performed better in reading than children who did not participate in the programs (Dorman et al., 2017).

Early reading skills such as phonological awareness, phoneme awareness, letter-sound knowledge, and concepts about print were vital for reading skills to persist in elementary school (Ansari & Pianta, 2017; Benner et al., 2017; Terrell & Watson, 2018). The magnitude of the preschool benefits in reading was the result of the length of preschool attendance, which reflected the number of days attended, the number of hours attended per day, and the number of years attended (Shah et al., 2017). The amount of exposure in preschool was associated with stronger prereading gains upon entry into kindergarten and a stronger chance for the skills to persist through elementary school (Fuller et al., 2017).

### *Development of Prereading Skills to Prevent Reading Fadeout*

Prereading skills obtained in preschool formed the foundation for more advanced reading skills in elementary school (Pyle et al., 2018). Achievement in foundational skills lead to increased orthographic knowledge and reading fluency that resulted in proficiency on the state-administered reading accountability assessments (Paige et al., 2019). Mastering prereading-related skills by the end of kindergarten or the start of first grade, predicted later word recognition and reading comprehension (Thompson & Sonnenschein, 2016). Prereading skills that emerged from preschool through elementary school included oral language, vocabulary, phonological awareness, print awareness, and letter knowledge (Terrell & Watson, 2018).

Essential to the development and persistence of reading are meaning-related skills that included oral language, which was the foundation for reading and a significant predictor of second-grade reading achievement (Niklas et al., 2016). Oral language measures included receptive and expressive vocabulary (Suggate et al., 2018). Vocabulary was the most significant predictor in reading comprehension and developed through shared reading and read aloud experiences (Barnes et al., 2017; Stover et al., 2017). Reading experiences improved vocabulary knowledge because the language in written texts exposed language users to new words, which increased the depth of word understanding (Huettig & Pickering, 2019). Reading experiences shared by adults and children were necessary for reading development (Johanson et al., 2016). Teacher-child interactions were significant because they assisted children in forming connections between words and meaning, and for them to use unfamiliar words in different contexts, which were all critical for oral reading fluency (Palacios, 2017).

Oral reading fluency was strongly associated with students' abilities to read passages and answer comprehension questions about those passages (Brown et al., 2018). There was a positive correlation between oral reading fluency and overall reading competence (Downey & Condron, 2016). Educators who focused primarily on reading speed and accuracy, but failed to include the meaning-making aspect of reading, had students with underdeveloped reading skills (Lin, 2016). Reading sustainability practices were essential for academic success and full participation in society (DeWitt & Lessing, 2018). Young students who demonstrated oral language proficiency and early abilities in processing print had more success in reading that persisted through elementary school

(Micalizzi et al., 2019). Reading persisted through elementary school if the skills were supported appropriately from grade to grade (Carroll, 2019).

Phillips et al. (2017) posited that integrating preschool programs into the broader educational system to sustain and expand preschool gains was crucial in ensuring that skills persisted through elementary school. Brummet et al. (2017) found that building children's reading skills over time was difficult if teachers frequently switched teaching assignments either from one grade to another or from one subject to another. Grade-level reassignments undermine student achievement because grade-switching reduced teachers' grade-specific teaching experience and knowledge (Anderson, 2019). Teachers who were new to the early grades and did not have professional development to teach reading were temporarily less effective and had students who exhibited lower reading achievement (Atteberry et al., 2017). Allen and Sims (2018) found that children from low-performing schools were more likely to have unqualified, inexperienced, or out-of-subject teachers than children from high-performing schools.

## Value of Examining Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers' perspectives are personal views or accounts of a phenomenon (Boylan et al., 2018). Teacher perspectives are the thoughts or mental images they have about themselves, their profession, and their students (Kotaman et al., 2018). Teachers' background knowledge and life experiences shaped their perspectives (S. K. Clark, 2020). Teachers' experiences included their family history, traditions, education, work, culture, and community (McKenney & Bradley, 2016). All of these experiences contributed to the way teachers viewed the world, and how they saw others (Zee &

Koomen, 2016). Understanding teachers' perspectives was important to their teaching practices (Halali et al., 2017).

Timmermans et al. (2016) found that teachers' perspectives on the academic achievement of primary school students were positively related to students' perceived assertiveness and independence. Perspectives of teachers are essential because they identify the basis behind teachers' actions as they performed their duties and responsibilities (Timmermans et al., 2016). Teachers' perspectives are critical to creating an efficient and successful learning environment (Gundogmus, 2018). Yılmaz and Turan (2020) posited that teachers' views were related to the teaching process, strategies they use in class, classroom management, and class participation. Teacher perspectives are essential to examine because they have an important impact on students' academic success (Brodeur & Ortmann, 2018), and might assist with understanding preschool reading fadeout.

## Summary and Conclusions

I reviewed existing literature related to reading fadeout, the possible causes of preschool reading fadeout, and the value of teachers' perspectives. F. A. Campbell et al. (2002), Puma et al. (2012), and Schweinhart et al. (2005) found preschool reading fadeout in three seminal longitudinal studies. Other well-known studies regarding preschool fadeout included studies in Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Ghana. Gove et al. (2018), Hill et al. (2015), Hogrebe and Strietholt (2016), and Lipsey et al. (2018) found that the short-term effects of attending preschool did not persist through the first few years of elementary school. The New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee (2016)

found mixed evidence of preschool reading fadeout while Dodge et al. (2017), Bakken et al. (2017), and Dodge et al. (2017) did not find any evidence of reading fadeout.

Cebolla-Boado et al., 2016 posited that preschool was an essential time for significant growth and development because critical prereading skills developed during this time. Children who attended preschool programs had better outcomes in prereading skills when they entered kindergarten (Dorman et al., 2017). As children moved into elementary schools, Stover et al. (2017) posited that teachers had to assess and monitor the ongoing development of children's reading skills to avoid spending time covering material that children mastered. If the teachers in the elementary schools do not support and build on the reading skills developed in preschool, the reading skills might fade over time (O'Connor & McCormick, 2019). One way for teachers to build on skills from one grade to the next was through the coordination and continuity of the curricula and the instruction (Neuman & Danielson, 2020).

Children had to be in school for teachers to build their reading skills. Children in elementary school who were chronically absent scored lower on academic achievement tests (Fuhs et al., 2018). Young children who were chronically absent from one year to the next during the early elementary school years reduced their chances of reading proficiently by third grade because they received fewer hours of instruction (Ansari & Purtell, 2017). Bailey et al. (2017) found that preschool reading fadeout might be the result of two concepts, sleeper effect and catch-up effect.

It was important to examine the teachers' perspectives about reading. Matsumoto and Tsuneda (2018) found that teachers' perspectives influenced their instruction in the

classroom, which affected the educational attainment of their students. Teachers' perspectives are their personal views or accounts of a phenomenon (Boylan et al., 2018). The perspectives of teachers are their thoughts or mental images about themselves, their profession, and their students (Kotaman et al., 2018), which impacted student achievement.

After reviewing the literature, I found evidence of preschool reading fadeout, as well as several possible causes and related factors to preschool reading fadeout. I also, found evidence of the value of examining teachers' perspectives. The gap in practice in the literature was that few researchers conducted qualitative research on early childhood teachers' perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. Additional research was necessary to better understand the extent to which preschool benefits might persist through elementary. I designed this study to gain a deeper understanding of preschool reading fadeout from the teachers' perspectives using semistructured interviews by telephone or Zoom. In chapter three, I explain the elements of the research design and methodology for the study including the instrumentation and procedures for participant recruitment. I describe the data collection and analysis processes and provide an explanation of how I created an ethical and trustworthy study to examine teachers' perspectives of preschool reading fadeout.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine early childhood teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and strategies they use to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low-performing schools. Because teachers provide direct reading instruction to children, I assumed that teachers could identify possible causes of reading fadeout and strategies to reduce it based on their experiences. The gap in the literature was that few researchers had conducted qualitative research on early childhood teachers' perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. Additional research was necessary to better understand the extent to which preschool benefits may persist through elementary grades. In this chapter, I provide a description of the research method used for the study, including details of the research design, rationale, and role of the researcher. I include explanations of the participant selection process, sampling, and instrumentation. A description of data analysis, measures of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures concludes the chapter.

## Research Design and Rationale

The following questions guided this basic qualitative research study:

RQ1: What are early childhood teachers' perspectives on the factors causing preschool reading fadeout?

RQ2: What strategies are teachers using to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low-performing schools?

Preschool fadeout occurs when children enter elementary school with prereading skills, but the skills slowly disappear by the time children enter third grade (Ansari,

2018). Investigating the causes of preschool reading fadeout from the teachers' perspectives using an interview format helped me gain a deeper understanding of the issue based on the experiences of those who teach reading to children from preschool through third grade. I conducted semistructured interviews by telephone or Zoom to explore the issue of preschool reading fadeout and strategies used to prevent fadeout from the teachers' perspective. Interviewing is one method of data collection used in qualitative research that provides information from participants who are knowledgeable of the phenomenon under study (Babbie, 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviewing participants about their perspectives of a phenomenon can provide researchers with a deep and full understanding of the phenomenon (Park & Park, 2016). I contemplated several research designs before selecting the basic qualitative design. I considered a case study in which a researcher attempts to describe the interactions of a bounded unit concerning a phenomenon (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The case study also requires multiple sources of data to ensure validity. My intent was to describe the individual teachers' perspectives of the causes of preschool reading fadeout and strategies they use to prevent fadeout, which did not require multiple sources of data. In my study, I used data from interviews; therefore, a case study design was not appropriate for my study.

I considered other qualitative designs, such as phenomenological and narrative. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of individuals concerning an identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). In a phenomenological study, the researcher looks at the individual experiences of the participants; constructs a universal meaning of the event, situation, or experience; and

arrives at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I decided not to use a phenomenological design because I wanted to explore the experiences and perspectives of individual teachers, and I did not plan to construct a universal meaning or a universal cause of preschool reading fadeout.

I considered a narrative design, which is used to understand the meaning of individual experiences concerning a phenomenon (see Burkholder et al., 2016). In a narrative design, participants provide first-person accounts of an experience told in story form having a beginning, middle, and end, using artifacts such as documents, journals, emails, letters, photographs, and videos to tell a story (Burkholder et al., 2016). The design of my study did not fit a biographical or historical account of preschool reading fadeout; instead, I was interested in the perspectives of individual teachers based on their lived experiences and knowledge of the topic. Preschool reading fadeout is a sensitive topic because it involves exploring teachers' perspectives, instructional practices, and the building of skills over time from grade to grade. Conducting semistructured interviews was the best approach for this study because the participants' responses might have included statements about the instructional practices of colleagues or the professional decisions made by administrators. I considered using focus groups to collect data for this study, but because of the sensitive topic of reading fadeout I wanted to keep the participants' comments confidential. Focus group interviews are not confidential, and they might limit participants from giving accurate and honest responses to interview questions. A basic qualitative study using semistructured interviews was the best approach for my study.

## Role of the Researcher

As the sole researcher, I was responsible for all aspects of this study. I was an early childhood teacher for nine years before I became the preschool supervisor in the study site district for 8 years. I am a principal of preschoolers in the study site district, but I did not have personal or professional relationships with the teachers in the study site schools. I did not observe or evaluate the participants; therefore, there were no issues regarding power differentials with the participants. As an administrator in the district, I have access to district and state test results, but I did not discuss or use the assessment data for evaluative purposes with any of the teachers in the district or study site schools. As a preschool principal, I am interested in the third-grade English language arts test scores because the prereading skills that are developed in preschool have a direct impact on third-grade reading outcomes. My experience with the English language arts third-grade state test scores, my teaching experience, and my current position as a principal prompted my interest in the conducting this study.

My background as an early childhood teacher, my current role as an administrator, and my experience as a young struggling reader may have produced biases in the study. To minimize biases, I made a conscious effort to disregard my experiences and to examine and understand the perspectives of the study participants. Researchers are a significant part of qualitative research and must be able to describe relevant biases, assumptions, expectations, and experiences when conducting a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Biases have an impact on a study, and reflexivity is a systematic assessment of the researcher's identity, positionality, and subjectivities aimed to reduce the impact of biases

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used a journal to reflect on my biases, theoretical preferences, research settings, selection of participants, personal experiences, relationships with participants, and the data generated and analyzed (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Journal writing sensitizes interviewers to self-biases and informs them of the impact these biases may have on research outcomes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

## Methodology

### Participant Selection

The district has three elementary schools that have preschool classes in the buildings, and I included all three in my study. I selected potential participants from the three elementary schools because my study population was preschool through third-grade teachers. There were several criteria to participate in my study. The first was that all participants had to be currently teaching in one of the early childhood grades, which included preschool through third grade. The second was that participants had to teach reading, and the third was participants had to be state certified teachers with a teaching certificate from the study site state. Administrators and teachers who taught other grades were not eligible to participate because the study focused on the early childhood period of development.

I obtained the email addresses of teachers who met the study criteria from the schools' website, and I emailed the teachers a participation and consent letter. I gave each potential participant a time frame of 5 days to consent to join the study. If participants declined to join or if after 5 days I did not hear from the potential participant, I removed the individual from the list. I continued to email additional potential participants inviting

them to join my study until I had enough teachers to conduct the study. Feasibility requires a sufficient number of people to meet participant criteria (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In qualitative research, the focus is not on representing a population; instead, the focus is on relevance to the research questions by those who can provide data for the study (Burkholder et al., 2016).

Sampling refers to the process of identifying individuals who can provide data for the study (Burkholder et al., 2016). I purposefully selected the participants for my study and used snowball sampling to ask participants to recommend others who could provide different or confirming perspectives regarding the topic (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Babbie (2017) noted that it is appropriate to choose a sample based on the knowledge of a population, its elements, and the purpose of the study. Purposeful sampling, including snowball sampling, facilitated an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of teachers on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and strategies they use to prevent it in low-performing schools. I recruited nine early childhood teachers who met the criteria for participation. In qualitative studies, the sample size is not as relevant because depth is more important than breadth (Burkholder et al., 2016).

## Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

### *Instrumentation*

In this basic qualitative study, I conducted semistructured interviews by telephone or Zoom using the interview protocol guide as the instrument to collect data. Interviews are the center of many qualitative studies because they provide a focused insight into individuals' lived experiences, and they assist researchers in understanding how

participants make sense of and construct reality concerning the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I conducted a semistructured interview with each teacher participant. The primary data came from the interviews, which I recorded on an iPhone 7 or through Zoom (only the audio portion of Zoom was recorded). Recording interviews ensures the accuracy of responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I created the interview questions to solicit teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. I used my own interview protocol form (see Appendix A) to gather demographic data, to record minor details, to inform the participants of the study expectations, and to ask interview questions. I asked the same questions in the same order for each participant to ensure consistency.

The interview questions were designed to elicit data that I could use to answer the research questions. Interview Questions 1 through 5 assisted in answering Research Question 1. Interview Questions 6 through 8 assisted in answering Research Question 2. I asked follow-up questions as necessary throughout the interview process. To address content validity, I asked two nonparticipating early childhood teachers to review the interview questions for clarity and to ensure that the responses to the questions would answer the research questions. I also conducted a mock interview with one nonparticipant to become familiar with the layout of the interview protocol guide and the technology.

### *Recruitment*

I selected potential participants from the three elementary schools because my study population was preschool through third grade teachers. I obtained the email

addresses of the teachers who met the study criteria from the schools' website, and I emailed the teachers a participation and consent letter. The participation and consent letter described the focus of the study for the teachers to review before deciding to participate. I gave the potential participants 5 days to decide whether they wanted to participate in the study. Teachers who agreed to participate replied that they consented to participate in a 45- to 60-minute interview by telephone or Zoom.

### *Participation*

After approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I emailed the potential teachers a participation and consent letter to give them the opportunity to review the details of the study before they agreed to participate. Teachers who agreed to participate replied that they consented via email. I sent all teachers who agreed to participate a thank-you email that included the interview protocol guide (Appendix A) and a list of interview appointment options for them to select the most convenient date and time slot. Rubin and Rubin (2012) indicated that the interview protocol may be shared with participants before the interview. I conducted the interviews as scheduled using specific interview questions from the interview protocol guide (see Appendix A).

### *Data Collection*

Basic qualitative research involves an interview process to understand people's positions, views, and experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Semistructured interviews took place by telephone or Zoom. I recorded the audio only of each interview using an iPhone 7 cell phone or Zoom. I had a backup iPhone for recording in case the first one did not

work properly. I practiced with and tested all equipment to ensure that all tools worked properly. It is best to become familiar with the instruments used in a research study to avoid distractions and wasted time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Creswell (2012) posited that data collection is a series of interrelated activities with the aim of gathering quality information to answer emerging research questions. To achieve the objectives of my study, I conducted interviews with nine certified early childhood teachers to gain their perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. Data collection was projected to last two weeks.

I used semistructured interviews to ask individual participants specific questions about their perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Semistructured interviewing provided me with flexibility and gave me the opportunity to explore topics that may arise during an interview session (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used the interview protocol as a guide for the conversation between me and each participant. The interview protocol guide was an instrument of inquiry that I used to obtain participants' thoughts, feelings, and concerns regarding preschool reading fadeout.

I organized interview times and dates based on the availability of the participants but did not interview more than three participants per day. Before the interviews, I greeted the participants to make them feel comfortable. I reviewed the informed consent letter, confidentiality terms, participants' rights, the purpose of the study, why it needed to be studied, who it may help, and the importance of the interviewee's participation (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used identifiers for all participants to protect their identities,

such as A1, A2, A3. I reiterated that the 45–60-minute interview would be recorded (audio only), and I used the interview protocol to ensure that I asked each participant the same questions in the same order (see Appendix A). I established trust and rapport by being flexible and engaging with each participant. I made the participants feel comfortable and I was open to clarifying questions that they had during the process.

The interview notes were secured in a locked safe, in a confidential location in the researcher's home. During debriefing, I reminded the participants that interview responses would remain confidential. I asked the participants if they had any questions regarding the interview process. If the participants did not have any questions, I thanked them for their participation and reminded them that I would email them a two-page summary of my findings and I did not conduct follow-up interviews. I documented each step of the data collection process to monitor and maintain the quality of data collection.

**Data Analysis Plan**

After completing the interviews, I uploaded the audio recordings to Transcribe.wreally.com, an online software program to transcribe the audio part of the interviews into written text. Each resulting transcription included a full, accurate, word-for-word written summary of the corresponding interview (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I reviewed and compared the written transcripts to the audio interview to confirm accuracy. The written transcript allowed me to analyze the data line by line of each participant to assist with data analysis. Data analysis in qualitative research is primarily textual to help researchers make sense of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data analysis is the process of looking across the data set to identify and construct analytic themes and

turn the themes into what is commonly referred to as “findings” to help answer the research questions (Saldana, 2016).

After I received the written transcriptions, I began data analysis. I used open coding for initial data analysis. I read my data line by line and coded keywords and phrases that stood out (see Saldana, 2016). I manually used different colored highlighters to distinguish the open codes. In the subsequent rounds of coding, I focused specifically on aspects of the conceptual framework and research questions until I coded all data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used open codes to organize my data into manageable units or chunks to help me discover ideas, concepts, and theories through the analysis of the written text (see Saldana, 2016).

After establishing open codes, I used axial coding, to group codes with other codes that had similar meanings (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used thematic analysis to develop themes. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). I reviewed my data until the point of saturation, which occurred when continued data collection did not add new themes or patterns (see Burkholder et al., 2016). Three themes emerged from the data.

I reviewed my data set to determine if my themes accurately reflected my data and to ensure validity. I continued to scrutinize my themes by checking and rechecking my interpretations against my data. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that researchers should look for alternative explanations, possible misinterpretations, and discrepant findings. Discrepant findings can point a researcher to potential flaws in the construction of instruments such as unintended ambiguity or insufficient depth in participants’

responses (DiLoreto & Gaines, 2016). I reviewed the participants' responses and checked for discrepancies derived from data analysis. Using member checking, I presented the participants with a two-page summary of my findings and gave them an opportunity to discuss the results.

I used Microsoft Word 2016 to record participants' demographic information and details about the interviews such as when and where each interview took place. I recorded all notes that were relevant during the interview. Chapter 4 contains the results of the study in the form of a conversation organized in sections based on the themes that emerged. I included quotes from the participants to provide insight into their lived experiences regarding preschool reading fadeout.

## Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers rely on trustworthiness criteria to ensure the rigor of qualitative findings (see Burkholder et al., 2016). Validity refers to procedures that researchers use to affirm that their findings are accurate to the participants' experiences, and it refers to the quality and rigor of a study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability assisted with the validity of the study. Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the research findings, and it establishes whether the research findings represent reasonable information drawn from the participants' original data (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I established credibility and transferability by ensuring that interview participants had the experience to discuss the subject matter of preschool reading fadeout (Birt et al., 2016). I also used the audio

recordings of the interviews and my notes of the participants' body language for credibility.

Dependability refers to the stability of findings over time (see Burkholder et al., 2016). I gained dependability by implementing member checking. Member checking is the process of sharing a brief two-page summary of the findings with the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I asked participants to take 15-20 minutes to read the summary and email me within 48 hours if they had any questions or concerns. If participants had questions, we would take 15 minutes to discuss their questions and concerns via the telephone. If I did not hear from participants within 48 hours after emailing the two-page summary, I concluded that the participants had no questions or concerns. Member checking is a strategy used to ensure that content in the study is trustworthy and to rule out misinterpretation of the participants responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability is the extent that qualitative studies can apply or transfer to broader contexts even though the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize from a sample to a population (see Burkholder et al., 2016). I provided a thick description, which is the process of providing a detailed description of the data and the context. Through my thick description, readers will be able to judge the appropriateness of transferring my findings to future research, or to make comparisons to other contexts (see Creswell, 2012).

Confirmability refers to the degree that a study is confirmed or corroborated by other researchers and that interpretations of the findings derive from the data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A goal of confirmability is to acknowledge the ways that researchers use

data to interpret personal biases and prejudices and to mediate those through structured reflexivity processes. I achieved confirmability by documenting in a journal an analysis of my biases, my role in and responses to the research process, and adjustments that I made to the study based on ongoing analysis (see Burkholder et al., 2016). I used Transcribe, a computer software program, to transcribe the interview responses. I manually coded all data to gain a deep understanding of the intent of the participants. The goal was to ensure the interpretation of data in an unbiased way (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

## Ethical Procedures

I completed all necessary IRB forms and received IRB approval (07-13-20-0931889) to ensure that my study protocol only included ethical procedures to reduce any unethical issues that may surface in relation to the treatment of human subjects. Universities have established IRBs to review research proposals and to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research activities conducted under its authority (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I completed the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research course in "Protecting Human Research Participants." I followed the ethical requirements of Walden University's IRB. If I had any ethical concerns related to recruitment materials or data collection, I would complete an Adverse Event Reporting Form and would send it to Walden University's IRB.

Beneficence means that researchers should always have the welfare of the participants in mind and should not cause harm to them in any way (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My study did not cause any harm to the participants. I did not have any personal

or professional affiliations with the study site schools or the teachers in the study site schools. I reassured participants that my role was that of a researcher not an administrator and their participation would help children and teachers. Participants were informed that they would not be coerced to participate in the study and job security was not tied to their participation or non-participation in the study. I reiterated that all responses would be kept confidential and that no one in the district, including the superintendent and principals in the study site schools would know the identity of the participants.

Before data collection, I emailed the participation letter and consent form to each potential participant. Participants replied indicating their consent. In the email, I described procedures for data collection, confidentiality, and the length of the interview. I reviewed the participants' rights and confidentiality procedures. To minimize psychological risks, all participants were informed that they could stop and drop out at any time during the interview process without any consequences or penalties. I reminded the participants of the purpose of the study and that it was not an evaluation of them or their practice. During the interview, I paused periodically to check to see if participants were comfortable enough to continue and I reiterated their rights throughout the interview process.

I kept all data confidential and used identifiers for all participants to protect their identities, such as A1, A2, A3, or B1. I stored all data from the semistructured interviews in my home office on a password-protected computer. I will keep data for a period of 5 years, as required by the university, and to avoid future risks to confidentiality. Recorded

materials will be erased after 5 years following final approval by the research committee. Hard copies of data will be shredded, and computer files will be deleted after 5 years.

## Summary

In this chapter, I explained the method I plan to use in the study site and the rationale for selecting a basic qualitative research design. I described the role of the researcher and the criteria for selecting the participants. The chapter included a rationale for data collection and analysis, as well as the types of data and procedures used to collect, store, and analyze data. This chapter also included strategies to improve the trustworthiness of the study. I outlined the measures for the ethical protection of the participants and the data. Chapter 4, includes the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

# Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine early childhood teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent it in low-performing schools. The superintendent of schools granted permission for me to conduct the study in compliance with the school board policies and procedures. I used the schools' websites and snowball sampling to gain access to potential participants. The research questions for this study assisted me with attaining a deeper understanding of early childhood teachers' perspectives based on their knowledge and experience. I sent each potential participant a copy of the letter of invitation and consent form to inform them about the study. Those who wished to participate replied, "I consent." When I received the replies, I sent another email to each participant to set a day and time for the interview. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to conduct semistructured interviews by telephone or Zoom. I recorded the audio of the interviews, uploaded the audio interviews to transcribe.wreally.com for transcription, and analyzed the transcripts to extract patterns and thematic structures. The purpose of this chapter is to present the analysis of data, which includes a description of the participant selection process, participants' demographics, and the procedures for data collection and analysis.

The following research questions guided me in gathering qualitative data required for the reliability of this study:

RQ1: What are early childhood teachers' perspectives on the factors causing preschool reading fadeout?

RQ2: What strategies are teachers using to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low performing schools?

## Setting

I conducted all semistructured interviews from my home through the telephone or Zoom. My original plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews, but because of COVID-19, I decided against the face-to-face interviews for health reasons. I selected participants for this basic qualitative study from a low-performing public school district located in the northeastern part of the United States. The district serves students from preschool through Grade 12. Three elementary schools were included in this study because they had preschool classrooms located in each building and because my study population was preschool through third-grade teachers. I assigned a numerical identifier (1-3) to represent each school. The reason for the selection of multiple sites was to allow analysis across the district. By selecting multiple schools, I ensured the study was vigorous (see Yin, 2016).

No unplanned occurrences affected the interpretation of the study results. Data were collected through semistructured interviews conducted by telephone or Zoom with nine early childhood teachers. I collected personal narratives related to individual perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent it in low-performing schools. I transcribed the interviews and began the coding and analysis process. I conducted seven interviews by telephone and two through Zoom.

## Demographics

In an urban school district located in a northeastern state, nine early childhood teachers shared their perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and strategies they use to prevent it from occurring. Each teacher provided personal perspectives for this study. The nine participants each held a current teaching certificate issued by the study site state, had at least 2 years of experience, and taught reading daily. I assigned participant identifiers A–I to protect their identities. Teaching experience ranged from 3 to 18 years. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' alphabetical identifier, highest degree obtained, school, years of teaching experience, grades taught, and number of years in the district.

**Table 1**

*Research Participants*

| Participant | Degree and certificate | School | Years of experience | Grades taught | Number of years in the district |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| P-A | Master's Curriculum and Instruction and Early Childhood Education Supervision | #1 | 16 | 1, 2 | 8 |
| P-B | Master's Early Childhood Administration | #3 | 18 | Prek, K | 6 |
| P-C | Master's Education and Administration Leadership | #1 | 8 | 2, 3 | 8 |
| P-D | Master's Teaching | #2 | 18 | Prek, K, 1 | 15 |

*(table continues)*

| Participant | Degree and Certificate | School | Years of Experience | Grades Taught |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| P-E | Master's Reading and Literacy | #2 | 18 | Prek, 1, 2 |
| P-F | Bachelor's Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education | #1 | 14 | Prek, K |
| P-G | Bachelor's Elementary Education | #3 | 10 | 2, 3 |
| P-H | Bachelor's Elementary Education | #1 | 6 | K, 1 |
| P-I | Bachelor's Early Childhood Education | #2 | 3 | 3 |

## Data Collection

The data collection process commenced once approval was obtained from Walden University's IRB (# 07-13-20-0931889). I used the websites of three elementary schools and snowball sampling to recruit participants. Participants received an electronic invitation to participate in the study. They were informed about the purpose of the study, the interview process, treatment of data, participants' rights, and maintenance of confidentiality. Participants typed "I consent" if they agreed to participate in the study and emailed it back to me. Data were collected from nine early childhood teachers using the interview protocol guide that I created (see Appendix A). I collected data through semistructured interviews by telephone and Zoom that addressed the research questions developed for the study.

Data collection occurred over 2 weeks with an average of 4.5 interviews each week. Seven participants preferred telephone interviews, and two preferred interviews through Zoom. Participants provided a day and time that was most suitable for their schedule. The length of each interview varied based on the amount of information shared by the participant and lasted between 45 and 52 minutes. I interviewed each participant once. I asked each participant the same questions to guarantee the same general information from each interviewee. During the semistructured interviews, I explored participants' thoughts, concerns, and opinions regarding reading instruction in the early childhood grades (preschool through third grade). I recorded the responses from the semistructured interview on an iPhone 7 or Zoom (only the audio portion of Zoom). I uploaded each interview to transcribe.wreally.com for a written transcription of the conversation. I did not deviate from the planned data collection process outlined in Chapter 3, and there were no unusual circumstances encountered in the data collection process. All data collected for the study will be secured in a locked cabinet in my home for 5 years. All electronic data will be password protected on a personal computer. I am the only person with access to the locked cabinet and password.

## Data Analysis

In this basic qualitative study using semistructured interviews, I examined teachers' perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. I asked each participant the same eight open-ended interview questions. I transcribed each recorded telephone or Zoom interview before analyzing the data and compared the written interview to the audio interview to ensure accuracy. I printed the

transcripts of the interviews to read each line by line. During the transcription process, I became more familiar with the data. I first analyzed the data based on the study's conceptual framework and the literature, which included dynamic skill building and skill formation theories. Next, I applied open coding to the raw data to search for repeated words, phrases, and concepts that could answer the research questions. Then, I applied axial coding by organizing the open codes into categories according to their similarities.

## Interview Analysis

I used Creswell's (2013) step-by-step approach for qualitative data analysis. The six steps included (a) organizing and preparing the data, (b) reviewing and becoming familiar with the data, (c) beginning to code the data, (d) generating themes, (e) discussing the findings, and (f) validating the findings.

### *Step 1: Organize and Prepare Data*

I compared the written transcripts with the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. I printed all of the interview transcripts and organized them in the order the interviews took place. I matched the interview protocol guide (see Appendix A) and the transcript to the participant's alphabetical identifier. Next, I paired the participant with the numerical identifier assigned to the corresponding school.

### *Step 2: Review and Become Familiar With Data*

I listened to the recordings two times without taking notes. I read the written interview data two times to become familiar with the data again without taking notes. To gain a renewed perspective, I did not reread the transcripts for 24 hours.

### *Step 3: Begin to Code the Data*

I used two phases to code the data: (a) open coding and (b) axial coding. In the first phase (open coding), I read the transcripts and made a notation in the margins. I reread the transcripts line by line and used highlighters to identify words, phrases, and concepts relevant to the conceptual framework (yellow highlighter) and research questions (blue for RQ1 and pink for RQ2). I made a list of all highlighted words, phrases, and concepts. I used my highlighting system to regroup the word, phrases, and concepts into codes by similarities and other common characteristics. Thirty seven open codes emerged from the data. Table 2 shows an example of eight open codes, participant identifiers, and examples of excerpts from the data that fit each code.

**Table 2**

*Examples of Codes*

| Code | Participant | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|
| Change | P-E | "We are constantly changing all the time." |
| | P-C | "The curriculum has changed at least three times in the last three years." |
| Developmentally appropriate | P-B | "I do wonder if maybe some of the push down of the standards, you know is developmentally appropriate." |
| | P-G | "Changing the kindergarten schedule to be more academic was a mistake – we are not what's in the state guidelines for kindergarten and our children are not getting what they need." |
| Alignment | P-C | "So, they may have taught phonics in pre-k the way they should have but once they get to kindergarten and beyond it's doesn't continue." |
| | P-I | "We don't have foundational skills within that curriculum from grade to grade; therefore, there is no alignment which is why you have fadeout." |
| Equity in professional development | P-B | "Consistency in what teachers know, do they have the right professional development." |
| | P-C | "They don't train us in school to teach any of these things." |
| Doubt | P-B | "I seriously doubt that fadeout will be prevented unless everyone gets the proper training, support and guidance from the top down." |
| | P-A | "I do not have faith in the set up that we have now, there are too many agendas and those who come to observe don't know how to improve our practice, we tell them what they should be looking for." |
| Rigid | P-C | "As teachers we need room to be flexible as needed with how we engage our children in the learning process, but that was taken from us and there isn't anything that we can do about it." |
| | P-D | "Because we have so much structure and so much to do within a block, I have to send a lot of remedial stuff home with my students to do for homework because our programs are scripted." |
| Class size | P-A | "The class sizes especially Pre-K to two is too large. To prevent fadeout, we need smaller class sizes." |
| | P-G | "You can't really teach 27 children all the things that I just mentioned in 90 minutes." |
| Discussion | P-C | "I spend more time getting the kids to do a lot of the talking during the read aloud." |

For the second phase of coding, I organized the codes into categories according to their similarities. Twelve categories emerged from the open codes. I recorded the categories and codes on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and searched for patterns. I compared and arranged the codes into categories to discover connections between the data and research questions. Table 3 shows an example of six codes and categories along with participant identifiers, and excerpts from the interview transcripts.

**Table 3**

*Examples of Open Coding and Categories*

| Code | Category | Participant | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| Frequent changes | Inconsistent curriculum | P-D | "Switching up the curriculum so often definitely does not give teachers a chance to learn it and then implement it. Most of the time, we don't even know if there was an impact on learning because we don't stick with it long enough." |
| | | P-I | "Part of the problem is that we don't have a curriculum, because we change so frequently so we all do our own thing." |
| Incomplete curriculum | Unclear guidance on reading instruction | P-A | I think the culprit is our curriculum, when they took out phonics and phonemic awareness out the curriculum it prevented us from moving on." |
| | | P-H | "We need foundational skills. We need them in our reading curriculum and we need to teach them explicitly." |
| Training by a specialist | Professional development for everyone by a reading specialist | P-B | "Professional training is a must, we are constantly trained by people who are not specialist. Only a handful of teachers get training directly from a specialist while the rest of us get the information in a turnkey fashion in half of the time needed to be trained." |
| | | P-G | "We have to stop relying on the district staff to train us right after they learn the stuff themselves – I don't have confidence that they are providing quality training." |
| Many directions | Confidence in reading instructional practices | P-A | "I think the fade-out happens because we don't have a consensus on what reading looks like in the lower grades." |
| iRead | Assessment Practices | P-B | "iRead pushes you through no matter. You can't rely on that data to drive your instruction and this is want the district wants us to do. It is faulty data." |
| | | | "Many of my children can't read on the level that iRead says they are on. This is problematic throughout our school." |
| | | P-G | "iRead I felt like everyone had to just get at first grade level and I just felt like that was setting the kids up for failure and us because it was our SGO. Also, they want us to use the iRead data to drive instruction but the data is not right" |
| Strategies for reading | Resources used for reading instruction | P-C | "The Read Aloud project works well for me and my students." |
| | | P-I | "I use guided reading with my kids because it works and I can easily fit it into our block." |

### *Step 4: Generate Themes*

I reviewed and combined the categories that emerged during the axial coding process. I ensured participants' interview responses answered the research questions. I studied the codes and added any similar new codes that emerged and grouped the codes into categories. I matched the themes to the corresponding research question. I confirmed alignment between the themes and the conceptual framework, related literature, and research questions. Three themes emerged: (a) teachers partially identify instability in reading programs and the curriculum as causes of reading fadeout, (b) lack of knowledge and confidence in reading instruction contributes to reading fadeout, (c) teachers use developmentally appropriate practices and engaging activities to help prevent reading fadeout. Table 4 shows the themes related to each research question along with the number of excerpts included in each category.

**Table 4**

*Axial Coding Categories, Themes, and Research Question Connection*

| RQ1: What are early childhood teachers' perspectives on the factors causing preschool reading fadeout? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Categories | Number of Participants Who Responded | Themes |
| Inconsistent curriculum | 15 | Theme 1<br>Teachers partially identify instability in reading programs and the curriculum as causes of reading fadeout. |
| No uniformed reading program | 6 | |
| Unclear guidance on reading instruction | 22 | |
| Ineffective alignment between grades | 6 | |
| Professional development for everyone by a reading specialist | 17 | Theme 2<br>Lack of knowledge and confidence in reading instruction contributes to reading fadeout. |
| Meaningful support to implement the reading plan | 19 | |
| Different levels of knowledge regarding reading skills | 6 | |
| Confidence in reading instructional practices | 36 | |
| Assessment Practices | 26 | |
| RQ2: What strategies are teachers using to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low-performing schools? | | |
| Resources used for reading instruction | 19 | Theme 3<br>Teachers use developmentally appropriate practices and engaging activities to help prevent reading fadeout. |
| Hands-on interactive games | 24 | |
| Small group instruction | 9 | |

### *Step 5: Discuss the Findings*

The results of the data revealed three themes related to the research questions. Two themes emerged for RQ1, and one theme emerged for RQ2 (see Table 4 p.71). I compiled the information into results based on the themes that emerged from the data.

### *Step 6: Validate the Findings*

I compared emerging themes to the current literature to validate the findings. I utilized an out of district Director of English Language Arts of a neighboring school district to review the codes, categories, themes, and findings. The feedback from the outside director validated the findings. I compiled and shared a two-page summary of the results in Chapter 4 with the participants and gave them time to review the findings. No one disputed the findings or contributed any additional information.

## Specific Categories and Themes

The responses from the participants were beneficial in acquiring information on their perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. Several categories emerged from the grouping of similar codes that originated from the interview transcripts. A common category for participants was levels of knowledge regarding reading skills. Six of the nine participants reported a lack of knowledge about the importance of phonics in reading development. P-G declared, “I think that if we had really understood what they called the science of reading, we would be better off.” “I didn’t know what phonemic awareness was literally until I read a book about it.” P-F said, “I think that some teachers are just not that knowledgeable about the importance of phonics.” P-A stated, “The administrators are unclear about reading

development and can't support us, the teachers." P-B shared, "I have been teaching for years, and when I took the LETRS course in reading, I couldn't believe how much I didn't know, and more importantly, the three coaches could not pass the course with a 90 or above to be the trainers for the next cohort. So, we all need to learn this."

Participants also discussed the inconsistent curriculum and reading programs within the district. Seven participants commented on the need for a concise and uniform curriculum. P-A stated, "We need a good curriculum, education, and training." P-D commented on changing the curriculum and said, "Switching up the curriculum so often definitely does not give teachers a chance to learn it and then implement it. Most of the time, we don't even know if there was an impact on learning because we don't stick with it long enough." P-I stated, "Part of the problem is that we don't have a curriculum, because we change so frequently, so we all do our own thing." P-B talked about the curriculum in the lower grades "Our curriculum is not that consistent throughout those lower grades." P-E talked about a step by step reading plan, "We need a more coherent reading plan, you know, one that gives you steps, like first you do this, and then this is the next step. We were kind of trying to patch things together." P-H did not know what curriculum the district used, "I am not sure what we use for curriculum. I think we just use different programs." P-A spoke about how disjointed the curriculum was, "The curriculum is a piecemeal of so many things."

Participants discussed assessment practices and how the district wants teachers to use assessment data to drive instruction. According to the teachers, the assessment data is not accurate. In particular, the participants talked about the iRead assessment. P-C said,

> So when they finish iRead it is supposed to take you right into 2nd grade so most of my kids passed this and went to Reading Plus which is a third-grade reading comprehension tool, but when I looked at the baseline analysis, it said that the kids are on a kindergarten reading level. I don't trust iRead at all.

P-B explained, "iRead pushes you through no matter what. You can't rely on that data to drive your instruction, and this is what the district wants us to do." P-A declared,

> I have no confidence in iRead data which the district is so big on. The data isn't accurate, and the fact that it's tied to our evaluation is problematic. We make a big deal when they finish iRead, but the kids can't read on grade level.

**Discrepant Cases**

Inconsistent and nonconforming data might be the result of potential flaws in the construction of instruments or insufficient depth in participants' responses (DiLoreto & Gaines, 2016). During the data analysis stage of my research, I did not find evidence that opposed the findings. Therefore, further analysis was not necessary. If I found inconsistent data, I would have reviewed the data and addressed the variances between the findings.

## Results

I examined teachers' perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent it through a basic qualitative study using semistructured interviews. In this section, I described the results of the responses that I collected during the interviews with nine participants. I used eight open-ended interview questions to help answer the research questions (see Appendix B). I used the interview method to develop an

understanding of the teachers' perspective. Teachers were able to provide in-depth and thorough responses through interviews.

The following is a summary of findings based on the research questions that guided this study. RQ1: What are early childhood teachers' perspectives on the factors causing preschool reading fadeout? Interview Questions one, two, three, four, and five addressed this research question (see Appendix B). Through interviews, participants identified instability of a reading curriculum, low confidence in reading instruction and assessment, and inconsistent alignment practices as causes of preschool reading fadeout. Two themes emerged regarding RQ1: (a) teachers partially identified instability in reading programs and the curriculum as causes of preschool reading fadeout, and (b) lack of knowledge and confidence in reading instruction contributes to reading fadeout. I discussed each of the themes in this section.

**Theme 1**

All participants expressed concerns about the district's overall reading programs and curriculum. The participants explained how changing the curriculum and programs frequently were factors that led to reading fadeout. P-I stated that teachers needed more stability regarding the reading curriculum. According to P-E, "We are constantly changing the curriculum." P-D stated that switching the curriculum often did not give teachers a chance to learn it and then implement it to fidelity. "Most of the time, we don't even know if there was an impact on learning because we don't stick with anything long enough." P-C acknowledged that the curriculum was changed three times within five

years. According to P-A, “We don’t take the time to try to understand a new program or curriculum because we are certain that it will change.”

To compensate for not having a consistent reading program or a sufficient curriculum, six participants stated that they used programs that were a part of old curricula to fill in gaps. P-E and P-G used the guided reading model while P-H used decodable books that came with Journeys (an old curriculum). A few years ago, P-F participated in the Children’s Literacy Institute (CLI) training series given by the district to a select group of teachers. Although the district discontinued using CLI, P-F continued to use sections of the program like message time plus. P-F stated, “I like to focus on skills through the interactive messages each day, some teachers prefer one curriculum over another and will stick to what they like no matter what.” P-A said, “The curriculum is a piecemeal of so many things; therefore, teachers do not know what they should teach or what to emphasize, which may leave gaps in the students reading development.”

Teachers struggled without a consistent reading program or a complete curriculum, which was noted by P-B. Therefore, some skills and concepts were often over or underemphasized or ignored, according to P-A. P-D stated that phonics was left out of the reading plan or underemphasized, which impacted reading achievement in students. P-C stated, “The curriculum has been hijacked by people who believe in just comprehension, and comprehension is an important part, but it’s just a part.” All participants expressed reservations about the appropriateness of the reading curriculum. P-E stated that over the years, the curriculum was not complete because it did not incorporate needed skills. P-A said the students were not getting proper instruction in

reading. P-B stated, “Changing the kindergarten schedule to be more academic was a mistake. We are not following K-3 guidelines from the state, and our students are not getting what they need to be successful readers by third grade.” P-G stated that students used to have choice time, sharing time, and time just to enjoy reading a favorite story, but now, “They are forced to learn skills that they are not ready for.” P-C said, “Students went right to reading without any foundational skills.” P-I stated that some teachers realized that students were missing foundational skills; therefore, teachers tried to teach those skills into an already packed reading block. P-B stated, “It’s obvious that we don’t build children’s foundational skills because the walls come tumbling down when they get to second and third grade because they can’t handle the rigor of those grades.”

Seven participants commented that there was no alignment with the curriculum from grade to grade. P-C acknowledged that phonics might be taught in preschool the way that it should be, but once the children entered kindergarten and beyond, it did not continue. P-I stated that fadeout occurred because there was no alignment between the grades. P-A said that the district does not have a clear plan for reading from one grade to next because “We don’t stick with anything long enough to collect data to see what worked and what didn’t and why.” P- E stated that the district needs a cohesive plan for reading. P-G stated, “teachers must stop redoing or reviewing standards and skills that students mastered in the lower grades.” P-H noted, “students were prepared for the next grade level, but for some reason, they regressed because something was not connecting when they entered second and third grades.”

**Theme 2**

The majority of participants stated they had some deficits in their knowledge base regarding reading instruction. Five participants commented on the need for the district to provide comprehensive professional development in reading by a reading specialist. The participants did not trust the professional development given by district staff. P-B stated,

> Professional training is a must; we are constantly trained by people who are not specialists. Only a handful of teachers get training directly from a specialist while the rest of us get the information in a turnkey fashion in half of the time needed to be trained.

P-C stated that some teachers had a reading course by trained reading specialists; however, the rest of the teachers will receive training from district staff. “It takes years to learn this stuff, how are they going to effectively teach us something that they just learned.”

P-D and P-G stated that they needed professional reading experts to improve the reading instructional practice of teachers. P-A has been in the district for many years and has never been trained by a specialist until 2018 when the district enrolled the first cohort of teachers in a reading course. P-G shared that some teachers get intensive training and feel very comfortable in their instructional practice; however, “this is not the case for teachers across the district.” Teachers did not get the same level or quality of training, according to P-G. P-A and P-D stated that they did not wait for professional development from the district; instead, they read educational books, search the internet, and joined

professional organizations to improve their practice. P-I stated, “Unless we’re taught how to move forward, we will remain stuck.”

One reason why teachers were reluctant to receive professional development from district staff was that they did not feel supported by those who were responsible for helping them improve their practice. P-D shared that administrators and reading coaches did not provide enough support to implement the curriculum to fidelity. P-C stated that teachers were afraid and embarrassed to ask for assistance because they believed administrators would think that they were unprofessional or not smart enough to teach; therefore, teachers did not ask for the support they needed. P-A and P-F stated they needed time to understand, process, and implement the curriculum, but the district did not give them the time needed. Rather, teachers had implement the curriculum as soon as they received training. P-B shared an account during an observation,

> One of the reading coaches observed my lesson and told me everything I did wrong, and I asked if someone could show me how to do what was asked of me, of course, no one came to model the lesson. They don’t know how to support, only criticize.

P-H stated, “I could use a little more support because I am still learning, but my coach told me to pair up and observe one of my colleagues. How can I improve if you don’t tell me how?” P-E suggested that the district needed to go back to grade level and across grade level meetings where teachers sat down and discussed students, curriculum, and assessments to help build on skills from the previous grades.

Four participants discussed how they were given mixed messages about their instructional practices by coaches and administrators. P-A was observed, and during the post observations, the coach shared suggestions for improvement; however, the recommendations were in contrast to what they learned during a professional development session. P-H had a similar account,

> When I got the feedback from my observation, both administrators thought I did a great job during my guided reading session. However, we are not supposed to use guided reading. The same supervisor observed a colleague in a guided reading session in another school, and the supervisor reprimanded that teacher.

P-I stated, "It's like they observe you from their own personal lens or philosophy about reading instruction. Depending on what someone reads about good instruction or reading on a given day, that's how you are evaluated." Doubt was evident and expressed by three participants. P-B stated, "I seriously doubt that fadeout will be prevented unless everyone gets the proper training, support, and guidance from the top down." P-A doubted that things would change because "those who come to observe you have their own agenda, and they are clueless as to how to improve someone's practice." P-E said, "You can't lead if you don't know where you are going. We don't have a strong English language arts team or reading plan to lead us to change and better student outcomes."

The various reading plans and the incomplete curriculum were concerns for some participants. P-D stated,

> How we teach reading is essential, but equally as important is what skills we teach and when they are taught. I don't have a lot of confidence that we are

> teaching the right things in the lower grades, which is why the kids are not prepared for third grade.

P-A stated that there were many ways of teaching young children how to read, “The problem is that people don’t always have the scope and sequence necessary for optimal growth and, if they don’t get it right in the beginning, students will struggle in the end.” P-B stated,

> We have so many belief systems in this district. My colleagues in another school were told by their coach to change the scope and sequence for reading, which they did, and I followed what they did. My coach told me that I could not switch the scope and sequence because it was not appropriate to do so. How is it good for one school and not the other?

P-F had a similar encounter,

> My principal observed me one time, and I had my kids laughing, talking, playing games, and they were, you know, learning on the move. I had children making letters with their bodies, too; it was good. I thought that it was a good observation. My principal wanted to know why I allowed my students to play so much. She said our reading block is important, and we can’t waste time because there’s too much to cover. I was doing what was developmentally appropriate, but she wanted me to do the opposite. Go figure.

P-I had a different take on instruction. P-I has older students who must take the third-grade reading test and believed that there was not a lot of time to do some of the things

that teachers do in kindergarten and first grade during the third-grade reading block. P-I stated,

> Message time plus is not going to get them to read. To read proficiently, they must read. At this juncture, the kids must spend most of their time reading, but that's not what the program for third grade says to do. We don't have a reading plan that progresses from grade to grade. Why am I doing exactly what they are doing in first grade for my reading block? It doesn't make sense.

The other factor the participants discussed thoroughly was the 90-minute daily reading block. Six participants addressed the amount of information they had to cover in a short period and how the pacing was too fast for some children. P-C thought that the district administrators should look at the 90-minute reading block and carefully restructure it to make it more effective. P-D stated that pacing, which was covering required material in a specific time frame, was challenging. "It's hard for a good teacher to cover all of the material they want us to cover in one block and to teach at a level where children master everything." P-F and P-B also stressed that the 90-minute block was very overwhelming because there were too many concepts and activities to cover that did not blend well. P-B stated, "We need a longer reading block in the lower grades to get all the requirements in each day." The 90-minute reading block posed an additional concern for P-A, P-G, and P-F. These participants thought that class size made it impossible to cover the amount of material required. P-E declared that some children entered kindergarten or first grade already reading; therefore, teachers spent time with the other children, and those who were more advanced did not get as much attention in

instruction as a struggling student. P-E also stated that having a large number of students in one classroom forced teachers to make decisions regarding who they spent time with because there were too many children.

The rigidity of the 90-minute reading block concerned five participants. P-C stated that teachers needed room to be flexible with how they engaged their students in the learning process, but flexibility and creativity were not options. P-D said,

> Because we have so much structure and so much to do within a block, I have to send a lot of remedial stuff home with my students to do for homework because our programs are scripted, and you have to stay on pace.

P-C stated,

> We have a reading plan, but the plan says you need to go this way, that you need to go back to a lower grade with the children, but you don't have time to go back even though the data says we need to, but our curriculum pacing pushes them through. There is no flexibility built-in.

P-I stated,

> I have to hide what I do with my kids who are struggling because the structure of the reading programs don't allow for teachers to do what they know children need. So, on occasion, I have to bring in my own strategies to get children from one point to the next because the programs that we use are too structured.

P-B shared,

> If all of our children are at different reading levels, why are we so bent about teaching them the same way. We should have the freedom to make changes based

> on the needs of the children, but the curriculum said that we must be on chapter whatever by December or whatever, and we are evaluated based on that.

P-C mentioned that staff was reluctant to "go off script" for fear of job security; therefore, they passed their students along (in reading) whether they were ready or not. P-C stated that the district had a habit of firing teachers because,

> Administrators have the notion that once they teach us something, we are supposed to have it mastered right away. Some of us need time to digest, process, and implement without the fear of being fired, which leads to long open positions and inexperienced teachers in front of our children.

P-F stated, "We lacked teachers for two or three years at a time in the lower grades because instead of building the skills in the teachers we have and supporting them, they send them to another grade or terminate them." P-E stated that some teachers were moved from the upper grades into the lower grades, and they did not understand how young children develop and learn.

Participants thought assessment was a significant threat to student achievement in reading. In particular, the iRead intervention program was a serious concern for all participants. The teachers in kindergarten through second grade had to ensure that all children engaged in iRead, and teachers had to use the iRead data to inform their instruction. The iRead data was monitored by district administrators and shared with teachers, periodically. P-A stated,

> I have no confidence in the iRead data, which the district is so big on. The data isn't accurate, and the fact that it is tied to our evaluation is problematic. We make a big deal when they finish iRead, but the kids can't read on grade level.

P-B and P-C stated that iRead was not an adaptive tool even though the district believed differently. P-B stressed that teachers could not rely on the iRead data to drive instruction because the data was faulty. P-F shared that the children became bored with iRead and stopped trying; therefore, teachers forced children to engage in the activities every day to meet district benchmarks. P-F stated that sometimes teachers kept children from other activities to focus on iRead, if they fell behind because teacher evaluations were tied to student's use and success on iRead. All participants commented that accurate instruction depended on accurate assessment data to meet children's reading needs. Seven participants stated that accurate data assisted in differentiation of instruction. P-E shared, "I have two sets of lesson plans, one for the principal to see and the one that I actually implement in the classroom to meet the needs of my students."

RQ2: What strategies are teachers using to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low-performing schools? Interview Questions six, seven, and eight addressed this research question. Based on the interviews, participants used hands-on interactive games, computer software programs, guided reading, leveled readers, decodable books, small group instruction, and read aloud activities to improve preschool reading fadeout. The theme that emerged for RQ2 was that teachers use developmentally appropriate practices and engaging activities to help prevent reading fadeout.

**Theme 3**

All participants expressed how they used hands-on activities to teach reading skills. P-E stated, “I use a lot of hands-on activities, you know, engaging all of the senses to help children learn specific reading skills.” The majority of participants reported that they used manipulatives, letter tiles, and flashcards to play games with their students to build their skills. P-C made flashcards, “I would just write, you know, SL on one and then, you know, an ending part on the other and use them as a visual and kinesthetic for children.” P-G also used manipulatives, “I have letter cubes and letter tiles to help build their word capacity, and you know, which will help with their reading.” Several participants used interactive technology to build children’s skills. P-B used Starfall because the interactive games build children’s skills in a fun way, and the software program was part of the learning centers, which gave children a choice as to whether they wanted to engage with it or not. Other participants used ABCMouse, ABCya, and Spelling City to engage children in the learning process. Six participants used small groups to teach foundational skills explicitly. P-A, P-D, and P-F used small groups to focus on critical reading skills like phonological awareness and vocabulary. P-B, P-C, and P-I used small group instruction to listen to their students discuss stories, share a prediction or insight into the story, get clarification on story points, or to retell a story to their peers in their own words. P-D said children must develop their oral skills to become proficient readers; therefore, children participated in read aloud activities to build oral skills.

Several participants used specific reading resources and strategies to help children become proficient readers. Four participants used guided reading, reading recovery, read-aloud experiences, and audiobooks in their classrooms. P-G stated, “I use guided reading with my kids because it works, and I can easily fit it into our block.” P-I used reading recovery, leveled text, and decodable text, while P-C used the read-aloud experiences to practice good reading. P-E stated, “I use a lot of audiobooks because my kids need to hear a fluent reader, so there is a lot of modeling of reading in my class, and I make it fun. Kids what to be like their teachers, so I model reading for them.” P-E and P-C used e-books that corresponded to the students reading levels to encourage children to read more. P-I and P-G used Newsela and Epic to help find books and reading material for children. P-G stated, “I give my children a choice in what they want to read because if they have a choice, in what they read, they will enjoy it more.” P-C said, “Epic is a lifesaver because my kids and their families get to select books that they like, and the kids get to see themselves in some of these books which keeps them interested.” P-E used electronic books and other resources to find books at the students’ level and interest. P-E stated,

> Gone are the days where a book represented the reading level of the kids so you had kids who didn’t want to be seen with a book that was a grade or two below his actual reading level because kids would make fun of him. So, I open up the doors for all kinds of resources for children to read without a stigma attached.

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers rely on trustworthiness criteria to ensure the rigor of qualitative findings (Burkholder et al., 2016). I employed credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability strategies for evidence of trustworthiness. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews. To address content validity, I asked two nonparticipating early childhood teachers to review the interview questions for clarity and to ensure that the design of the questions would answer the research questions. I also conducted a mock interview with one nonparticipant to become familiar with the interview protocol guide. Semistructured questions allowed the participants to share their perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and strategies they use to prevent fadeout.

### Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the research findings, and it establishes whether the research findings represent reasonable information drawn from the participants' original data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I ensured credibility by interviewing participants with experience to discuss preschool reading fadeout (see Birt et al., 2016). I interviewed nine teachers who had an average of 10 years of professional experience teaching children in preschool through third grade. I gained credibility by implementing member checking. Participants received a two-page summary of the findings. All participants agreed with the results and did not have any questions or concerns about the findings.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of the study might apply to other groups or settings (Burkholder et al., 2016). I provided a detailed, thick description of the data to describe the findings (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through my thick description, readers will be able to judge the appropriateness of transferring my findings to future research on preschool reading fadeout, or to make generalizations to other schools experiencing similar issues with fadeout. The context of the study was described to assist the reader in determining the transferability of the results from the study to other schools experiencing reading fadeout.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the stability of findings over time (Burkholder et al., 2016). I gained dependability by audiotaping and transcribing all interviews verbatim to ensure the data was collected accurately. I did not need to conduct follow-up interviews. I also kept a reflective journal to record my thoughts as the study progressed and to limit personal biases with data collection and analysis. I utilized the interview protocol guide to ask the participants the same questions and in the same order. Before each interview, I reminded participants of their rights, including the fact that they were volunteering their services and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without cause. I compared the emerging themes to the current literature to validate the findings.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the degree that a study is confirmed or corroborated by other researchers and that data and interpretations of the findings derive from the data

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability certifies that the findings are generated from the participants' responses, and not researcher biases. Each participant brings his or her own unique perspective to a study; therefore, confirmability depends on whether participants' perspectives can be validated. Throughout the research, I kept a reflective journal and used it to document my thoughts and feelings as they arose, and my personal biases as they were recognized. I established confirmability by comparing the findings to the themes and the research questions. The goal was to ensure that there were no researcher biases by interpreting the data in an impartial way (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

## Summary

This section addressed the data analysis and the results of the study. My study was constructed on two research questions and explored teachers' perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and strategies they used to prevent fadeout. Nine participants from a school district in a northeastern state presented their perspectives for this basic qualitative study using semistructured interviews. During data analysis, I used Creswell's (2013) six-step approach to analyze the findings. Three themes emerged (see Table 4 p. 71), that reflected the perspectives of the participants. The participants' responses from their interviews revealed a range of perspectives regarding the causes of preschool reading fadeout. The central causes of reading fadeout included: instability of a reading plan and curriculum, lack of confidence in reading instruction, and inconsistent alignment practices in the early grades.

All participants had concerns about the frequent changing of the district's reading curriculum and programs. To compensate for not having a consistent reading program or

a complete curriculum, the participants used programs that were a part of old curricula, which meant that there was no uniformity regarding the curriculum in the district. Also, participants were concerned that the curriculum did not emphasize foundational skills that students needed to become proficient readers. Finally, participants believed that there was no alignment or a plan for building reading skills from grade to grade.

In the second theme related to RQ1, the knowledge levels and feelings of doubt impacted reading instruction and assessment. The majority of participants stated they had some deficits in their knowledge base regarding reading instruction. The participants commented on the need for the district to provide comprehensive professional development in reading by a reading specialist instead of district staff to be sure that everyone had equitable professional development opportunities. Participants felt that they did not receive enough support from coaches to implement the curriculum to fidelity. Some participants were afraid and embarrassed to ask for assistance because they thought that administrators would believe that they were unprofessional or not smart enough to teach; therefore, they did not seek the support they needed. Also, participants were given mixed messages about their instructional practices by different coaches and administrators, which left them confused and frustrated.

Other concerns about instruction centered around not teaching the proper scope and sequence necessary for optimal growth in reading. Besides the scope and sequence, all participants had concerns about the 90-minute reading block. Participants expressed they had too much information to cover in a short period and that the pacing was too fast for some children. Additionally, the participants expressed the need for teachers to have

the freedom to be creative and flexible with how they engage their students in the learning process. The participants wanted authentic student assessment data to inform their instructional practices to meet the needs of their students. Participants expressed displeasure with the district's use of one data point like iRead to inform instruction because the iRead data did not give a complete and accurate account of student's needs.

The responses from participants to RQ2 regarding strategies to prevent preschool reading fadeout demonstrated that teachers used hands-on interactive games and computer software programs to encourage students to use their senses to build reading skills. Participants used reading resources and strategies like guided reading, leveled readers, and decodable books to engage children in the reading process. Also, participants used story discussion techniques during small groups to explicitly teach reading skills and to engage children in discussion techniques that included, acting out stories, retelling stories in their own words, story sequencing, and read-aloud activities.

Participants used manipulatives like letter tiles and flashcards to play fun games with children to keep them engaged. They used ABCMouse, ABCYa, and Spelling City for children to practice reading skills using appropriate software programs. Participants used small group instruction to listen to their students talk and discuss stories, share predictions or insight into the stories, and to retell a story to their peers in their own words. Several participants turned to specific reading resources and strategies to help students become proficient readers that included, guided reading, reading recovery, read-aloud activities, and audiobooks. The participants also used Newsela and Epic to help

find books and reading material for children on their reading level and interest to keep them engaged and to give them a choice in what they read.

Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of the findings and whether the findings extend knowledge in the discipline. I compared the findings to what was found in the peer reviewed literature in Chapter 2. I interpreted the findings in the context of the conceptual framework. I described the limitations of the study and provided recommendations for further research based on the research found in Chapter 2. I end Chapter 5 by describing the potential impact for positive social change in reading for teachers, children, and the early childhood profession.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

I conducted a basic qualitative study with semistructured interviews to examine teachers' perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and strategies they use to prevent it in a low-performing school district in a northeastern state in the United States. Nine early childhood teachers participated in the study. I conducted interviews by telephone or Zoom to obtain data. Through the analysis of data, three themes emerged: (a) teachers partially identify instability in reading programs and the curriculum as causes of reading fadeout, (b) lack of knowledge and confidence in reading instruction contributes to reading fadeout, (c) teachers use developmentally appropriate engaging activities to help prevent reading fadeout. Understanding the participants' perspectives of preschool reading fadeout in low-performing schools may lead to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

Chapter 5 includes the research findings with a connection to the current literature and conceptual framework. I also provide implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research. I used a qualitative method for this study because qualitative research focuses on understanding, interpreting, and explaining phenomena (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The participants shared their perspectives on the factors that cause preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. Through the qualitative approach, I gained a deeper understanding of preschool reading fadeout.

## Interpretation of the Findings

I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB before data collection began. I used the following research questions to guide this study:

RQ1: What are early childhood teachers' perspectives on the factors causing preschool reading fadeout?

RQ2: What strategies are teachers using to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low performing schools?

I asked participants nine questions about their perspectives of preschool reading fadeout and strategies used to prevent fadeout. I generated three themes and analyzed them based on the research questions. Two themes aligned with the early childhood teachers' perspectives of factors that cause preschool reading fadeout, and one aligned with the strategies they used to prevent fadeout. The findings of this study indicated that the participants identified instability of reading programs, an incomplete curriculum, and a lack of knowledge and confidence in reading instruction as contributing factors to preschool reading fadeout. Participants used developmentally appropriate practices and engaging activities to help prevent reading fadeout.

I evaluated the interpretations of the findings through current literature and the constructs of my conceptual frame. I used Fischer's dynamic skill-building theory to explore the development of skills over time within two levels of performance: functional, and optimal (see Fischer, 1980). I used Cunha and Heckman's skill formation theory to explore the formation of skills because learning is a cumulative process in which new knowledge depends on previously acquired knowledge (see Mandel et al., 2019).

**Theme 1**

The study site district adopted and discontinued the use of several reading programs over the years for various reasons and, in many cases, without the teachers'

input or without data to indicate whether the programs had an impact on students' reading development. The teachers expressed concerns about changing the reading programs frequently. P-E stated, "We are constantly changing all the time." P-G said, "Once you get familiar with one, then there would be a new program to learn. We have to just stick with one program for a longer period of time and really see the results." P-A stated, "We don't take the time to even understand what the program is offering before we switch to something new." Because of the frequent changes in the reading programs, teachers became less confident in the district's plan for reading development in the lower grades. Teachers employed in the district for many years ended up using different parts of old reading programs. According to P-A, the reading programs that teachers used were "a piecemeal of many different programs across the district." The participants who used different reading programs created different learning experiences for students. The learning experiences in some cases did not build on students' previous learning experiences because some of the reading programs did not align from grade to grade. Students need consistency and continuity in their reading development (Neuman & Danielson, 2020) to prevent reading fadeout. Also, an essential principle of skill formation theory is that learning is a cumulative process in which new knowledge depends on previously acquired knowledge (Mandel et al., 2019).

Current study participants reported that as the reading programs changed, the reading curriculum changed because the curriculum had to correlate with the reading programs. Staff writers of the curriculum for the district wrote from their perspectives of how to teach reading. The different curricula perspectives did not always include a focus

on foundational skills or opportunities for children to engage effectively with the curriculum. Gershenson et al. (2016) found that a narrow curriculum that assumed an idealized middle-class knowledge base created barriers to learning by excluding children from under resourced communities from using their experiences to connect to new concepts. P-C stated, “Everyone is coming from their own school of thought when it comes to reading. We all have our thoughts about how children learn, but when you are in a school, there needs to be some type of consensus.” P-F stated, “Some teachers pick and choose what they want to teach regarding the curriculum regardless of the scope and sequence.” Aydin et al. (2017) posited that teachers’ ability to implement the reading curriculum to fidelity influences the type of instruction children receive for reading.

Joo et al. (2020) found that reading curricula had to emphasize prereading skills, guide teachers’ reading instruction, and enable teachers to rely on structured learning activities to scaffold prereading skills that were beneficial for children’s reading development. The reading curriculum adopted by the district over- or underemphasized critical reading skills, which influenced reading instruction and reading achievement in the early grades. P-A stated, “I think the culprit is our curriculum when they took out phonics and phonemic awareness out the curriculum it prevented us from moving on.” P-H said, “We need foundational skills. We need them in our reading curriculum, and we need to teach them explicitly.” Foundational skills are necessary for increased oral development and reading fluency (Paige et al., 2019). Mastering prereading-related skills by the end of kindergarten or the start of first grade is essential in predicting later word recognition and reading comprehension (Thompson & Sonnenschein, 2016). The

curricula that the district adopted over the years did not have a consistent emphasis on prereading skills such as oral language development, vocabulary, and phonics. Foundational skills are necessary for reading to persist in elementary (Cunha & Heckman, 2010; Fischer, 1980). P-B stated, “Vocabulary and prior knowledge are important, but neither was a focus in our reading programs or the written curriculum.” P-C stated, “We went right to reading without any foundational skills.”

Oral language and vocabulary development were skills that concerned several participants. P-C said, “The vocabulary is not there as well. So, we have to spend extra time doing a lot of talking in his class to try to catch up on a lot of vocabulary instruction.” P-A stated, “Before we read aloud, we focus on vocabulary.” P-E used read-aloud activities to help with discussion and to help build students’ oral language. Oral language includes receptive and expressive vocabulary, and both are critical for reading sustainability (Suggate et al., 2018). Micalizzi et al. (2019) posited that students who demonstrate oral language proficiency and early abilities in processing print have more success in reading that persists through elementary school.

Curriculum alignment from grade to grade concerned several participants in the current study. P-C stated, “They may have taught phonics in pre-k the way they should have, but once they get to kindergarten and beyond, it doesn’t continue.” P-G shared, “We have to stop redoing or reviewing standards and skills that students mastered in the lower grades.” Cunha and Heckman (2010) posited that child development is a continuous and cumulative process in which skills developed in one grade are used to build skills in later grades. The current study participants did not have continuity of

instruction across all grades, which was a factor in reading fadeout. According to Cunha and Heckman, teachers must build on early reading skills for later reading skills to develop proficiently. The lack of continuity in the curriculum in the early years was a possible cause of reading fadeout (see Madondo, 2020). The current study findings supported the research reviewed in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework.

**Theme 2**

The district's plan for reading instruction in the early grades was not uniformly and succinctly articulated to the teachers in the study. The teachers had trouble explaining the district's reading plans as well as their individual reading instructional plans for their students. Many of the teachers used outside resources to help them with reading development and instruction. Teachers lacked the knowledge and confidence necessary to provide effective reading instruction. Benner et al. (2017) posited that the children's elementary schools and the instructional practices they receive in the first few years of school are possible reasons for fadeout. P-E stated, "I didn't know what phonemic awareness was until I read a book about it." P-A said, "The administrators are unclear about reading development and can't support us." P-B commented, "Teachers are not familiar or comfortable with what they're teaching." Teachers did not have the knowledge necessary to teach reading effectively because of the quality of professional development they received, which was sporadic and unevenly distributed among the teachers. Some teachers received professional development in reading while others did not. Some received professional development from reading specialists over time while others had to wait for the reading coaches and supervisors to turnkey the information.

The inconsistency in professional development influenced teachers' levels of knowledge in reading instruction. P-B stated,

> Professional training is a must; we are constantly trained by people who are not specialists. Only a handful of teachers get training directly from a specialist while the rest of us get the information in a turnkey fashion and in half of the time needed to be trained.

P-G said, "Some teachers get intensive training and feel very comfortable, but it's not across the district; not everybody is able to get that same level of training."

The participants did not have a clear understanding of the developmental processes of reading, which was a factor in reading fadeout. Kuijk et al. (2016) posited that teachers need a clear understanding of the developmental levels of their children to build on the skills they already mastered. Teachers who do not have the knowledge in reading instruction might not know how to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of children who experienced preschools that focused on academics (Timmermans et al., 2016). Elementary school teachers who taught content that children already learned during preschool curtailed their academic growth and tempered their achievement gains (Bailey et al., 2017). P-G stated, "We have to stop redoing or reviewing standards and skills that students mastered in the lower grades. We spend the first three months of the school year redoing what they already know; it's a complete waste of time."

Participants' lack of knowledge regarding foundational skills and the scope and sequence of skill development affected the reading performance of children when they entered second and third grades. Some of the teachers in the study did not have a

systematic guide to building a reading foundation in children. Reading is a cumulative process in which mastery of easier skills is necessary for more advanced skills to develop (Heckman, 2008). P-I stated, “We don’t have a reading plan that progresses from grade to grade.” P-F said, “I don’t think we spend enough time on the foundational skills.” Teachers must teach reading in a consistent and orderly manner (Cunha et al., 2006) for reading to persist.

The current study findings supported the conceptual framework. In dynamic skill-building theory, there is a sequence to the development of reading (Ansari, 2018), and the skills at one level are the result of specific skills at the prior level (Delalibera & Ferreira, 2019; Fischer, 1980; Geert & Fischer, 2009). Early academic skills are the foundation for the development of later skills (Bailey et al., 2018). Participants in the current study taught reading skills in an inconsistent manner. Some participants focused on foundational skills, while others focused on decoding and reading comprehension. The inconsistent instructional practices in reading inhibited the systematic building of skills across grade levels. P-D stated, “I think a lot of the children are missing foundational skills because we were focusing more on comprehension.” P-B said, “It’s obvious that we don’t build children’s foundational skills because the walls come tumbling down when they get to second and third grade because they can’t handle the rigor in those grades.” P-C stated, “By the time they get to me, they should be reading fluently, but instead, I am still teaching skills that they should have mastered in the lower grades.”

Some participants in the current study stated that they lacked support and confidence to implement the curriculum to fidelity. There are layers of administrators in

the English language arts department, and each has his or her own beliefs and thoughts about the teaching of reading. P-F stated, “Everybody has their own idea of how to teach.” Teachers lacked confidence in their ability to teach reading because they received mixed messages about their instructional practices from administrators. P-A said, “During my post-observation meeting with the supervisor, she documented what she saw me do and made suggestions on how to improve. However, the suggestions made were in contrast to what we were told during our professional development session.” P-G said,

> Two administrators conducted a co-observation, and they saw the same thing. I received several strategies to improve my instruction from both; however, one person told me to do one thing, and the other told me something very different. As a teacher, who do I follow?

Participants stated that teachers who needed support often declined to ask for help from an administrator or reading coach out of fear of job security. P-C stated, “Teachers are afraid to ask for help when they need it because they fear that they may get reassigned or flat out terminated. Teachers are moved around very often here.” P-F said, “We lacked teachers for two or three years at a time because instead of building the teachers and supporting them, they send them to another grade or terminate them.” P-E stated, “Sometimes teachers get moved from, let’s say a fifth-grade into kindergarten, and they don’t understand how young children develop and learn.” Moving teachers around in the lower grades without proper guidance and training to teach reading impacted student-reading achievement. Anderson (2019) found that grade-level reassignments undermined student achievement because grade switching reduced grade-specific teaching experience

and knowledge. Atteberry et al. (2017) posited that teachers new to the early grades with little professional development to teach reading were temporarily less effective and had students who exhibited lower reading achievement.

Participants in the current study did not have confidence in their instructional practice because they did not have proper assessment data to plan instruction, and they had too many lessons to cover within a rigid 90-minute reading block. One of the district's primary data points for the early grades is iRead. However, the data from iRead were inaccurate in the study site district, making it difficult for participants to plan instruction to meet the needs of their students. P-C stated,

> So, when they finish iRead it is supposed to take you right into second grade, but when I looked at the baseline analysis, it said that the kids are on a kindergarten reading level. I don't trust iRead at all.

P-B said, "iRead pushes you through no matter. You cannot rely on that data to drive your instruction and this is what the district wants us to do. It is faulty data." Participants experienced a lack of uniformed preassessment and assessment plans for reading. Participants in the current study used their own assessment tools, or did not assess children until December. Other participants began instruction at the beginning of the reading continuum regardless of where children were developmentally. Without a clear understanding of the developmental levels of children, teachers could not provide an individualized instructional plan to address children's skill levels. Consistent with the conceptual framework, individuals remain at a functional level of development if their skills were not supported (Bailey et al., 2018). Fischer (1980) posited that lower skills not

supported hindered the development of advanced skills. Alatalo et al. (2017) asserted that children who did not receive reading instruction at their current level experienced fadeout because they did not have exposure to more advanced content to bolster new skill development.

In the current study, participants' lack of accurate assessment data to inform their instructional plans was a factor in reading fadeout. Chapman and Tunmer (2018) found that data-informed instruction was necessary for children to progress in reading. P-A stated, "We all start at the same place, and as I see them needing more, I will give them more, this way I don't have to worry about anybody missing skills, we all move together." P-F stated, "I use running records to monitor my students, but we really don't start that until around December after the children get acclimated to school." Knowing children's specific reading levels allow teachers to place children in appropriate reading groups and to create lessons that promote specific skill development, rather than assuming which skills children lack (Preston et al., 2016). Assessment is an essential aspect of education because it influences the instruction students receive, which correlates with reading development (Pellegrino et al., 2016).

The daily 90-minute reading block was highly structured, fast-paced, and inflexible according to the participants in the current study. Participants could not fit all the reading requirements into the 90-minute block because they had too many lessons and activities and the pacing was too fast for some children. P-D stated, "Pacing can be difficult. It's hard for a good teacher to cover all of the material that they are supposed to in one block and to teach at a level where children master everything." P-B said, "We

need a longer reading block in the lower grades to get all the requirements in each day." P-C stated, "You don't have time to go back even though the data in reading says we need to, but our curriculum pacing tells us to keep moving. There was no flexibility built in for children who needed extra time." Instruction during the 90-minute reading block was not as effective because participants in the current study had to keep up with the pacing and could not spend time with individual students as needed because there were too many children in the classrooms.

P-A stated, "The class size, especially in kindergarten, is too large. To prevent fadeout, we need smaller class sizes." P-G said, "You can't really teach 27 children all the things that are required in 90-minutes." Participants worked with the students who needed extra support and allowed the children who had more advanced reading skills to work independently, which could account for reading fadeout. Bailey et al. (2017) and Mwoma (2018) posited that children who did not participate in preschool received twice as much reading instruction in the first grade after the teacher identified them as reading below grade level.

In the current study, struggling students received extra support and time with the teachers, and they caught up to their peers who were not struggling. Reading fadeout may be the result of the catch-up effect. In the catch-up effect, children who enter kindergarten with no preschool experience and low reading skills receive extra support from teachers to catch-up to their peers who attended preschool (Bailey et al., 2017; Kang et al., 2019). P- E stated, "Some children come into kindergarten or first grade, and they can read, they may not get as much attention in instruction as a struggling student would get." Teacher-

child relationships were essential in the development of reading. Johanson et al. (2016) found that reading experiences shared by adults and children were necessary for reading development. Teacher-child interactions are significant because they assist children in forming connections between words and meaning, which is critical for oral reading fluency (Palacios, 2017).

In the current study, some of the pacing guides did not meet the reading levels of children when they entered first grade. Participants noticed a definite difference in the children who had preschool experience because they had advanced prereading skills. P-F stated,

> I could tell who went through the district's preschool program and who didn't. The ones that went to the preschool program were very successful in reading and reading above grade level, but I don't know what happens when they leave kindergarten.

P-B said,

> I prepare my kids for the next grade, but I get so frustrated when I sit in meetings, and the teachers in the upper grades talk about how unprepared the children are and how they have to go back to the beginning with some of the kids.

Budinski and Lujic (2018) found that children who attend preschool and enter kindergarten with prereading skills, benefitted from teachers that provide academic instruction at the children's current level. Cunha and Heckman's (2010) posited that early investments facilitate the productivity of later investments. Bailey et al. (2018) posited that the advantages of preschool persisted if the elementary schools' children attended

focused on building skills incrementally. The findings supported the research found in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework.

RQ2: What strategies are teachers using to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low performing schools?

**Theme 3**

Participants, in the current study, used games, puzzles, flashcards, interactive software programs, reading programs, and manipulatives to develop students' reading skills. Participants used small group instruction to explicitly teach reading skills like phonics, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. Mastering prereading related skills by the end of kindergarten or the start of first grade predicted later word recognition and reading comprehension (Thompson & Sonnenschein, 2016). P-F stated, "I use small group instruction to work on specific skills in reading instruction."

Participants in the current study spent a lot of time developing children's oral language skills by engaging them in reading practices as often as possible. Oral language development is essential in the reading process. Niklas et al. (2016) found that the development and persistence of reading depended on oral language development, which is the foundation for reading and a significant predictor of second-grade reading achievement. P-C shared, "We have to make time for our children to practice reading." P-F said, "I ensure that my children hear me reading. We need to give children more time to practice reading so that they become fluent."

Participants provided opportunities for children to become meaningfully involved in read aloud activities, story discussions, story reenactments from different points of

view, and retelling stories in children's own words. Castles et al. (2018) found that reading instruction that excluded the engagement of children in meaningful and relevant reading activities limited children's reading access, which could cause reading fadeout if left unmonitored. P-C shared, "I spend more time getting the kids to do a lot of the talking during the read aloud." Participants provided many opportunities for children to engage in reading activities because children needed to read more to become proficient readers. Mackey (2019) found that for children to develop strong reading skills, they had to practice more and engage with increasingly longer and more challenging texts. Participants in the current study used different reading resources for children and families to enjoy. Giving students a choice in their reading material kept them interested in reading. P-G stated, "I give my children a choice in what they want to read, and I use Newsela because when they have a choice in what they want to read, they enjoy it more." Weiguo et al. (2019) posited that confident readers engage in reading more, which was significant for students' reading performance and reading skills. The current findings supported the research found in Chapter 2.

## Limitations of the Study

Possible limitations in this study included sample size, the coronavirus pandemic, participants' willingness to participate, and researcher bias. This study was limited to early childhood teachers currently teaching reading in classrooms within the same school district. I excluded administrators, reading supervisors, and coaches, who might have responded differently. Another limitation was the sample size. I limited the number of participants and used three elementary schools in the study site district. I extended an

invitation to 20 teachers from three different elementary schools in the month of July when potential participants were on summer break. I ended up with nine participants. The low number of participants and schools might limit the overall perspectives of preschool reading fadeout. More teachers might have participated if the interviews had occurred during the school year. Several potential participants replied to my invitation to participate in my study after the deadline. During the summer months, teachers do not check their emails frequently; therefore, several potential participants did not open the email in enough time to participate in the study.

The coronavirus virus is a respiratory illness that can easily spread from person to person. The spreading of the virus so quickly led to a worldwide health pandemic during the evolution of my study. State and school quarantines and health and safety mandates prohibited me from conducting interviews face-to-face. Therefore, I changed how I collected my data for health and safety reasons and interviewed participants by telephone and Zoom. I conducted seven semistructured interviews by telephone and two through Zoom. I intended to collect data from ten participants, but I was only able to attain data from nine.

Another possible limitation was the honesty of the participants in sharing their perspectives with me since I am an administrator in the study site district. I did not have any personal or professional affiliations with the study site schools or the teachers in the schools. I reassured participants that my role was that of a researcher and not an administrator in this study. I did not coerce participants to join the study and job security was not a factor in participation or non-participation. I reiterated that all responses were

confidential and that no one in the district, including the superintendent and principals of the elementary schools, would know the identity of the participants. I informed the participants that I was not acting on behalf of the school district and that this study was not a job requirement.

Researcher bias was also a limitation. I reflected upon my experiences as a teacher, an administrator, and a struggling reader in the early grades. My passion for reading in the early grades was the impetus for this study. It was important to report the participant's responses to the interview questions accurately and without prejudice. I searched for biases while I conducted my study and documented any potential biases throughout the study in a personal journal (see Creswell, 2013). A journal sensitizes interviewers to their subjectivities and informs them of the impact that these influences have on research outcomes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher is a significant part of qualitative research and must be able to describe relevant biases, assumptions, expectations, and experiences that qualify him or her to conduct the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also explained data collection and analysis in detail. This study confirmed some of the research findings and major tenets from the conceptual framework regarding the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies teachers use to prevent fadeout.

## Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. Participants in the current study identified instability of a reading curriculum, low confidence in reading instruction and assessment, and inconsistent alignment practices as causes of preschool reading

fadeout. Participants used hands-on interactive games, computer software programs, guided reading, leveled readers, decodable books, small group instruction, and read aloud activities to prevent preschool reading fadeout. These findings confirm the body of knowledge concerning preschool reading fadeout. The following are recommendations for future research.

The first recommendation is to replicate the study in low-performing schools that do not have district funded preschool programs. I would also recommend inviting male participants. A study of this nature could give a different viewpoint and understanding of teachers' perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and strategies they use to prevent fadeout. A second recommendation is to study the methods used by school administrators to adopt and introduce a new reading curriculum and reading programs to teachers. The adoption of a curriculum and reading programs provide a shared vision for reading development for all stakeholders. Based on the findings of the current study, some participants did not receive a reason or a rationale for the frequent changes in the reading programs or the curriculum. Over the years, participants resisted using the reading programs and curriculum and began using old programs that were familiar to them. Teachers must understand the vision, rationale, and reasons for the selection of a specific reading program and curriculum for them to have a stake in the fidelity of implementation. Schechter et al. (2017) found that teacher engagement and buy-in were crucial for the successful implementation of a new curriculum, and the quality of implementation depended on how involved teachers were in the process of adopting a new curriculum.

A third recommendation is for researchers to conduct a study that examines meaningful and comprehensive professional development that explores early reading practices. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) found that teachers must engage in effective professional development that is content focused, involves active learning, aligned with the curriculum, and provides sufficient learning time for teachers to learn the concepts. Based on the findings of the current study, participants expressed concern that professional development was not comprehensive, not consistently delivered, and not conducted by trained reading professionals. Martin and Gonzalez (2017) found that teacher knowledge was vital to their professional growth and that of their students. For students to be successful, teachers need to participate in relevant reading professional development to meet the needs of all students (Schmid, 2018). To implement a reading program and a curriculum to fidelity, teachers must have confidence that both meets the needs of their students. Teachers must also have confidence in their skills to provide appropriate reading instruction (Schechter et al., 2017).

The fourth recommendation is for researchers to conduct a study that examines the importance of curriculum alignment from preschool through third-grade. It is important to understand specific practices that lead to reading sustainability from grade to grade. Based on the findings of the current study, curriculum alignment between the grades was a problem. Neuman and Danielson (2020) found that a lack of coordination and continuity in curricula from grade to grade created gaps in the learning process that hindered children's growth in reading. Aligning standards, curriculum, instruction, assessments, environment, and teacher professional development from preschool through

third grade had a positive impact on reading skills that persisted through elementary school (Manship et al., 2016).

The fifth recommendation is for researchers to conduct a study that examines reading assessment practices in the early grades. Based on the findings of the current study, assessment practices did not align with instruction. Participants' found that assessment results were inaccurate and prevented them from providing instruction that meets the needs of their children. Instructional decisions based on student assessment data assist teachers in identifying skills that need further development and skills that children mastered (Stover et al., 2017). Assessment is an essential aspect of education because it affects the instruction students receive, and it correlates with reading development (Pellegrino et al., 2016).

## Implications

A goal of the study was to understand preschool reading fadeout and strategies used to prevent it from the perspectives of early childhood teachers. Participants in the current study expressed challenges with the frequently changing reading programs and the incomplete curriculum. Participants also experienced a lack of confidence in their knowledge of reading development, which influenced their instructional practices. The lack of confidence was due, in part, to the inconsistent professional development and support practices by school administrators. The results of the current study have implications for early childhood educational leaders. Leaders might use the outcomes of the study to examine district reading protocols and to inform their decisions regarding reading programs, curricula, and practices that meet the needs of all students.

Implications for positive social change may also include practices to improve knowledge and confidence in the implementation of reading programs and curricula. Improved knowledge and confidence in reading instruction may lead to an increase in the number of proficient readers by third grade in low-performing schools. In addition, implications for positive social change include an awareness of the importance of professional development opportunities by trained reading specialists and meaningful support from district administrators.

Based on the findings of the current study, the curriculum was out of alignment from preschool through third grade. The results of the current study could provide information about alignment practices from preschool through third grade that would include the curriculum, reading instruction, and reading assessments. Knowledge of the developmental continuum in reading from grade to grade is essential for reading to persist. Teachers are crucial figures in the implementation and sustainability of classroom-based curricula from grade to grade (Humphries et al., 2018). Alignment practices that assisted with sustained learning gains included curriculum and assessment continuity, and articulation meetings with teachers and school support staff from preschool through third grade (Ansari & Purtell, 2017). The findings from this current study may provide direction and guidance for early childhood professionals in reading instructional practices that may prevent preschool reading fadeout. The teachers' perspectives provided new insight into the challenges they face in sustaining reading practices from grade to grade to prevent preschool reading fadeout.

## Conclusion

Teachers' perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and strategies they use to prevent it is significant, and an essential element of this study. The results of my study filled a gap in the literature. Research exists on preschool reading fadeout, but little research exists regarding early childhood teachers' perspectives on preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. Thus, the impetus for this study topic was to examine the factors that cause children's reading skills to fade over time in the early grades and strategies used to prevent fadeout. The results of this study demonstrated the importance of a clear vision for early reading. The vision for reading assist administrators with adopting consistent and appropriate reading programs and curricula aligned from preschool through third grade. Teachers indicated that consistent professional development by reading specialists for all early childhood teachers and reading support staff was essential for effective reading instruction from grade to grade. The results of the study provided evidence that professional development must also include a focus on foundational skills. Teachers must expose children to foundational skills in a developmentally appropriate and engaging manner conducted in small groups. The results of the study demonstrated the need for effective data-driven instructional practices for reading to persist through the early grades.

I hope that results from my study will lead to a greater understanding of preschool reading fadeout and strategies teachers use to prevent fadeout. The expectation is that policymakers and early childhood educational leaders will use the information to support reading initiatives, policies, strategies, and procedures that may prevent preschool

reading fadeout. I believe that school administrators, reading support staff, and teachers could use the information from my study to make school-based decisions about reading practices from preschool through third grade. I hope that districts use the results to help them plan developmentally appropriate, intentional, and meaningful reading experiences for all children attending low-performing schools.

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# Appendix A: Interview Protocol Guide

Interviewee: _____Location: _____
Date: _____Time: _____
School: _____ Grade level: _____

Reading gains made in preschool disappear by third grade in some school districts. This experience is known as preschool reading fadeout, which occurs when short-term cognitive gains decline over time, leaving no long-term traces of their initial positive impacts. The purpose of this interview is to examine teachers' perspectives on the causes of preschool reading fadeout and the strategies they use to prevent fadeout. The results of my study may benefit students, teachers, and early childhood professionals in other communities experiencing similar issues.

You have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the perspectives of the causes of preschool reading fadeout. Your participation in this interview is important and voluntary. This means that I will respect your decision of whether or not you want to participate. If you decide to participate now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal. I do not intend to inflict any harm. This audio only recorded interview is scheduled to last about 45-60 minutes.

**Introduction and Background Information**: Thank you for volunteering to share your insights and experiences concerning preschool reading fadeout. I would like to begin by asking you some background questions to get to know you better.

A. Participant's Background

How long have you been teaching? _____
How much time do you spend teaching reading each day? _____
What other grades have you taught and how many years in each grade? _____
How many years of experience do you have with reading curriculum? _____
How many years have you been teaching in this district? _____

B. Interview Questions

1. Preschool reading fadeout occurred when children entered elementary school with prereading skills, but over time, the skills slowly disappeared by the time children entered third grade. What has been your experience with the reading skills of children when they enter your class?

2. What are some factors that cause preschool reading fadeout?

3. How does reading instruction impact reading fadeout?
4. How does the development of reading skills impact fadeout?
5. How do you determine where to begin your reading instructional program with the children who enter your classroom?
6. What resources have you used that help to prevent preschool reading fadeout?
7. What teaching strategies do you use to prevent preschool reading fadeout?
8. Is there any additional information that you would like to add concerning preschool reading fadeout?

# Appendix B: Interview Questions for Participants

*Interview Questions Corresponding to each Research Question*

| Interview Questions |
| --- |
| RQ1: What are early childhood teachers' perspectives on the factors causing preschool reading fadeout?<br><br>1. Preschool reading fadeout occurred when children entered elementary school with prereading skills, but over time, the skills slowly disappeared by the time children entered third grade. What has been your experience with the reading skills of children when they enter your class?<br>2. What are some factors that cause preschool reading fadeout?<br>3. How does reading instruction impact reading fadeout?<br>4. How does the development of reading skills impact fadeout?<br>5. How do you determine where to begin your reading instructional program with the children who enter your classroom? |
| RQ2: What strategies are teachers using to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low-performing schools?<br><br>6. What resources have you used that help to prevent preschool reading fadeout?<br>7. What teaching strategies do you use to prevent preschool reading fadeout?<br>8. Is there any additional information that you would like to add concerning preschool reading fadeout? |

Possible follow up prompts that I will keep visible as I interview each participant:
What did you mean by…….?
Tell me more about…….
You mentioned……
What do you mean by…...?
Please give me an example of when that…. worked/did not work.

Appendix C: Data Summary Table

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| Inconsistent curriculum | Frequent changes | P-D | "Switching up the curriculum so often definitely does not give teachers a chance to learn it and then implement it. Most of the time, we don't even know if there was an impact on learning because we don't stick with it long enough." |
| | | P-B | "Our curriculum is not that consistent throughout those lower grades." |
| | | P-E | "We need a more coherent reading plan you know, one that give you steps, like first you do this, and then this is the next step. We were kind of trying to patch things together." |
| | | P-A | "The curriculum is a piece meal of so many things." |
| | Change | P-E | "We are constantly changing all the time." |
| | | P-C | "The curriculum has changed at least three times in the last three years." |
| | | P-F | "Changing of curriculums frequently is our number one problem, it's just too much." |
| | | P-G | "Regarding the reading programs, once you get familiar with one, then there would be a new program to learn. We have to just stick with one program for a longer period of time and really see the results." |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| No uniformed reading program | Old programs | P-E | "I use guided reading model in my classroom even though we are not supposed to now." |
| | | P-G | "I use old resources, like the journeys decodable books that came with that program, the guided reading books in my reading centers." |
| | | P-F | "I really like using the message time plus that the children's literacy initiative had because I am able to focus on skills through interactive messages. The district kept this part of CLI but threw the other parts out so we have a little bit of everything but nothing really." |
| | | P-F | "Some teachers like one program more than another and they would say like, oh, well, I'm still going to hold on to this." |
| Unclear guidance on reading instruction | Overemphasizing/ Underemphasizing skills | P-A | "Overemphasize some things and under emphasize or ignore others." |
| | | P-D | "Phonics is not emphasized enough after kindergarten." |
| | | P-E | "The curriculum has been hijacked by people who believe in just comprehension and comprehension is an important part it is but it's a part" |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Incomplete curriculum | P-A | "I think the culprit is our curriculum, when they took out phonics and phonemic awareness out the curriculum it prevented us from moving on." |
| | | P-H | "We need foundational skills. We need them in our reading curriculum and we need to teach them explicitly." |
| | | P-B | "Vocabulary and prior knowledge are important but neither are a focus in our reading programs." |
| | | P-F | "I also feel like we got away from phonics down the years so we have to account for that in our instruction." |
| | Foundational skills | P-C | "We went right to reading without any foundational skills." |
| | | P-I | "We realized they don't have the foundation and so what we do is spend a lot of time with foundational skills, but not really. You know, we try in our centers, but that doesn't always work because we have a curriculum and a pacing guide that totally ignores those foundational skills." |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ineffective alignment between grades | Alignment | P-C | "So, they may have taught phonics in pre-k the way they should have but once they get to kindergarten and beyond it doesn't continue." |
| | | P-I | "We don't have foundational skills within that curriculum from grade to grade; therefore, there is no alignment which is why you have fadeout." |
| | | P-G | "We have to stop redoing or reviewing standards and skills that students mastered in the lower grades and so that's something I would say that our district needs to focus a lot on." |

| Theme 2: Teachers knowledge levels and feelings of doubt impacted reading instruction and assessment. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
| Professional development for everyone by a reading specialist | Training by a specialist | P-C | "We did have reading course the last two years to now close that gap for the foundational skills like phonics skills but not everyone will be trained by the specialist. After the first cohort is trained, they will train the rest of us. It takes years to learn this stuff, how are they going to effectively teach us something that they just learned." |
| | | P-B | "Professional training is a must; we are constantly trained by people who are not specialist. Only a handful of teachers get training directly from a specialist while the rest of us get the information in a turnkey fashion in half of the time needed to be trained." |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | P-C | "They don't train us in school to teach any of these things." |
| | | P-G | "Some teachers get intensive training and feel very comfortable but it's not across the district not everybody is able to get that same level of training and that's where I think we kind of fall by the wayside." |
| | | P-I | "Unless we're taught how to move forward, we will remain stuck." |
| Meaningful support to implement the reading plan | Support and mentoring | P-D | "Not enough support from coaches to implement the curriculum to fidelity." |
| | | P-A | "We need to give time both to the student and to the teacher. Give teachers time to really digest the information so that they can do all those things that we have to do in 90 minutes." |
| | | P-B | "One of the reading coaches observed my lesson and told me everything I did wrong and I asked her if she could show me how to do what she was asking me, of course she couldn't. They don't know how to support only criticize" |
| | Observations | P-A | "During my post observation meeting with the supervisor, she documented what she saw me do and made suggestions on how to improve. However, the suggestions made were in contrast to what we were told during our professional development session." |
| | | P-D | "One time I had two people observe me at the same time because one person was in training. Both of them were supervisors but during the post |

| | | | observation meeting, they gave me feedback but neither one was able to give me specific feedback.” |
|---|---|---|---|
| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
| | Staff turnover | P-F | “We lacked teachers for two or three years at a time in ELA because instead of building the teachers we have and supporting them, they send them to another grade or terminate them.” |
| | | P-E | “Sometimes teachers get moved from let’s say a fifth-grade into kindergarten and they don’t understand how young children develop and learn.” |
| | | P-G | “I was thinking about the first graders in my building like we’ve had a high turnover rate of first grade teachers recently in my building so it seems like in the past couple years there hasn’t been like the same team of first grade teachers” |
| | Vertical and horizontal communication | P-D | “I think sometimes reading up more on things talking with colleagues who may be above your grade level or below your grade level to just kind of get ideas and strategies to work with children.” |
| | | P-A | “At my school we both were first grade teachers. She was told one thing - I was told another or nothing at all. We need to make sure that you know information is transmitted universally.” |
| | | P-H | “There is a selective few who have information and others do not. Everyone should have that information.” |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| Different levels of knowledge regarding reading skills | Knowledge | P-E | "I didn't know what phonemic awareness was literally until I read a book about it." |
| | | P-A | "The administrators are unclear about reading development and can't support us, the teachers." |
| | | P-F | "I think that some teachers too are just not that knowledgeable about the importance of phonics." |
| | | P-B | "Teachers are not familiar or comfortable with what they're teaching." |
| Confidence in reading instructional practices | Doubt | P-B | "I seriously doubt that fadeout will be prevented unless everyone gets the proper training, support and guidance from the top down." |
| | | P-A | "I do not have faith in the set up that we have now, there are too many agendas and those who come to observe don't know how to improve our practice, we tell them what they should be looking for." |
| | | P-C | "Everyone is coming from their own school of thought when it comes to reading. We all have our thoughts about how children learn but when you are in a school, there needs to be some type of consensus." |
| | Many directions | P-A | "I think the fade-out happens because we don't have a consensus on what reading looks like in the lower grades." |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 90-minute reading block | P-C | "I think we need to look at more than 90 minutes in order to really do it effectively." |
| | | P-D | "Pacing can be difficult it's hard for a good teacher to cover all of the material that they supposed to in one block and to teach at a level where children master everything." |
| | | P-B | "We need a longer reading block in the lower grades to get all the requirements in each day." |
| | | P-G | "Taking away time from our reading block was really not good because when I started, we had two hours for literacy skills and now we are down to 90-minutes." |
| | Rigid | P-C | "You don't have time to go back even though the data says we need to but our curriculum pacing pushes them through. There is no flexibility built in." |
| | | P-I | "I have to hide what I do with my kids who are struggling because the structure of the reading programs don't allow for teachers to do what they know children need.." |
| | | P-C | "As teachers, we need room to be flexible as needed with how we engage our children in the learning process." |
| | | P-B | "We should have freedom to make changes based on the needs of the children but the curriculum said that we must be on chapter whatever by December and we are evaluated based on that." |
| | Instruction | P-D | "It is important that we not only know how to teach but we need to know what to teach. I don't have a lot of confidence that we are |

| | |
|---|---|
| | teaching the right things in the lower grades which is why the kids are not prepared for third grade." |
| P-A | "I think there are many ways of teaching young children how to read, however, the problem is that people don't always have the scope and sequence necessary for optimal growth." |
| P-B | "We have so many belief systems in this district." |
| P-F | "My principal observed me one time and I had my kids laughing, talking, playing games, and they were, you know learning on the move. My principal wanted to know why I allowed my students to play so much. She said our reading block is important and we can't waste time because there's too much to cover. I was doing what was developmentally appropriate, but she wanted me to do the opposite. Go figure." |
| P-I | "I have the older children, I don't have time for some of the things that they do in kindergarten and first grade. In order to read proficiently, they must read. At this juncture, the kids must spend most of their time reading We don't have a reading plan that progresses from grade to grade. Why am I doing exactly what they are doing in first grade for my instructional block? It doesn't make sense." |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Class size | P-A | "The class sizes especially in K is too large. To prevent fadeout, we need smaller class sizes." |
| | | P-G | "You can't really teach 27 children all the things that I just mentioned in 90 minutes." |
| | | P-F | "Class sizes have gotten larger and it's hard to cover all of the material effectively with that many children in your classroom and you may have an assistant but she may not have the skill set to help." |
| | Reading programs | P-B | "The programs that we use have too many holes in them and you have to spend so much time finding supplemental material to plug in the holes." |
| | | P-D | "We have teachers in all the lower grades and in the different schools doing different things that's why professional development and mentoring don't work because everyone is doing her own thing." |
| | | P-A | "We take bits and pieces from all of the past programs and try to blend them into one reading plan." |
| Assessment Practices | iRead | P-C | "So when they finish iRead it is supposed to take you right into 2nd grade, l but when I looked at the baseline analysis it said that the kids are on a kindergarten reading level. I don't trust iRead at all." |
| | | P-C | "You could finish iRead and your students could still be reading at a kindergarten level because it is not an adaptive tool." |
| | | P-B | "iRead pushes you through no matter. You can't rely on that data to drive your instruction." |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Assessment | P-B | "I first start by observing them and see where they are. And then of course we take our data record and then build upon where they are." |
| | | P-C | "Our assessment plan must really show the needs of our children so that we can plan accordingly. iRead should not be used for this purpose." |
| | | P-E | "Understanding the child's learning style and recognizing why they're struggling is important" |
| | | P-G | "I'm not in the reading cohort or anything, but apparently, they have their own assessment and so this year we were told to use their assessment and it was intense because we had no training" |
| | Meeting children's needs | P-C | "The vocabulary is not there as well. So, we have to spend extra time doing a lot of talking in his class to try to catch up on a lot of vocabulary instruction" |
| | | P-G | "I assess my children when they enter my classroom and I monitor their development along the way. If we spend an additional 3 weeks on basic skills, the kids will be superstars. I was told that we must keep up the pacing because everyone should be doing the same thing. By moving on too quickly, the children suffer." |
| | | P-D | "Because we don't have a uniformed preassessment or assessment plan, we are not meeting children's needs. We don't know how to help them if we can take time to properly assess them." |

| RQ2: What strategies are teachers using to prevent preschool reading fadeout in low-performing schools? | | | |
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| Theme 3: Developmentally appropriate resources and strategies for reading instruction. | | | |
| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
| Resources used for reading instruction | Discussion | P-C | "I spend more time getting the kids to do a lot of the talking during the read aloud." |
| | | P-D | "I use book videos with similar or differing views to stimulate conversations with my kids, they have to develop their oral language skills to be successful readers." |
| | | P-F | "I ask students questions and have them provide text evidence." "I have students retell the story in their own words to a friend/teacher." |
| | | P-A | "If we're not providing discourse inside of our classroom, I think we missed the mark because it's not what you know, it's about the process of your learning." |
| | | P-B | "I ask students for their opinions/observations and again ask them to back it up with text evidence." |
| | Strategies for reading | P-G | "I use guided reading with my kids because it works and I can easily fit it into our block." |
| | | P-I | "I use reading recovery, leveled text and decodable text." |
| | | P-C | "The Read Aloud project works well for me and my students." |
| | | P-E | "I use a lot of audiobooks because my kids need to hear fluent reading so there is a lot of modeling of reading in my class and I make it fun." |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
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| | Reading resources | P-I | "My children are all at different levels so I use Newsela and Epic to |

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| | | | help find books and reading material for children." |
| | | P-G | "I give my children a choice in what they want to read and I use Newsela because when they have a choice in what they want to read, they enjoy it more." |
| | | P-D | "I use a lot of eBooks and free books and free websites with books. I ensure that the books are on the students reading level and that they are appropriate." |
| | | P-E | "I like using the electronic books and other resources to find books at my kids' level. Gone are the days where a book represented the reading level of the kids so you had kids who didn't want to be seen with a book that was a grade or two below his actual reading level because kids would make fun of them." |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hands-on interactive games | Interactive games | P-D | "I made flashcards, I would just white, you know SL on one and then, you know an ending part on the other and use them as a visual and kinesthetic for children." |
| | | P-I | "I use graphic organizers to provide a high-level view or to document the details of a story." |
| | | P-A | "I use games that require manipulatives for example, I might have a letter tile that has like a letter and another tile with a different letter, and the children have to blend the two together to make a word like word puzzles." |
| | | P-G | "I also have letter cubes and letter tiles to help build their word capacity and you know, which will help with their reading." |

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| | Acting out stories | P-A | "I have them act out the story or they turn and talk to a friend about the story. You have to really keep them engaged and involved." |
| | | P-D | "After each read aloud, we culminate it with a major production to help with oral skills. We have half of the children acting out the story and the others are reporters and critics." |
| | Interactive technology | P-B | "I use Starfall with my children and they love it. It builds their skills in a fun way and it is part of our learning centers so they actually select to go there." |
| | | P-F | "I use ABCmouse with my children along with some other interactive software programs because the children love technology so I make sure that they are learning while using it." |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
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| | Activities | P-F | "I used a lot of resources from Children's Literacy Institute because I like the interactive activities and using the whiteboard to practice writing sight words." |
| | | P-C | "My kids like to read. I make sure we do D.E.A.R drop everything and read every chance we get." |
| | | P-C | "We have to make time for our children to practice reading." |
| | | P-F | "I ensure that my children hear me reading and I think that overall, we need to give children more time to practice reading so that they are not reading like a robot rather they should be smooth, fluency is key." |
| | | P-I | "I try to make sure that the stories are age-appropriate, that children are not sitting for long periods of time." |

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| Small group instruction | Skill building | P-A | "Small group we focus on phonological awareness." |
| | | P-B | "It's going in your small group and listening to the children talk and explain a point of view in the story." |
| | | P-I | "Students work in small groups to share a prediction or insight into the story or to get clarification." |
| | | P-F | "I think that small group instruction and working on specific skills is very important in reading instruction." |

| Categories | Codes | Participants | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Vocabulary development | P-A | "I spend a day just teaching the vocabulary that's essential to that book and we continually talk about them every day." |
| | | P-C | "We spend a lot of time on vocabulary because it's big. If you don't have the vocabulary, then you won't understand the story." |