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Teachers' Perspectives of Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Catrina Jones Cooper

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Abstract

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by

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MA, Anderson University 2004

BS, Alabama A&M University 1995

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

In a Midwestern, urban, elementary school, a problem is teachers are struggling to support the instructional needs of the students with limited resources and training opportunities. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of reading teachers in Grades 3 to 5 about the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the elementary students at the target site. Gagne's theory of the conditions for learning and Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction comprised the conceptual framework. Data for this study were collected from semistructured interviews with 10 teachers in Grades 3 to 5 who currently teach or had taught reading in the last 5 years and had at least 3 years of experience with teaching reading in Grades 3 to 5. Data were coded and organized into 10 themes: insufficient support for diverse students, students' motivation affected their reading outcomes, parental support was insufficient, students struggled because of limited vocabulary development and background knowledge, challenges with providing differentiated instruction, the Benchmark Literacy program failed to meet the instructional needs of many of the students, the needs of low socioeconomic status contributed to the reading outcomes, teachers lacked the resources and training needed to deliver quality instruction, the pacing guide was not consistent with data-driven instruction, and teachers needed more time to collaborate with colleagues. The results of the study were that the teachers struggled to meet the instructional needs of the students at the local school. The findings revealed the need for professional development (PD) on research-based reading strategies for the teachers. The proposed PD on this topic could benefit the teachers' instructional practice, resulting in the increased academic growth and development of students.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated in memory of my mother, Bettye Jones, and my aunt, Nellie Walker. My mother always demonstrated a life of faith and trust in God that went beyond her financial, mental, and physical abilities. Her most stated phrase, "There's nothing too hard for God," has propelled me to reach outside of myself and achieve the unimaginable. My aunt Nellie's humble spirit has been infectious and taught me to have a spirit of gratitude in every aspect of life. Aunt Nellie valued her role as an educator and always advocated for the needs of the students. My mother and aunt are an integral part of who I am and what I will become.

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The utmost gratitude is extended to my God, who has been the driving force and strength in my completion process. All of what I have obtained is because of the faith and trust I have in Him. I would also like to thank my family who has been patiently waiting and supporting my efforts in completing this process. Their encouragement and belief in me have kept me on this journey and have provided me with a sense of hope and perseverance in this process. I would also like to thank the school district and school where the study was conducted. A special thanks goes out to the principal and data coach who provided data and documents to aid the study along with the teachers who were participants in the study. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Richard Penny for the constant support and encouragement. My professional and scholarly developments are evident of the feedback and guidance he has provided. Special thanks are also extended to Dr. Barbara Schirmer for her thorough feedback that has helped to strengthen the contents of the study. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Cathryn Walker for the encouraging and comforting support she has provided in this final stage of the process.

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Section 1: The Problem

Problem Statement

In an elementary school in the Midwestern United States, the problem is teachers are struggling to support the instructional needs of the students with limited resources and training opportunities. Despite the implementation of a new district reading program, teacher-designed interventions, and additional reading resources, students in Grades 3 to 5 have continued to struggle with reading outcomes. The average students' scores on the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP) from the school were below state standards and trailing those of the district. The student performance on the ISTEP provided further information supporting this problem (see Table 1).

Table 1

Percentage of Students Achieving Proficiency on English/Language Arts ISTEP at the Study Site Compared to District by Grade Level and Year

Years	Target	District	Gap	Target	District	Gap	Target	District	Gap
Grade		3			4			5	
2015-16	57	62	-5	53	59	-6	41	57	-16
2016-17	51	58	-7	45	62	-17	49	52	-3
2017-18	55	60	-5	36	54	-18	42	48	-6
2018-19	55	59	-4	42	47	-5	37	43	-6

Note. Adapted from District ISTEP data. Retrieved from https://www.doe.in.gov.

Each year, the Indiana Statewide Testing of Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP+) has been administered during the spring. According to the 2018 results of the ISTEP+ assessment, less than 50% of the Grades 3 to 5 students at the study school received

passing scores. As shown in Table 1, student performance scores on the test declined over the four years from 2015 to 2019, with the result that in the most recent year, less than 60% of the Grade 3 to 5 students received passing scores. In addition to a decline in scores between the years of 2015 and 2019, Table 1 shows the gap in performance between the target school and the district in reading for the students in Grade 3 to 5 as measured by the ISTEP+ assessment. The data in the table show that the ISTEP+ reading scores for students at the target site remained below the overall district elementary students' scores from 2015 to 2019. Additionally, there had been a gap in scores between the target campus reading scores and the district or state scores for the last 3 years.

The next set of evidence supporting the problem was, in August 2014, the school district adopted a new reading program, the Benchmark Literacy Series. Launched by the district in recognition of the importance of addressing the low reading performance at its schools, the principal stated that this reading program was intended to strengthen the teacher's instructional practices and increase the students' reading performance. However, after the implementation of the reading program, the teachers continued to struggle with meeting the needs of the students at the school. The February 2019 faculty meeting notes revealed that several interventions were still needed to support the reading instructions provided through the Benchmark Literacy Series instructional guide. The principal reported that the specific interventions that were implemented were pull-out services by the reading specialists. The additional interventions and support constituted evidence that the reading teachers continued to struggle to meet the diverse needs of the students at the school.

Another piece of evidence that supports the problem of the challenge teachers faced with meeting the instructional needs of the students was reading teachers were using supplemental materials in addition to the Benchmark Literacy Series. According to three third-grade teachers, they struggled to meet the needs of the students following the instructions and guidelines set by the reading program. As stated in the 2017 administrative walk-through report, 75% of the teachers found themselves having to use supplemental materials during a whole group instructional time. Two fifth-grade teachers reported that teachers found that relying primarily on the instructions provided by the district-adopted reading program did not result in improving students' reading outcomes. This lack of improvement led to teachers making curricular revisions that were not originally intended. However, according to the 2017 schools' reading report, the teachers' inconsistency in the instructional approaches to the district-adopted Benchmark Literacy Series might have contributed to the students' below-average performance in reading. The Benchmark Literacy Series is a comprehensive reading program in which reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language instruction are integrated and intended to increase students' literacy outcomes (Benchmark Education, n.d.). A report completed in 2014 revealed the effectiveness of the Benchmark program in a K–6 school in Virginia (Benchmark Education, n.d.). Additionally, Preble et al. (2012) found that English language learners (ELLs) in the Virginia school improved in literacy achievement from fall 2013 to fall 2014, after completing the Benchmark Literacy Program. However, using this program has not resulted in increased performance of the students at the school under study.

Rationale

There is an ongoing struggle with reading comprehension among many students in the United States. McGown and Slate (2019) discovered that many students have trouble with reading outcomes. Comprehension difficulties are more prevalent as students enter third to fifth grades when texts become more complex (Wanzek et al., 2016). One challenge that students face as they enter third grade is the shift from learning to read using mostly narratives in the previous grades to reading to learn using expository text and informational material (Roberts & Norman, 2015). This shift requires an increased level of explicit instruction in reading comprehension; therefore, school officials and educators are expected to implement quality reading curriculum programs to ensure that students are receiving instructions that meet their needs (Dorsey, 2015). Implementing quality reading instruction could decrease the struggle many U.S. students have with reading comprehension.

The problem of students' below-average performance in reading outcomes is evident throughout the nation. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2019), a total of 35% of fourth graders in the nation performed at or above proficiency in reading. Researchers in education have contended that preventing reading difficulties lies with the quality of instruction (Brokamp et al., 2019). Besides, delivering reading instructions and interventions with sufficient intensity and dosage have demonstrated the potential to alter future educational trajectories (Dorsey, 2015; Miciak et al., 2017). Determining the best method for instructing students continues to be a concern for many educators (Detrichson et al., 2017).

To address the concerns of students not meeting the grade-level expectations in reading, in 2014, the study site district required teachers to use a commercially developed reading program, Benchmark Literacy Series, to strengthen literacy. However, despite the implementation of the program, the students' reading outcomes continued to be below grade-level expectations. Additionally, three third-grade teachers reported that teachers had attempted to use supplemental resources and designed interventions outside the district program to support student learning in an attempt to meet the needs of the students performing below grade level; yet the students' overall reading outcomes remained below grade-level expectations.

In this study, I focused on the challenges the teachers faced with instructing Grades 3 to 5 students who were struggling with reading outcomes and exploring the teachers' perspectives of resources and training they needed to support students' reading instruction. The implementation of the Benchmark Literacy Series has continued in the absence of evidence with regards to the teachers' experiences of the program. The findings of this study provided insight into the teachers' perspectives of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of all students at the study site.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of reading teachers in Grades 3 to 5 about the challenges and resources needed to strengthen the reading instruction for the students at the school under study. Therefore, in this study, I sought to obtain information regarding teachers' perspectives related to challenges and resources needed for providing reading instruction to students in Grades 3 to 5.

Achieving the purpose of the study may provide insight into the reading interventions and resources needed to strengthen the reading skills of the students at the school.

Definition of Terms

In this subsection, I provide clarification of terms used in this study.

At-risk students: Students who do not meet the goals, standards, and academic requirements for a traditional school setting (McGee & Lin, 2017).

Culturally responsive teaching: A mode of teaching that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009)

Differentiated instruction: A mode of teaching in which teachers administer diverse instructions, materials, or teaching styles based on the needs of the learner (Shyman, 2012).

ELL: Students with limited English proficiency (Harper & de Jong, 2004).

Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA): Legislation demonstrating the commitment of the United States government to advance equality in education by increasing the autonomy of state agencies in policymaking (Chu, 2019).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB): A federal government mandate designed to decrease the achievement gap between upper- and middle-class students and those students underserved by their schools (Heise, 2017).

Reading comprehension: Actively extracting meaning from text and constructing meaning from prior knowledge (Grover et al., 2019).

Reading interventions: Providing alternative instructions to prevent or remediate reading difficulties in most students (Otaiba et al., 2018).

Scripted reading program: A program funded by the Reading First initiative of NCLB (Griffith, 2008).

Significance of the Study

This study was significant to the population and stakeholders of students who struggle with reading outcomes at the elementary study site. The most recent results of the ISTEP+ assessment that was administered to the students in Grade 3 to 5 at the elementary school under study revealed that less than 50% of the students received passing scores. Teachers at the study site struggled to meet the instructional needs of the students with limited resources and training opportunities. Research on this phenomenon was important to conduct to determine what resources and tools the teachers may need to provide quality instructions for the students. This study contributed to filling the gap in understanding the teachers' perspectives of instructing students in reading when the teachers are provided limited resources and training. Additionally, the results of the study contributed to understanding the reading outcomes of the students at the elementary school under study. Similar to the current study, Powell et al. (2017) investigated teachers' perceptions of reading instruction to improve the teaching of reading in the classroom. The results of their study revealed that teachers were resistant to implementing the reading program when constraints were placed on their reading instructions. Increased understanding of the teachers' perspectives of instructing elementary students may benefit administrators by helping them make informed decisions

when implementing reading programs and training opportunities. The results may also be used to determine the kinds of training needed to support teachers when instructing students in reading.

Providing quality reading instruction is essential to the growth and development of all students, especially at the elementary level. The goal of instruction is to equip students to become independent, flexible, and interactive while reading and writing (Scanlon et al., 2016). However, when students enter Grades 3 to 5, the text becomes increasingly difficult (Roberts & Norman, 2015). When students perform below grade level at this stage, providing effective instruction and intervention is essential to their future growth and development in reading. According to Hempel-Jorgensen et al. (2018), teachers should balance reading for pleasure with reading for proficiency for all students, especially those who struggle with reading outcomes. Selecting reading programs and materials that provide quality training in the use of these materials could help improve the students' reading outcomes.

The results of this study may benefit both the teachers, students, and other stakeholders at the school. As a result of this study, teachers could receive ongoing training in using the Benchmark Literacy Series and other research-based interventions for the students. Students may benefit from the quality instruction that will be provided by the teachers. Insights from this study may benefit other stakeholders by providing ideas and suggestions for improving students' performance in reading.

Research Questions

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate the experiences, perspectives, and practices of the teachers of Grades 3 to 5 at the study school about their challenges in meeting the instructional needs of students in reading as well as to explore the teachers' suggestions for improved resources and training. The following two research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What were the reading teachers' perspectives of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the students in Grade 3 to 5 in reading?

RQ 2: What were the reading teachers' perspectives of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the students in Grade 3 to 5 in reading?

Review of the Literature

The search of the literature for this study was done primarily using the Walden University Library. I obtained additional resources through EBSCO Research database, Education Research starter, Sage Journal, ProQuest Central, Taylor and Francis Online, and Google Scholar searches for current, peer-reviewed articles with a focus on sources published within the last five years. References from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses also informed the study. The search terms included *effective reading instructions and student performances, effective reading programs, reading difficulties in elementary schools, reading programs successes and failures, students reading outcomes and scripted reading programs, at-risk students and reading performance, English-language learners and reading performance, differentiated instructions, and reading outcomes, scripted reading programs,* and *implementation fidelity.* The literature review is divided

into the following six subsections respectively: conceptual framework, students reading difficulties and outcomes, effective reading programs and interventions, differentiated instructions/culturally responsive teaching, scripted reading programs, and teachers' experiences and perspectives.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study comprised Gagne's (1985) theory of the conditions of learning and Tomlinson's (2014) theory of differentiated instruction. Both theories relate to the study approach because they support the importance of the quality of instruction by the teacher. Additionally, I used both theories to guide the development of the research questions and as lens through which to interpret the data in this study.

Gagne's theory encompassed part learning theory and part instructional design (Kretchmar, 2018). Gagne (1985) contended that student learning outcomes are closely aligned to the quality of instruction by the classroom teacher. Within the theory of the conditions of learning, Gagne stated that the diversity of instruction is an essential key to cognitive development. Contrary to the belief of developmental psychologists who attributed learning to maturation and growth, Gagne believed learning is incremental and cumulative (Kretchmar, 2018). Gagne supported the idea of student-centered learning in that it views the teachers' role as the facilitator of learning and self-direction (Alutu, 2006). The learner's involvement in the instructional process is an important part of Gagne's work (Richey, 1996). Additionally, the conditions of learning theory also helps to understand the teacher's role in instructing students.

Gagne (1985) stated that learning could take place without instruction but that instructional events should be designed to support learning. The teacher's role in the learning process is essential to the students' growth. Within the philosophy of the conditions of learning, Gagne listed nine events for instruction: (a) gaining students' attention, (b) informing students of the learning objective, (c) connecting to students' prior learning or background knowledge, (d) presenting the information or content, (e) providing guided practice, (f) formally assessing student learning, (g) providing feedback, (h) providing a summative assessment of learning, and (i) reflecting on learning. This framework provided support in understanding the teachers' experiences and perspectives of the training and resources needed to meet the challenges with instructing students in reading.

Supporting Gagne's conditions of learning theory is Tomlinson's (2014) theory of differentiated instruction. Tomlinson defined differentiated instruction as a process of adjusting instructions to meet the needs and levels of individual students. According to Tomlinson, students can learn the more rigorous concepts when taught at an appropriate level. The goal of differentiated instruction is that students will progress at the level and pace that is appropriate for them (Tomlinson, 2014). Although students perform at various academic levels, they are still able to be successful when teachers provide differentiated instruction. Additionally, the results of a 1-year, quasi-experimental study by Valiande (2015) revealed that students receiving quality differentiated instruction by the teacher showed reading success and that equity in education was reached.

Although traditional modes for instructing students may still be appropriate in some educational settings, differentiated instruction provides support to students. As school leaders attempt to meet the needs of all students performing at different levels, implementing differentiated instruction has become the new mode of instructing students (Leonardo et al., 2015). Through differentiated instruction, teachers are prepared to engage students in learning using various forms and techniques that appeal to the knowledge level of the student (Tomlinson, 2014). This practice strengthens the instructional delivery of the teacher and maximizes the growth possibilities of the students. Furthermore, differentiated instruction allows struggling readers the opportunity to become self-sufficient, confident, and competent in a way that traditional lecturing would restrict (Leonardo et al., 2015). However, incorporating differentiated instruction strategies within the classroom has been a challenge for teachers, especially when teachers have little to no experience with implementing differentiated instruction strategies. Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction supported this study by demonstrating the importance of adapting instructions to meet the needs of all learners. Inquiry into the instructional practices of teachers at the study site through the data collection process revealed whether differentiated instruction is promoted and used by teachers when delivering reading instruction.

Review of the Broader Problem

Teachers had used various strategies and techniques to try and meet the needs of the students at the elementary school under study. In this research study, I explored the perspectives of reading teachers of Grades 3 to 5 students about the challenges with

meeting the instructional needs of students at the study site. The teachers' perspectives of the training necessary to meet the needs of the students were also explored. The results of the study provided information that may help administrators understand how the teachers' perspectives contributed to understanding the students' reading performance at the school under study. Additionally, the results of the study will provide information to administrators that will aid them in understanding the teachers' instructional needs for teaching elementary students in reading.

Students' Reading Difficulties and Outcomes

Reading comprehension difficulties are common among many students in the United States, and the challenge increases with students from low socioeconomic status (SES) areas (Heppt, et al., 2015). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), (2017) reported that the overall performance of fourth graders in the nation is less than proficient. Although assessment results are mere symptoms of the problem of reading struggles, they are indicators of students mastering reading comprehension. Struggles with academic language contribute to the problem of below proficient reading performance for many students, especially those identified as ELL students (Heppt et al., 2015). Students who typically fall within the category of below proficient reading performance are those who are at-risk for failure in school, culturally and linguistically diverse, and usually reside in urban areas (Musti-Rao et al., 2015). This reality increases the difficulty of providing effective reading instruction to the students.

Providing quality reading instruction to students in Grades 3 to 5 is key to improving their reading outcomes. The goal of reading instruction is to equip students to

become independent, flexible, and interactive while reading and writing (Scanlon et al., 2016). However, when students enter Grades 3 to 5, texts become increasingly difficult (Roberts & Norman, 2015). When students perform below grade level at this stage, providing effective instruction and intervention is essential to their future growth and development in reading. According to Hempel-Jorgensen et al. (2018), effective teachers should balance reading for pleasure with reading for proficiency for students. Selecting reading programs and materials consistent with the idea of providing quality training in the use of these materials could help improve the students' reading outcomes.

Administrators have been concerned about students reading performance and effective programs for the instruction of underperforming students. Legislative policies required schools to become more accountable for implementing evidence-based programs that are effective in helping students improve reading outcomes (Cheung & Slavin, 2016). Such policies increased the importance of large-scale evaluations of educational programs. Deciding what program will be the most effective for a school required a lot of time and research. In the 2001 mandate of NCLB, the effective educational practice was described as a scientifically based research practice, while the 2015 ESSA defined effective practice as strong, moderate, or promising evidence of effectiveness (Cheung & Slavin, 2016). Although both descriptions identified effective practice as evidence-based, the ESSA provided a more specific description of effectiveness. Using these guidelines, schools could begin to make decisions about which reading program is best for the school.

Achievement Gap. A possible contributing factor to the struggle with instructing students in reading is the achievement gap among the students. Through assessment results, researchers found there is a continual achievement gap in reading performance among diverse elementary students (McGown & Slate, 2019). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2015), the average reading score for fourth-grade students was the highest among European American students (274). Subsequently, the average score for African Americans was 247 and for Hispanic Americans, the average score was 253. Despite efforts made to close the achievement gap between ethnic groups and improve academic performance for U.S. students, 51% of African American, 49% of Hispanic American, and 53% of Native American fourth graders continue to perform below basic in reading (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019). Additionally, with the introduction of Common Core Standards and their increased rigor, students performing below grade level in reading faced even more challenges (Hock et al., 2017). The gap in reading performance between diverse elementary students has been a critical concern for many educators in the nation. (McGown & Slate, 2019; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019).

Students' reading outcomes in the elementary grades may project their future success in education. Dorsey (2015) discovered that a student performing below grade level in third grade was less likely to overcome the reading deficit by ninth grade. Addressing this issue in the early stages of development is crucial to the students' future educational achievement. Austin et al. (2017) also found that students who struggle with reading difficulties in the primary grades will likely continue to struggle with reading

throughout their education and, consequently, are less likely to graduate from high school (Dorsey, 2015). Therefore, early detection and intervention are necessary to change the trajectory of the below-average performance in reading for many students.

Motivation for Reading. Motivation for reading is another factor that contributes to reading difficulties in elementary students. Troyer et al. (2019) explored the relationship between the reading motivation, reading amounts, and the reading comprehension of 4,000 students in Grades 3 to 5 in 59 high-poverty schools in the United States. Their results showed a positive association between intrinsic motivation, reading amounts, and reading comprehension and a negative association between extrinsic motivation, reading amounts, and reading comprehension in elementary students. Understanding this relationship helps teachers when instructing students.

It is important to incorporate motivation strategies when instructing all students because such strategies increase student engagement during academic learning time, which leads to success in the development of reading skills. Motivation is an important factor to consider in reading instruction because it determines how involved students will be in the learning activity (Haerazi & Irawan, 2020). Researchers have also discovered that there are gender and ethnic differences in students' reading motivation and comprehension. Wigfield et al. (2016) reported that although boys and girls valued reading equally, girls had a higher level of reading motivation than boys; therefore, girls were found to have a higher reading comprehension level than boys. Wigfield et al.'s results support the idea that reading comprehension is connected to students' reading motivation with students from low SES families. In many cases, motivation for reading is

associated with the student's willingness to participate or the incentives received as a

result (Kirshner & Mostert, 2017). These two ways of motivating students are identified

as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is when students are self-

encouraged to perform the task, while extrinsic motivation is being motivated by

something outside of the student (Haerazi & Irawan, 2020). Stutz et al. (2016) found that

there was no significant difference in the intrinsic motivation of boys and girls; however,

their results revealed that students' intrinsic motivation contributed to their reading

comprehension. The researchers also noted that students who were motivated

extrinsically saw reading as a school activity rather than a leisure activity. The finding

that students who are extrinsically motivated view reading as a school activity can

influence students' reading comprehension outcomes. Both intrinsic and extrinsic

motivation should be considered when evaluating reading motivation (De Naeghel et al.,

2016). Considering ways students learn and what motivates them to read could help

teachers when providing reading instruction and administrators when choosing the most

effective reading program. Incorporating these motivation methods may increase the

likelihood of students being interested in reading and their overall reading outcomes.

Qualities of Effective Reading Programs and Interventions

To help students become successful readers, it is essential to provide effective and

meaningful instruction. Effectively delivering reading instruction has the potential to

change future educational paths of success for many students (Dorsey, 2015; Miciak et

al., 2017). The responsibility to provide research-based instruction is placed upon

teachers (Dorsey, 2015). This responsibility increases the pressure to implement effective

reading instruction. Many students entering Grades 3–5 continue to struggle with reading

outcomes; however, the fundamental skills for reading are generally provided at the early

elementary stage of learning (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015). One challenge that

students face as they enter third grade is the shift from learning to read using mostly

narratives in the previous grades to reading to learn using expository text and

informational material (Roberts & Norman, 2015). Addressing this challenge becomes

more difficult when teachers are expected to provide instruction to diverse learners. This

struggle may compel teachers to search for best practices in teaching reading and

demands effective programs that meet the needs of all students.

ELL Support. ELL support is an important component of an effective reading

program. Providing support for ELLs has been shown to strengthen educational outcomes

(Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Garrett et al. (2019) completed a study in the Cleveland

Metropolitan School District to find out whether the academic outcome of ELLs in the

district was associated with the school's characteristics such as ELLs support staff. The

researchers examined the English language arts and math performance on the state

assessment for ELLs. Data were collected over 6 years but there was no significant

change in students' performance. However, the results revealed that students in the

schools where there were more support staff performed better than the schools with a few

support staff. According to Comings (2015), students need to receive instruction in their

native language to support their understanding of the new language. Understanding the

teachers' experience, perspectives, and practice of the challenges with meeting the needs

of the students receiving ELL services is necessary. In the regular classroom, teachers

must possess skills in serving ELLs as well. Hong et al. (2019) concluded that teachers struggle with understanding the ELLs' learning potential and process because of their limited second language learning experience. The authors suggested teachers acquire literature that supports their understanding of the cultural differences of the students. Hong et al. also suggested teachers engage in culturally and linguistically responsive teaching to promote the engagement and performance of ELLs. Therefore, an effective component of a reading program is the support it provides for ELLs.

Culturally Responsive Teaching. Providing culturally responsive teaching is a way to incorporate instruction that is culturally relevant while enhancing the learning experience of all students. Taylor et al. (2015) discovered that teachers who taught in an elementary school with high poverty saw better results when they engaged students using culturally responsive teaching strategies. Culturally responsive teaching also contributes to understanding students' diverse cultures and values while closing the achievement gap (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). According to Vaughn (2019), teacher education programs should prepare preservice teachers for instructing diverse groups of students through culturally responsive teaching. Such strategies yield positive outcomes with struggling students. Recent research by Marttinen et al. (2019) found that pre-service teachers who worked with students in an afterschool service-learning project were able to gain valuable experience in acquiring effective management skills as they engaged in culturally responsive teaching. In contrast, Karatas and Oral (2019) evaluated an undergraduate program and the efforts made to prepare teachers for culturally responsive pedagogy and found that the program was ineffective. The researchers concluded that the information

within the program was not presented at the appropriate level of knowledge and skills related to culturally responsive teaching for the teacher candidates. Culturally responsive teachers must continue to build their knowledge of the students' cultures as they practice teaching (Gay, 2018). This knowledge base can be acquired through the review of recent literature or communication with students. Incorporating culturally responsive teaching and learning contributes to providing a quality learning experience for all students.

Direct Instruction. When choosing a reading program, there are many factors school officials must consider. One factor to consider is whether the program supports direct instruction. Direct instruction is an effective practice for instructing diverse groups of students (Head et al., 2018). However, the researchers discovered that the effect of a direct instruction reading program was marginal when working with students with autism or developmental delays (Head et al. 2018). Juxtaposed to this notion, Grant (2017 revealed that students with learning disabilities made just as much progress as the students receiving services in general education after receiving direct instruction. Similarly, Hock et al. (2017) showed that when teachers were engaged in direct instruction throughout the lesson, there was a significant gain in students' performance. Direct instruction is an essential component in a reading program.

Differentiated Instruction. Another factor to consider when choosing a reading program is whether the program provides opportunities for differentiated instruction in small groups. Teachers need to use different strategies to explore content in any classroom setting. Differentiating instruction results in an instructional delivery process that is more learner-centered as opposed to curriculum-centered (Stone, 2018). According

to Hanewicz et al. (2017) the learning styles of students are varied, so teachers must administer differentiated instructions to meet their diverse needs. On the contrary, Stone (2018) described differentiated instruction as a *Band-aid* approach to an educational system that struggles to meet the need of all students. Yet, this approach has yielded favorable results for students performing at diverse levels. Teachers are better able to meet the needs of diverse learners when they group them according to their instructional level. Therefore, teachers must be knowledgeable about differentiated instruction techniques. Whitley et al. (2019) examined the factors that influence a teachers' use of differentiated instruction in the classroom. The results of the study revealed that the teachers' use of differentiated instruction was related to their beliefs, self-efficacy, and organizational support. The art of differentiating instruction may not be easily attained by teachers with little experience. Therefore, receiving training increases the teachers' confidence in their ability to implement differentiated instruction. The results of the study by Bevik et al. (2018) support the notion that student teachers lack confidence in their ability to differentiate instruction, although they do realize its importance. This lack of confidence could affect the teachers' ability to effectively meet the needs of all students. Smets (2017) stated that both pre-service and in-service teachers are challenged with adapting the curriculum to implement differentiated instruction. However, the teachers' level of confidence increases when they are provided quality training on how to implement differentiated instruction in the classroom. Smets devised an evidence-informed checklist that helps teachers apply the concept of differentiating instruction in

their practice. The list consisted of the teacher and student relationship, the teacher's learning goal, and the teacher's learning design.

Whitley et al. (2019) later recommended that teacher training programs incorporate relevant differentiated instruction content to prepare teachers for administering quality instruction. The training program may increase the likelihood of teachers being effective and feeling more confident at meeting students' academic needs. Opportunities for differentiated instruction could strengthen the effectiveness of a reading program.

Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies. Hock et al. (2017) found another instructional practice that affects reading achievement. The instructional practice is teaching students cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies for word-level reading, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. On the other hand, Quinn et al. (2020) found that students with learning disabilities had similar vocabulary development as students served in general education kindergarten. However, their reading comprehension was much lower, and it had not increased by fourth grade. Developing cognitive and metacognitive skills is essential to successfully understand text (Hock et al., 2017). Another instructional practice that these authors discovered to be effective was allowing students to work cooperatively on skills in reading and writing. The practice of teaching cognitive and metacognitive strategies could help students provide and receive feedback on their work as learners while allowing them to reflect on their thinking. When coupled with an effective reading program, these cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies may contribute to positive reading outcomes.

Evidence-Based Reading Programs

Evidence-based reading programs are critical to successfully meeting the diverse learning needs of students (Swanson et al., 2017). Students who struggle with reading outcomes generally require unconventional modes of instruction and interventions. Finding an evidence-based program for all students increases the likelihood of them being successful in reading outcomes.

Scripted Reading Programs. The rise in the use of scripted reading programs can be traced to the mandate of No Child Left Behind, (2001), when school systems were required to implement evidence-based reform (Wyatt, 2014). Research on scripted reading instruction has shown positive reading achievement outcomes (e.g., Cheung & Slavin, 2016; Hock et al., 2017). Cheung and Slavin (2016) evaluated a program that provided a script to guide teachers in delivering reading instruction to students who had previously struggled with reading outcomes. The researchers reported that the strengths of the program included the structure it provided to the teachers, as well as the professional development (PD) and the guidance or technical support provided on-site. Additionally, it has been reported that the use of stock reading programs eliminates the need for teachers to think deeply or creatively about the content (see Graue et al., 2015). After 2 years of implementing the program, the school that received the scripted reading instructions scored significantly higher than the matched school in the area (Cheung & Slavin, 2016). However, different perspectives of scripted reading programs have also been reported. Wyatt (2014) suggested that such programs are more beneficial in

supporting new and less experienced teachers because the ease of lesson planning and the

instructional guidelines make it easier for administrators to monitor teacher performance.

Some teachers believe there are advantages and disadvantages to the scripted

reading program. Powell et al. (2017) found that the teachers in their study reported

benefits of a scripted reading program for struggling readers. However, the use of the

scripted program was reported to negatively affect the teachers' psychological well-

being. Some teachers believed that they were being stripped of their professional

authority when implementing scripted reading programs (Powell et al., 2017). This belief

may have been due to the scripted nature of the program; there was little flexibility for

teachers to use professional judgment or make adaptions. Other researchers found that

teachers often adapt instructions when using scripted reading programs to meet the needs

of their students (Parsons & Vaughn, 2016), especially when adaptations yield positive

results relating to student achievement (Snow & Matthew, 2016).

Instructional Adaptations. Adaptations generally happen when teachers believe

there are some components of the program that contribute to the students' success and

other components that dos not. However, such instructional adjustments are often

difficult to implement (Wyatt, 2014). The need to make adaptations may also contribute

to teachers' adverse perspectives of a scripted program. Novice teachers are reluctant

about making adaptations for fear of being reprimanded for deviating from the set script

or guidelines (Wyatt, 2014) although experienced teachers spend a lot of the instructional

time adapting instruction to maximize the opportunity for students to be successful.

(Troyer, 2019). Adaptations are also made to meet the social, linguistic, and cultural

needs of the students (Parsons et al., 2018). However, many of the teachers administered different forms of instructional adaptations. Hardy et al. (2019) discussed two forms of adaptations in their study, intended adaptive instruction and implemented adaptive instruction. The authors further explained that intended adaptive instruction was based on the needs identified within a specified assessment or the prerequisite skill needed to master a concept; implemented adaptive instructions are those made during the classroom instruction as the teacher sees the need arise. According to Fletcher and Nicholas (2016) subject curriculums require different approaches to instructional delivery and adaptations. The diverse views on reading methodology and strategies provide educators with an array of choices to consider when formulating reading services and thus can result in inconsistent approaches for the delivery of reading instruction and services in school systems nationwide.

Effects of Teachers' Perspectives on Practice

Considering the teachers' experiences and perspectives is necessary to the success of any reading program. A negative perspective could lead to resistance to implementing the program or not implementing the program at all (Snow & Matthew, 2016). However, a positive perspective could lead to the teachers' willingness to implementing the program. Teachers are expected to create strategies, activities, and instructional materials that meet the diverse needs of the students. Therefore, understanding the teachers' experiences and perspectives contributes to understanding whether the reading programs and interventions will meet the instructional needs of the students. The research on teachers' perspectives of a scripted reading program revealed that the teachers' positive

perceptions of the program were an early indicator of their acceptance and readiness to use the scripted program to implement the curriculum (Powell et al., 2017).

Teachers are often mandated to implement reading programs with fidelity. Such mandates could contribute to the teachers' beliefs that their work as professionals is being compromised. Even when teachers believed the program is beneficial to the students, they are often reluctant to implement such programs (Powell et al., 2017). In a seminal study by Tichenor and Tichenor (2004), the authors argued that teachers are the most important individuals that direct the students' success and their professional judgment relating to the needs of the students should be encouraged. Additionally, the researchers concluded that teachers must have a depth of knowledge of the skills and strategies they teach. With a strong knowledge base, teachers make informed decisions about the delivery of instruction.

Training and PD for Reading

Providing teachers with effective training opportunities builds confidence in their instructional delivery and validates their perspectives of reading curriculum and programs. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) defined effective PD as structured professional learning that yields change in teacher practice and improvement in student learning outcomes. Teachers bring different experiences and knowledge levels into the classroom (Curtis et al., 2019). Novice teachers build upon their knowledge through interactions with students and curriculum in the classroom as well as PD opportunities. Successful PD has the goal of transforming the teachers' beliefs and practices (Curtis et al., 2019). However, it must begin before the teacher enters the classroom and be ongoing

periodically throughout the teachers' tenure. PD also enhances the teachers' knowledge

and ability to effectively deliver instructions. A seminal study by Reid Lyon and Weiser

(2009) concluded that the instructional knowledge and ability of the teacher correlated

with the students' growth in reading. Therefore, providing teachers with quality PD is

needed to help the teacher build confidence and meet the needs of many students in the

classroom.

The goal of a quality PD program for teachers should focus on a specific content

area and include elements of instruction within that content area. Specific to my study is

the focus on reading instruction and achievement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017)

discovered that the reading recovery PD model demonstrated effective support to

teachers and yielded gains for students that were three times as large as the average gains

for similar instructional interventions. The strength of the Reading Recovery PD model is

that it focused on the content that teachers teach (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Therefore, PD programs should focus on a specific content area to produce quality results

for teachers and students.

Learner-Centered Teaching Approach

The learner-centered teaching approach is an evidence-based strategy for

instructing students giving them more control over their learning. This approach requires

teachers to assist and support learners rather than dictate what the student should do and

when the learning should take place (Hanewicz et al., 2017). Receiving assistance and

support could yield increased motivation and achievement for all students. According to

Dole et al. (2015), high stakes testing and scripted curriculum have changed the structure

of teaching to where both teachers and students are losing control over what is being taught in the classroom. The researchers further predicted that the relationship between the teacher and students will diminish as teachers are pressed to meet the guidelines of standards and pacing guides. However, learner-centered teaching could restore the relationship when implemented effectively. In a classroom that promotes learner-centered teaching, students may become more active and motivated to think critically while decision-making. Students must transition from being directed by the teacher in the first stage to being self-directed in the fourth stage (Hanewicz et al., 2017). Therefore, learner-centered teaching provides a way for students to be in control of their learning.

Some teachers may struggle with the idea of having students direct their learning, but the results may prove beneficial to the students' success in the classroom. In the study by Dole et al. (2015) the teachers revealed their initial reluctance to the learner-centered approach to teaching. However, when the teachers saw the positive learning atmosphere of the classroom and the rapport they built with the students, they were encouraged to continue the process. According to Lee (2015), students who are more familiar with activity-based projects are successful and are willing to accept challenges in a learner-centered classroom. This conclusion by Lee suggests that students who are unfamiliar with activity-based projects are less likely to be successful in a learner-centered classroom without the opportunity to practice. Therefore, teachers must be prepared to assist students in developing the skills needed to be successful in a learner-centered classroom.

The effectiveness of the learner-centered approach is dependent upon the teacher's knowledge about facilitating the process with students and the students' attitude about the approach. Teachers are often hesitant about implementing learner-centered teaching approaches because of their lack of experience with the techniques. Wilson et al. (2015) explored ways teachers used learner-centered instruction in their teaching process. The results revealed that the teachers' ability to effectively administer student-centered instruction depended on how well they were trained in implementing the techniques. Additionally, some teachers are also concerned that students' attitudes and learner autonomy may not be conducive to the learner-centered approach to teaching. Although the research was completed internationally, Boyadzhieva (2016) discovered that the teaching and learning process depends on the social interactions and what both the student and teacher believe about the nature of education. Therefore, the learner-centered approach is effective in a learning environment where relationships are established, and students are encouraged to value their role in education. In a relevant international study by Younes and Hassan (2018), these authors explored 63 teachers' perspectives of the learner-centered approach to the teaching and learning process. The results revealed that teachers were accepting of the approach after receiving training on how to properly administer learner-centered teaching in the classroom. Teachers at the school under study may find this approach highly effective when providing reading instructions to all students.

Learner-centered teaching is an effective strategy when instructing students in reading. According to Dole et al. (2015), learner-centered instruction leads to an

environment where students are divergent and deep thinkers. These skills are important in reading. The learner-centered teaching approach also gives students the ability to be independent thinkers with a sense of responsibility. Choosing a reading program that promotes learner-centered teaching practice could yield increased motivation for reading among students while increasing the students' reading outcomes. So, implementing learner-centered teaching within the reading instruction for all students is an effective strategy.

Although researchers support learner-centered teaching as an effective pedagogical approach to teaching, many reading programs are structured to support teacher-centered instruction. New teachers often rely on teaching strategies that are more consistent with a teacher-centered method (DuFour & Marzano, 2016). After all, teacher-centered instructions give the teacher control over the curriculum and pace it is taught (Dole et al., 2015). Additionally, students will need a lot of support and guidance to effectively direct their learning. School administrators may choose teacher-centered reading programs because they believe teachers controlling the curriculum and pace of instruction is beneficial. According to Snow and Matthew (2016), teacher-led instructional methods are appropriate when introducing certain skills, such as phonemic awareness, but the students should be allowed to apply those strategies using learner-centered strategies. Considering the extent to which a reading program promotes teacher-centered and student-centered instructional strategies is appropriate when adopting a reading program that will support instruction for all students.

Summary of Literature

This review of literature attempts to support the study on the challenges of instructing elementary students in reading. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2017), reading struggles are common within all categories of learners in the United States. Additionally, Roberts and Norman (2015) found that as students enter Grades 3 to 5, texts become increasingly difficult. Dorsey (2015) also discovered that when students enter third grade performing below grade level, they are less likely to overcome the reading deficit by ninth grade. Teachers are faced with the challenge of trying to help students overcome the reading deficits and change the trajectory of underachievement. Therefore, addressing the issue of reading failure in the early stages of development is crucial to the students' future educational achievement.

Many students struggle with reading outcomes because of the development of language in the early grades and the lack of instruction in their native language. Meyer and Behar-Horenstein (2015) reported that providing effective reading instruction and interventions during the early years of education is essential to the path of success for all students. However, when instructing students, teachers struggle to meet the diverse individual needs of all the students, even the student who received early intervention. Other researchers have found that instructing ELLs in their native language increased the likelihood of the students being successful in reading (Comings, 2015; Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018). For example, Comings (2015) found that students who had received instruction in their native language increased 12 to 15 percentile points in reading

outcomes. Therefore, language development in the early grades and instruction in the students' native language is essential for success in reading outcomes.

Culturally responsive teaching is another effective strategy for improving reading outcomes in students. Culturally responsive teaching contributes to understanding students' diverse cultures and values (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Taylor et al. (2015) discovered that students were more interested in reading when they were engaged in culturally responsive literature. Students' level of interest in reading contributes to their reading outcomes. Vaughn (2019) suggested that teacher education programs prepare pre-service teachers for instructing diverse groups of students through culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching helps improve reading outcomes for students.

Other forms of research-based instruction supported by this literature review included direct instruction and differentiated instruction. Head et al. (2018) reported that direct instruction is an effective practice for instructing diverse groups of students and students. The study by Hock et al. (2017) showed that teachers who engaged in direct instruction yielded students who performed better in reading outcomes. Additionally, differentiated instruction is another research-based strategy for instructing all students. According to Hanewicz et al. (2017), teachers must administer differentiated instructions to meet the diverse needs of all students. However, Stone (2018) argued that differentiated instruction is an attempt to adapt a curriculum-centered to a learner-centered approach. Nevertheless, both direct instruction and differentiated instruction are research-based approaches that support this study.

The literature review also supports learner-centered instruction as a best practice for the instruction of diverse students. Dole et al. (2015) discovered that teachers who receive quality training with implementing learner-centered teaching strategies were more successful at students' reading outcomes. Learner-centered teaching also allowed students to be more involved in the learning process and encouraged them to think critically while decision-making. On the other hand, other researchers found that teacher-centered instruction has been useful when instructing elementary students. According to Snow and Matthew (2016) teacher-led instructional methods are appropriate when introducing certain skills, but the students should apply the strategies using learner-centered techniques. For instance, whole group instruction may be more beneficial when teacher-led, but students should be able to apply the concepts through self-discovery. So, applying learner-centered strategies is a best practice for instructing all students.

One teacher-led instructional strategy that is examined in the literature review is scripted instruction. Powell et al. (2017) found that teachers saw benefits of a scripted reading program for struggling readers. However, scripted instructional methods placed restraints on the teachers' creativity and professional judgment. Therefore, some researchers support adaptations to the scripted instructional methods. According to Parsons et al. (2018) adaptations are made to meet the social, linguistic, and cultural needs of the students. Wyatt (2014) found that scripted instructional methods are beneficial to inexperienced teachers because of the ease of lesson planning and little preparation time. Yet the effectiveness of the scripted method is controversial because

teachers sometimes must make adaptations to the instructions (Parsons et al., 2018; Wyatt, 2014).

In conclusion, the literature review attempts to demonstrate saturation of the body of knowledge related to instructing students. The importance of considering the perception of teachers in instructional decision-making is also supported in the literature review. A qualitative method may provide an understanding of the teachers' perspectives of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of students at an urban school in a Midwestern state.

Implications

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of reading teachers in Grades 3 to 5 about the challenges and resources needed to support the reading instruction for the students at the study site. By revealing the teachers' experience and perspectives of the challenges with instructing the students, the study informed administrators about the instructional needs of the students and the training teachers need to effectively instruct the students. Implications of the research were useful in designing quality training or PD for teachers at the school under study that will improve the instructional delivery of reading for the students. After collecting data, it was necessary to develop a 3-day PD for teachers of students in Grades 3 to 5 at the elementary school focusing on the needs of struggling readers. The PD consisted of effective instructional strategies for instructing diverse levels of readers. This qualitative study could potentially contribute to social change by supporting teachers who

experience challenges with working with diverse students and offering solutions to improving students' reading outcomes.

Summary

The problem addressed in this study is teachers are struggling to support the instructional needs of the students with limited resources and training opportunities. Although the teachers were using various forms of instructions, many of the students continued to struggle to meet grade-level benchmark performance. Evidence of the problem is supported using personal communications from the teachers. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of reading teachers in Grades 3 to 5 at the school under study about the instructional challenges and resources needed to support the reading instruction for the students. The research questions that were addressed are:

RQ1: What were the reading teachers' perspectives of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the students in Grade 3 to 5?

RQ2: What were the reading teachers' perspectives of the resources and needs to support the instruction of the students in Grade 3 to 5?

This study was significant to teachers, students, and other stakeholders involved in the reading instruction of all students at the school under study. The literature review provided background information related to teaching all elementary students and the challenges with instructing this population of students. The review also helped to promote effective reading instructional practices and interventions needed for instructing all students in Grades 3 to 5 who struggle with reading outcomes. Also, the review supported effective training and PD opportunities for teachers of reading. Based on the

finding in this study. I designed a 3-day PD project that may inform and engage Grades 3 to 5 reading teachers in practicing effective reading instructions to students at the school under study.

Section 2 of this study includes the methodology used to address the research questions in Section 1. Section 2 also includes the teachers' responses to the interview questions. Additionally, I discuss the data collection and analysis procedure I used to answer the research questions from Section 1 as I explored the local problem further.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

A basic qualitative approach was appropriate to address the purpose of this study because this approach is best suited to understand individuals and groups in their environment (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of reading teachers in Grades 3 to 5 about the challenges faced and resources needed to strengthen the reading instruction for students at the school under study. To explore the teachers' perspectives of instructing students, I collected information through semistructured interviews about their experiences with meeting the instructional needs of the students they serve.

Relationship of the Research Design to the Problem

The basic qualitative research design was most suited to address the problem of the challenge teachers experience when instructing students at the study site. Qualitative research is the systematic and contextualized research process used to interpret how people view, approach, and make meaning of their experiences, context, and the world (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For this study, I collected information through interviews to interpret the teachers' views of their experiences with instructing the students at the study site. The background literature supported my understanding of the teachers' perspectives.

Description of the Research Design

In this study, I employed the basic qualitative study design. Creswell (2018) stated that a qualitative study helps to gain insight into an issue through one-on-one interviews with individuals. Additionally, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) listed the

exploratory process as a key component of a basic qualitative approach. A researcher conducts a qualitative study to attempt to gain an understanding of and explore how individuals make meaning of the world and provide a description of practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I used a basic qualitative approach to explore the perspectives of 10 teachers of students in Grades 3 to 5 regarding their challenges with meeting the instructional needs of students. Exploring the teachers' perspectives through one-on-one interviews allowed me to gain insight into their experiences when providing reading instruction to the students at the school.

Relationship of Research Design to the Guiding Question

The basic qualitative research design was appropriate to address the following guiding research questions for this study:

RQ1: What were reading teachers' perspectives of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the students in Grade 3 to 5?

RQ2: What were the reading teachers' perspectives of the resources and needs to support the instruction of the students in Grade 3 to 5?

The research questions were informed by my personal experiences, current literature, and my personal view of the world. I designed the research questions for this study to gain knowledge about the teachers' perspectives of their experiences and views of the challenges with meeting the reading instructional needs of the students. The questions also explored the teachers' perspectives of the support and training that were provided to enhance the quality of their instruction at the study site. The qualitative research design supported the use of open-ended interview questions to gather in-depth

information and rich data from the participants to help understand their perspectives of

instructing elementary students in reading.

Justification for Research Design

When considering a suitable research design for this study, I found that the basic

qualitative approach was the most appropriate. Initially, I considered using a case study

as the research design for this study. A case study would have been appropriate if I

incorporated the use of observations or meeting notes as data for the study; however,

using interviews as the only data source made the basic qualitative approach more

suitable for this study. Another consideration was the narrative research design. This

design was not chosen because it requires the researcher to collect and shape narrative

stories into a chronology (see Creswell, 2018). This design would have been difficult to

employ because of how the participants may have verbalized the challenges related to

teaching reading at the study site. The basic qualitative approach allowed me to focus on

the perspectives and experiences of the teachers as they instruct the reading students with

limited resources. Using a qualitative approach was most appropriate for me to develop

and seek an understanding of the reading teachers' perspectives of the challenges with

meeting the instructional needs of all students.

<div align="center">Participants</div>

In this subsection, I provide an overview of the participant demographics, setting

of the study, the criteria for the selection of the participants, and the procedures for

gaining access to the participants. Additionally, the process of establishing a relationship

with the participants is explained. Finally, this section includes an explanation of the protections put in place for the participants in the study.

Participant Demographics

I selected teachers of students in Grades 3–5 as participants in this study because the focus of the study was on meeting the needs of elementary students within those grade levels. The selection of the participants was completed through purposeful sampling (see Creswell, 2018). Teachers who had been teaching at the school under study within the last 5 years were invited to participate in the study. This sampling allowed for the selection of teachers who had experienced teaching reading using the Benchmark Literacy Series and working with the target demographics of students.

I invited a pool of 15 teachers to take part in the study. Out of this pool, there were 11 classroom teachers of Grades 3 to 5, two reading specialists, and two ELL staff members. Invitations to participate were sent to a public email address for each of the participants. A total of 10 teachers volunteered to take part. Of the teachers who participated in the study, there were one male and nine females. A total of four out of the 10 teachers had taught more than one grade level within their five years at the school. Included in the list of participants were an English as a new language (ENL) teacher, a reading specialist, six classroom teachers, and two intense intervention teachers. All the 10 teachers had at least 2 years of teaching experience in Grades 3 to 5.

Setting and Population

The school under study was located in an urban city in the Midwestern United States. In 2019, the demographic makeup of the students was 43% Hispanic American,

33% African American or multiracial, and 24% European American. Additionally, 96%

of the students had low SES. Of the total Hispanic American student population of the

school, 90% received ELL services.

Criteria for Selection

The criteria required for participation were as follows: (a) participants were

teaching or had previously taught reading to students in Grades 3 to 5 at the school under

study within the last 5 years, (b) participants had at least 3 years of experience with

teaching reading in Grades 3 to 5, (c) participants were willing to participate in an

interview, and (d) participants were willing to share their perspectives about teaching

reading at the school under study. I used a purposive sampling technique because it

allowed me to include individuals who had relevant knowledge about the phenomenon.

Justification for the Number of Participants

I chose a total of 10 participants in hopes of achieving saturation in this study and

increase the possibility of making an in-depth inquiry about the phenomenon. Including

this number of participants in the study was supported by recent literature. Creswell

(2018) stated that the final sample size is determined by the level of saturation achieved

in the study. Creswell also noted that the number of participants should provide enough

opportunity to identify themes in the study. I chose 10 participants according to the

recommendation of Fusch and Ness (2015) who stated that a small sample size of eight to

10 participants is large enough for a diverse group of participants. Tipton et al. (2017)

also agreed that the sample size should be small enough to provide rich, in-depth

information and diverse responses that themes can be developed from. In this study, 10

interviews provided the rich, in-depth data needed for a quality study.

Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants

Before conducting the study, I consulted the elementary superintendent for the

district to obtain their approval to collect data and access participants. I also completed

the research application process for Walden University and received approval from the

Walden University Institutional Research Board (IRB; IRB Approval No. 12-15-20-

0736289). The IRB approval number was electronically shared with the elementary

superintendent. I then searched the school's website for potential participants and emailed

all eligible possible participants at their school email account inviting them to take part in

the research study.

Establishing Researcher-Participant Relationship

I initially established a relationship with the superintendent when I began

discussing the study in hopes of receiving access to participants with no reluctance. My

researcher-participant relationship involved gathering information regarding teachers'

perspectives of their experiences and views of the challenges with meeting the reading

instructional needs of the students. When recruiting participants, I provided sample

interview questions and informed each participant that I was available to answer any

questions they may have regarding the consent form. As the primary instrument for the

data collection, I attempted to establish a relationship with the participants that was built

on trust. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), trust is a priority in qualitative

studies. Trust increased the likelihood of the participants feeling comfortable during the

interview as well as being open and honest when answering interview questions. I assigned each participant a number that was used to ensure confidentiality and protect their identity. I continuously followed preexisting data collection protocols, throughout the study (see Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I revisited my role as the researcher in the study before I interviewed each participant. My focus with each interviewee was to seek an understanding of the phenomenon and not evaluate or judge them. A casual conversation with the participant was initiated to increase their comfort level and develop rapport. The interview protocol that I used consisted of probing questions that contributed to gaining in-depth, detailed information from the participants. I acquired and maintained trust from the participants by providing detailed information in the invitation, obtaining consent from the administration, sending follow-up emails, conducting thorough interviews, and through member checking. Building trust was a continuous process that contributed to the credibility of the data collected in this study.

I used a reflective journal to assure that the data were presented accurately and to make notes of the participants' nonverbal responses. The reflective journal was also useful when recalling information during the interview (see Lincoln and Guba, 1986). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also suggested that a reflective journal be used when observing any personal experiences, biases, prejudices, and assumptions. I chose to use the reflective journal to note my personal biases related to the themes. By doing so, I was able to address the biases in the final study and in my interpretation of the results.

Protection of the Participants Rights

After completion of the interviews, I maintained the researcher-participant relationship by continuing to respect the rights of all the participants by preserving their information and providing confidentiality in the study. The participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Additionally, I worked to establish rapport and avoid the appearance of coercion in this study. Maintaining a researcher-participant relationship was important to the reliability of the study.

I obtained a letter of cooperation from the superintendent and principal of the study site to confirm their consent to contact the teachers that met the inclusion criteria for the study. After obtaining permission to contact the teachers, I emailed the recruitment flyer to all potential participants along with a letter of consent. The letter informed the possible participants about the nature of the study, the requirements to participate, the expectations of the participants, and the basic protection agreement. One week after emailing the initial invitation to participate in the study, I again emailed each potential participant requesting their commitment to participate. The email included the statement, "Please respond by indicating 'Yes, I consent to participate in the research study' or 'No, I do not consent to participate in the research study.'" A follow-up email was also sent to teachers who had agreed to participate to schedule a date and time for the interview. After scheduling the date and time for the interview, I emailed the interview protocol to the participants.

The participants were informed that there was no monetary compensation for participation. Also, the participants were informed of the minimal risks involved with participating in the study as well as no risk of physical harm involved in the study. Before conducting the interview, I verbally reminded the participants of the details related to the study and their rights as participants.

I was intentional about making sure the participants were unidentifiable throughout the study. By continuing to use numbers to identify the participants for the duration of the interviews, I maintained their confidentiality. Additionally, I assigned each participant a number when coding and reporting findings within the study. The data and identifying factors were stored and password-protected on my personal computer. The findings and results of the study were made available to the participants at a later date.

Confidentiality

The participants were informed that the information they provide would be confidential and their names would not be used in the study. Additionally, I informed the participants that only I would have access to the documents used, and these documents would be kept for 5 years, which is Walden University's requirement. They were also informed that the documents would be destroyed after 5 years, per the requirements for Walden University. Finally, the participants were informed that their signed consent form would not be kept with the data, and any published research would protect their identity and confidentiality. The signed consent form served as their understanding of the terms and conditions as well as their agreement to participate.

Informed Consent

I obtained informed consent by the written signature of each participant before conducting interviews. The details of the informed consent form explained the purpose of the study, any risk involved with participating in the study, and their rights as participants in the study. Additionally, the indicated stated that all information collected about the participant in the study would remain confidential.

Data Collection

In this qualitative research study, the perspectives of 10 teachers instructing Grades 3 to 5 students in reading were explored through interviews. Semistructured, one-on-one interviews helped provide in-depth responses to the questions on the teachers' perception of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the students. Qualitative data were presented using direct quotes from participants about their feeling, experiences, opinions, and knowledge of the phenomenon (see Patton, 2015).

Description of Data to be Collected

Qualitative data for this study were collected through the interview process. Elementary teachers of students in Grades 3-5 were interviewed. The data collected through the open-ended interview protocol allowed me to gain rich and in-depth knowledge about the teachers' perspective of the phenomenon. The ability to ask follow-up and probing questions added to the richness of the data. Additionally, conducting semistructured interviews provided an opportunity to gather firsthand information from the teachers. Although the researcher develops a phenomenon to be explored, participants are assumed to have greater insight on the subject (Ralston et al., 2019). Therefore,

collecting data through interviews was the most appropriate way to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives.

Justification of Data Chosen for Collection

Semistructured interviews were ideal for gathering rich and in-depth knowledge about the participants' perspectives and answers to the research questions. The interviewing process provided information about the teachers' perspective of their reading instructional practices. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), interviewing is one method of data collection that could provide the depth of knowledge needed for a qualitative study. The authors also stated that interviews, where the researcher asks the participant the same set of questions, are successful at reaching data saturation. Guest et al. (2013) stated that qualitative interviewing allows more flexibility and interviewers can ask questions in different ways to clarify for participants. Therefore, collecting data through the interview process was most appropriate for this study.

Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument used in this study was an interview protocol (Appendix B). Developing good interview questions was key to gathering meaningful information in this study. The interview protocol contained 15 questions. The interview protocol was designed to gather data about the teachers' experience and perspectives of providing reading instruction to students at the school under study. All the interview questions were open-ended to maximize the opportunity for participants to expand upon their perspectives. Creswell, (2018) stated that open-ended questions also help researchers construct new ideas. Prompts were used to clarify questions or to elicit a

thorough response to the questions. Additionally, probing questions were used to gather in-depth, detailed information to enhance the study. Each interview question was aligned with one of the research questions. The alignment is shown below in Table 2.

Table 2

Aligning Interview Questions to Research Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ 1. What are reading teachers' perspectives of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the students in Grade 3 to 5?	Describe your experience working with Grade 3-5 reading students. Include the number of years you have been teaching.
	In your years of experience, what difference, if any, have you noticed in the reading outcomes of diverse students?
	How have your years of experience contributed to your ability to work with the students?
	Describe the demographics of the school. What changes, if any, have you noticed in the demographics of the school within the last five years?
	In what way has the SES contributed to the reading results of students at this school?
	In your years of experience, what difference, if any, have you noticed in the reading outcomes of diverse students?
RQ2. What are the reading teachers' perspectives of the resources and needs to support the instruction of the students in Grade 3 to 5?	What measures were put in place to accommodate the demographic change of students at this school, such as support for students, or new reading adoptions? What instructional practice(s) are most effective when working with students?
	How should the curriculum or reading program support the differentiation of instruction?

Research Questions	Interview Questions
	What elements of the reading program are supportive of the instructional needs of diverse learners?
	What are some effective techniques when providing reading instruction to diverse learners?
	Describe the initial and ongoing support that has been provided to teachers at this school.
	What PD or training has been provided related to the school-adopted reading program?
	How has the PD or training helped teachers in delivering quality instruction to diverse students?
	What support is needed to enhance the quality of instruction to the students at this school?

To ensure the validity and quality of the interview protocol, I consulted with a peer debriefer to provide feedback about the interview questions. The questions were sent to the peer debriefer through email. When the debriefer suggested revisions, they were made to the protocol. The interview protocol was then reviewed by the committee chair and second member. After review from the committee chair and second member, there were no more revisions that were suggested.

Sufficiency of Data Collection Instrument to Answer Research Questions

The interview protocol was sufficient to answer RQ1 because some of the interview questions were developed to gather information about the challenges with instructing elementary students in reading. Additionally, the participants were able to

speak about their knowledge and experience with instructing the students in Grades 3-5. Follow-up questions were used when the participants' responses needed further clarification.

The interview protocol was sufficient to answer RQ2 because some of the interview questions helped to understand the need for training and PD in reading instruction. The participants provided responses that revealed the lack of quality PD for the teachers at the school. Rephasing the questions also helped to clarify the nature of questions when necessary.

Process for Generating, Gathering, and Recording Data

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling. The purposeful sampling strategy was used to include only the teachers who were knowledgeable about the phenomenon. The 10 participants who agreed to participate in the study were teachers of Grades 3 to 5 students.

Data were collected through semistructured interviews. Each interview was conducted within one hour. Occasionally I contacted participants by phone to clarify responses to the interview questions. I conducted interviews until the point of saturation, or there is no new information that is presented in the study. After conducting 10 interviews, saturation was reached, and the process was discontinued.

System for Tracking Data and Emerging Understanding

I began the process of tracking data by analyzing answers to the interview questions and determining if the data answered the research questions. I also developed categories and themes from the data. To accomplish this task, I gave attention to

emerging patterns in the data. Themes and categories were developed as patterns emerged. New categories were also developed as needed. I revisited the literature to help understand the relationship between my data and other related research (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, key points made by each participant were organized using a color-coded system, then the data were transferred to a matrix that was used when coding.

Role of the Researcher

At the time of the study, I was the dean of students within the same school district as the study site. The participants in the study were my former coworkers. However, my role in this study was a researcher and not a participant. As a researcher, I was concerned with producing valid and reliable results in this study. Therefore, I remained unbiased and focused on the participants' perspectives throughout the study. Because the school under study was different from the site where I worked at the time of the study, I had limited access to the participants and no supervisory role over them. This limited access minimized the chance of participants being exposed to my perspectives or ideas related to the phenomenon.

I previously taught at the school under study for 15 years. I served as a third-grade teacher for 1 year and a fifth-grade teacher for 14 years. I was responsible for teaching language arts (which included reading), as well as math, science, and social studies. I also served as a mentor teacher to new teachers at the school for a minimum of 2 years. I participated in grade-level meetings at the school and served as a representative for the school on the district's team for teachers of Grade 5.

With my experience with working with teachers and students in Grades 3 to 5, I have developed a bias that there will always be a challenge with helping students overcome reading deficits when they enter third grade. This belief was the catalyst for this research study. The interview questions were structured to minimize the effect of this bias in this study.

Data Analysis Methods

In qualitative research, data analysis features the researcher's understanding of how all aspects of the research process come together to develop a valid picture of the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Using an integrative approach to data analysis was appropriate for this study to show how the method is directly related to the findings (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data in this study were analyzed through this approach.

The analysis process began after the first two interviews. I began organizing the data as I saw patterns in the responses of the participants. As I continued to conduct the interviews, I manually categorized the patterns in the data. After conducting all interviews, I began to organize and code the data more precisely. Initially, I used MaxQDA, a computer-assisted software program, to transcribe the digitally recorded interviews. I reviewed and analyzed the transcriptions to consolidate similar ideas and look for broad topics or themes that emerged. The themes from the data were categorized using colored notecards. The data from the notecards were then manually transferred to a matrix according to the categories. I continued to organize the data as I analyzed each participant's transcript. If data did not fit within a category or theme, I created a new category to include all data. When there were patterns found in the data, I collapsed

similar ideas into overarching themes. After manually organizing all the data into

categories, I continued to refine the categories by developing new themes when needed.

After analyzing the ninth interview, I realized I had reached saturation in the data because

there were no new ideas revealed in the data (see Tipton et al., 2017). However, I

proceeded to analyze the final transcript and it was confirmed that I had reached

saturation. Finally, I revisited the transcripts, categories, codes, and themes to make sure

all information was included and accurate.

Evidence of Quality of the Data

Providing evidence of the quality of the data was important to establish credibility

in this study. To enhance and show evidence of the quality of data, I used several

strategies recommended by Creswell (2018) to validate the findings; member checking,

peer debriefing, and quotes in the narrative of the study. These strategies also helped to

minimize any biases in the study. In qualitative research, the quality is determined by the

rigor and trustworthiness of the study (Cypress, 2017). Although qualitative researchers

cannot capture an objective truth within a study, some techniques can be used to increase

the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore,

using member checking, peer debriefing, and quotes in the narrative of the study

enhanced the quality of data in the study.

Member Checking

I achieved member checking by having study participants individually review and

verify my interpretations in the study. This process also required me to ask clarifying

questions after some of the interviews. After each interview, I emailed the transcript of

individual interviews to the participant and receive assurance that all data are presented accurately (see Creswell, 2018). Members were given seven days to review the transcript and provide revisions and corrections as needed. I applied the correction to assure the validity of the data. After completing the analysis, I asked the participants about their views of the written analyses. This technique was critical in the development of an accurate and trustworthy study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that member checking allows the participants to fine-tune the researcher's interpretation to better capture their perspectives. Additionally, Caelli et al. (2003) stated that member checking increases the rigor of the study. Therefore, member checking was used to increase the validity and credibility of this study.

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing was used to provide an external check of the research process and provide another layer for establishing credibility in this study. One of my colleagues served as the peer debriefer who reviewed and provided feedback about the interpretation and meaning of the data. I selected the peer reviewer because of this individual's knowledge about current trends in education and their expertise in educational leadership. Initially, the peer debriefer reviewed the interview protocol and provided feedback. I adjusted the questions accordingly. I later provided the peer debriefer with a copy of several transcripts from the interviews to receive an alternate perspective of the interpretation I had received. Finally, I consulted with the peer debriefer while interpreting the findings in the study. This process was helpful to the credibility of my study.

Quotes

Lastly, I included quotes from the participants in the narrative of the study. The quotes assured accuracy and supported the themes in the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through this process, I noticed that many of the responses were quite similar. This redundancy was noted in the study. The member checking process was helpful to assure accuracy before including the quotes in the study. This established protocol of including the quotes in the study decreased the possibility of my personal biases compromising the integrity of the study.

Procedure for Addressing Discrepant Cases

One strategy that I employed to establish credibility in the study was to address all discrepant data. Negative or discrepant cases were important to understanding the diverse perspectives of the participants. In this study, I found that some participants revealed experiences that were inconsistent with the patterns that emerged, specifically, in response to Research Question 2. The experience of two of the participants was different from the other participants. These discrepant cases were included and discussed in the narrative of the study to provide an alternative perspective for the readers. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), some researchers purposefully look for data that could challenge the emerging findings. These cases could add relevance to the research study. Therefore, when discrepancies occurred in the study, all interpretations were presented in the final analysis (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Analysis Results

In an elementary school in the Midwestern United States, the problem is teachers were struggling to support the instructional needs of the students with limited resources and training opportunities. Despite the implementation of a new district reading program, and teacher-designed interventions, and additional reading resources, students in Grades 3 to 5 continue to struggle with reading outcomes. The purpose of this study was to investigate the experience, perspectives, and practice of the teachers for Grades 3 to 5 about the challenges involved in meeting the instructional needs of the students in reading and to explore the teachers' suggestions for improved resources and training. Exploring this phenomenon helped to understand the below grade-level reading outcomes of the students. To collect data for this study, one-on-one interviews were conducted using a 15-item protocol instrument with all open-ended questions that allowed each participant to share their perspective and experience confidentially.

The questions used helped to support the research questions related to the challenges with instructing elementary students in reading. The interview protocol is included in Appendix B. Each interview lasted a maximum of 60 minutes. An audio recording captured the interviews with the permission of the participants. Member checking was used to clarify responses and enhance the quality of the data. After each interview, data were transcribed, reviewed, categorized, and coded. Along with the colored note cards, the computer-assisted software, MaxQDA, was used to categorize and develop codes from the interviews. The study findings summarized the participants' responses about their perspective of the challenges with instructing elementary students

in reading and details about the proposed project that may support the needs of the teachers at the school.

Framing Data Analysis Through the Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to explore the perspective of Grade 3 to 5 teachers at the school about the challenges with instructing students in reading. A total of 15 questions were used to interview participants in this study. The interview protocol was designed to gather data that would contribute to understanding the research questions.

Process for Generating, Gathering, and Recording Data

Using the model by Creswell (2018), participants were selected through purposeful sampling. The purposeful sampling strategy was successfully used to include the teachers who were knowledgeable about the phenomenon. The 10 participants who agreed to participate in the study were all teachers of students in Grades 3 to 5.

Data were collected through semistructured interviews. Each interview was conducted within one hour. Occasionally there was a need to contact participants to clarify responses to the interview questions. Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested conducting interviews until the point of saturation, or there is no new information that is presented in the study. After conducting 10 interviews, saturation was reached, and the process was discontinued.

Coding and Theme Development

I began organizing the data by coding the information. I began the coding process by highlighting within the transcribed text and manually noting similar ideas in the data. I later began developing codes using the computer-assisted software MaxQDA. Using both

methods ensured the accuracy and precision of the organization process. I later developed

categories and themes from the codes. After reviewing the categories and themes that

were developed, I realized I had reach saturation of data that were needed for the study.

I began organizing the 37 codes by categorizing them according to their

similarities using colored notecards. From the 37 codes, I was able to form 12 categories.

I assigned each of the categories identifying phrases. I continued to review and analyze

the categories which led me to refine and restructure the groupings. After reviewing the

categories, I then consolidated them to form themes. From the categories, I developed 12

themes. After initially reviewing the theme, I discovered that two of the categories did

not address the research questions. I consolidated the data within the categories into

existing themes. I later consolidated the 12 themes to 10 that addressed the research

questions. After developing the 10 themes, I checked to make sure each of the codes

aligned with the themes. Table 3 shows how each of the codes was organized and aligned

with the themes in the study.

Table 3

Alignment of Codes to Themes

Themes	Codes
Theme 1: Teachers perceived that there was insufficient support for diverse students at the school.	1. Student demographics 2. Classroom management

Theme 2: Teachers perceived that the students' motivation affected their reading outcomes	3. Student Motivation 4. Struggling Reader 5. Interesting Stories 6. Read aloud books
Theme 3: Teachers perceived that parental support was insufficient.	7. Parent Support 8. Community Support
Theme 4: Teachers perceived that the students struggled because of limited vocabulary development and background knowledge.	9. Background knowledge 10. Vocabulary development 11. Cross-curricular vocabulary
Theme 5: Teachers perceived that there were many challenges with providing differentiated instruction	12. Differentiation of instruction 13. Ability grouping 14. Small group instruction 15. Whole group instruction 16. Diverse learners 17. Reading level ranges 18. Below level readers
Theme 6: Teachers perceived that the Benchmark Literacy Series failed to meet the instructional needs of many of the students.	19. Supplemental materials 20. Higher instructional levels 21. Leveled readers 22. Culturally responsive literature
Theme 7: The teachers perceived that the needs of low SES contributed to the reading outcomes.	23. School demographics 24. Resources for students 25. Low SES
Theme 9. Teachers perceived that the pacing guide was not consistent with data-driven instruction.	26. Pacing guide 27. Data analysis
Theme 10: Teachers perceived that they needed more time to collaborate with colleagues.	28. Data-driven instruction 29. Collaboration among teachers 30. No common planning time

After organizing the codes into the themes, I reviewed each theme to make sure it

aligned with the two research questions in the study. In this process, I had to revise the

four of the themes to appropriately align them with the research questions. Table 4

provides a summary of how the 10 themes aligned with the research questions.

Table 4

Themes Aligned With Research Questions

Research Questions	Themes
RQ1: What were the reading teachers' perspectives of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of students in Grade 3 to 5?	Theme 1: Teachers perceived that there was insufficient academic assistance for diverse students at the school.
	Theme 2: Teachers perceived that student motivation affected reading outcomes.
	Theme 3: Teachers perceived that parental support was lacking with the students.
	Theme 4: Teachers perceived that the students struggled because of limited vocabulary development and background knowledge.
	Theme 5: Teachers perceived that there were many challenges with providing differentiated instruction to the students.
RQ2: What were the reading teachers' perspectives of the resources and needs to support the instruction of students in Grades 3 to 5?	Theme 6: Teachers perceived that the Benchmark Literacy program failed to meet the instructional needs of the students
	Theme 7: Teachers perceived that the needs of the low SES students contributed to their reading outcomes.
	Theme 8: Teachers perceived that they lacked resources and training needs to deliver quality instruction.
	Teachers perceived that the instructional pacing guide was not consistent with data-driven instruction.
	Theme 10: Teachers perceived that they needed more time to collaborate with colleagues.

Findings

In this section, I present the findings of my data analysis. The following narrative is developed and framed by the research questions for this study. Summary of the participants' demographics, quotes from the interviews with the participants, narratives of the emerging themes that were coded, and tables displaying the findings were presented as data. I also provide a summary of the findings that helped to answer the research questions. The participants gave their perspective of the challenges with instructing students in Grades 3 to 5 in reading. The open-ended interview questions allowed the teachers to speak out about the factors that contributed to these challenges. Additionally, teachers were able to reflect on their practice, their instructional needs, and the expectations of the school administration. A total of 10 themes contributed to answering the research questions.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 (RQ 1) addressed the teachers' perspective of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the students in Grades 3 to 5. There were five themes developed to answer this question. Each theme highlighted the challenges experienced by the teachers when instructing the students at the school in reading. The similarities and differences in the responses of the participants regarding their perspective of these challenges were also highlighted. The participants also shared techniques and strategies that were used to address the challenges.

Theme 1: Teachers Perceived that There was Insufficient Academic Support for Diverse Students at the School

The first theme that emerged from the data was useful to answer RQ1 Additionally, Theme 1 is supported by Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction. Most of the participants reported that there needed to be more quality academic assistance for diverse students at the school. Specifically, many of the teachers reported that the African American and Hispanic students needed assistance outside of the classroom setting that could support their academic needs.

The concerns for the academic needs of the African Americans were shared in more detail by three of the 10 participants. Participant 5 claimed that since the number of African Americans had slightly declined within the last 5 years and the English as a new language (ENL) population (commonly known as English language learners or ELL) had increased, more focus has been placed on the needs of the ENL students. The participant went on to say: "As a result, many of the African American students who struggle with reading continued to struggle because they were not getting the services they need." Participant 2 claimed that the African American males were the lowest-performing subgroup at the school. To support this claim, the participant said, "With so many Hispanics that struggle with learning the language, I thought they would be the lowest-performing. However, I found out that it was the black males who were at the bottom." The participant also shared the belief that there should be more assistance for the students within this subgroup.

Participant 2 also revealed that although there was evidence that the African American males were struggling with reading outcomes, there had not been any strategic support for the students outside of the classroom. When asked about some specific

strategies that had been tried within the classroom to meet the needs of the African American males, Participant 7 reported: "What works in my classroom are providing literature that is interesting to the students, developing reading groups that are catered to the students' interest, and providing books that have illustrations that are inviting to the students." Similarly, Participant 1 also shared concerns for the African American population of students: "I feel our African American population has somewhat declined in their reading because they are not getting all of the support that they need because the focus has been on the ENL population."

Participant 5 also shared the concern that other non-ENL students needed more quality assistance in reading. The participant supported this claim in the following comment:

There is an abundance of ENL support, which is great… but we still have to support our other students. I know we only have so many reading teachers… but the way they weed them [the students] out with the different assessments must be evaluated. Sometimes I want to suggest a student be a part of the group that's receiving help, but they [the students] may do just enough to not qualify for the support.

Another concern addressed by the participants was approximately 40% of the students were ENL, and over half of them had limited knowledge of the English language. Participant 4 also indicated that this limited knowledge of the English language was also true of the parents, which explained the lack of support from home. Some participants reported that there was a lot of ENL assistance for the students at the school,

but their overall reading outcomes continued to be below-average. Participant 1 explained a possible reason why there was more support for the ENL students than the other groups of students at the school. The participant reported that several federal grants were made available to the ENL students. However, the participant also shared the belief that many of the students continued to struggle even after benefiting from the federal grant funds.

However, Participant 6 reported that the ENL students had historically done a little bit better than the general population of students. The participant went on to explain this claim in the following comment:

Part of that [the reading results] is because they [the ENL students] get a little extra support…. and they don't have to necessarily qualify for it [ENL support]. But the kids who go to reading specialists, they qualify because a lot of them are struggling readers. So, the services that they [the struggling readers] get might help them improve as opposed to the ENL student that may already be doing well in the classroom.

Not all participants agreed on which students received or needed the ENL guidance. Participant 6 pointed out that just because the students were ENL does not mean they will struggle with reading outcomes. However, some of the participants alleged that there were a high number of ENL students who struggle to meet expectations for reading outcomes. According to Participant 2, most of the ENL services were provided to the students by teachers who were non-Spanish speaking. Therefore, the participant reported that the help may not have been as effective or sustaining.

The data collected under Theme 1 showed similar responses about the lack of academic assistance provided to the diverse groups of students at the school. The participants consistently presented their perspective of the help outside of the classroom that would contribute to the students' reading success. Additionally, a similar pattern emerged concerning more support being provided to ENL students than African American students.

Theme 2: Teachers Perceived that the Students' Motivation Affected the Reading Outcomes

The teachers perceived that the student' motivation affected their reading outcome. This theme became the foundation for understanding the challenges with providing reading instructions to the students at the school. Gagne's theory of the condition of learning contributes to understanding the importance of student motivation when learning to read. Over half of the participants reported that the students' motivation had a significant effect on their reading outcome. The participants reported that many factors contributed to the students' lack of motivation. Several of the participants explained how this lack of motivation contributed to the challenge of instructing the students in reading. Participant 5 explained the challenge in the following account:

> When they [the students] come in with the attitude *I don't know how to read and I'm not planning to read any books.* They will not do any better…. So, when they are unmotivated it is hard to teach them new reading skills.

Participant 7 speculated that many of the students may lack confidence in their ability to read fluently or learn how to read altogether. So, they were resistant to the task

of reading and the motivation to learn new skills in reading. The participant supported this claim by providing an example of an occasion when a student refused to read aloud during group time. The participant shared the belief that the student's prior experience with not being able to read fluently led to their lack of confidence in the task. Participant 10 reported that students were more likely to build their confidence and develop better skills in reading when they practiced reading the same text. The participant explained this allegation by saying:

> The only way you get better at something is to practice over and over again until it becomes routine…. So, the more you read with them the better they become. Sometimes you might read the same book over and over 2 or 3 days in a row just so they can get the repetition.

Another participant revealed that the lack of motivation may exist because the students were highly exposed to other means of learning and entertainment and were not expected to sit down with a book and read. According to Participant 8, a big struggle was getting the students to want to read. The participant explained further by saying, "A lot of it is due to technology. The kids are so excited about that, but it's hard for them to know how to disengage [from technology] and read a book."

When asked how technology was used to promote student learning, Participant 2 revealed that many of the students struggle with reading independently. So, they continued to struggle with some of the digital programs that were used to enhance reading. Similarly, Participant 3 supported the claim by suggesting that this problem

existed because many of the students do not read for enjoyment, which also contributed to their resistance to reading online text.

According to Participant 6, student motivation had more implications for reading outcomes than when examining outcomes by other demographics such as race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. One of the participants reported that there were unmotivated students in each subgroup and many of the students struggled with reading outcomes. According to Participant 8, there was a huge difference in the students' reading outcome when they were motivated to learn. The participant stated. "A lot of kids honestly think they learn to read so they can pass a test."

Participant 8 reported that the motivation level of the ENL population had changed over time. The example was given that 5 years ago, the ENL population of students was more consistent with completing homework and exhibiting fewer behavior problems. However, today, these unfavorable behaviors were found to be more prevalent. When asked what may have brought about the change, the participant indicated, "I don't know but I believe it may have a lot to do with the expectation of other students and staff."

Participant 7 attributed the students' lack of motivation to the kinds of stories within the reading adoption. The participant explained: "I feel like a lot of the times, the reading program gives kind of boring readings that kids can't relate to anyway or it just doesn't interest them."

Participant 1 claimed that students' lack of motivation may exist because there were not enough reading materials that appeal to their interest or background knowledge.

The participant went further to explain: "I feel it is important that you include whatever their (the students) culture is. They have to be able to read stories that include things that they can identify with."

Attempting to increase the students' motivation for reading seemed to be the challenge that many of the participants experienced. Participant 8 expressed: "Part of my job is to foster the love for reading in all of the students. However, the task gets increasingly hard as the years go by." Using incentives to try and increase student motivation was common among the participants. However, intrinsic motivation, or having a love for reading, was found to be the most sustainable and contributed to students' reading outcomes. However, helping students to develop intrinsic motivation was reported to be a difficult task. One participant shared a strategy for getting students to develop a love for reading. The participant found that sharing personal experience with reading for enjoyment was a way to instill a love for reading within the students.

The participants shared several strategies that were used to enhance the students' love for reading. A total of six out of the 10 participants reported that reading aloud to the students before and during instruction was an effective way to increase students' intrinsic motivation for reading. However, there was a variation in the methods that the participants used when reading aloud. Several participants indicated that students were more engaged with read-aloud books that interested them. Participant 3 stated that reading aloud was a way to hook the students in wanting to continue reading books independently. Participant 7 said that they allowed the students to choose the read-aloud books for the class. Participant 10 claimed that reading aloud to students helped to build

comprehension skills. The participant also noted that many of the students who struggled with reading fluently were more engaged in the process. However, another, participant reported that the students who struggled with reading fluently and understanding what is being read relied heavily on having the teacher read aloud and were not motivated to read independently. Participant 10 also reported that reading aloud to students contributed to their love for reading. One strategy that was used by the participant was choral reading. The participant stated: "I always have the students read passages together. This helps them be able to read fluently and increases their confidence to read orally."

Several of the participants shared their belief that the students would develop a love for reading when they have books that are interesting to them. A total of four out of the 10 teachers reported providing books and other literature in the class library that were of interest to the students. However, Participant 4 indicated that some of the age-appropriate literature was above the students' independent reading levels. The participant stated that sometimes it was necessary to provide books that were significantly below the students' reading level. Participant 4 also communicated that this practice was effective at allowing the students to feel reading success and build their level of confidence in reading. The responses from many of the participants helped to understand the challenge with increasing the students' intrinsic motivation which contributed to their below grade-level reading outcomes.

Participant 5 shared some strategies intended to increase the students' intrinsic motivation. The participant reported using anchor charts and acting out scenes in the stories. Another strategy that Participant 5 reported using was finding out about the

students' interests at the beginning of the school year and gathering literature that appealed to their interest. The participant also found that this was a way to build rapport and make the student more open to learning to read.

Participant 3 shared other strategies for instilling a love for reading into the students and increase intrinsic motivation. Some strategies mentioned by the participant were the use of graphics novels, reading shorter passages, and incorporating high-interest readings. Although the participant found that these strategies worked for some students, they did not work for other students.

According to Participant 2, students were motivated to read when they were encouraged to have high expectations for themselves and set goals for being successful. The participant also stated that students wanted to be successful, but they were not taught how to plan for success. One strategy that the participant mentioned was conferencing with the students and helping them set attainable goals for reading.

One participant found that extrinsic motivation was not long-lasting and did little to affect the students' reading outcomes. Participant 9 referred to a program initiated through the library. The participant talked about a program that was designed to motivate students to read at home by offering an incentive if they met a goal set by the classroom teacher. However, the participant found that the students were more concerned with the reward and not developing the skills for reading. The participant revealed: "When it comes down to showing proof that they actually read the books, we all know that the parents just sign the logs, and the students are not reading the books." Additionally, the

participant found that most of the students that were successful at obtaining the rewards were those students who initially had little struggles with reading.

Overall, there was a pattern in the responses from the participants that supported the theme that student motivation affected the reading outcomes and contributed to the challenge of instructing the students. Although some of the participants shared various strategies for increasing students' motivation for reading, they also reported that many of the students continued to struggle with reading outcomes. The responses from the participant provided an understanding of this challenge.

Theme 3: Teachers Perceived That Insufficient Parental Support Affected Reading Outcomes

The teachers perceived that insufficient parental support affected the students' reading outcomes. This theme contributed to answering RQ 1. Also, Gagne's conditions for instruction helped to understand the importance of addressing the challenges teachers face with providing instruction to students with little to no support from parents. Five of the 10 participants indicated that parental support factored into the students' motivation and ability to increase reading outcomes. A similar thought shared by several of the participants was parental support is necessary to increase the motivation of students and improve reading outcomes. This thought was supported when two of the participants shared their experience with working with students whose parents were actively involved within the students' education and those parents who were not involved. Participant 10 shared the following explanation:

When we send reading logs home, all we ask is that they [the students] read 20 minutes a night with a parent and log it. When we collect the logs, you can tell the difference between the students that did the reading logs each night and the students that didn't. The ones that did the reading were the better readers. So, I think there is a direct correlation between parents sitting down with their kids or making sure they are practicing with reading and the students' reading outcome.

Similarly, Participant 6 reported that students whose parents were active participants in their education performed better on reading outcomes and assessments. The participant said:

I think one thing that I do seem to notice is kids that have good parent support seem to do better. I can think of some of the parents that I have seen in the school. Their kids, a lot of the time do better on tests. Not always, but they have more support.

Participant 4 explained that some students without parental involvement outperformed students who had support from parents. With those students, it was reported that their motivation for learning was higher than those students who had not performed well in reading outcomes. This comment also supported Theme 2 because it explained the need for increasing the students' motivation for reading. However, some participants indicated that many of the parents had reasons for not being able to help students at home. Participant 7 noted: "Parents are busy, so they are not able to work with them or read with them as much. So, their [students] reading skills are a lot lower now than when I first started teaching."

Some participants shared their beliefs that other factors hindered the parents' ability to help the students. Participant 6 said that many of the ENL students struggle with reading outcomes because the parents did not have the means to provide literature in the home to support the students' learning. Additionally, parents' knowledge of the English language hindered their ability to help the students at home. Much like Participant 6, Participant 7 expressed the view that the home lives of the ENL students have changed over time and affected the parental involvement they received. For instance, the participant indicated that more ENL parents were working outside of the home and were unavailable to help students.

The perspective provided by Participant 2 helped to understand the importance of parental involvement in a students' overall success. The participant said:

> I feel that parent involvement is a major role in a student's overall achievement. As a teacher, for many years I've had to play many roles in order for my students to succeed. I feel that our students, today, need a social and emotional connection to a role model. No matter the race, just someone they can connect with. Someone to let them know they are loved, and they have a purpose.

There were some commonalities reported by the participants that help to understand the reasoning for the lack of parental involvement in the students' reading success.

Several participants raised the issue of parents being unskilled or unwilling to help their child overcome reading struggles. According to one participant, some of the parents were frustrated with the student when they saw them struggle with reading. The participant supported this account by saying:

I had a parent tell me that they are not the teacher, and it was my job to teach.

I proceeded to tell the parent that all I ask is that they sign the reading log after the

student read the book. The parent responded that it was taking the student too

long to read, and they did not have the time or the energy to listen to the

student finish reading the book.

Although seven out of the 10 participants supported the claim that parental

involvement was needed to improve student reading outcomes, Participant 5

indicated that some students who received parental support and continued to struggle

with reading outcomes. This perspective is also included later in the discrepant case

section of the study. In this discrepant case, Participant 5 explained this alternative

perspective by saying:

Even when parents are involved, some students struggle because they do not have

the basic reading skills to be successful. However, students with parents who are

actively involved may perform a little better on classwork, but they may still

perform poorly on reading assessments.

The lack of parental involvement was not reported to be more common within one

race or ethnic group of students than the another. One participant alleged that there were

parents from each race of students that had not been involved with the students' reading

success. According to Participant 4, there were many parents from each ethnic group who

were not supportive of their child's academic success.

Throughout the interviews, participants shared experiences with working with

students with parental involvement and students without parent involvement. Overall, the

teachers perceived that students with parent involvement were more successful at reading outcomes. The lack of support from parents seemed to present challenges for students at the school.

Theme 4: Teachers Perceived That Many Students Struggled Because of Limited Vocabulary Development and Background Knowledge

The teachers perceived that many of the students struggled with reading because of their limited vocabulary development and background knowledge. Theme 4 supported RQ 1 and was especially important to the study because it led to understanding the challenges of helping the students develop comprehension skills. Additionally, Gagne's theory of the conditions of learning provides support for Theme 4. This theme emerged when I inquired about the factors that contributed to the students' reading success. A total of seven of the 10 teachers referred to the students' lack of vocabulary development and background knowledge as a barrier to their success in reading and comprehension. Participant 2 stated: "Teaching vocabulary is a must when helping students overcome reading struggles." Participant 1 also shared that the struggles students had with vocabulary development hindered their ability to improve their reading outcomes. Additionally, Participant 3 reported that the students did not understand what they read if vocabulary was not introduced before reading the stories. In a similar response, Participant 9 explained:

> If the students can't relate to the vocabulary, they are not going to understand the
>
> reading. So, it is important to teach vocabulary all day in whatever area you teach.

Incorporating vocabulary helps them understand better. I even add vocabulary to

my spelling list.

When asked if the Benchmark Literacy program supported vocabulary

development, Participant 8 shared the belief that it did not. The participant alleged that

the program presented vocabulary that was difficult for the students. The participant also

reported that the ENL students struggled with pronouncing the vocabulary words within

the reading adoption because many of the words did not follow the rules for the English

language. Participant 5 compared the district's reading adoption to other programs that

had previously been used. The participant said a reading program that had previously

been used in the district introduced vocabulary more progressively than the Benchmark

Literacy program. The participant made the following comment about the previously

used reading program: "The Reading Street program introduced vocabulary words at the

students' independent reading level. Then when they [the students] moved up, they

worked with words at the next level." Participant 1 also remarked that the Benchmark

Literacy program lacked components that supported vocabulary development.

Some participants reported the need to develop strategies for helping students

improve vocabulary. Participant 7 reported that the use of pictures helped to increase

vocabulary and background knowledge. The participant provided more details to support

this idea: "For example, we were discussing the word canoe and many of the students did

not know what a canoe was. Then I showed them a picture of a canoe and that allowed

them to better understand the word." Participant 10 shared the belief that vocabulary

development and reading success go hand in hand. Overall, most of the participants saw

the limited development of vocabulary as being one of the barriers to students' success in

reading. Additionally, the Benchmark Literacy program was not effective at helping

students build vocabulary skills.

The concern for the vocabulary development and background knowledge for the

ENL population was common among many of the participants. Participant 4 shared the

belief that many of the ENL students were unfamiliar with common English terms which

affected their ability to comprehend stories that were read aloud to them. This belief also

supported the needs of low SES, lack of background knowledge, and experiences of ENL

students. Participant 4 explained:

> So, if we are talking about New York City and the students have never been or
>
> even heard of New York City, they don't know anything about it. Whereas many
>
> of the other students understand that New York City is one of the most populous
>
> cities in America. If the students are not familiar with New York City, I would
>
> need to stop and explain that to them.

This lack of understanding vocabulary words led to one participant spending more

time explaining the terminology and less time focusing on the reading skill or

concept. Participant 6 attributed the ability to predict the struggles the ENL students

would have with vocabulary words to the years of experience working with the students.

Participant 7 explained a similar strategy that was helpful with teaching the ENL students

vocabulary. The participant explained:

> I would always preview the story searching for vocabulary words that I assume
>
> the students will struggle with. Then I search pictures and objects that I think

would help the students get a better understanding of the word. This worked for

many of the students most of the time.

Participant 6 found that many of the ENL students who struggled with vocabulary

development and building background knowledge were those who struggled with reading

outcomes in their native language. The participant explained: "There are kids that don't

have a good Spanish foundation, or they have learned a dialect, or they have interrupted

schooling. I think some of that had to do with parental support and socioeconomic

status."

Although many of the participants reported that the school implemented

active ENL support services, the development of vocabulary for the ENL

students continued to be a concern. Additionally, the lack of background knowledge for

many of the students was a concern for the teachers providing reading instruction. The

participants consistently shared stories of techniques used to strengthen the vocabulary

and background knowledge of the students.

Theme 5: Teachers Perceived That There Were Many Challenges With Providing

Differentiated Instruction

The teachers perceived that there were many challenges with providing

differentiated instruction. Theme 5 contributed to answering RQ 1 because it helped to

understand the challenge with providing differentiated instruction to students at the

school. Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction supports the understanding of

Theme 5. When participants were asked about effective instructional practices when

working with diverse students, differentiated instruction was the practice that was

reported the most. Differentiated instruction was reported to be an instructional strategy by eight of the participants. Participant 7 indicated that differentiated instruction is encouraged throughout the school district. The participant shared that there was a period in the day that students are grouped according to their performance on an assessment administered by the classroom teachers. The participant also stated that this process allowed grouping of students who may struggle with one skill and perform well at another. However, there were many challenges when grouping students for differentiated instruction.

Although most of the participants reported that the practice of differentiating instruction is very challenging, they continued despite the students' reading outcomes. One challenge of administering differentiated instruction presented by Participant 7, was there were so many levels of performances by the students that the teachers were unable to provide instruction at all the levels. The participant explained:

When arranging the groups according to the levels of the students, I would sometimes have more groups than I can serve in one or two days. Then I would need to consolidate the groups in the interest of time…. I found that sometimes I would need to provide one-on-one instruction to some of the students.

Participant 6 also referred to the varying levels of the students as being a challenge with administering differentiated instruction. The participant indicated that the varying levels of instruction in a single classroom may have ranged from kindergarten to Grade 5. Although the teachers were knowledgeable about how to administer differentiated instruction, there was a limited amount of time to provide instruction that

met the needs of all the students. The participant went on to say: "The teachers would have more groups than they were able to service within a class period."

A major challenge that was presented by the participants was the Benchmark Literacy program minimally supported the need to differentiate instruction. The Benchmark program had been selected within the school district to support the diverse needs of the students. Yet, several of the participants reported that there were difficulties with using the program to provide differentiated instructions to the students. Three of the 10 participants shared the concern that the Benchmark program encouraged differentiated instruction throughout the lessons but there were challenges with implementing the process successfully. One statement made by Participant 4 referred to how some components of the program are being implemented. The participant said:

> I would say the components are there but are they being used properly? No…. I know there's a differentiation piece in our adoption, but it is missing quite a few pieces that you must have. You need more people to really implement the program like it is supposed to be implemented.

In addition to the lack of staff support to provide differentiated instruction, Participant 4 also believed that many of the materials were inappropriately leveled for the students. Another statement by Participant 4 explained the lack of fidelity when providing differentiated instruction using the Benchmark Literacy program. The participant stated: "When the teachers see the program is not working, they don't keep doing it because it becomes a waste of time." Participant 5 also stated that the Benchmark program did little to support the needs of students at different levels of reading. The

participant shared that the reading adoption is on a higher level than most of the students' level of performance. However, Participant 7 said that the initial goal of the Benchmark Reading program was to provide different levels of support for the students. Participant 4 made the following claim when asked how the reading adoption supports differentiated instruction:

Me, personally, I don't think it supports differentiated instruction as much as it should. For us to have a diverse group of students, I think it is hit and miss, depending on the unit and every unit should be diverse. Every unit should be differentiated but we can't because some of the stories are unrelatable to the students that we are dealing with.

According to Participant 8, differentiated instruction that was suggested in the Benchmark Literacy program presented challenges because it was not appropriately leveled. The participant shared this comment:

I think the materials that are provided have a good structure, but the materials used within the structure may need to be adapted for the students. I also think the books aren't leveled appropriately or they don't have enough levels within the grade-level texts. I just think the leveling of the text is not accurate.

Responses from the participants supported the assumption that the Benchmark program endorsed differentiation but did not provide the flexibility to deliver the instruction. Participant 3 stated that the Benchmark program encouraged differentiated instruction by providing posters and other materials that can be used for diverse groups of students. However, the participant also stated that the use of these materials minimally

contributed to the students' reading outcomes because of the level of difficulty of the materials. Participant 3 further explained this statement by saying: "When we try to use some of these materials, the students are still lost because they are not appropriately leveled. So, the students still struggle." This statement supported the idea that the Benchmark Literacy program endorsed differentiated instruction but does not provide the flexibility to deliver it.

Another challenge with differentiating instruction mentioned by Participant 6 was classroom management. The participant said that providing instruction to a small group of students was difficult when other students in the class were expected to work independently. The participant stated:

When teachers are instructing one group, the other students must be able to complete work on their own without disrupting the small group and sometimes that's hard for the students and the teacher…. So, teachers have to try to work through it [the disruptions] or stop the small group lesson and handle the problems.

Another pattern that emerged through the study was the differentiation of instruction minimally helped when instructing students with grade-level materials. Participant 9 expressed the belief that many students performed below grade level, and it was a challenge to provide instruction at grade level. The participant gave the following explanation:

Although we do provide differentiated instruction, many of the students are still behind. They may make improvements, but they may never get caught up. So, when it comes down to grade-level assessments, it may look like they are failing.

Another participant supported the idea that differentiated instruction minimally supports below-level readers with grade-level materials. Participant 1 said: "Students may understand the reading skill presented at the grade level but may struggle to read the grade-level text." The comment helped to understand the challenges of providing differentiated instruction at the students' independent reading level when they are assessed on grade-level material.

These challenges contributed to the level of fidelity and buy-in by the teachers at the school. The lack of fidelity with using the Benchmark program was evident when some of the participants shared various other ways of providing differentiated instruction to the students. One participant shared techniques used to group students for differentiated instruction that they believed were effective. Participant 4 reported the use of heterogeneous and peer support grouping were effective practices. The participant explained:

When I put a low reader with a high reader it challenges the low reader to perform better. It also helps the higher reader to feel success…When you have students at the same level grouped together, no one is motivated to move up. The low stays low, and the high stays high.

Another technique reported by Participant 8 that supported the lack of fidelity with using the Benchmark program was the use of audiobooks for lower-level readers.

This creative technique helped to remedy the deficiencies within the Benchmark program. The participant commented: "When the students listen to and read along with audiobooks, they feel like they are successful at reading and it builds their confidence." Another technique used to group students mentioned by Participant 8 was flexible grouping where students can move up as needed. The participant indicated this practice of grouping students was appropriate because students learn at different rates and they should be able to move at the rate of growth. The participant shared the belief that many of the students try harder within their groups when they know they have the opportunity to move up.

Theme 5 contributed to understanding the challenge of providing differentiated instruction. One major concern was the Benchmark Literacy program was ineffective at supporting the diverse needs of the students at the school. Additionally, differentiation was challenging with the various levels of instructional needs of the students.

Research Question 2

RQ 2 asked about the teachers' concerns related to the resources and training that were needed to enhance the quality of instruction. A total of five themes emerged from the data that shed light on RQ 2. The themes helped to understand the instructional needs of the teachers at the school. The participants provided information about the current support that was provided to teachers and the support that was needed to enhance the quality of reading instruction at the school.

Theme 6: Teachers Perceived Benchmark Literacy Program Failed to Meet

Instructional Needs

Because the Benchmark Literacy program promotes differentiated instruction, Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction was useful in understanding Theme 6. Failure of the Benchmark Literacy program to meet the instructional needs of many of the students was another concern reported by the participants. The participants presented several reasons for their claim. According to four of the 10 participants, many of the teachers discontinued using the Benchmark Literacy program.

A common pattern that was revealed was supplemental materials were needed because the teachers struggled to meet the diverse needs of the students using the Benchmark Literacy Series, the district-adopted reading program. One participant alleged that most of the stories in the reading program were designed for instructing students at or above grade level. Participant 5 reported that the Benchmark Literacy program had little support for students who struggled with grade-level materials. This claim was supported in the following remark: "If I have a student who is reading on a first-grade level, I would need to find a story on that level, then teach the grade-level reading skill or strategy using the first-grade-level story."

Similar responses were reported in support of the perspective that the stories within the Benchmark Literacy program were not appropriately leveled to meet the diverse needs of most of the students. Participant 4 addressed the issue of needing supplemental materials to support the needs of the below grade-level materials. The participant alleged that it was common to expect most of the students to enter the grade

level already two or three grades behind and in need of prerequisite skills. The participant

went on to say, "It is already stressful when kids are coming in behind, and then having

to go out and find supplemental materials makes it even worse."

Although the Benchmark Literacy program was the adopted reading program for

the district, there were four of the 10 participants who said they were not using the

Benchmark Literacy program. The responses of these participants helped to understand

the challenge with providing consistent instruction to all the students at each grade level.

Participant 5 stated that there had been little use for the Benchmark Literacy program in

the classroom, and other materials were being used to support the needs of the students.

Additionally, the participant shared the belief that the Benchmark program seemed to be

"a one size fits all program" which was not conducive to the diverse needs of the students

at the school. Participant 5 also referred to a reading program previously used by the

district that had more success at providing resources that were useful when instructing

diverse students. The participant made the following remark:

> I like using the Reading Street program because it had more components that we
>
> could use to help struggling readers. It was also good because many other schools
>
> across the country used the program as well, and we could find resources from
>
> other school districts.

The use of supplemental resources was common among most of the participants.

According to one participant, the teachers addressed the issue of the need to use

supplemental resources and the school administrators approved the use of several other

programs in addition to the Benchmark program. Participant 8 shared the experience of

using a supplemental program to instruct small groups of students because the level readers provided through the Benchmark Literacy program, were not written at the students' independent reading levels. The participant stated:

> I think it has been a major frustration for the teachers. They definitely need supplemental materials because the Benchmark materials are above the students' reading levels. The teachers have to take time to find the materials and it is overwhelming at times, especially third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers, where people assume that the students are coming in at grade level.

Participant 9 made a similar claim in an explanation about how the students struggle when reading stories from the Benchmark Literacy program. The participant explained that the students lost interest in the material when they struggled to read stories that are far above their independent reading levels. Additionally, Participant 7 claimed: "The students are lost when they read the stories within the adoption because they experience little success with the materials within the program."

Several other participants provided reasons for using supplemental programs instead of the Benchmark Literacy program. Participant 3 described a supplemental reading program that was believed to help students develop comprehension skills at different levels. The participant stated that the program was online and was individualized to build students' reading skills. Participant 6 reported using an alternative reading program to support the ENL students at the school because the Benchmark Literacy program was lacking in support for this population of students. The name of the alternative reading program was not provided by Participant 6. However, the participant

believed that using the reading program helped to support the needs of the ENL students because it provided materials that were relevant to their diverse needs. Another participant referred to the use of a guided reading program for the ENL students that was more useful than the Benchmark program. Participant 7 said:

> I know the ENL teachers do a guided reading program [other than Benchmark] with their students that has been helpful. They also have books in the program for the students. The Benchmark Literacy program has reading books for our grade level as well, but they are way too hard.

In a discrepant case, Participant 2 shared the belief that the Benchmark program consisted of several components that were designed to support the students' diverse needs. However, the participant stated that teachers must be creative when using the program. Participant 2 stated:

> Benchmark has the level readers that can be used by the teachers when they are teaching their small groups. They [the teachers] just need to find the most appropriate ones for their students. Sometimes you just need to spend time planning how you will use it in your classroom.

This discrepant case is also included later in the discrepant case section of the study. In support of this alternative perspective, Participants 3 and 5 also believed that the Benchmark program had components that teachers can use when instructing students. Some useful components of the Benchmark program that were mentioned by the participants were level readers, anchor charts, and other instructional posters. However, the need to find supplemental materials was not denied by either Participant 3 or

Participant 5. Both participants claimed that the Benchmark program was used primarily for whole group reading instruction.

According to Participant 4. The need to use supplemental resources immediately was necessary. The participant stated: "Over the years, I kind of learned where they [the student] are and then supplement immediately instead of waiting because the longer you wait to figure out where they are, it just delays the process." This statement helped in understanding the challenge teachers face when trying to support the diverse needs of the students at the school.

Overall, the participants perceived that the use of the Benchmark Literacy program did not contribute to the students' success in reading outcomes. Responses indicated that additional resources and programs were needed to enhance instruction. Some participants implemented new programs that were more successful at supporting students.

Theme 7: Teachers Perceived That the Needs of Low SES Students Contributed to Reading Outcomes

The teachers perceived that the needs of the low SES students contributed to their reading outcomes. Theme 7 provided information in the study that helped to understand RQ 2, and the theme is supported by Gagne's theory of the conditions of learning. According to Participant 6, over 90% of the students at the school are considered low SES. Several of the participants indicated that the students' low SES status contributed to the challenge of instructing them in reading. In support of this claim, Participant 7 stated: "I have noticed a difference in the SES status of the students over the years, and I also see

the difference in the reading outcomes." Participant 10 also shared the concern that the

students' inability to obtain necessary tools for learning contributed to their reading

outcomes because they were not consistent with practicing at home.

There were opposing thoughts regarding the availability of reading materials for

the students presented by two participants. Although Participant 6 stated that Title One

support was made available for all the students, Participant 4 shared that students' lack of

availability to resources outside of school contributed to their reading outcomes.

Participant 6 believed that many of the students may lack literacy support at

home. The perception from the participant was this lack of support may be due to the

limited literacy skills and financial resources of the families. However, accommodations

were made available to students to address this lack of support. For instance, Participant 2

reported that students were provided textbooks and digital devices to take home, as well

as tutors to support their academic needs. Findings indicated that despite the availability

of these accommodations, students at the school continued to struggle with reading

outcomes.

In a discrepant case, Participant 9 shared the belief that the lack of resources at

home did not contribute to the students' below-level reading outcomes. The participant

believed that students had adequate access to printed material within the classroom.

However, the participant also shared the belief that the students' desires to access the

materials were minimal. This discrepant case is also included later in the discrepant case

section of the study. Participant 9 expressed: "It seems to me that a lot of the kids play

these video games and they read what is on there because that is what's important to them… But when it comes to choosing books, they are not as interested."

There was a pattern that emerged concerning the participants' view of the needs of the students that are low SES. Several participants shared the belief that the students lacked vital resources that were needed to support them in reading. For example, one participant speculated that most of the students had no library or books in their home. The participant went on to say, "The students take books home from the school but most times they have to bring them back so other students can have access to the books as well." Participant 2 stated that the students are sometimes allowed to take textbooks home to read but many times they come back destroyed. Additionally, the participant stated that the students take computer devices home but most of them do not have internet access at home. These concerns helped to understand the challenge with providing resources to support the needs of the low SES students.

One participant referred to the students' low SES status as being a contributor to their reading success, but other indicators were more prevalent. Participant 7 made the following allegation:

Sure, most of our students are of low socioeconomic status and don't have things at home like books and other reference materials to support them when they need it. But the main problem is they have other priorities at home that take them away from studying, such as responsibilities for siblings, worrying about food, whose house they will stay in, and everything else. These are the things that hinder their success.

In a discrepant case, alternative perspectives were presented by three participants. These perspectives are also included later in the discrepant case section of the study. According to Participant 6, the needs of the students appear to be the same, whether they are low SES or not. The participant made the following comment:

> I think I heard someone say that around 94% of our students are of low socioeconomic status but I don't really know the statistics on who is in what class. I think many of their needs are the same…. All I see are students and I just try to meet the needs of all the students.

In another discrepant case, two participants shared contrasting perspectives of whether the low SES contributes to the students' reading outcomes. Participants 5 and 9 shared the belief that low SES does not indicate the students will perform poorly in reading. Participant 9 made the following claim: "I think when the students are motivated, they will do well. It does not matter whether they are low SES or not. They will succeed if they have the desire to." Additionally, Participant 9 shared the belief that some students in low SES performed well in reading. The participant stated: "I have had some students in poverty who have done well in reading." This discrepant case provided an alternate perspective about whether low SES contributes to the students' reading outcomes.

Several participants shared strategies that were used to support the needs of the low SES students. Participant 10 said that the students were allowed to take books home each night for reading. The participant shared the belief that this was a way to make sure the students had access to reading materials. The participant explained this process:

The students have several books and a reading log that they take home each night

and they must bring it back the next day. The student must show evidence that

they read the book or books by having a parent's signature on the reading log.

After they have shown proof, they get another book to take home and the process

continues until Friday.

The responses by the participants revealed that the students received support to

help them with reading success. One participant noted that most of the students had

computer devices that they can take home. However, the participant also shared that

many of the students had no access to the internet. The participant explained that the

students could have access to a school-issued hotspot device free of charge to help them

access the internet. Several participants supported the claim that the low SES students are

supported with resources to help them achieve success in reading.

In summary, most of the teachers perceived that the low SES of the students

hindered their reading success. Although resources and materials were provided to the

students at the school, responses from the participants indicated that resources outside of

school were needed for students to be successful.

Theme 8: *Teachers Perceived That They Lacked Sufficient Resources and Ongoing*

Training to Deliver Quality Reading Instruction

Theme 8 supports RQ 2 because it helped to understand how the need for training

and resources contributes to the challenge of instructing the students in Grades 3 to 5.

Gagne's theory supporting instructional design helps to understand the importance of

ongoing training for teachers. According to Participant 8, ongoing PD is needed to support students with reading struggles. The participant explained:

> Reading is such a complex task, and you have to learn how to evaluate and how to provide scaffolding to kids. So, it's [PD] really ongoing and you must continue to educate yourself and collaborate with colleagues about how to best help each child.

A pattern emerged in the responses of the participants when asked to describe the initial training that teachers received in preparation for teaching reading. Two participants shared the belief that there was a need to have ongoing training in reading. Participant 1 expressed:

> Whenever we have a new reading adoption, we go through the training. But most of the time companies are trying to sell materials. Then we find out that the programs are not like the way they describe and there is no ongoing training after that initial training.

In a similar response, Participant 9 stated that the district provided initial training when they introduced the new reading program and there was no continued support thereafter. The participant went on to say that the company presented the materials in a certain way that appealed to the teachers, but later the teachers found that it was not as it was described. These responses supported the theme that there was a need for more ongoing training to deliver quality reading instruction to the students at the school.

When describing the quality of the training provided by the district, participant 5 began with an extended pause, then responded, "It's, basically, information that I can go

out and get on my own." The participant went on to say, "I am always searching the internet for information that will help me in the classroom." In support of this claim, Participant 2 also said that there was a need for teachers to go out and educate themselves by reading materials that would help them be better prepared to teach reading. Participant 2 went on to say:

> Because I love teaching, I am always researching to find things that will help me. Within the last 10 of the 20 something years that I have been teaching, I have been out there by myself trying to find ways to inspire my students, and I have been blessed to be successful at helping students do well.

The need for the continued support of new teachers by the district administrators was expressed by most of the participants. Seven of the 10 participants indicated that there was little to no support for new teachers to prepare them to teach reading at the school. Some of the participants were not sure if there were any support at all for new teachers of reading. However, four out of the 10 participants referred to a mentor teacher program for the district. One participant explained that this mentoring program was designed to allow veteran teachers to work alongside new teachers to assist them with a range of expectations set forth by the school and the district. On the other hand, one participant said: "The mentor teachers do not seem to have adequate training to support the new teachers in all academic areas. So, the teachers are left trying to figure things out on their own." This allegation helped me to understand the challenge with new teachers being able to deliver quality reading instruction to the students. Additionally,

Participant 9 indicated that the amount of focus that the mentors gave to teaching reading was unknown.

Because several of the participants appeared to be uncertain about the quality of the support from the mentoring teachers, I asked a follow-up question inquiring about other ways new teachers are supported when teaching reading. Four out of the 10 teachers reported that many of the new teachers relied on their colleagues to provide support for teaching reading. However, Participant 1 shared that the support was given from the perspective of the teacher providing the support, not necessarily that of the school or the district. Some participants believed this form of support may contribute to the challenge with teaching reading because it may not be consistent with all teachers at the school or grade level. Participant 1 explained this claim by making the following comment:

> It's like with any situation. I am going to tell you what I know, but is it really what the program supposed to involve? Or is that how you are supposed to utilize the program? So, it is not 100% developed instruction. So, everyone has their take on what they're supposed to do, and they're going to put it in their terms, instead of the corporation really showing you and telling you about the different components of the program and what is the benefit of those components within the program.

This explanation by Participant 1 helped in understanding the challenges for new teachers when teaching reading at the school. In a similar explanation, Participant 9 said that new teachers relied heavily on the support of their veteran colleagues.

Additionally, the participant stated that new teachers were sometimes reluctant about asking for help because they did not want to appear unlearned or ill-qualified to teach reading.

There was a pattern of responses when I inquired about the support for all teachers when teaching the school-adopted reading program, Benchmark Literacy Series. Participant 1 found that some of the new teachers had no idea about what is required to teach the reading program, including materials to use nor how to use the materials to instruct students. The participant went on to say:

> When new teachers ask for support when using the reading program, they may find that some teachers are using one part and other teachers are not. They may even find out that some teachers are not using the program at all. How does this help them teach the program?

Participant 8 provided a different perspective of the support provided by the school district. According to this participant, there had been some support for the two reading specialists at the school. However, the support had been discontinued within the last 3 years. The reading specialists were support staff at the school whose role was to support classroom teachers with reading instruction. Additionally, the reading specialists provided small group instruction to students performing significantly below grade level. Participant 8 shared thoughts about the quality of the support provided to the reading specialist by the school district in the following comment:

> I think a lot of the time the people who are the reading coaches and PD providers, for example, they know you are supposed to do a mini lesson for a particular skill,

and they have the whole idea of how to teach reading, and a lot of them have

never been in a classroom. That is the problem. Many of them (the PD providers)

don't have the classroom experience, and it is not easy trying to fit in all the

components suggested in the training. That's what makes it so hard.

Although most of the participants reported that there was a need for quality

support and training for the reading teachers at the school, two participants believed that

support and training were made available to the teachers. However, this assistance was

not provided to all grade-level teachers. Participant 7 supported the acknowledgment that

there were reading specialists at the school that helped teachers when instructing third-

grade students. In addition to the support for teachers, Participant 7 described another

role of the reading specialist as being support for the students. The participant stated:

We have been given some support from our reading teachers [reading specialist].

Last year, they came down to help me with small group instruction and doing

guided reading quite a bit second semester. So, that was good. The reading

teachers [reading specialist] are always giving support.

According to one participant, the support by the reading specialist helped with some of

the challenges with instructing the students. Participant 10 believed that the reading

specialists at the school were instrumental in supporting teachers with reading instruction.

The participant stated:

So, when I first began this position, myself and another teacher met with the

reading specialist in our building. They spent half an hour just showing us and

training us on what we should do and how we should do it. Then, when we went

virtual, they came in and demonstrated what we should do. They also showed me how to test the students.

Although the participants believed that the support for reading teachers was available at the school, neither of the participants said that the support helped them to teach the Benchmark Literacy Series. Two of the participants stated that they received support from the reading specialist for using an alternative reading program called Guided Reading Plus. Although this program was used by some of the teachers of Grade 3 at the school, Participant 7 shared that the district administrators did not want this program to take the place of the Benchmark Literacy program. However, most of the participants reported little to no support with teaching the Benchmark Literacy program.

Participant 4 shared a memory of the initial training that was provided when the reading program was adopted. The participant communicated:

I think there may have been a training years ago where we went and somebody else talked to us about how they implemented the program in their class. But as far as other training, I don't think I have had any.

On the other hand, Participant 4 did not believe that the new teachers in the district had been provided the training. This perspective was based on the participant's experience with new teachers reaching out to receive help from veteran teachers.

Not all the teachers reported that there was no support for the teacher when teaching the Benchmark Literacy Series. In a discrepant case, an alternative perspective given by Participant 3 provided evidence of training that is offered that would help teachers when teaching the Benchmark Literacy program. This perspective is also

included later in the discrepant case section of the study. The participant stated that there had been online training that was available to teachers. Additionally, the participant indicated that the school district offers after-school training. However, the teachers must sign up when they needed support. Therefore, the training is only given to the teachers who sign up. Participant 3 was the only participant who mentioned this support. There was no mention of how successful the training was to those who attended.

Overall, the participants perceived the lack of training as a hindrance to the success of providing quality instruction to the students. Additionally, most of the participants shared similar thoughts about the lack of support with instructing students using the Benchmark Literacy program, especially for new teachers within the school district. Suggestions were made about further support that is needed to enhance quality reading instruction.

Theme 9: Teachers Perceived That the Pacing Guide Was Not Consistent With Data-Driven Instruction

The teachers perceived that the district's pacing guide was not consistent with data-driven instruction. This theme helped to answer Research Question 2 because it supported the need for effective collaboration among the teachers. Gagne's theory of learning contributes to understanding the use of a pacing guide. The instructional pacing guide was devised by the district administrators to provide consistency of instruction by all teachers at each grade level. The participants in the study expressed concern that the pacing guide did not contribute to data-driven instruction. Participants 6 and 10 both revealed that they were not using the pacing guide when instructing the students.

Participant 10 shared the belief that the pacing guide did not support the students' needs for improving reading outcomes. However, another participant expressed that the pacing guide was designed to provide consistency for all teachers at the school. The teachers perceived that the difference in the use of the pacing guide contributed to challenge with instructing students in reading.

Similar opinions about the pacing guide were shared by Participant 1 and Participant 6. The two participants shared their belief that the pacing guide hinders the teachers' ability to instruct students according to their needs. Participant 1 expressed:

If we truly had data-driven instruction, the students would learn a lot more instead of following a pacing guide. Because with pacing guides, we don't take the students' needs into consideration. All students don't learn at the same pace.

Participant 1 also noted that there are always changes in the pacing guide, such as standards being moved and removed. The participant also believed that the pacing guide can stifle the growth of some higher-performing students.

Although Participant 6 reported not follow the pacing guide when instructing the students, the participant believed there were some advantages of having the pacing guide. The participant explained:

I see some pros and cons from having a pacing guide. I like that we have tried to focus on some of the more important standards through the pacing guide…. I also like the idea of reteaching a standard when students continue to have difficulties. However, I do not like that the students are tested on the standards every three

weeks to see if they master the standards within the pacing guide, but I do not

have a better idea to find out what students have learned.

When responding about how the pacing guide is informed by the data analysis,

Participant 2 said that there were some inconsistencies within the data. The participant

shared the belief that the data analysis presents one aspect of the students' performance,

and the overall picture of the students' performances is not seen. Participant 2 explained

this claim:

> When we [the teachers] meet to look at the data, it sometimes says that the
>
> students did well in prior grades, but when we get them in third, fourth, and fifth
>
> grades it looks like they have lost it somewhere… So, if we don't refocus on the
>
> skill within the pacing guide the students miss vital skills within that grade level.

Although several participants shared the concern for using a pacing guide at their

specific grade level, Participant 8 reported on the difficulty of using a pacing guide at any

level of instruction. The participant claimed: "I think that pacing guides at each grade

level would be difficult because children develop at different rates. It could possibly lead

to more whole group reading instruction."

Both Participants 1 and 8 provided suggestions on how to better meet the needs of

the students instead of using a pacing guide. Participant 1 indicated that the pacing guide

should not be based on assessed standards. The participant went on to say, "When the

only standards on the pacing are those that will be assessed at the end of the year,

students miss vital prerequisite skills that are needed to be effective readers." The

participant also shared the belief that some students need to be introduced to more

standards than those on the pacing guide. Participant 8 made this suggestion for providing reading instruction:

> It would be more beneficial for teachers to have access to a guide that covers reading skills that need to be mastered at each grade level. If teachers have a clear understanding of what is expected for the child to become proficient at a given level, it can help guide the instruction. However, I do think there is a need for a pacing guide for whole group mini lessons.

In a discrepant case, Participant 5 provided insight on the usefulness of the pacing guide. This perspective is also included later in the discrepant case section of the study. The participant stated: "The pacing guide can be helpful as far as students in the district being taught the same content and materials around the same time." However, the participant went on to say, "The guide can be a hindrance because the time allotted to teach the content may not be enough time for some students to adequately understand the concepts. This discrepant case provided an alternative perspective of the usefulness of the instructional pacing guide.

In summary, most of the participants shared that the teachers perceived the instructional pacing as not being successful at promoting data-driven instruction. Although the purpose of the pacing guide was said to be a way to guide reading instruction across the school district, the participants believed that it should correlate with the data. The participants also shared that having a pacing guide can be a hindrance to quality instruction.

Theme 10: Teachers Perceived That They Needed More Time to Collaborate With

Colleagues

The teachers perceived that they needed more common planning time to collaborate with colleagues. Theme 10 helps to answer RQ 2 because it provides an understanding of the support that the teachers desire at the school. Although some teachers at each grade level shared planning time, there was a need for teachers to meet with other grade-level colleagues and across grade levels. When inquiring about the support for the teachers at the school, it was revealed by several participants that there were not sufficient opportunities for the teachers to collaborate with colleagues at different grade levels. This lack of support led teachers to provide instruction that was inconsistent and may not have supported the needs of all the students. Participant 7 described a grade-level meeting format that encouraged collaboration. However, the participant did not believe it supported the needs of the teachers and encouraged consistency. The participant explained:

> In our grade-level meeting, we look at student data and discuss what we are going to do as a grade-level to improve the students' reading outcomes and we group the kids for remediation of a particular standard. But rarely do we talk about other stuff, like how to help kids who are still struggling with skills they should already have mastered, like phonics and stuff like that…. It's like everybody is doing their own thing in their classroom.

The need to collaborate was expressed by several other participants. Participant 1 shared the belief that all teachers must collaborate and learn from each other. The participant stated:

There needs to be more collaboration at all levels within the school. Teachers need to collaborate. Special area teachers need to collaborate with classroom teachers. Classroom teachers need to collaborate with special education teachers. The administrators really need to make sure there is time set aside for more collaboration and more share of practice. As a result, I think the kids will see the interaction and appreciate the fact that everyone on board is looking out for their best interest.

According to Participant 9, veteran teachers needed to assume the responsibility of collaborating with new teachers without being assigned or told by administrators. The participant stated: "Veteran teachers just take the new teacher under their wings and help them with whatever they need help with." Participant 7 found that this process was beneficial to both the new and veteran teachers. The participant claimed: "Many times the new teacher has a lot of support for the veteran teacher, especially with technology." These responses by the participants helped to understand the benefits of collaboration at the school.

One participant revealed that there was a challenge with encouraging teachers to collaborate because of the fear of being judged by other teachers. Participant 8 shared the belief that teachers need more opportunities to collaborate in a nonjudgmental environment. The participant explained:

Teachers need to feel free to speak out when they need help because it is assumed

that all teachers know how to teach reading… But sometimes they may need to

feel supported and not think they are being judged when they ask for help.

In a supportive statement, one participant reported that new teachers struggle as to

whether they should seek help from veteran teachers. Participant 2 stated: "New teachers

don't always want other teachers to know what they don't know. So, they just work in

isolation. Sometimes they [the new teacher] can provide a different perspective on how to

teach a skill."

The concern for encouraging collaboration was shared by several participants.

Participant 8 provided more of an explanation for how to create an environment that

fosters collaboration among teachers. The participant recommended:

Since we don't do much collaboration during PDs, teachers should be allowed to

visit other teachers' classes. We could be teaching the same thing and still learn

so much from each other if we were free to do that without judgment and it's a

safe environment.

In a discrepant case, another perspective was revealed by Participant 6. This

perspective is also included later in the discrepant case section of the study. Although

most participants expressed the need for teachers to collaborate more and share ideas

about teaching reading, Participant 6 shared the belief that teachers are provided

opportunities to collaborate during grade-level meetings. Participant 6 stated:

I like when teachers spend time reflecting on what they think they did well to

teach a standard and give advice and collaborate within their grade level on how

to best teach a standard. I feel like it would be even more beneficial if teachers just opened up and shared more.

Overall, most of the participants perceived that the lack of collaboration contributed to the challenges with instructing the students in reading. Responses from the participants also helped to understand that the teachers perceived that collaboration was needed to support new teachers at the school. Additionally, the participants perceived that veteran teachers needed collaboration to glean from the ideas of the new teachers at the school. Lastly, the participants shared thoughts about how to effectively engage in collaboration across disciplines.

Discrepant Cases

In this study, there were four discrepant cases within the data. The first discrepant case applied to Theme 6 regarding the Benchmark Literacy program. Two participants found that the Benchmark Literacy program supported the teachers using differentiated instruction. The two participants spoke of several components that provided leveled materials to support the needs of the students. One of the two participants shared the belief that teachers had to be creative when working with the students using the leveled materials. The other participant believed that displaying the anchor charts within the program supported the diverse needs of the students. These discrepant cases are important to note because it explains the inconsistency with the use of the Benchmark program as well as the need for further training in the use of the program. Although several participants spoke of training that was provided at the initial stage of

implementing the program, these outlying cases support the need for ongoing and consistent training in the use of the Benchmark program.

The second discrepant case applied to Theme 5 where inquiry about whether the low SES contributed to the students reading outcomes. Two participants did not support the claim that the low SES hindered the students' ability to be successful in reading. One of the two participants believed that there was enough literature and support at school that was available for the students to access. The participant also stated that some resources are available for students to take home if needed. The other participant did not support the claim that the low SES contributed to the students reading outcome because the participant believed that the students lacked the desire to access the materials at school. This information provided an understanding of the various perspectives of the teachers that may contribute to the challenge of instructing the students in reading.

The third discrepant case applied to Theme 8 when one participant did not support the claim that the pacing guide was not consistent with data-driven instruction. The participant expressed appreciation for having the instructional pacing guide for instruction. The participant also spoke of the consistency that exists across the district when an instructional pacing guide is used. This discrepant case was useful in understanding the perspectives of the teachers about what they believe was important when using an instructional pacing guide.

The last discrepant case applied to Theme 10. All but one of the participants believed that there was a need for more collaboration among teachers. One participant shared the belief that ongoing collaboration is available to teachers during grade-level

meetings. The participant spoke of a strategic weekly planning opportunity where teachers can look at data and discuss how to support students at all levels of instruction. However, the participant stated that the amount of time to collaborate was limited and the discussion was led by an administrator. This discrepant case helped to explain the importance of teacher-led collaboration.

Summary

The problem in this study was teachers were struggling to meet the instructional needs of the students in Grades 3 to 5 with limited resources and training opportunities that were provided through the school and district. To address this problem the district implemented a reading program to support the needs of the teachers when instructing the students. Despite the efforts made by the teachers and the administrators, the students continued to struggle with reading outcomes. The purpose of this study was to investigate the experience, perspectives, and practices of the teachers for Grades 3 to 5 about the challenges involved in meeting the instructional needs of the students in reading and to explore the teachers' suggestions for improved resources and training. To study this problem, I developed two research questions to explore the perspectives of the Grades 3 to 5 reading teachers at the school. I used a basic qualitative case study method that allowed me to understand the perspective of the participants through their experiences. Gagne's theory of learning and instructional design was instrumenting in framing the study. Additionally, Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction supported the understanding of the challenge teachers face when instructing students. In this study, I collected data through interviews with 10 elementary reading teachers of students in

Grades 3 to 5. The point of saturation was achieved after interviewing the 10 teachers because there was no new information that was being presented to help address the research questions.

There were 10 educators were chosen through purposeful sampling. Each teacher had been or was currently teaching reading at the study site within the last five years. Most of the participants interviewed were veteran teachers with at least 15 years of experience. The years of experience contributed to the teachers' ability to provide their perspective of the changes they had witnessed in the students' overall reading performance throughout the years. Each of the participants spoke about many of the challenges with instructing the students in reading. However, the participants also shared many strategies that were used to support the needs of the students despite the many challenges. Most of the teachers provided strategies that they believed helped the students be successful at reading outcomes. Each of the participants revealed a desire to receive more training in how to better meet the needs of the students in reading.

There was a total of 10 themes that emerged from the data. Each of the themes is listed:

Theme 1: Teachers perceived that there was insufficient support for diverse students at the school.

Theme 2: Teachers perceived that the students' motivation affected their reading outcomes

Theme 3: Teachers perceived that parental support was insufficient.

Theme 4: Teachers perceived that the students struggled because of limited vocabulary development and background knowledge.

Theme 5: Teachers perceived that there were many challenges with providing differentiated instruction

Theme 6: Teachers perceived that the Benchmark Literacy Series failed to meet the instructional needs of many of the students.

Theme 7: Teachers perceived that the needs of low SES contributed to the reading outcomes.

Theme 8: Teachers perceived they lacked the resources and training needed to deliver quality instruction.

Theme 9. Teachers perceived that the pacing guide was not consistent with data-driven instruction.

Theme 10: Teachers perceived that they needed more time to collaborate with colleagues.

The two conceptual frameworks used in this study is Gagne's theory of the conditions of learning (1985) and Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction (2014). Applying Gagne's theory of the conditions of learning helped to establish the importance of the quality of instruction by the teachers and contributed to understanding the student growth and development. (Gagne, 1985) believed that the teacher's role in student learning is important to their growth and development. Gagne included the nine events for instruction to support his philosophy. Therefore, Gagne's theory of the conditions of learning appropriately supported this study. Tomlinson's theory of differentiated

instruction also supported the study. Tomlinson believed that students could learn

rigorous concepts when they were presented at an appropriate level. Additionally,

Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction provided an understanding of the

importance of administering instruction at the appropriate pace for the students.

Evidence from the literature suggested that over half of the elementary students

in America perform below grade-level expectations (National Assessment of Educational

Progress, 2019). Additionally, the literature supported the need to provide differentiated

instruction to decrease the achievement gap between diverse groups of students (see

Stone, 2018). The themes developed to support RQ 1 provided substantial information

that helped to understand the perspectives of the teachers related to the challenges with

instructing the students in reading. The participants' responses provided an in-depth

understanding of the phenomenon. Findings are summarized in the following narratives.

Regarding the demographics of the students at the school, there were some

similarities in the responses of the participants. Most of the participants reported that the

instructional needs of the student population at this school presented challenges. The

concern that was expressed the most was the support for the ENL students. The results of

the study by Garrett et al. (2019) revealed that students in schools where there is more

ENL support performed better than students in schools where there is little support for the

students. Many participants believed that there was an abundance of support for the ENL

students. However, most of the support was provided through pullout programs.

Additionally, the participants reported that the reading program had little support that

contributed to improving the reading outcomes of ENL students. Therefore, consideration for the ENL population needed to be made when selecting a new reading adoption.

Several participants were concerned with support for African American males at the school since this was said to be the lowest-performing subgroup according to the state assessments. The participants believed that there needed to be a focus on the needs of these students that would support their reading outcomes. A suggestion made by one participant was to incorporate literature that was interesting to this subgroup of students. This suggestion was consistent with culturally responsive teaching. Aronson and Laughter (2016) reported that culturally responsive teaching contributed to understanding students' diverse cultures and values while closing the achievement gap. Although two participants believed that there is support and resources made available to all the students at the school, most of the participants agreed that the support did not yield favorable reading outcomes for the students.

Most of the students at the school were of low SES as well. The participants presented concerns that the students lacked resources at home to support their learning needs. Although there were a lot of resources and reading materials at the school, the students struggled when accessing resources outside of school because of financial restraints. One participant believed that the students' ability to use school-supplied materials at home could support their learning needs. However, it was revealed that many of the students lacked the desire to use school-supplied resources at home. Another challenge revealed by the participants related to instructing low SES students was the development of vocabulary and background knowledge. According to Heppt et al.

(2015), the struggle with academic language contributes to the problem of below proficient reading performance for low SES students. Despite the efforts made by the teachers to increase the students' vocabulary development, they continued to struggle with reading outcomes.

Findings also indicated that the lack of student motivation contributed to the challenges of instructing them in reading. According to Haerazi and Irawan (2020) motivation determines how involved a student will be in the learning activity. This concern for the students' lack of motivation became the basis for understanding many of the challenges faced by the teachers when instructing the students. Two participants shared the belief that when students were motivated to read, reading outcomes are much better. The results of the study by Wigfield et al. (2016) supported the idea that reading comprehension is connected to the students' reading motivation. Many of the participants claimed that the students with high intrinsic motivation were those who performed well with reading outcomes. In support of this position, Troyer (2019) reported a positive relationship between students' intrinsic motivation and reading comprehension. Although several of the participants shared strategies for increasing the students' intrinsic motivation, they reported that many of the students continued to struggle with reading outcomes.

Another theme that supported RQ 1 was related to parent involvement. Hunter et al. (2017) found that children who learn to read early in their education were from families that were actively providing literacy and reading support. The lack of parent involvement also contributed to understanding the students' lack of motivation. For

example, one participant stated that many of the students who were reluctant about accessing reading materials within the classroom had little to no parental support at home. As many of the participants shared their belief about trying to receive parental support, it became apparent that support to the students was inconvenient for some of the parents or the parent was not aware of the need to support the child. For example, one participant said that a parent stated that trying to work with their child at home became too time-consuming. Additionally, another participant reported that one parent was not aware of how to support the student at home. According to Epstein and Sheldon (2016), parents may be reluctant about helping the students because of their lack of knowledge of how to support the student. This research contributes to understanding the challenges with instructing the students with little to no parent support.

On the other hand, another participant shared that some parents had a desire to support the students' reading success but had little opportunities at home because of other responsibilities, such as caring for younger children and working extensively outside of the home. It was found through the participants' responses that the students who had sufficient parent involvement were more successful with reading outcomes. In contrast, there were students with no parent involvement who continued to perform well in reading outcomes. The participants believed that those students developed a high level of intrinsic motivation for reading.

Further analysis of the data revealed that the students lacked vocabulary skills and background knowledge contributed to the challenges with instructing them in reading. This lack of skills hindered the students' ability to develop comprehension skills. Carter-

Smith (2018) supported the theory that vocabulary development is a fundamental skill that contributes to reading comprehension. The participants reported that teachers spend more time helping the students develop vocabulary skills and less time working on other skills needed for growth in reading. The participants believed that this challenge was especially true when working with ENL students. The evidence to support this belief was revealed when a participant shared the need to use pictures and objects to explain some vocabulary terms. Findings indicated that despite the teachers' effort to help students increase vocabulary skills, their reading outcomes did not improve significantly.

The literature supports the effectiveness of differentiated instruction at the elementary level for diverse learners. This study revealed that teachers struggled to provide differentiated instruction that helped the students with grade-level materials. One participant believed that although the students may show growth in reading outcomes, many of the students continued to struggle to master grade-leveled materials. Additionally, some participants indicated that there was little support within the reading program that supported differentiation of instruction. Therefore, the participants stated that the teachers often used supplemental materials to meet the diverse needs of the students.

The participants in this study reported that there was a need to provide quality training and PD to support the instructional needs of the teachers. Curtis et al. (2019) found that when teachers actively engage in quality training and PD, they are more confident in their instructional delivery. Most of the participants said there was little to no initial and ongoing training provided to the teachers for implementing the district reading

adoption. Therefore, the teachers shared their belief that they needed more training to effectively teach the reading program at the school. When the participants shared their perspective about the support for new teachers, it was revealed that the new teachers relied heavily on the support of veteran teachers at their grade level to teach reading. However, there were challenges with the new teachers receiving support from veteran teachers. For example, the support provided may not have been consistent with the district's expectation for implementing the program.

Another concern by the participants was the teachers' need for training when working with ENL students. The participants revealed that most of the support for the ENL student was through a pullout program. So, the participants believed that the teachers needed more training to effectively work with the ENL students within the classroom. Additionally, some participants claimed that many of the ENL teachers were not fluent in Spanish which may contribute to their inability to effectively instruct the students in reading outcomes.

The need for collaboration also contributed to the instructional needs of the teachers. The participants revealed that there were not enough opportunities provided for the teachers to collaborate at the school. According to Althauser (2015) collaboration among teachers helps to transform instructional practices. Although most of the participants shared their belief that new teachers rely on the assistance of veteran teachers, they also reported that all teachers needed opportunities to collaborate, either during PD or grade-level meetings. In a discrepant case, one participant believed there

were opportunities for collaboration among teachers. However, many of the teachers

believed that the collaboration needed to be teacher-led rather than administrator-led.

Section 3: The Project

The major themes that were developed from conducting interviews with 10 teachers at a Midwestern elementary school in this study led me to propose that a 3-day PD for teachers as a viable option for addressing the challenges with instructing elementary students in reading. This PD workshop is entitled, Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading, and is designed to provide teachers with strategies and techniques that may help elementary students build reading skills and achieve success in reading outcomes. The techniques and strategies are practical for use in the classroom with students in Grades 3 to 5 that struggle with developing and strengthening their reading skills; therefore, the 3-day PD is the best option to address the needs of the teachers of elementary students.

The 3-day sessions will all be held online and available to teachers through the Zoom meeting platform. One day will be devoted to the proper implementation of the Benchmark Literacy program. For the remaining 2 days, the teachers will learn strategies and techniques to use when instructing elementary students in reading. Resources relating to best practices when instructing ENL students will also be provided to the teachers. Teachers will be able to engage with the facilitators and other attendees through the Zoom platform. The training will incorporate activities focused on readings; reflections; accessing scenarios; and evaluating past thinking, personal biases, and perceptions. Teachers will also engage in small group collaboration and role-playing. All materials shared in the sessions will be made available online for teachers to review after the workshop.

The following learning outcomes will be addressed in the 3-day, online, PD sessions. These outcomes are aligned with the needs identified in the current study. In the PD sessions, the teachers will:

- Explore research related to the reading development of elementary students.

- Acquire instructional techniques that will support the needs of elementary students during small and whole group reading instruction.

- Demonstrate the use of resources that support the learning of elementary students.

- Create and modify lessons, activities, and assessments to meet the needs of elementary students performing at different levels.

- Collaborate and plan for continued use throughout the remainder of the school year.

Rationale

In this study, the teachers shared that they had not received an adequate amount of training in the execution of the Benchmark program. They also revealed that teachers who only used the Benchmark Literacy Series to provide instruction were experiencing the least amount of success with students reading outcomes. After reviewing the literature about the program, I realized that the success of the program depended heavily on implementing the program with fidelity; therefore, it was necessary to address the teachers' need to receive extensive training on the use of the Benchmark program.

The study results also revealed the need for teachers to receive training in effectively adapting instruction and using supplemental materials to meet the needs of

elementary students. Many of the participants reported teachers having made instructional adaptations during each lesson and using supplemental resources when needed; however, the instructional adaptations did not sufficiently yield favorable outcomes for the students. This PD will guide teachers in learning evidence-based strategies for adjusting instruction designed to yield desirable reading outcomes for elementary students.

This PD project could contribute to helping teachers build confidence in their ability to provide quality instruction to elementary students. The literature review revealed that when teachers are provided quality training and PD, they are more confident in their instructional delivery (see Curtis et al., 2019). Therefore, I needed to create a PD that would cater to the needs of the teachers at the school under study. Teachers can apply the techniques and strategies learned from the PD in their classroom and build confidence in their ability to provide effective instruction to elementary students.

I designed the PD project to enhance the reading instruction of teachers of elementary students in Grades 3 to 5 by providing resources and practical strategies that are researched based. Initially, I researched the Benchmark Literacy program, including schools that were successful at increasing the reading outcomes of elementary students using the program. I also delved into components of the program that presented strategies that were effective at the school under study. Then, I planned a day of the PD to provide intense training in the effective use of the program. Along with PD on the implementation of the Benchmark program, I also planned 2 days of providing effective instructional adaptations for elementary students, including strategies, techniques, and

resources that the teachers will be able to use in the classroom when adapting

instructions. Each of these components will be utilized to enhance the reading instruction

of Grades 3 to 5 teachers of elementary students. The findings presented in this study and

the PD program can benefit all stakeholders and have the potential for positive social

change. The performance of both teachers and students can be positively influenced by

the outcomes of this proposed PD.

Review of Literature

The literature review in Section 1 helped in the formation of the problem related

to the challenges with providing effective instruction to elementary students. In this

literature review, I summarize and provide examples of effective practices for teaching

reading in the classroom. Additionally, studies supporting the effective practices and

strategies for implementing the practices in reading instruction are also presented in this

subsection.

The literature reviewed in this section support the importance of delivering

effective PD. A PD project is appropriate to address the problem presented in this study

because it could contribute to improvements in reading instruction. According to Darling-

Hammond et al. (2017), effective PD should result in a change in how teachers teach and

how students learn. When developing this project, I considered the following qualities of

effective professional development: (a) teacher engagement, (b) focus on student

learning, (c) data driven, and (d) the contribution to teacher performance.

The literature highlighted various formats to provide effective PD in, such as webinars, online leadership style surveys, and collaboration with colleagues. The structure of the literature review supported the purpose and rationale for the PD project.

Additionally, this literature review helped to explain why the PD project addresses the issue of providing effective reading instruction to elementary students. Each component of the PD program was supported through the literature on the best practice for instructing struggling readers. Therefore, an explanation for the importance of this PD project is explained in Section 3 of my study.

The framework that supported this PD project was the whole teacher approach. This framework emphasizes promoting all aspects of the teacher's development, including attitudes, knowledge, skills, and classroom practice (Chen & Chang, 2006). Additionally, this approach is multidimensional, domain specific, integrated, and developmental (Chen & Chang, 2006). I explored each aspect of the teacher's development that is integrated into this approach in this PD project. The whole teacher approach was also supported in the literature review. The design, implementation, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the project were guided by the principles within this approach; therefore, the whole teacher approach was an appropriate framework for this PD project.

I obtained most of the sources cited in this literature review through the education databases accessible through the Walden University Library, including SAGE Publications and ERIC. Some sources were also found using Google Scholar. The search terms used were *PD, effective PD, elementary reading strategies, Benchmark Literacy*

Series teacher training, guided reading strategies training, PD for small group reading instruction, and *PD and effective reading strategies*. After using these terms to find articles, I narrowed my search to only include articles published within the last five years. In Google Scholar, I also found articles from similar studies by using the "cited by" feature. Through this feature, I was able to expand my search and gain access to more studies supporting PD and reading strategies.

Professional Development

PD is a way to provide teachers with information and training that helps in the delivery of quality instruction. According to Fullan (1995), PD is continuous learning focused on both formal and informal learning pursued and experienced by the teacher. PD for teachers should also meet the demands of current issues related to classroom instruction. The ability to use the knowledge and understanding gained through PD in practice increases the likelihood of teachers being willing to engage in the professional learning experience (CITE). According to Patton et al. (2015), PD should ultimately increase the teachers' ability to support the needs of the students.

It is also essential to know what components of the PD maximize the positive effects of the experience. In a seminal study, Desimone (2009) identified five core features of high-quality PD that are critical to increasing teacher knowledge: content focus, coherence, active learning, duration, and collective participation. According to the researcher, these features are reflected in recent research as being the components that are the most promising for increasing student achievement.

Over time, the structures and demands for PD have changed. When school improvement is necessary, providing PD that addresses the gaps in knowledge and incorporates research-based strategies for instruction is essential (Cavazos et al., 2018). Since the 2001 mandate of NCLB, PD for teachers has gained more emphasis (McCay, 2019). In response to the NCLB guidelines, many school administrators improved and increased opportunities for teachers to receive PD within their district and funds for PD were distributed to school districts (Wieczorek, 2017). However, the standards set for high-quality PD were interpreted differently across states. In 2015, the ESSA brought about a new set of guidelines for PD. Under the new set of guidelines, effective PD was described as any professional learning resulting in the change in how teachers teach and improvements in how students learn (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). These guidelines have changed the structures and demands for PD.

Transformative Learning

Effective PD must be sustainable and transformative. Mezirow (1997) supported the social constructivist theoretical model by identifying three areas that show how an adult (i.e., teachers) transforms learning:

- Teachers reflect on what they believe about effective teaching and how new learning fits into that frame.

- Teachers reflect individually or with peers about their assumptions and beliefs of what is included in instructional practice.

- Reflective rational discourse leads teachers to act and transform their beliefs and behaviors.

Additionally, Martin et al. (2019) provided three aspects that contributed to the transformation of instruction: social content, the role of the administrator, and cohesion between PD and the needs of the students and teachers. PD projects are designed to support transformative learning that must also be sustainable.

Technology and PD

The integration of technology in the schools has increased the need for PD on how to use technology in the classroom. Since 1995, the efforts to infuse technology into the schools have resulted in over $18 billion being devoted to schools across the United States (Stokes-Beverly & Simoy, 2016). However, a gap developed between teachers having the use of technology at their disposal and the degree to which technology contributes to their professional growth (Siefert et al., 2019). Since the infusion of technology, teachers have struggled with how to properly integrate the use of technology in the classroom. According to a survey conducted by Siefert et al. (2019), about 20% of teachers across the United States reported that technology has made their work harder. The struggle may exist because of the lack of proper training in the use of technology. Although many teacher-training institutes now integrate the use of technology within the courses for the classes, there continues to be a debate about how to successfully incorporate the use of technology within instruction (McCay, 2019). In a qualitative, multi-case study, Durff and Carter (2019) interviewed educators to determine how they overcame the barriers to technology integration. Their results revealed that providing appropriate PD and establishing support for the use of technology for learning were some of the strategies that helped the teachers overcome the barriers to technology integration.

Providing PD that focuses on how to use technology for reading instruction could contribute to the success and confidence of teachers and increase student reading outcomes. Therefore, providing PD on how to integrate technology in the classroom is important to both teacher and student success.

Effective PD

The effectiveness of the PD opportunity should be determined by the outcome for the teachers and students. According to Patton (2015), effective PD may be linked to teacher engagement, teacher practice, and student achievement. (Patton, 2015) listed the following eight core features of effective PD:

- is based on the teachers' needs and interests,

- acknowledges that learning is a social process,

- includes collaborative opportunities within communities of educators,

- is ongoing and sustained,

- treats teachers as active learners,

- enhances the teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge,

- facilitated with care,

- focuses on improving the learning outcomes of students.

The first four features relate to teacher engagement in the PD opportunity. Engagement in the PD increases the likelihood of the teachers learning and growing from the content. Core Features 5 to 7 are linked to the improved practice of the teachers. These features help to understand the importance of the teachers applying the knowledge gained from the PD, and the last Core Feature 8 is related to the impact the PD have on

students' learning outcomes (see Patton, 2015). Therefore, when creating a plan for implementing PD opportunities, administrators must consider these core features while evaluating the needs of the staff and students at the school.

Teacher Engagement

Effective PD allows teachers to be engaged in the learning process. Harper-Hill et al. (2020) noted that an effective PD program could impact the teaching practice only when teachers engage in the PD. Additionally, the researchers indicated that engagement in PD allowed the teacher to gain practical information. Engagement in the PD is a way for teachers to also incorporate prior knowledge and take ownership of the professional learning. According to Patton et al. (2015), when teachers are provided opportunities to participate in deciding what and how they will learn in the PD, ownership of the learning is increased. Ownership of the content presented in the PD may contribute to the teachers applying the knowledge within the classroom. Therefore, involving teachers in the planning of PD programs and keeping them engaged is essential to the effectiveness of the program.

Collaboration

Collaboration among colleagues was another effective way to engage teachers in the PD process. Collaboration among teachers helps in transforming instructional practices (Althauser, 2015). According to Jao and McDougall (2016), the time teachers spend collaborating contributes to their effectiveness and student success. During PD, collaboration is a way for teachers to learn from the practice of colleagues and reflect on their thinking as well as develop new understanding. However, trust is essential for

teachers to effectively collaborate. Also, Tallman (2019) found that when teachers are

comfortable and open to collaborate, they are more willing to question current practices

and try new ones. Rodesiler and McGuire (2015) explained that when teachers work with

colleagues during PD, they can improve areas of weakness within their instructional

practice. Collaboration among teachers can also be done informally, such as within

hallway conversation. In a seminal study, Desimone (2009) revealed that any activities

and interactions that increase or improve the knowledge and skills of the teachers can be

a form of PD. Informal interaction among teachers may occur more frequently than

formal PD. Therefore, collaboration among teachers is an effective way to engage

teachers in the PD opportunity.

Student Performance and Data-Driven PD

The goal for teacher training and PD should be to improve the academic

performance of students through improvement in teacher performance. According to

Brown and Militello (2016), teachers are continuously judged on the student academic

outcomes. Additionally, when teachers gain knowledge and understanding about the

academic content, they are better equipped to provide quality instruction to the students.

Therefore, student performance should be a focus for PD.

Effective PD should also be data driven. Data driven PD can improve

achievement (Lai & McNaughton, 2016). Administrators or other PD providers could

collect data on the teachers' knowledge level and current practice before designing the

PD program (Hirsch et al., 2019). (Hirsch et al., 2019) also stated that these data can

pinpoint those teachers who have similar PD needs. This practice gives the teachers a

voice in what they will learn. Teachers may be more willing to participate in the PD

when they believe their voice is being heard. Additionally, PD programs should be

designed based on student data. Administrators and teachers should review student data

and devise a plan to improve performance within the PD program. In a seminal study,

Hayes and Robnolt (2007) described a PD model where Reading Excellence Act grant

coordinators in an elementary school compiled and used student achievement data to

devise the PD program for the teachers. Matching student achievement data to PD, each

grade level received different models of PD for the teachers. Kindergarten through first-

grade teachers received training in phonics and spelling instruction. The PD program for

second through fourth grades addressed the instructional weakness in reading fluency and

reading comprehension. PD models that use data to inform the program could create

teamwork among the teachers. Therefore, using data to devise the PD is an effective

method.

Peer Mentoring

Another form of effective PD is peer mentoring. Mentoring is a form of PD that

focuses on one-on-one feedback and encouragement (Desimone & Pak, 2017). This form

of PD is effective because mentoring provides immediate responses to teacher practices.

However, both the new teacher and the mentor teacher must develop a level of honesty

and resilience during the mentoring process because it involves providing advice about

both strengths and weaknesses related to the teaching practices (Carr et al., 2017).

Additionally, rapport between the new teacher and the mentor is essential to the success

of the PD opportunity. According to Pearce et al. (2019), an important component of peer

mentoring is the partnership between the teacher and the mentor. Investing time to

develop this relationship is vital to the effectiveness of this PD model. When done

effectively, peer mentoring also contributes to expanding the knowledge level of both the

experienced and novice teachers. According to Kelly and Cherkowski (2015), novice

teachers can learn new practices through the expertise of the more experienced teacher

and the experienced teacher can gain new ideas from the new teacher. Therefore, peer

mentoring is an effective PD model for all teachers.

Teacher Performance

PD may contribute to improving the quality of the teachers' overall performance.

District and school administrators should consider improvements in the teacher

performance as an intended outcome of the PD opportunity. According to Kraft et al.

(2018), PD is an effective way to improve the teachers' knowledge and instructional

practice. Providing content for the PD that support the instructional needs of the teachers

is important to the success of the PD. Additionally, PD provides a way for teachers to

self-reflect on their instructional practice (Markussen-Brown et al., 2017). The self-

reflection may result in improvements and changes in the teaching practice. Self-

reflection also helps the teacher become more accountable for their overall teaching

performance. Holding teachers accountable for the learning outcomes during professional

development contributes to the success of the PD (Babinski et al., 2018). This practice

leads to teachers being more likely to learn and grow from the PD opportunity and

ultimately apply the concepts learned into the classroom. This accountability could also

contribute to improving the teachers' instructional performance. Therefore, effective PD programs should help to improve the quality of instruction for teachers.

Job-embedded PD is an effective model for teacher training and PD that improves the quality of instruction for teachers. Dennis and Hemmings (2019) found that teachers needed job-embedded PD geared toward the instructional needs of the students. Job embedded PD could also contribute to the teachers developing knowledge related to reading content and instruction. Cavazos et al. (2018) examined the effects of job-embedded PD programs in reading. The results of the study indicated that the content knowledge of the teachers increased, and they used more evidence-based practices. Therefore, job-embedded PD models are effective at improving the quality of instruction for teachers.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are a form of job-embedded PD. PLCs provide a work environment that encourages PD, collaboration, and innovations among teachers (Brown & Militello, 2016). The learning and development within the PLCs are relevant to the needs of the teachers and classroom instruction. The focus of PLCs illuminates the teacher outcomes by leading to change in the teaching culture and practice (Ning et al., 2015). Additionally, creating this atmosphere of community among teachers is important to the achievement and success of the students. So, PLCs are an effective job-embedded PD for teachers.

PD and Reading Instruction

Providing teachers with PD that supports reading instruction could contribute to the improvement of students' reading outcomes. Collins et al. (2018) evaluated the

effectiveness of a PD model on students' reading skills. The results of the study revealed that after the teachers participated in the PD and implemented the skills learned, they saw improvements in both the teachers' knowledge and the students' reading outcomes.

PD programs with a focus on a specific subject area contributed to improving students' reading results. Providing teachers with the tools needed through focused PD initiatives could help improve students' reading outcomes (Didion et al., 2020). Didion et al. (2020) completed a meta-analysis to examine the effect of teacher PD on reading outcomes for students in grades kindergarten to eighth grades. The results revealed that PD had a moderate, significant, effect on reading achievement. However, the researchers also noted that PD alone was not likely to improve the reading scores of the students. Therefore, PD supports teachers as they provide quality reading instruction in the classroom.

High-Quality Reading Instruction

Because of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of elementary students, providing reading teachers with high-quality PD is essential. Vernon-Feagans et al. (2018) presented the results of a high-quality PD program for impoverished rural schools that helps to enhance the skills of struggling readers. This PD program, targeted reading intervention was used as a Tier 2 intervention within the response to intervention framework. Within this framework, the teachers provide differentiated instruction to individual struggling readers. The findings revealed that struggling readers in the targeted reading invention treatment classrooms showed greater gains in reading compared to struggling readers in control classrooms. In a similar study, Doubet and Southall (2018)

indicated that focused high-quality PD that includes strategy-modeling contributed to shaping the teachers' beliefs and practices of instructing struggling readers. Therefore, high-quality PD is important to meet the instructional needs of elementary students.

Determining what constitutes high-quality PD is essential to any PD program for reading instruction. The meta-analysis by Didion et al. (2020) examined the effect of teacher PD using the conceptual framework by Desimone (2009). This framework consisted of four core features that are central to high-quality PD for reading. These features are intensity, relevance, active learning, and collective participation. Although little consensus has been reached about what makes these features effective for teacher learning, the importance of using them was documented in the meta-analysis by (Didion et al., 2020). Additionally, the researchers concluded that PD that incorporated each of these features yielded successful outcomes for the teachers. So, there must be criteria for determining what is considered high-quality PD.

Intensive and Sustained Support

High-quality PD for reading instruction should be intense and sustainable. Intensity, which refers to the number of hours spent in PD, may vary when determining the need for optimal change in teacher performance and student achievement (see Kennedy, 2016). However, a considerable amount of time devoted to the professional training opportunity is necessary to maximize the effect of the experience. Intense and sustainable PD for reading instruction could be presented using several models. One model is coaching. Reichenberg (2020) examined the effects of literacy coaching for teachers of adolescent English language learners. According to the researcher, literacy

coaching provides ongoing training to teachers at the pace and time of the teacher receiving the support. The findings in Reichenberg's study suggested the likelihood of sustained changes in the literacy practices of the English language teachers were associated with literacy coaching. Therefore, intense, and sustainable training is important to high-quality PD.

Evaluation of the Professional Development

To determine the effectiveness of the PD, it is important to thoroughly evaluate the program to determine its quality. PD became an integral part of policies to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the schools (Ingvarson, 2019). Effective PD contributed to growth in student achievement as well. Therefore, it was important to understand whether the PD experience was worthwhile and impactful to the teachers and the students. Because student performance on high stakes testing is the most common form of evaluation for PD programs, knowing that the experience impacted the knowledge and practice of the teachers was also essential (Crockett & Crockett, 2016). Therefore, determining the effectiveness of a PD program is important to both teachers and students.

One way to determine the effectiveness of PD is to evaluate the PD program. Evaluation of PD must be strategic and purposeful. Using a quality evaluation model could contribute to developing an effective PD program. Two important factors considered in PD for schools were student achievement and teacher performance. Guskey's five critical levels of evaluation (Guskey, 2002) were a model used to evaluate the PD of a school district in California. The five levels are participants' reaction,

participants' learning, organizational support, and change, use of new knowledge and skills, and student outcomes. The district administrators learned that there were gaps in the way PD was evaluated within their district. Through this model, the researchers were able to identify the gaps and adjust the evaluation model to address the concerns of the participants. Therefore, evaluating a PD program is essential to determining its effectiveness.

Teacher-led evaluations of a PD program could provide quality information in determining its effectiveness. McChesney and Aldridge (2019) examined the nature and quality of practitioner-led PD evaluation. The result of the study determined that there was a significant gap in theory and practice related to PD evaluations. Within the study, the researchers showed that theoretical recommendations for evaluating a teacher's PD are not reflected in the routine school-based evaluation. On the other hand, teacher-led evaluations could provide meaningful information to administrators that are based on practical needs. Therefore, the most useful PD evaluations were practitioner or teacher-led evaluations.

Project Description

In the PD program that I designed; participants will receive a 3-day training related to meeting the instructional needs of elementary students in Grades 3 to 5. The training could take place during the summer or three consecutive Saturdays within the school year. Although the sessions would be exclusively online, active participation could be encouraged. All sessions would be recorded for later review or viewed by others not participating in the live sessions.

Resources and Existing Support

The resources that will be needed for the PD are computer devices. Each participant may use the device provided by the school district or personal device. Additionally, the reading specialist and classroom teachers will be encouraged to provide input based on their knowledge and experience related to the topic of best practices when teaching reading. Collaboration among the participants will be encouraged to maximize the opportunity for sharing of ideas and strategies when teaching reading.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

A potential barrier that may hinder the success of the PD project is participation is voluntary. Teachers may choose not to participate because the sessions are outside of the normal workday for participants. Additionally, no compensation will be provided to the participants. A possible solution to this issue is to offer free materials that could support the teachers when instructing the students in reading.

Another potential barrier that could affect the success of the PD project is the technicalities of the presentation platform. The sessions will convene through the Zoom platform. Although this meeting platform is designed for video and audio meetings as well as conferencing, the reliability of the connection and communication is uncertain. Additionally, the Zoom platform allows for minimal collaboration opportunities among participants. A solution to this barrier is to test the format beforehand and inform participants of the possibilities of technical issues and offer an alternative meeting format.

Project Purpose and Goal

The purpose and goal of this PD project were to provide reading teachers of Grades 3 to 5 students with research-based strategies for instruction as well as training on the use of the Benchmark Literacy Series. After completing the study, participants revealed the need for training on the use of the Benchmark Literacy Series as well as effective strategies for instructing elementary students in reading. The participants were not confident in their ability to implement each component of the Benchmark Literacy Series, especially with struggling elementary students in Grades 3 to 5. Teachers reported having to make instructional adaptations to meet the needs of the students in reading. Therefore, this project would provide teachers with research-based strategies for teaching students in Grades 3 to 5 and training on how to implement the Benchmark Literacy Series.

Intended Outcomes

The following are the intended outcomes of the PD project. The participants will receive:

- research-based strategies that support the instructional needs of elementary students.
- knowledge in the use and implementation of each component of the Benchmark Literacy Series.
- opportunities to collaborate with colleagues about a new understanding of how to implement each component in the classroom instruction.

- an opportunity to reflect on their classroom instructional practice and

  determine how to apply the strategies learned within the training.

Project Timeline and Implementation

An implementation timeline was created before the PD. Table 5 provides the

timeline for planning and implementing the PD experience.

Table 5

PD Timeline

Task number	Description	Duration	Start	End
1	Determine date for PD	1 day	Day 1	Day 1
2	Confirm date with administrators	1 day	Day 2	Day 2
3	Provide proposal of project content	1day	Day 3	Day 3
4	Receive approval for project content	5 days	Day 4	Day 8
5	Research and gather printed materials to support project content	3 weeks	Day 6	Day 28
6	Organize content	5 days	Day 28	Day 32
7	Devise invitation list	1 day	Day 32	Day 33
8	Send initial email invitation	1 day	Day 34	Day 34
9	Determine budget for training resources	4 days	Day 35	Day 38
10	Plan topic for training	5 days	Day 39	Day 43
11	Finalize agenda	1 day	Day 44	Day 44
12	Set up online meeting	1 day	Day 45	Day 45
13	Send reminder email, agenda, and link to online meeting	1 day	Day 46	Day 46
14	Develop Pre and Post Survey	2 days	Day 47	Day 49
15	Test online format	1 day	Day 50	Day 50
16	Conduct online training	3 days	Day 51	Day 53
17	Assessment of PD	1 day	Day 54	Day 54

Project Evaluation Plan

Determining if the outcome of this PD project was successful is important and must be done strategically. So, at each stage of the planning and implementation, I would consider the objectives and goals and whether they are being met. Another consideration that would be made is the strengths and weaknesses of the project. Formal and informal assessments would help provide information about the strengths and weaknesses of the

project as well as learning outcomes for the teachers. I would also administer a pre-and-post survey to gather information about how much knowledge was gained through the PD project. The assessments would help me determine the success of the project.

Gathering information through a formative assessment is one way I would evaluate the project. The use of a formative evaluation would be necessary to gather immediate feedback about whether the goals and objectives are being met. (Cai & Sankaran, 2015). To accomplish this task, I would ask questions about the information that is being presented throughout the sessions. Some questions will include "How does this information support your classroom instruction?" "How can you use these strategies with your students?" and "How does this information help to improve your reading instructional delivery? Another way to gather immediate feedback is to have the participants work in groups to discuss takeaways. Then have one participant share out highlights from the group's discussion. At the end of each daily session, participants would have the opportunity to ask questions that may not have been answered during the session. This opportunity would assure that the session met the needs of the teachers. Therefore, a formative evaluation is one way I would evaluate the PD project.

A summative evaluation would be another evaluation technique that would be utilized at the end of the 3-day session to determine the overall success of the project. The assessment will help me determine if the goals and objectives of the project were met. This information would be provided through the post-survey. In this survey, I would ask rated scale questions as well as open-ended questions to determine if the participants are better prepared to implement the strategies in their classroom. Participants would also

be encouraged to provide suggestions on how to improve the PD sessions. By using a

summative evaluation, I would be able to determine the overall success of the project.

Stakeholders

Several stakeholders will benefit from the proposed PD project. These

stakeholders are the district administrators, the school administrators, the teachers, and

the students at the school. The district administrators will benefit in that they will be able

to evaluate the success of the training that will be provided to the teachers at the study

site and determine if other schools could benefit from the PD. The school administrators

will benefit by providing relevant training for the teachers that will support their reading

instruction at the school. The teachers will receive research-based training that will

enhance their reading instructional methods and the students will benefit through the

implementation of the strategies that the teachers receive in the PD.

Project Audience

The target audience for this PD experience is teachers of elementary students,

specifically those teaching reading to students in Grades 3 to 5. Other stakeholders that

may also benefit from the contents of this PD are reading coaches and interventionists.

Additionally, administrators could benefit from attending and engaging in this PD

program.

Project Implications

To contribute to positive social change, I created a professional development

project. This PD project is designed to support reading teachers of the local elementary

students in Grades 3 to 5. This PD project will be focused on providing teachers with

research-based strategies for instructing elementary students. The 3-day PD session may prepare the reading teachers to implement effective instructional strategies that will contribute to increased reading outcomes in the students. Through the interactive format, teachers will engage and provide input about strategies and best practices that are presented. Teachers could also benefit by planning and executing the strategies within their practice with underperforming elementary students. According to Covay et al. (2016), PD could ultimately contribute to the academic achievement of students and build the teachers' skills in delivering quality instruction. Therefore, this PD project is needed to help veteran and novice teachers when instructing elementary students in reading.

This PD project has implications for social change around training for educators and support staff working with diverse elementary students in reading. Along with supporting teachers of elementary students, the PD project could have a positive effect on student reading achievement. The strategies and best practices presented could reflect in the classroom instruction and contribute to the students reading performance. Collins et al. (2018), found that after teachers participated in a PD designed to enhance their reading instructions, they saw improvements in the students' reading skills. Therefore, the use of these strategies in the classroom could yield positive effects on the students' reading outcomes.

Based on the findings presented in this study, the teachers perceived that they needed PD of research-based strategies that would support their instructional practices when teaching reading to students in Grades 3 to 5. Providing PD that incorporates research-based strategies for instruction is essential when school improvement is

necessary (Cavazos et al., 2018). Additionally, the students' reading outcome could increase because of the effective implementation of the PD. Therefore, this PD could yield improvement in the teachers' instructional practice and students' reading achievement.

Section 4: Reflection and Conclusion

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

The strength of the virtual, 3-day, PD project shared in Section 3 was its potential to increase the teachers' knowledge and understanding of best practices when teaching reading. Research-based principles were presented and explored to increase the reliability of the best practices. Discussions about the effectiveness of the practices were included throughout the PD. I devoted a considerable amount of emphasis to strategies for increasing student motivation because the concern was identified through the responses of the participants. The project was designed to evoke high levels of participation and engagement as well as reflections on personal practices and biases when teaching reading. The PD also provides practical details that could be used in the classroom to enhance the quality of instruction. Opportunities for collaboration are also provided and encouraged.

Another strength of the project is the opportunity it provides to increase the teachers' knowledge of the Benchmark Reading program at the school. The results of the data analysis in Section 2 revealed that many of the teachers wanted more knowledge about how to effectively implement the Benchmark program within their reading instruction. One day of the PD is devoted to providing knowledge to the teachers about how to best use the various components of the program within the classroom. I developed the project based on the need for support identified by the participants in Section 2. With the support of the literature in Section 1, I also identified practical strategies that would

strengthen the ability of the teachers to implement the various components of the Benchmark program.

One final strength of the project was the relevance of the topic and strategies presented in the PD. I developed the topic was developed to focus on the needs identified by the participants in Section 2. The strategies presented apply to the immediate needs of the students served at the study site. Additionally, the strategies are research based and supported by recent literature.

Limitations

One limitation of the project will be obtaining a physical location for the 3-day PD session. Because of a national pandemic, the physical gathering of the participants is discouraged; therefore, the meeting place will be online through Zoom, a virtual meeting platform. The data from the study indicated that the teachers lacked the time and opportunity to collaborate with colleagues. The Zoom meeting platform will limit the participants' ability to work cooperatively with other participants; however, the capability of breakout rooms within the Zoom platform will provide an opportunity for the teachers to discuss some topics in small groups. Although I will make efforts to allow the participants to work and participate in group discussions, there will be challenges with engaging with other participants in a virtual format.

Another limitation to this PD project was the focus on the instructional needs of the teachers at the Midwestern U.S. school under study. Despite the richness of the data collected in the study, the generalization of the findings may not be valid. The project may have been strengthened by gathering additional data from a larger sample of schools

rather than focusing on a specific study site. Additionally, a larger sample may add reliability to the findings in the study. This limitation decreased the possibility to generalize the findings in this study.

Recommendation for Alternative Perspective Approaches

An alternative approach to online PD would be to incorporate new reading strategies within the monthly, schoolwide staff meetings. Incorporating these strategies during the monthly meetings could help the teachers receive ongoing training as they implement the best practices within their instruction. Additionally, the teachers would have the opportunity to have discussions more frequently about what strategies work best within the classrooms. Therefore, sharing these reading strategies during the monthly staff meeting would be a recommended alternative approach to online training.

Another recommendation would be that the teachers collaborate with other teachers of Grades 3 to 5 within the school district. This approach would help the teachers gather the perspectives of other colleagues within the school district and increase the knowledge base of the teachers at the school under study. Additionally, the collaboration could provide the teachers with opportunities to share and gain best practices for teaching reading. Collaboration about the Benchmark program could also help the teachers with techniques for implementing the various components of the program in the classroom. Collaborating with other Grade 3 to 5 teachers in the district would be an appropriate alternative approach to online PD because it would yield support for the needs of the teachers at the school.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

Through conducting this study, I have learned a vast amount about the idea and process of scholarly research. Before deciding on this study, I explored several related topics of interest related to reading and reading program evaluations. I decided on this specific topic after inquiring about several interests of the teachers at the school under study. The teachers were mostly concerned about the challenges with instructing the students at the school and the below grade-level reading outcomes of the students. After identifying the problem and purpose for this study, I began the process of gathering literature related to the concerns of the teachers. Aligning the problem, purpose, and research questions was also an important part of developing a scholarly research study. Through this research process, I became increasingly vested in gathering more support for my study in the recent literature. After weeks of intense research, I gathered a considerable amount of support for this study. What I learned from this research allowed me to expand my knowledge of providing reading instruction and best practices when teaching reading to elementary students. I also learned the importance of effectively exploring the literature to present a valid and scholarly study.

I experienced many challenges during the data collection process that strengthened my ability to develop a scholarly study. One lesson learned was that the sample size and collecting sufficient data contribute to a credible research study. When recruiting participants for the study, I learned that 10 participants were the minimum number of participants needed to reach saturation within the data (see Creswell, 2018).

This level of saturation became apparent when I noticed that there was no new information being presented in the interview of the last participant. I also learned that maintaining an unbiased approach was crucial to scholarly research; therefore, I was careful to only include the perspective of the participants in the study. This was quite difficult because I had opinions and ideas related to teaching reading that may have added value to the study; however, I was unable to include these ideas within the study. I found that the data collection process added great value to the purpose of the study.

Project Development

The development of this project emerged after 20 years of teaching in an urban elementary school. I had taught reading within several schools in the Midwest and noticed a pattern in the reading performance of the diverse students served within these schools. As I witnessed the many challenges with instructing the students and the continual below the grade-level performance of the students, I was concerned about their success. When the teachers at the study site showed interest in wanting to understand these challenges, I began to develop this study. My goal was to present a study that would contribute to changing the trajectory of below-average performance of the students at the study site.

It was enlightening to see that there was a lot of support in the literature related to this study. The peer-reviewed articles and other related Walden final studies that were reviewed were instrumental in helping me to gather information and support for the current study. Categorizing the information gathered in the research made it easy to create an outline and organize the literature. The Main Idea, Evidence, Analysis, and

Lead out, plan, suggested by my committee chairperson, was useful in effectively organizing each paragraph in the literature review section. The support provided by the literature contributed to me developing a quality research study.

Leadership and Change

This project was instrumental in helping me develop as a leader. The knowledge gained from the research and data collection and planning processes expanded my perspectives as a practitioner and future researcher. Although I realize that this study and project only have the potential to help the teachers at the study site, I believe the information presented is useful to others as well. I learned that the role of a leader is to listen to others and provide what is needed for a positive change in the knowledge and performance of others, even if the information provided is not applied. Therefore, my ability to develop as a leader was strengthened by this doctoral capstone process.

Throughout my journey as a Walden doctoral student, I have been encouraged and inspired to be a change agent. The process of completing the final study contributed to my desire and ability to be a part of positive change in the field of education. I learned that leaders inspire others to also be a part of positive change. This PD project was designed to create teacher leaders among the participants who could become change agents through this process. I now realize that becoming a change agent is a continuous process. My efforts to be a part of positive change will not stop after this project. This study has influenced my desire to support other efforts to improve the quality of reading instruction for students. This final study has provided the encouragement I need to

continue developing as a leader and change agent. The inspiration I have acquired as a

Walden doctoral student has played a major role in my development as a leader.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

When reflecting on this project study, I began to think about the extensive amount

of time it took to complete. I also thought about the iterative process for completing

scholarly writings. I realized that it was more important to be thorough in this research

study than expeditious. The results presented required efficient and quality time and

effort. The subject of reading instruction and students' reading performances had been

addressed many times in recent literature; therefore, the findings of this study contribute

to the body of research related to reading instruction. The amount of time and effort

devoted to this study contributed to the success and the importance of the PD project.

As I reflect on this PD project, I believe that it will be beneficial to the teachers

and students at this midwestern U.S. school. The challenges with providing reading

instruction to elementary students at this school are well documented in this study, and

this PD project addresses the needs identified in Section 2. When applying the skills and

strategies presented in the project, teachers could improve the quality of reading

instruction administered to the students. Additionally, students could improve their

overall reading outcomes. Ultimately, this PD project will contribute to improvements in

the delivery and outcomes of reading at the school under study.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Implication for Positive Social Change

In his study, I examined the perspectives of reading teachers in Grades 3 to 5 about the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the elementary students at the target site. The results revealed that the teachers at the local school struggled to meet the instructional needs of the students and the teachers' need for PD on research-based reading strategies. The proposed 3-day PD project will provide teachers with research-based strategies for instructing elementary reading students at the local school.

The PD project could contribute to positive social change for many stakeholders within the local community. The teachers at the local school could benefit from the PD project by gaining a better knowledge of research-based strategies for instructing elementary students. The PD project will also benefit the teachers by providing them with the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues about developing additional strategies for overcoming the challenges with instructing the elementary students at the local school. The implementation of the research-based strategies could help the students in the classroom improve their reading. Stakeholders in the community will benefit through the social change of having schools where students receive a quality education that prepares them to be productive citizens. Additionally, an organized society is established when the students are better able to think for themselves (CITE).

One methodological implication derived from this study stemmed from the data collection process. I conducted the interviews through the Zoom platform. This format had several challenges that affected the flow of the process, such as a technical glitch that

caused a disconnection in communicating with the participants. Additionally, the Zoom platform made it hard to observe nonverbal ques from the participants. My recommendation for other researchers would be to conduct the interviews in person when possible, to alleviate these issues.

Applications

The application of the PD is for reading teachers of students in Grades 3 to 5 at the school under study. The PD could support the instructional needs of the teachers by providing knowledge about best practices for teaching reading to the elementary students at the school. The PD program can also provide an opportunity for collaboration among the teachers about what works when instructing elementary students. Participants in the PD program could immediately use the skills and strategies presented in their classroom instruction.

Direction for Future Research

The findings in this present study revealed the need for support to teachers of students in Grades 3 to 5 relating to challenges with instructing students in reading. The results also revealed the need for collaboration among the teachers that would support these identified needs. The PD project addressed these needs by presenting best practices for teaching reading to the students in a format that encouraged collaboration among the teachers. Future research could investigate the effect of using best practices when instructing below grade-level students in reading. The following research questions could be explored.

- What are some reading strategies that are effective for instructing below grade-level students?

- What reading strategy is most effective when teaching below grade-level students in reading?

- What reading strategy is least effective when teaching below grade-level students in reading?

- How could teachers best implement the research-based strategies to support the needs of below grade-level students in reading?

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of reading teachers in Grades 3 to 5 about the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the elementary students at the school under study. Despite the efforts made by the teachers to support the needs of the students, the students continued to struggle with reading outcomes. The results revealed the teachers' need for knowledge and application of best practices within the reading instruction provided by the teachers. The results also revealed the need for collaboration among the teachers to support their instructional needs. The participants indicated that consistent support for the teachers was essential to provide effective reading instruction to the students. The results of the study supported the need to provide PD programs that are focused on the needs of the teachers. The PD project proposed in Section 3 was designed to address the needs identified by the participants in this study. The knowledge and skills presented in the PD program could contribute to the needs of the teachers as well as the improvement of reading outcomes for the students.

Exploration of this phenomenon may contribute to other studies related to providing effective reading instruction to elementary students. I believe the results in this study will lead to an increased understanding of the challenges with instructing elementary students as well as best practices that will yield improvements in the students' reading outcomes. I desire that teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders will use the knowledge within this study to inform their decisions about policies and procedures related to reading instruction and students reading outcomes.

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Appendix A: The Project

Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Outline for 3-day online PD

Overview

This PD project was designed to address the instructional needs of elementary students in Grades 3 to 5. The purpose is to provide the teachers with training in the use of the Benchmark Literacy Series and research-based reading strategies to support the learning needs of elementary students. The teachers will also reflect on personal instructional practices and determine how to implement the strategies within the classroom.

Target Audience

The target audience for the project is Grades 3 to 5 reading teachers of elementary students. Literacy coaches, reading specialists, and building administrators will also be invited to attend the PD program.

Goals and Objectives

The goals and objective for the PD session are:

- The participants will engage in the PD sessions through discussion and collaboration about teaching reading.

- The participants will read and respond to articles related to teaching reading.

- The participants will observe and respond to multimedia about best practices when teaching reading.

- The participants will apply knowledge of PD content through role-playing and modeling reading strategies.

Evaluation

Participants will complete formative and summative evaluations. The formative evaluation will be a pre-survey about their knowledge of the Benchmark Literacy Series and their knowledge and use of instructional strategies for reading. Throughout each session, checkpoint questions will also serve as an evaluation of their understanding of training information. The summative evaluation will be completed on the last day of the session. The participants will complete a post-survey and provide feedback about how they will apply the concepts in their classroom.

Resources and materials needed

- PowerPoint presentation
- Electronic device
- Internet connection
- Pens or pencils
- Pre-survey
- Post-survey

Workshop Agenda (Day 1) Best Practices for Teaching Reading

Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Welcome, Introduction, and Objectives (10 minutes)

Facilitator welcomes all participants (Slide Display)

Facilitator gives a brief overview of the study and objectives (Slide Display)

Facilitator gives the schedule for the day and expectations for the Zoom format (Slide Display)

Facilitator introduces icebreaker

Ice Breaker Activity- Kahoot- Teacher Movie Trivia (25 minutes)

Participants will log into the Kahoot game site. Then use a code to connect and answer the 10 questions. After answering each question, the computer will rank the players by who answered correctly first. The game is complete when all 10 questions are answered. The first, second, and third place winners are displayed on the screen.

Participants will then be assigned a number for participating or engaging throughout the 3-day training and PD. (Only used with certain activities. Participants will be informed when numbers are being used.)

-First Whole Group Activity

My Ideal Classroom (40 minutes)

Each participant will generate a list that describes a classroom that they would consider ideal for maximum instruction and learning in a reading class.

Description may include, but is not limited to:

- Teacher motivation and knowledge level

- Student motivation and knowledge level

- Availability of resources

- Teacher/Student engagement within the classroom

After 10 minutes, participants may choose to share the ideas listed. Facilitator will jot down all the ideas that are shared. As a group, the participants will decide what are the first, second, and third most important ideas on the list.

Other questions that could be included in the discussion.

- Why is the first idea the most important?

- Who is responsible for making sure these ideas are in place for learning?

- Which is more important for student learning, student behavior, or teacher behavior?

15 minutes break.

Activity 2: Looking at Best Practices for Teaching Reading (40 minutes)

https://youtu.be/vNV8baJGdWU

What makes the reading approach in this video successful?

What would make the outcome different?

As participants are discussing the video, the facilitator is writing down the answers provided.

Further discussion questions:

- Are best practices effective in all reading classroom settings?

- How do you determine if the best practice actually works? (Is it the practice or just the group of students?)

- How do you determine whether to continue or discontinue the practice?

Lunch Break 1 hour

Welcome back and recap of the morning session.

Afternoon Session: What Works and How Do You Know? Effective Reading

Instruction. (45 minutes)

- Participants will be given a list of "best practices" for teaching reading.

- Participants will categorize the list according to what they believe works always, sometimes, or never.

- Participants will randomly be put into Zoom breakout rooms to discuss their lists and generate a list for each category (Always, Sometimes, Never). After 15 minutes, each group will select a spokesperson to summarize their discussion and present their new lists.

- Final discussion as a whole group

Facilitator: Topic: Good, Better, or Best Practice? (40 minutes)

Day 1 Wrap-up- Place lingering questions in the chat for tomorrow.

Workshop Agenda (Day 2) Motivating Students to Read

Opening- Share simple and good breakfast recipes (5 minutes)

Discuss/Answer questions or concerns from yesterday's session.

Activity 1: Motivated? NOT! (25 minutes)

Participants will share some myths about students who are motivated to read.

Facilitator will read a series of events describing students' reading habits.

- Participants will respond as to whether they believe the student is motivated or not for reading.

- Participant must explain their answer as to why they believe the student is or is not motivated to read.

- Groups discuss whether they agree or disagree with the participant.

Final discussion-why is motivation for reading important? 10-15 minutes

Video: Inspiring Lifelong Readers

 https://youtu.be/ERSZb2wHFDw

Discussion: (25 minutes)

What were some strategies mentioned in the video that promoted reading motivation?

What strategies did not promote reading motivation?

Break- 15 minutes

Facilitator: Role Play: "I Hate Reading" (25 minutes)

- Facilitator portrays several students who do not like reading.

- Participant volunteer to be the teacher that inspires the student to enjoy reading.

https://www.readingrockets.org/article/reading-motivation-what-research-says

- Participants will be given a link to the article about motivating students to read.

- Participants will make notes of some effective strategies for motivating students to read mentioned in the article.

- Groups discuss strategies and how they could be used in their classroom.

- Facilitator will cover the highlights of the article.

Lunch: 1 hour

Question and answer session (Recap of session) 20 minutes

- Are all students who have high reading motivation successful at reading outcomes?

- Are all students with low motivation for reading unsuccessful at reading outcomes?

- What role does reading motivation play in reading outcomes?

- What are some effective strategies for motivating students to read?

Facilitator topic: Intrinsic versus Extrinsic motivation (30 minutes)

PowerPoint presentation

Application Activity (30 minutes)

- Facilitator gives reading lesson scenarios.

- Participants work in groups of 3 to create reading lessons that are motivating students. (Breakout rooms)

- One participant presents the lesson to the whole group.

Facilitator Daily wrap-up and question and answer session (remaining time)

Day 3: Benchmark Literacy Training

Morning opener: Share personal stories about student growth in reading

Participants will complete a pre-assessment about their knowledge and usage of the

Benchmark Series

Topic: What is Benchmark Literacy Series? (45 minutes)

http://literacy.benchmarkeducation.com/

- Facilitator inquires about what the participants already know about the

  Benchmark Literacy program and generates notes.

- Participants contribute by sharing details about the program.

- Participants watch a video about the program.

- Participants share the new knowledge gained from watching the video.

Facilitator summarizes the discussion about the philosophy of the program.

Benchmark Literacy in action.

Video https://youtu.be/hyrviVkJ_vl

Facilitator: Whole Group Lessons (30 minutes)

- Value of whole group instruction

- How to present whole group lessons

- Model lesson for whole group instruction

- Discussion

Break: 15 minutes

Facilitator: Small group Lessons (30 minutes)

- Value of small group instruction

- How to present small group lessons

- Model small group lesson

- Discussion

Facilitator led discussion: Incorporating Vocabulary (30 minutes)

- Volunteer participants will select a vocabulary word.

- Participants will explain various ways to introduce the word to students.

- Participants will discuss other effective strategies for introducing vocabulary

  words.

Lunch 1 hour

Topic: What is the Purpose of Leveled Readers

Facilitator: How and When to Use Leveled Readers

Discussion

- What are the various levels?

- View texts and identify levels

- Compare and contrast levels

Training Wrap-up

- Questions

- Evaluation completion

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Professional Development (PD) Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of the PD are:
- The participants will engage in the PD sessions through discussion and collaboration about teaching reading.
- The participants will read and respond to articles related to teaching reading.
- The participants will observe multimedia of best practices when teaching reading.
- The participants will apply knowledge of PD content through role-playing and modeling reading strategies.

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Professional Development Outcomes

The intended outcomes for the PD sessions are the teachers will receive:

- research-based strategies that support the instructional needs of elementary students.

- knowledge in the use and implementation of each component of the Benchmark Literacy Series.

- opportunities to collaborate with colleagues about new understanding of how to implement each component in the classroom instruction.

- an opportunity to reflect on their classroom instructional practice and determine how to apply the strategies learned within the training.

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Project Study

- A qualitative study was conducted at the school to gain the teachers perspective of the following research questions:

    - What were the reading teachers' perspectives of the challenges with meeting the instructional needs of the elementary students in Grades 3 to 5?
    - What were the reading teachers' perspectives of the resources and needs to support the instructional of elementary Students in Grades 3 to5?

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Research on Professional Development

After conducting research on quality professional development, it was revealed that effective, sustainable professional development for teachers must meet the following criteria:

- Relevant to participants
- Engaging
- Data-driven
- Impact student performance
- Impact Teacher performance

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Program Goal

By the end of the three-day professional development, the teachers will have gathered knowledge about strategies for providing effective reading instruction to students in Grades 3 to 5 that will contribute to improvement in the students' reading outcomes.

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

AGENDA

- Day 1: Best Practices for Teaching Reading
- Day 2: Motivating Students for Reading
- Day 3: Implementing the Benchmark Literacy program

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GROUP NORMS- online

- Be present in the video
- Mute when appropriate
- Attend Breakout sessions/Participate
- Noise-free background

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

DAY 1: I Am... Now Who Are You?

Facilitator: Catrina Cooper

Now Who are you?

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Game- Teacher Movie Kahoot

Go to kahoot.com

Join a Kahoot

Put in Code

Provide name (could be a nickname)

Participant numbers for breakout rooms

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Breakout Room Activity

Participant numbers 1-4 (Breakout Room 1)

Participant numbers 5-9 (Breakout Room 2)

Participant numbers 10-13 (Breakout Room 3)

Participant numbers 14-17 (Breakout Room 4)

Participant numbers 18-20 (Breakout Room 5)

Activity

What is the most ideal classroom for maximum teaching and learning of read? (25 minutes)

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Breakout Room Activity

List as many criteria for teaching and learning.
Could include student behavior, student background
knowledge level, parental support etc.

- Include everyone's input on the list.
- Discuss agreements and disagreements
- Prioritize list
- Choose spokesperson
- Share with whole group after breakout session
- Facilitator will inform you when there are 5 minutes
  left

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Whole Group

- Return to whole group
- Identify Spokesperson
- Spokesperson share group list
- Tell the prioritized list and explain why
- Whole group generate discussion for clarity

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Whole Group

Further Discussion Question

- Why is the first idea the most important?
- Who is responsible for making sure these ideas are in place for learning?
- Which is more important for student learning, student behavior or teacher behavior?

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Break Time- 15 minutes

SHOW AND TELL

When you return from break, please bring something interesting.. (ie. pet, picture, food, kid(s), husband..)

You are free to briefly tell us about your item/person.

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Activity 2: Looking at Best Practices for Teaching Reading

https://youtu.be/vNV8baJGdWU

Reflection Questions:

- Are most best practices effective in all reading classroom settings?

- How do you determine if the best practice works? (Is it the practice or just the group of students?)

- How do you determine whether to continue or discontinue the practice?

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1 Hour Lunch

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Welcome Back

Workshop Trivia..
You are free to search the answers before the session begins. Place answers in the chat.

Q1: How many Dr. Suess books are published to date?
Q2: What year was the first Dr. Seuss book published?
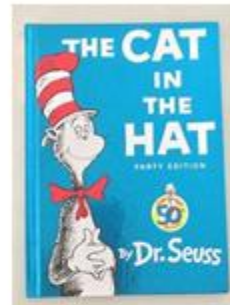
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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

What Works and How Do You Know?
Effective Reading Practices.
"Always, Sometimes, Never" Activity
Breakout Groups
Participants chosen randomly for each breakout room.

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Each group will take the list of strategies for teaching reading and categorize them according whether they think the strategy works always, sometimes, or never. Group will discuss why they put the strategy in the category.

After 20 minutes, the group will choose a spokesperson for the whole group discussion. The spokesperson will share the list with the whole group.

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Facilitator Topic:

Good, Better, or Best Practice.

Points to Consider

Some instructional practices may have a time limit.

Some instructional practices may need tweaking.

Some instructional practices may take more time than others.

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Effective Tools for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Closing

Wrap up

Post clarifying questions to the chat. They will be discussed at the beginning of tomorrow's session.

Tomorrow's Topic: Motivating Students for Reading.

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Day 2: Motivating Students for Reading

Facilitator: Catrina Cooper

Please prepare to share a simple breakfast receipt with the group.

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QUESTIONS?

What questions or concerns from yesterday's session do you have?

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Motivated? NOT!

Student motivation MYTHS

- Students who are introduced to books before kindergarten enjoy reading.
- Students whose parents are active at reading with them enjoy reading.
- Students who are good at reading enjoy reading.
- The more students read the more they will enjoy reading.

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Reading Motivation

Can we identify students who are genuinely motivated for reading?

Look like

Act like

Sound like

Listen to the series of events describing various students' reading habits. Discuss whether the student seems to be motivated for reading.

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Reading motivation

Is motivation for reading important to a students' reading success? Why or Why not?

Video: Inspiring Lifelong Readers
https://youtu.be/ER5Zb2wHFDw

What were some strategies mentioned in the video that promoted reading

motivation?

What strategies did not promote reading motivation?

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Break Time

Break Time
15 Minutes

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Reading Motivation

Role Play: "I Hate Reading?"

Participants are given roles that portrays students who does not like reading.

Another participant portrays the teacher who helps the students develop a motivation for reading.

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Reading Motivation

Effective Strategies for motivating students for reading.

Breakout rooms

Even numbers 1-10– Room #1

Odd numbers 1-10– Room #2

Even number 11-20– Room #3

Odd number 11-20– Room #4

https://www.readingrockets.org/article/reading-motivation-what-research-says

Access the article in the link. Discuss effective motivation strategies mentioned in the article. Tell whether and how they could be used in your classroom.

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Reading Motivation

LUNCH

1 hour

60:00

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Reading Motivation

- Are all students who have high reading motivation successful at reading outcomes?

- Are all students with low motivation for reading unsuccessful at reading outcomes?

- Does extrinsic motivation work for students?

- Does reading more often increase their motivation for reading?

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Reading Motivation

Intrinsic vs Extrinsic motivation

What is the difference?

How does intrinsic motivation affect the students' reading outcomes?

How does extrinsic motivation affect the students' reading outcomes?

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Reading Motivation

Intrinsic motivation strategies

- Model reading for students
- Teach reading in a systematic way
- Provide honest feedback
- Praise success at reading/ build confidence
- Provide students with interesting print
- Provide culturally responsive materials

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Reading motivation

Extrinsic Motivation Strategies

- Class rewards
- Setting personal goals
- Break Times/ game time
- Chose a reward
- Reading certificates
- Class display

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Reading Motivation

- Choose 1 reading lesson from the list.
- Work in groups of 3 (your choice) to make the reading lesson motivating.
- Breakout rooms will be assigned when groups are formed.

One person from the breakout groups presents the lesson to the whole group and tell about motivation strategies.

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Reading Motivation

Wrap-Up
Questions? Discussion.

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Benchmark Literacy Program

Benchmark Literacy in Action

After watching the video, compare your classroom instructional practice to the practice in the video.

Video: https://youtu.be/hyrviVkJ_vl

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Benchmark Literacy Program

Whole Group Lessons

What is the purpose of the whole group lessons in the Benchmark program?

- In the whole group lessons, teachers activate new learning using focused mini-lessons, demonstrations, and discussions that promote problem solving and reflective thinking.
- Daily focus for whole group discussions: word study/foundational reading, close reading and writing.

(Benchmark Education, nd)

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Benchmark Literacy Program

Small Group Instruction

- In small groups, students are engaged in guided reading with the teacher.
- Students are grouped homogeneously.
- Instruction are provided by the teachers using leveled texts
- Other students are practicing skills independently at different stations
- Mange groups by using charts and timers to guide students in knowing what they should be doing and how long.

(Benchmark Education, nd)

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Benchmark Literacy Program

Modeling of a small group lesson

Video: https://youtu.be/QrpHgjf4U2E

- Discuss video in breakout rooms.
- Compare and contrast the video to your classroom practice

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Benchmark Literacy Program

Incorporating vocabulary

- Teachers assess students on Tier One, Two, and Three vocabulary.
- Students are engaged in vocabulary practice at their instructional level.
- New vocabulary is introduced weekly

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Benchmark Literacy program

Strategies for introducing vocabulary to students

- Pictures
- Objects
- Read in context
- Drawings
- Wordle

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Benchmark Literacy program

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Benchmark Literacy

Leveled Readers

What is the purpose of leveled readers?

Leveled readers are designed to eliminate barriers to understanding grade level text

(Benchmark Education, nd)

Leveled texts

- Provide individualized support
- Builds foundational reading skills
- Encourage close reads
- Engage students in authentic literature
- Provides an array of genres

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Benchmark Literacy Program

Understand Leveled Readers

How and when do you use leveled readers? Discuss.

- View leveled texts.
- How are text similar?
- How do the leveled text differ?

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Benchmark Literacy

Leveled Readers

What is the purpose of leveled readers?

Leveled readers are designed to eliminate barriers to understanding grade level text

(Benchmark Education, nd)

Leveled texts

- Provide individualized support
- Builds foundational reading skills
- Encourage close reads
- Engage students in authentic literature
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Benchmark Literacy Program

Understand Leveled Readers

How and when do you use leveled readers? Discuss.

- View leveled texts.
- How are text similar?
- How do the leveled text differ?

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Effective Strategies for Instructing Elementary Students in Reading

Training Wrap Up

Questions? Concerns? Clarification?

Complete the Evaluation for the 3-day session

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Teacher experience

1. Describe your experience working with reading students at the school. Include the number of years you have been teaching.

2. In your years of experience, what difference, if any, have you noticed in the reading outcomes of diverse students?

3. How has your years of experience contributed to your ability to work with students at this school?

School demographics

4. Describe the demographics of the school. What changes, if any, have you noticed in the demographics of the school within the last five years?

5. How has the demographical change affected the reading results of students at this school?

6. What measures were put in place to accommodate the demographic change of students at this school, such as support for the students, or new reading adoptions?

Instructional practice and reading program

7. What instructional practice(s) are most effective when working with diverse learners?

8. What are some advantages of providing differentiated instruction to diverse learners?

9. How should the curriculum or reading program support the differentiation of instruction?

10. What elements of the reading program are supportive of the diverse instructional needs of students?

11. What are some effective techniques when providing reading instruction to elementary students?

Support and PD

12. Describe the initial and ongoing support that has been provided to teachers at this school.

13. What PD or training has been provided related to the school-adopted reading program?

14. How has the PD or training helped teachers in delivering quality instruction to SES students?

15. What support is needed to enhance the quality of instruction to the students at this school?