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Teacher and Coach Perspectives Regarding the Role of Preschool Literacy Coaches in Developing Preschool Teachers' Literacy Pedagogy

Marilyn Grigsby
Walden University

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Marilyn Grigsby

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Teacher and Coach Perspectives Regarding the Role of Preschool Literacy Coaches in
Developing Preschool Teachers' Literacy Pedagogy

by

Marilyn Grigsby

MA, Notre Dame de Namur University, 1993

BS, University of Liberia, 1983

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2022

Abstract

According to the National Assessment of Education Progress, students in one state in the midwestern United States showed little change in reading scores despite the use of literacy coaches. The problem of focus in this study was inadequate primary students' reading achievement in the focus state. Bandura's social learning theory was used in this basic qualitative study to increase understanding regarding the perspectives of five preschool literacy coaches and five teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing teachers' literacy pedagogy. The research questions focused on how preschool teachers and preschool literacy coaches each described the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing teachers' literacy pedagogy. Findings from the data collected with semi structured interviews conducted via Zoom teleconferencing indicated that interaction between coaches and teachers was infrequent, not targeted to the needs of prekindergarten teachers, and often did not focus on early literacy. In addition, these study findings indicated that prekindergarten teachers were less likely than coaches to credit coaching with improvements in their instructional practice. It is recommended that further research be replicated for a more diverse population from other geographical locations and after disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are several years in the past. This study contributes to social change by indicating the need for greater attention to prekindergarten literacy and especially the critical role of dedicated preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy and children's subsequent reading success.

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Dedication

In memory of Mabel Grigsby Yaidoo

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The focus of this study was the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers on the development of preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy.

According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), students in the state of focus in this study have shown little change in reading scores since 2017 despite the use of literacy coaches (as cited in Bandeira de Mello et al., 2019). The data recorded by NAEP in public school districts in the target state from 2013 and 2019 showed 29% to 31% of Grade 3 students were unable to achieve the basic level of reading proficiency, despite the support of literacy coaches for primary grade teachers (NAEP, 2019). These data do not include preschool children's literacy achievement. However, the foundations for literacy development are created in the preschool years (Ansari & Pianta, 2018).

In this chapter, I provide background information to put the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers into context, and I present the study problem, purpose, and conceptual framework. I also describe the research questions that guided this study. In this research study, I gathered information regarding the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers concerning the role of the literacy coach in the development of teachers' literacy pedagogy.

Background

In the field of early childhood, coaching has received significant focus as a professional development tool (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Coaching has been described as a social process in which an expert practitioner guides a novice to recognize what they know and can do and to strengthen their ability to make more effective use of what they

know and can do (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Coaching in education in the United States is used to facilitate professional learning experiences for teachers in early childhood education programs and elementary schools (Schachter, 2015). When coaches work with teachers individually or in small groups, they help increase those teachers who are part of the coaching processes (coachee) knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Weber-Mayer et al., 2018). According to Ansari and Pianta (2018), as the need for early childhood education programs became more widespread, the focus increased on teacher development of children's language and literacy skills necessary to succeed later in school.

This study focused on preschool literacy coaches and teachers working in public school districts in one state in the midwestern United States. However, the problem of low reading achievement is felt nationwide. According to the United States Department of Education (USDE), in 17 states in the United States students at Grade 4 and in 31 states students at Grade 8 had declining reading scores in 2019 compared to 2017. These declines reflect the national score decrease of 1% at Grade 4 and 3% at Grade 8 (USDE, 2018). Even though school districts across the country use professional development and literacy coaches to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills (USDE, 2018), there has been no relative change for the lowest-performing students across the country compared to 1992, and those students have shown a performance decline since 2017. Although preschool students are not included in NAEP or USDE reports of reading achievement, the quality of preschool early literacy pedagogy influences children's elementary grade reading achievement (Jacoby & Lesaux, 2017). Therefore, the perspectives of preschool

literacy coaches and teachers regarding literacy coaches' role in the development of preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy may provide important information about how to improve reading achievement in the lowest-performing students. A gap in practice exists regarding understanding of the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy.

Problem Statement

The problem that was the focus of this study is low reading achievement among primary students. According to the NAEP, students in the state that was the focus of this study showed little change in reading scores since 2017 despite the use of literacy coaches (as cited in Bandeira de Mello et al., 2019). The data recorded by NAEP in public school districts in the target state from 2013 and 2019 showed 29% to 31% of Grade 3 students were unable to achieve the basic level of reading proficiency, despite the support of literacy coaches for primary grade teachers (NAEP, 2019). This study was needed to address the problem of inadequate primary students' reading achievement by understanding perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to increase understanding regarding the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. In most school districts literacy coaches provide continuous professional development for teachers, which incorporates organizing professional learning communities, facilitating small

group planning sessions, and conducting work one-on-one with teachers (Calo et al., 2015). Literacy coaches, according to Shearer et al. (2018), can help schools reform projects by improving the teaching of literacy skills and, as a result, improving students' learning outcomes. To address the problem of low reading achievement among primary students, I explored the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in the development of preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. In this study, I strived to understand the perspectives of preschool teachers and preschool literacy coaches and address the gap in practice regarding understanding of the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy.

Research Questions

Two research questions (RQs) were addressed in this study:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers describe their perspectives of the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy?

RQ2: How do preschool literacy coaches describe their perspectives of their role in developing the literacy pedagogy of preschool teachers?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative research study was based in the social learning theory of Bandura (1969). Bandura suggested that learning takes place when individuals gain knowledge and skill from each other, by means of perception, imitation, and observation. Bandura also believed that people learn by observing the consequences that happen to others. Literacy coaching is grounded in Bandura's social learning theory because it focuses on the social aspects of learning and coaching. The

principle of the theory of constructivism is that learning is an active and positive process (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Constructivist education focuses on constructivist learning theory and has been used to develop acceptable curricula and teach different topics.

Bandura (1969) suggested that learning takes place when individuals gain knowledge and skill from each other, by means of perception, imitation, and observation. Bandura also believed that people learn by observing the consequences that happen to others. Literacy coaching is grounded in Bandura's social learning theory because it focuses on the social aspects of learning and coaching. Social learning theorists believe learning is taking place even when there is no apparent response because learning includes mental processes, such as how people think, their attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and expectations (Bandura, 1969).

In addition, social constructivism posits that the learning experience is reciprocal (Bandura, 1978), so teachers and coaches learn from each other. Coaches' observations of teachers and reflection on what they see helps to shape coaching practice even as coaches shape teacher practice. Bandura (1966) proposed four essential modeling components present in a social learning situation: (a) The learner's attention is drawn to the material to be learned, (b) efforts are made to help the learner remember the material to be learned, (c) the learner is guided to replicate the activity that was modeled for them, and (d) the learner is rewarded in some way for their attempt to replicate the activity so that they are inspired to repeat the activity in the way it was learned. I explored the perspectives of preschool literacy coach teacher development of literacy pedagogy. The RQs aligned with the framework, in that the elements of social constructivism are the

basis for the work of coaching and may feature in participants' description of development of preschool literacy pedagogy.

Nature of the Study

This study was anchored by a basic qualitative design with interviews, following a constructivist paradigm, as described by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017). Under the constructivist paradigm, insights are constructed from the perspectives of informants embedded in the phenomenon under study and do not derive from the researcher or a preexisting theory. Interviews are a data collection method consistent with the constructivist paradigm. Analysis of interviews permitted me to construct a clearer understanding of early childhood literacy coaches' perspectives in ways that other methods, such as an online survey, would not have done. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that a qualitative design is appropriate when the researcher intends to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation and meaning for those involved.

The phenomenon under study was the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers regarding their understanding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. A qualitative design using interviews was more appropriate in pursuit of this phenomenon than would have been another qualitative method, such as observations or document analysis, neither of which would have provided insights into coaches' and teachers' perspectives. A quantitative method using a survey would have provided me with an opportunity to use a larger sample but would have required the establishment of independent variables and

hypotheses (see Creswell, 2014), which would have been counter to the study purpose of gathering participants' perspectives.

Five preschool literacy coaches and five preschool teachers, all of whom work in school districts in a midwestern state in the United States, were recruited to participate in this study. The participants in my study were those who worked in multiple school districts across the target state. Hence, I used online video conferencing tools to conduct the interviews for my research because this method helped overcome the practical constraints inherent in conducting interviews in person, including costs associated with travel, scheduling problems, and the need to secure a venue for interviews when I had no ready local facility. I coded data by hand and analyzed data for emergent themes.

Definitions

The following are definitions for terms commonly associated with literacy coaching that are used in this study.

Coach (instructional): An educator whose responsibility is to use evidence-based practices in classrooms to enhance teachers' practices (Ben-Peretz et al., 2018).

Constructivism: Grounded on the conviction that learners are actively creating, interpreting, and reorganizing knowledge individually (Kay & Kibble, 2015)

Demonstration: A phase of the literacy coaching sequence that is devoted to having the coach explicitly model the use of evidence-based approaches and literacy experiences in each classroom during a regularly scheduled, whole group, book-reading time (Gettinger & Stoiber, 2016).

Literacy coach: An educator who helps teachers to reflect on their teaching and learning and assists to enhance their skills to make effective use of what they know and do (Toll, 2017).

Observation: In coaching, observation is a social construct, organized and accounted for as a phenomenon in standard procedure and interaction of coaching (Corsby & Jones, 2020).

Preschool teacher: For the purpose of this study, preschool teacher refers to a teacher of children ages 3 to 5 who work in a public preschool or prekindergarten program and who is served by a preschool literacy coach.

Reflection: In coaching, reflection is used as an instrument mostly for guiding practice under established criteria or guidelines (Cushion, 2018).

Assumptions

Several assumptions guided this study. The first assumption was that responses from the coaches and teachers who participated in this study presented their honest depiction of their perspectives and experiences. Relying on participant honesty is central to ethical and valid research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also assumed that the participants in this study reflected the characteristics of the larger pool of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers who work in public school districts in the target state. To ensure this, I invited literacy coaches and teachers who had experience and knowledge of the target phenomenon, as suggested by Patton (2015). These assumptions are inherent in a study based on interviews, in which data are comprised of informant reports.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study encompassed the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers regarding understanding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. This study's delimitation included five preschool literacy coaches and five preschool teachers from public school districts in the target state who had literacy coaching experience (as a coach or as a teacher) of 2 years or more in the public preschool environment. Excluded were coaches whose job title was not literacy coach, whose work was divided between literacy coaching and other duties, who worked exclusively with teachers of children in other contexts than preschool, or who worked in multiple school districts in the target state. Also excluded were teachers who taught other children than those aged 3 to 5, who did not teach children in a general education setting, or whose work was divided between classroom teaching and nonteaching roles. These delimitations were needed to ensure the transferability of the results of this study because readers whose focus is on a different population or context may not find this study's results pertinent to their context.

Limitations

This research study had several limitations. The first was its focus on a single geographic region and teaching discipline. Focusing on one geographic region and teaching context limited my ability to apply the findings and recommendations to other schools, grade levels, subject areas, and teacher populations. The second limitation of this study was its small sample size, which was driven by the data-intensive nature of interviews. These limitations weaken the anticipated results, thereby limiting future

applicability, but these limitations are typical of a study based in interviews (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The third limitation of this study was my own biases. Because I controlled participant selection, data generation, data analysis, and interpretation of results, my point of view may have interfered with the validity of this study. To control the influence of my biases, I strived to consider and evaluate all the data I obtained with a fair and unbiased mind. Also, I reexamined my experiences and responses on an ongoing basis to ensure that preexisting biases are kept at bay (see Galdas, 2017).

Significance

The current study may be significant because it provides an insight into the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. According to Shearer et al. (2018), literacy coaches can support school reform initiatives by enhancing the teaching of literacy skills and, in turn, improve students learning outcomes. Toll (2017) stated that literacy coaching has become prevalent in schools, but little information is available regarding perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. My study may shed light on perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers regarding their perspectives of their role in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy and contribute information that can resolve a gap in practice surrounding the role of preschool literacy coaches.

Teachers who have access to continual coaching have the means to learn and refine the pedagogies required to teach skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). However,

in the state that was the focus of this study, student achievement in literacy has not improved even though teachers have support from literacy coaches. Results from this study may lead to positive social change by informing preschool literacy coach training and practice, which may contribute to improved teacher practice and increase young children's mastery of early literacy tasks and learning outcomes. More importantly, understanding the perspectives of both groups may provide administrators insights to improve collaboration between preschool teachers and literacy coaches, increase their reciprocal trust, maximize the effectiveness of literacy coaching, and lead to positive outcomes for children.

Summary

In this study, I examined the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers regarding their perspectives of the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. In Chapter 1, I presented the problem statement, RQs, significance of the study, definition of terms, and limitations of the study. In Chapter 2, I provide a review of related literature related to the understanding of the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this research study was to increase understanding of the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. This research study addressed the gap in practice that exists regarding understanding of the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. The study may inform preschool literacy coach training and practice, which may contribute to improved teacher practice and increase young children's mastery of early literacy tasks and learning outcomes. In this chapter, I explain the literature search process, describe the conceptual framework for this study in detail, and present a review of related literature. Finally, I conclude with a chapter summary.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the Thoreau Multi-Database Search of Walden University to investigate literacy coaching, restricting the catalog to full-text, peer-reviewed studies from 2015 and beyond. These databases included Early Childhood Research Quarterly, American Psychologist, ERIC, Journal of Adult Education, Sage Journals, and PsycNet. I also used Google Scholar to locate open access articles. I included the works of social constructivists Joyce and Showers and Bandura. The following search terms were used to locate articles specific to this study: *coaching, coaching in education, demonstration of coaching, observation in coaching, origin of coaching, coaching, reflective coaching, and role of literacy coach*. Variations of these terms were used through an iterative process to locate articles specific to my study: *educational coach, literacy coach, and early*

childhood literacy coach. Deviations of terms helped to ensure exhaustive search results. Searching for literature has been a systematic process, including a series of iterative steps. In starting this process, I first took a close look at my RQs and used those RQs to help me identify key terminology. In identifying the language and key terminology of literacy coaching, I was able to identify the most effective words for my search.

Also, in taking a closer look at educational coaching, there was a need to identify various types of educational coaching. As I gained an understanding of various types of educational coaches, my attention narrowed to literacy. With literacy as a focal point of coaching, information on the elements of literacy coaching and the essence of early literacy instruction and its benefits to early childhood development was gathered. With the need to increase my understanding of preschool literacy coaches' perspective of the development of literacy pedagogy, I first had to research the reason why teachers might need literacy coaching. Then I searched for research on literacy coaches' precise roles and why coaches might be necessary in an early childhood setting.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was drawn from the work of Bandura (1969), whose work in social construction of knowledge aligns closely with the processes related to coaching. Social constructivism addresses persons' behavioral changes that occur through the process of social interaction (Bandura, 1969). In order to provide a coherent model that could account for the diverse range of opportunities to learn that occur in the real world, social learning theory integrates behavioral and cognitive learning theories (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Social constructivism also encompasses

constant reciprocal engagement between behaviors and their influence (Bandura, 1969). Educators use the processes of social constructivism when they share their own experiences with colleagues; this sharing of experiences is an important, informal tool for professional development (Ben-Peretz et al., 2018). Bandura and Walters (1977) posited that social constructivism is a model that influences learning and develops human behaviors.

To provide a comprehensive model that accounts for the wide range of learning experiences occurring in the real world, social constructivism integrates behavioral and cognitive learning theories. Bandura (1969) proposed learning as a cognitive process that occurs in a social environment. Additionally, Bandura (1978) opined that the range of learning processes included in social constructivism by incorporating observation as a mechanism by which new knowledge may be acquired. Through observation, individuals can obtain visual representations of modeled activities rather than particular stimulus-response connections (Bandura, 1978). Bandura (1966) discussed four processes that guide modeling, including the individual's attention to the modeled activity, their retention of the activity and how it was modeled, the individual's replication of the activity in the way it was modeled, and reinforcement of the individual's replication attempt so that motivation to repeat the modeled activity is reinforced and the activity becomes part of the individual's repertoire.

Joyce and Showers (1980) first introduced the idea of coaching after a comprehensive review of the literature on training and the social constructivist ideas of Bandura. They presented their findings as a set of hypotheses about the different types of

training exercises likely to produce results. The training components they suggested were theory presentation, modeling or demonstration, practice, structured and open-ended feedback, and in-class assistance with the transfer. They believed that "modeling practice under simulated conditions, and practice in the classroom, combined with feedback" (Joyce & Showers 1980, p. 384) resulted in the most successful training design. When coaches collaborate with mentees, the mentees learn and enhance their teaching practice. A social constructivist approach offered a framework to my study.

Social constructivism and the use of social constructivist elements such as reflection, demonstration, and observation were featured in prior research in coaching practice at the elementary, middle, and secondary school levels. For example, the element of reflection was described as a key element of effective literacy coaching in bringing about changes in teaching practice in a study of primary educators conducted by Elek and Page (2019). Similarly, Mraz et al. (2016) found that observation was an effective tool for providing feedback and a responsive basis for coaching conversations for development in high school teachers of English. Finally, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), in a meta-analysis of 35 studies, found the use of demonstration as a social constructivist tool supported teachers across grade levels in understanding the implementation of strategies. These social constructivist elements in previous studies of successful literacy coaching in primary and secondary settings suggest the need for similar research study of literacy coaches in preschool settings, thereby providing information in understanding the lack of change in reading scores in the target state for the past 3 years, despite the use of literacy coaches.

In summary, social constructivism is proposed as a strategic basis for literacy coaching. Examining how practice and modeling reinforce learning situations through a social constructivist lens provides a structure for my research in which I explored the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches concerning teacher development of literacy pedagogy. The remainder of this chapter offers a comprehensive literature review of the research related to literacy coaching.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

This section begins by defining coaching in various contexts, followed by a description of the emergence of coaching in education. I present literature on the role of literacy coaches. Finally, I present literature on coaching as a form of professional development and the effect that literacy coaches have on educational practice.

Coaching Defined in Various Contexts

According to Passmore (2018), coaching is a process of growth and development by which an individual, called a coach, helps support a learner by aiding and guiding attainment of a precise set of professional or personal goals. The individual who is coached is sometimes called a coachee. Coaching may regularly indicate an informal connection between two people, one of whom has more knowledge or experience than another, and offers guidance (Passmore, 2018). The term “coach” was used in association with a tutor and emerged in the 1830s as a colloquialism on the campus of Oxford University to refer to a tutor who helped students prepare for their exams (Maoining Tech, 2001). “Coach” was later used in 1861 to enhance the skills of athletes (Maoining Tech, 2001). Workplace coaching developed in the 20th century and mainly has been

associated with job skills preparation for new recruits (Grant, 2017). Typically, the coach facilitates change and growth. Coaches have been shown to enhance staff or team engagement and potentially contribute to improved results for coachees, even including for medical patients (Dyess et al., 2017). Coaching is similar to instruction but is often more personal and more situated in a specific context or in a specific task than is instruction (Lave, 1988). Coaching as an organizational strategy offers potential to influence numerous aims for environment transformation and staff well-being (Westcott, 2016).

Coaching has become an increasingly valuable technique for enhancing and developing most professional practices (Stoddard & Borges, 2016). In medical education (Lovell, 2018), sports (Lake, 2018), and business (Jones et al., 2016), skilled coaches are used to assist people to attain their personal best. Lovell (2018) suggested that professional coaching is different from traditional tutelage in that it does not concentrate on transmission of knowledge and understanding of factual material, nor does it focus on therapy and counseling. Coaching usually requires the provision of personalized feedback on observable behaviors and the use of stimulating and challenging findings to help the coachee achieve maximum potential (Lovell, 2018).

A coach observes the coachee and uses a combination of provocative questioning, guided reflection, and encouragement to help the coachee enhance performance (Deiorio et al., 2016). According to Deiorio et al. (2016), the primary purpose of coaching is to produce significantly improved performance. Stoddard and Borges (2016), in their typology of teaching roles in medical education, asserted that a coach strives to extract

from the learner the highest level of performance practically possible. Lovell (2018) concluded that coaching in various contexts (sports, business, and personal psychology) is an important, developmental approach to teaching that holds the same significant promise in the realm of personal and professional growth and development as it does in the area of medicine.

Coaching in Expert-Novice Research

Coaching in expert-novice research is described as the main framework in the process of assisting individuals in becoming reflective thinkers who behave in new and different ways to effect real change, consequently making their behavior compatible with the best practices (Stefanik, 2017; Weathers & White, 2015). According to Stefanik (2017), the coaching process is also performed within an apprenticeship system where experts inspire novices to consciously demonstrate their information gain. Stefanik stated that coaching is a key component of any cognitive learning situation that facilitates self-exploration through guiding goal setting. Therefore, the coach's role is to advise their protégé on professional practices and to model the unique culture and nuances of the organization. The coaching method combining modeling, scaffolding, contemplation, and articulation is an important element in training novices for engagement in real-world environments (Lave, 1988).

Vygotsky (1978) stated that all real learning takes place in contact with other people and indicated that authentic adult learning must be embedded in the authentic structures of colleagues in a shared environment. Most literacy coaching research and practice takes inspiration on this sociocultural theory of learning by Vygotsky as a

method of structured social interaction. Working within the learner's zone of proximal development offers scaffolding for growth from a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978).

Coaching in Education

Educational coaching has become prevalent as professional development expanded to promote school reform in districts throughout the United States (Schachter, 2015). Most school district reform efforts aim to improve instructional standards that increase students' learning outcomes. Because quality instruction is connected to improving student learning, efforts, and investments to create change have significantly increased, focusing on indicators of quality and the enhancement of teachers' practices (Jimenez et al., 2015). Educators and policymakers ponder effective strategies for teachers' professional development that will provide the necessary support to students for them to manage the complex skills needed to prepare for the 21st century.

An effective professional development program is essential to teacher learning and fine tuning the pedagogies necessary to teaching effectively. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) defined and studied professional development as an element that is beneficial in changing teaching practices and improving student learning outcomes. Their study resulted in elements of effective professional development. They posited that to achieve effective professional learning, there needs to be a content-driven educational plan or goal that incorporates a purposeful focus on program improvement and instructional methods. In instructional coaching, educators are engaged in active learning that fosters collaboration and creates opportunities for sharing with colleagues (Darling-Hammond et

al., 2017). Through coaching, teachers are offered feedback and are able to reflect in order to make necessary changes to their teaching (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2018).

Ben-Peretz et al. (2018) reported that researchers, specialists, and policy makers believe that school improvement relies upon deep-rooted learning by educators, such as that gained through educational coaching. In the field of early childhood education, coaching interventions have gained popularity in recent years, and models have involved both a broad focus on enhancing teacher practice, or they may have a more particular focus on enhancing delivery of curriculum (Ben-Peretz et al., 2018). Coaching models may also differ in the type of activities utilized in the coaching process, ranging from skills assessment, modeling, and teacher observation (Jimenez et al., 2015). However, most educational coaching designs fulfill the definition of coaching given by Hindman & Wasik (2012), which described coaching as a gradual approach involving scheduling observations of teaching practice in classrooms and reflective coaching and feedback on their practice. When new teachers receive support and coaching from another teacher, it is an effective way to support these teachers and to facilitate their continuous professional growth and learning (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

Educational coaching sometimes takes the form of peer coaching when one teacher coaching other teachers, which reflects a nonhierarchical relationship (Ben-Peretz et al., 2018). Peer coaching involves two colleagues who engage in a common supportive role and aims to improve teaching practices. Joyce and Showers (1980) discussed coaching as modeling, which involves demonstrating teaching skills or strategies either through coteaching or through video or other media. Ben-Peretz et al. (2018) described a

nonevaluative model of peer coaching that follows a few simple procedures and rules to engage in conversations about instructional strategies. These procedures are approached in an unobjectionable way and include a nonevaluation structure for analyzing teacher lessons.

Joyce and Showers (1995) pondered ways in which students could benefit as teachers learned and developed their practices. They studied ways in which teachers could construct better teaching environments and enhance their teaching and observed with interest a revelatory by-product of early coaching studies or theory (Joyce & Showers, 1995). The by-product they observed was that coaching as a tool increases teachers' capacity in classroom facilitation. They also realized that peer coaching is not an end result nor a total school improvement plan, but rather it must serve in the context of general coaching, professional development, and basic school improvement. To enact more intensive change, professional coaching may be used as a support and improvement in specific instructional practices. For example, Domenico et al. (2018) found that when literacy coaches collaborate with teachers, they are able to create new instructional elements within and even beyond the syllabus frameworks of the school district, in support of literacy instruction.

Literacy Instruction in Preschool

Preschool teachers provide opportunities for young children to use and develop their oral language skills (Peterson et al., 2016). According to the Reutzel (2015), early instruction in literacy sets the tone for all success, thereby creating secured foundations that lead to possible academic success in later education. As teachers add

vital elements to early literacy instruction, they will be able to offer students more effectively with an effective framework for acquiring the necessary early literacy understandings, concepts, and skills for literacy success in primary-grade classrooms (Jacoby & Lesaux, 2017). In this section, I will present what young children learn and what teachers teach with regards to early literacy instruction.

Early Literacy process in preschool

Early literacy is an interwoven process that encompasses reading and writing with various instructional activities (Neuman, 2018). The concept of emerging literacy refers to the process by which a child develops an understanding of language, signs, and print functions (Carter-Smith, 2019). The literacy process starts in early childhood, although some researchers believe it can begin before birth (Horowitz & Kraus et al., 2017). As children develop language skills, they also acquire skills that foster emergent reading.

The first step in children's development of early literacy is the development of oral language (NICHD ECCRN, 2005). Oral language includes numerous skills of vocabulary (receptive and expressive), syntactical awareness, and processes of narrative discourse (comprehension and storytelling), and influences achievement of reading during both the early phase of learning to decipher words and the later phase of reading text, when the emphasis is on comprehension (Whorrall & Cabell, 2016). Preschoolers develop many language skills during non-teacher directed activities, when they participate in conversations with peers and teachers (Cabell et al., 2015). Development of reading abilities in preschool is associated with oral narrative abilities, which in turn are dependent on vocabulary development and understanding of syntax (Gardner-Neblett &

Iruka, 2015). Gardner-Neblett and Iruka (2015) found oral narrative capacity mediated the connection between infant language and emerging literacy capacity in kindergarten children.

A second step in children's development of early literacy is an understanding of the alphabetic principle (NAEYC, 1996). The alphabetic principle is defined as useable knowledge of the fact that phonemes can be represented by letters, such that whenever a particular phoneme occurs in a word, and in whatever position, it can be represented by the same letter (Buckingham et al., 2019). Additionally, the alphabetic principle refers to the interpretation that a particular letter relates to specific sound units. As children develop an understanding of alphabetic principle, they begin to recognize the connection between speech sounds and their knowledge of letter names (Anderson et al., 2019). When children learn to read and spell, they understand that letters serve a purpose. This helps children recognize and learn the letters in their names and the sounds associated with them. Furthermore, they learn to use symbols in a cohesive mixed medium and construct and express meanings in different ways, integrating their oral language, with interpretation of images, print, and play schemes (Schmidt-Naylor et al., 2017). Children begin the reading of words, by applying their knowledge letter-sound relationships to words and syllables. Similarly, through exposure to language awareness play, nursery rhymes, and rhythmic exercises, children absorb the patterns of language. Use of rhyming, skipping games, chants, and word games typical of childhood interactions contain the origins of phonemic recognition, a strong indicator of subsequent reading performance (NAEYC, 1996).

Young children's development of early literacy is also attributed to the development of executive functioning skills of attention, memory, and problem solving (Blair, 2016). Cognitive flexibility, a major component of executive function, is crucial in a child's ability to think resourcefully and to regulate emotions and behaviors in the process of task completion (Zelazo et al., 2016). According to Zelazo et al. (2016), cognitive flexibility develops from infancy and improves through the child's elementary years. Blair (2016) believed that cognitive flexibility is a skill especially necessary for reading since both the words and the context of a passage need to be grasped simultaneously. Readers need to consciously move attention back and forth throughout reading between the meanings of words and text, letter-sound correspondence, and syntactic structure. According to the Hawkins & Weber (2009), children's cognitive flexibility leads to development of literacy skills that are predictive of reading development.

Teachers' role in Fostering Early Literacy Skills

Early childhood teachers play a crucial role in fostering the growth of literacy by actively creating literacy-rich environments and learning experiences. Explicit, systematic, and direct instruction is required for the teaching of skills in early literacy (National Reading Panel 2000; Hawkins & Weber 2009). Such intentional instruction in early literacy occurs through explicit vocabulary instruction, reading books with children, encouraging language use during play, and explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle.

Explicit vocabulary instruction is part of early childhood teachers' work in developing language facility in young children. In vocabulary instruction, the teacher

gives an explicit description of the meaning of a phrase prior to or during the reading of texts (Myers & Ankrum, 2018). This instruction involves the use of teaching techniques by adults, such as asking questions about words and their meanings, offering word definitions, modeling words in relevant contexts, urging children to supply a missing word, linking words to life experiences of children, and correcting incorrect use of vocabulary words by children (Lorio & Woods, 2020). The teacher includes in this conversation possibilities for students to speak and link the new vocabulary word to the text and previous interactions. This helps the student to transfer their learning into expressive language, a process which is referred to as analytic dialog (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2016). When students engage in analytic dialog, they advance their comprehension of new words (Myers & Ankrum, 2018). Explicit vocabulary instruction blends textual experiences with student opportunities to use new vocabulary.

New vocabulary also is taught using storybook reading (Bowne et al., 2017). Bowne et al. (2017) found teachers enhance preschoolers' receptive and expressive vocabularies through repetitive reading aloud. Reading several texts on the same subject is one way to provide repeated exposure to new vocabulary, and to provide opportunities for students to use new terms in discussion (Christ & Chiu, 2018). Wright (2019) found that this inherent repetition benefits word learning in meaningful contexts. Thus, the use of text sets can be especially advantageous because it helps students simultaneously in building knowledge and vocabulary. The process of using text and having a dialogue with students during reading is referred to as dialogic reading (Huennekens & Xu, 2016). Dialogic reading is another read-aloud technique useful in developing children's

vocabulary. It is an evidence-based practice that is geared toward young children's typical language and literacy development and especially helps children at risk for language and literacy developmental delays (Towson et al., 2017). In a dialogic reading, the teacher assumes a position of active listening and inquiry, even as they read the story themselves, by asking questions, adding explanations and relevant facts, and prompting students to imagine what a character is feeling or what in the story might happen next (Dickinson et al., 2019).

Similarly, guided play has also shown potential as an activity that teachers provide to enhance language development and literacy learning. Gibson et al. (2020) found a high level of narrative engagement and skill during children pretend play. Preschoolers engaging in pretend play were found to exhibit verbal narratives that were more elaborate and coherent than those of children who engaged in other modes of play (Rowe et al., 2019). Play generates a context in which to master communication of meaning and the development of conversations, which are needed in collaboration and negotiation with peers (Rowe et al., 2019).

Furthermore, preschool teachers explicitly teach the alphabetic principle, which was describe above as the structured relationship between letters and sounds (Baker et al., 2018). In mastering the alphabetic principle, children come to understand that letters represent phonemes and can be grouped together to interpret and pronounce written words (Buckingham et al., 2019). The alphabetic principle is essential in development of reading skill (Castles et al., 2018), and practice in applying the alphabetic principle develops automaticity in association of letters and sounds (Verhoeven et al., 2020).

Explicit instruction of the alphabetic principle with preschool children is one way to ensure children's success in learning to read (Castles et al., 2018; Henbest, 2017).

In summary, during the preschool years, children master oral language, develop a rich receptive and expressive vocabulary, associate letters, and phonemes, and develop executive function skills of attention, memory, and problem solving. Preschool teachers support children's literacy development by providing literacy-rich environments and experience with printed words and books, supporting vocabulary development through reading aloud, engaging in conversation, providing opportunities for social interaction through pretend play, and explicitly teaching the alphabetic principle. Children's success in literacy achievement in kindergarten and elementary school depends on experiences and instruction offered in preschool (Stuart & Stainthorp, 2016). However, barriers may interfere with preschool children's literacy mastery.

Barriers to Preschool Children's Literacy Development

Barriers to preschool children's literacy development can be found in the lack of processes of emergent literacy, including processes engaged at home. For example, even though shared reading with young children has shown positive outcomes in language development and development of literacy skills, some parents face challenges in engaging in this activity, thereby creating a barrier to preschooler literacy development. Brown et al. (2017) stated that children learn new vocabulary during storybook reading or shared reading. The lack of shared reading experiences in early childhood creates a barrier for receptive and expressive vocabularies. Logan et al. (2019) indicated that about 25% of caregivers never read with their children. Logan et al. reported that children from

literacy-rich households hear a total 1.4 million more words during storybook reading over the 5 years prior to kindergarten entry than do children who are never read to. These findings indicated that lack of home-based shared book reading is a significant barrier to early literacy, and differences in children's experience with shared reading may affect teachers' success in teaching literacy skills.

Additionally, English vocabulary deficits in children whose home language is other than English may present a barrier to English literacy development. According to Singh et al. (2015), bilingual preschoolers face factors that hinder English language mastery, including lack of exposure to sophisticated words and reduced opportunities to use English at home and their home languages school. Boit et al. (2020) found that bilingual children at an early stage of English language literacy skill development required more supports and instructional mechanisms to advance in academic language skills than native English speakers and were less likely to have met the linguistic criteria needed to apply English language skills in school. Lack of facility with English may interfere with a child's ability to understand the teacher, to follow directions, and keep up with the class (Jimenez et al., 2020).

Although recent studies have shown that development of phonemic awareness in the child's home language predicts literacy acquisition in both their home language and English (Barnes et al., 2016), barriers exist in children's ability to transfer from one language to another, particularly if their mastery of their home language is incomplete. According to Goodrich and Lonigan (2017), preschoolers with limited language may be sufficiently proficient in their home language to understand and be understood, but not

proficient enough to transfer their home language rules of syntax, spelling, phonology, or pragmatics to their second language of English (Galloway & Lesaux, 2017). A lack of English language skills makes it more likely that bilingual children will have trouble learning to read, which reduces teacher success in early literacy instruction.

In addition, experiences between specific aspects of the child, family, culture, and classroom contexts create barriers that affect literacy skill development (Soutullo et al., 2016). As a consequence, according to Darling-Hammond et.al (2020), children have individual needs and trajectories that require differentiated instruction and support to allow competence, trust, and motivation to develop optimally. Such supports seek to ameliorate the effects of barriers to children's literacy and language development as well, but not all teachers are skilled in providing such support. As teachers build up a strong knowledge base of early childhood literacy development, they are likely to provide appropriate early literacy learning opportunities to children who experience barriers to literacy (Rohde, 2015). However, Rohde (2015) indicated that preschool teachers with insufficient knowledge of the advancement of literacy are substantially less capable of providing children with the literacy development they need. If teachers have access to and understanding of a model that explains the components, experiences, and the role of environmental factors in supporting children, they will be better able to promote all elements of emerging literacy. Such support for teachers could be provided by an early childhood literacy coach.

Role of the Early Childhood Literacy Coach

Ippolito et al. (2016) described the role of literacy coaches as a support system for teachers. Literacy coaches provide instructional support, with a focus on the needs and concerns of teachers, instruction, content planning, reflection, and data analysis. Calo et al. (2015) suggested that coaches take on a number of leadership roles in some schools. They found that coaches were engaged in leading school improvement plans, developing school-wide literacy projects, coordinating with administrators, and acting as the administrator in the absence of the administrator; these roles suggested to Calo and colleagues that literacy coaches regard themselves as literacy leaders. Moreover, March et al. (2020) indicated that literacy coaches facilitate professional learning and focus on evidence-based interventions and systematic school improvement efforts, such as response to intervention.

The role of literacy coaches, unlike the roles of other instructional coaches, is to provide continuous, job-embedded professional development for educators (Domenico et al., 2019). This professional development may take place in large group settings, or when coaches interact within small teacher groups or with a single teacher (Hathaway et al., 2016). During this interaction and communication, coaches guide teachers as they put theory into practice and master new practices. Coaches listen to and involve teachers as trusted members of a collective and engage in mutual conversations, which are crucial for establishing trust between the coach and the teacher, facilitating teachers' growth, and improving student learning (Hathaway et al., 2016). However, the expected improvement in student learning following use of literacy coaches was not achieved in the target state.

The purpose of this research is to increase understanding of why reading scores in the target state showed little change over the past three years, despite the use of literacy coaches. My focus in this study was on literacy coaches who work with preschool teachers because development of literacy may be affected by numerous barriers in the early years.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented a detailed description of this study's conceptual framework of social learning theory, because coaching relies on provision of modeling, guided practice, structured and open-ended feedback, and assistance with transfer of skills and knowledge to real-life contexts. My synthesis of current research literature included information on literacy coaching, a practice that has been used over the years to enhance teacher practice. The literature suggested that, despite the value of social learning from expert practitioners, literacy coaches, school administrators, and district policy makers are often left to determine on their own the specific roles and responsibilities of their literacy coach. The problem that motivated this study, that some primary students' reading achievement is inadequate, suggested that greater understanding of how preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers each approach the role of preschool literacy coaches might be useful in improving children's literacy success. I outline in Chapter 3 the methodological approach I used in conducting this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this research study was to increase understanding of the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. In this chapter, I describe the methodology, study participants, procedures, and analysis methods, and how I addressed ethical concerns inherent in this study.

Research Design and Rationale

Two RQs guided this study:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers describe their perspectives of the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy?

RQ2: How do preschool literacy coaches describe their perspectives of their role in developing the literacy pedagogy of preschool teachers?

The central phenomenon under study was the development of literacy pedagogy in preschool teachers under the guidance of a preschool literacy coach, as perceived by preschool literacy coaches and teachers. The research design I used in this study was the basic qualitative study. The nature of the proposed RQs, regarding preschool teachers' and coaches' perspectives of the role of literacy coaches in developing teachers' literacy pedagogy, provided the main support for the selection of the research design. This qualitative design supported my purpose to increase understanding of the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that qualitative research approaches are used to achieve a deeper understanding of the

phenomenon through lived experiences that provide clear and insightful details about the participants' interactions with opportunities and challenges in daily life. The basic qualitative research design allowed me to learn and understand the perspectives of the literacy coaches and teachers.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this research was that of an observer, in that I conducted the interviews and recorded participants' responses but did not contribute my own ideas or experiences (see Billups, 2020). However, I was an insider, as described by Burns and Lobo (2018), because, in my role as an early childhood educator, I could relate to the experiences of literacy coaches and the responses to coaching of early childhood teachers. This unique role as an insider may have helped me with trust and acceptability of the participants in the districts in the target state (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I presently work as an early childhood educator and worked in the past as a literacy coach with preschool teachers. I have a professional interest in the subject of this study and preconceived notions about literacy coaches, all of which may have affected my conduct as a researcher. Ravitch and Carl (2016) advised the researcher to keep a journal to reflect on their feelings and thoughts and to be mindful of how those feelings and thoughts might influence data analysis and review; I took their advice and kept a reflective journal. The participants whom I chose had no direct relationship with me, no reporting relationship or contract, or any friendship that may have created bias in this research study. I was careful to avoid communicating in ways that might suggest bias and tried to remain aware of my cultural assumptions (see Berger, 2015). To do that, I

practiced continuous reflexive awareness to manage my thoughts and biases, using a reflective journal, as suggested by Mortari (2015).

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population for this study, as reported by the department of education in the target state, was made of over 1,800 teachers who worked in preschool classes and were employed by public school districts and approximately 200 preschool literacy coaches. The sampling strategy used was purposive sampling because it permitted me to identify and invite individuals who were knowledgeable about and experienced in literacy coaching, thereby enabling me to gather quality data. Preschool teachers who worked with children ages 3 to 5 were invited because children of that age are taught literacy basics, like letter names, letter sounds, rhyming, and narrative structure. I invited literacy coaches who work with preschool teachers exclusively. The teachers and coaches who were invited to participate in this study all worked in public school districts located in various communities across the target state.

Participants were recruited by posting a message on the professional networks Facebook Friends of Family Education and Federal Striving Reading Comprehensive Literacy Program (SRCL). The message explained the study and included a request for reply. I also contacted administrators of the SRCL program and requested permission to post the email on their website, within a blog, or to the association's members directly. Because social media did not yield the target number of teacher or coach participants, snowball sampling was used, as described by Dusek et al. (2015), to solicit referrals of

new participants from the interview participants I was able to reach through social media. As described by Creswell and Poth (2018), this more active strategy of chain referrals resulted in improved ability to reach my intended sample size.

Vasileiou et al. (2018) indicated that final sample size determinations cannot be made in qualitative studies prior to data collection but must emerge as data are received and with consideration for the purpose of the study. Hennink and Kaiser (2019) wrote that sample size is determined to be sufficient only when no new information is attainable. To this end, I was ready to continue seeking and interviewing teachers or coaches in excess of the five participants in each group if on the fifth interview, I gathered new information not included in the previous four interviews. Because no new information was forthcoming in the final interviews, I stopped recruiting, with a total of 10 participants, five preschool teachers and five preschool literacy coaches.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to gather data were interview protocols comprised of open-ended questions asked in individual interviews. The interview protocols for teachers and for coaches are included in Appendix A and respectively Appendix B. Each protocol began with a brief welcome, confirmation of the participant's consent, and reiteration of the confidential nature of the interview. Each protocol included seven interview questions that reflected the conceptual framework and were intended to permit me to answer the study research questions. The interview questions were reviewed by an outside expert to establish content validity. This expert, who at the time of this study held a doctorate in early childhood and was a professor of education, suggested a few small changes, and

suggested that I include a question they felt was missing. The outside expert confirmed use the interview questions to effectively answer my research questions.

The first six interview questions for teachers (Appendix A) addressed RQ1 about teachers' perspectives of the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing teachers' literacy pedagogy. Interview Question 1 introduced the issue at hand by asking for their experience in general. Interview Questions 2 through 6 asked teachers for their perspectives on specific elements of their coached experience, the value they found in that for children, and how their coaching experience could have been improved. The seventh, final interview question for teachers asked how much teachers would recommend to other teachers that they use a literacy coach.

Interview questions for coaches (Appendix B) followed the same format as the interview questions for teachers, beginning with a general overview of coaching from coaches' perspective, their use of specific elements of coaching in working with teachers to develop literacy pedagogy, and the value they believed they provide to children and to teachers. The interview questions for coaches ended with an invitation for coaches to talk more about their work that might not have surfaced in the previous questions. At the conclusion of each interview, with coaches and with teachers, I thanked the participant and told them that I would email the interview transcript for their review.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

There were 10 participants included in this study. I invited participants based on their employment as preschool literacy coaches or preschool teachers in public school districts in the target state. I recruited participants by posting a message on the

professional networks Facebook Friends of Family Education and SRCL. The message explained the study and included a request for reply. I also contacted administrators of the SRCL program and requested permission to post the email on their website, within a blog, or to the association's members directly. Because recruitment was slow, it seemed I might not receive enough responses through social media to meet my minimum target of five participants in each group, so I asked those participants who already interviewed with me to nominate someone else whom they thought might be interested in participating. I gave interviewees a print copy of the social media message to share with colleagues. In this way, the contact information of their nominees remained confidential until the nominee decided to respond to the flier, and the nominating person did not know if the nominee responded. As interested individuals responded to my posted message, I responded by reiterating participant criteria, by explaining how the interview would work, and by emailing the consent form.

The consent form directed individuals who wished to proceed with participation in the study to reply via email to me with "I consent." When I received each "I consent" response, I began to schedule Zoom interviews. I continued recruiting and launching the interview process until five preschool literacy coaches and five preschool teachers enrolled in the study and interviews were underway. I conducted interviews by telephone or Zoom teleconferencing, depending on the preference of the participant (see Archibald et al., 2019; Daniels et al., 2019; Lobe et al., 2017; Matthews et al., 2018). All interviews were audio-recorded, and participants affirmed their consent for recording prior to the interviews. Audio recording was supported by the Zoom platform and by my cell phone.

All literacy coaches and teachers in the target state used Zoom conferencing as part of their work. I followed the Zoom video conferencing interview method protocol described by Lobe et al. (2020). Although Zoom recorded both audio and video, I retained only audio files. After each interview was concluded, I thanked the participant and let them know that I would email them a transcript of their interview for their review. I confirmed each participant's email address to which to send the transcript so they could check the transcript for accuracy and request any changes the participant thought necessary. This member checking supported the trustworthiness of the data and the results, as described in a later section.

Data Analysis Plan

Following each interview, I transcribed the interview myself, beginning with an audio file created by Zoom and creating a verbatim record of the conversation using tools from support.apple.com. I emailed the transcript to each participant, as described above, and allowed 10 days after sending the transcript email to receive a corrected version. The corrected transcript of each interview, if one was submitted, was used as the basis for data analysis.

To begin analyzing the data from interviews of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers, I removed participant identifiers and replacing those with codes, such as C1 for the first coach participant, T1 for the first teacher participant, and continuing numerically until all identifiers were replaced by a code name. I then read through the transcripts to get an overall impression of what participants said. I organized the transcripts into a three-column table, with the transcripts in the center column. I included

participant codes, so it was clear to me which participant made which comments and organized the transcripts in the table with coach transcripts first, followed by teacher transcripts.

In the left column of the transcript table above mentioned, I inserted my thoughts, including those that occurred as I conducted and transcribed the interviews and those that occurred during the process of rereading them in the transcript. Then, in the right column, I indicated the codes I identified as I reviewed the transcripts. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the reason for coding is to facilitate the organization of the data and supporting data analysis by allowing for the identification of patterns across multiple data points, relationships within data, and common themes. I read through the entire set of transcripts at least twice, so I was certain of capturing all the codes from participant interviews.

Next, I created another three-column table. The left column was where I put all the codes, one under the other in a long list. I rearranged and reordered these codes as needed, grouping similar ones together. Then, I decided on a category label for each group of similar codes and inserted that category label in the middle column adjacent to the codes from which I derived the category. The right column was for the themes that derived from grouping the categories. Again, I rearranged and reordered the categories and their associated codes, grouping categories together to demonstrate a main idea or theme the categories seemed to represent. I inserted the theme label in the right-most column. In this way, I gleaned all the data from the interviews, coding and then

categorizing them, and finally reached an understanding of the themes indicated by data extracted from participants' responses.

This process allowed me to define connections between participant's interview responses and categories created by grouping similar ideas. The three-column table also enhanced my analytic insight and improved my data organization efficiency. Lastly, as analyzed, the data were consistent with the research questions, purpose, and context of the research, and represented the actual information provided by the participants, not extended, or manipulated to suit my preconceived opinions. To safeguard against these vulnerabilities, I took steps to ensure trustworthiness, as I describe below.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

In a qualitative research study, credibility refers to the belief that the research results are founded on facts. To build credibility in this qualitative investigation, I employed the reflexivity technique. Reflexivity examines the researcher's personal beliefs, behaviors, and judgements; the researcher engages in self-reflection. I used my reflective notes to ask questions, capture ideas, make sense of them, chart my thoughts and feelings, and keep track of any problems that arose during the data collection time (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Furthermore, as Ravitch and Carl (2016) directed, I included any interpretations I saw and recorded in my field notes. Member checking, in the form of participant transcript review, was used to double-check the accuracy of the transcript data, adding to the credibility of this study. Participant transcript review was used to

double-check the accuracy of the transcript data, adding to the credibility of this research work.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research is equivalent to external validity in quantitative research. It is the way qualitative research can be extended or adapted to wider contexts while maintaining their context-specific property (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transferability was ensured by providing verbatim examples of participant responses, detailed description of the study setting, and clear explanations of the process by which I generated my results so that sections of my study findings and design can be evaluated by readers, school administrators, or even other researchers in determining the transferability of my findings to their own contexts. I presented rich, thick descriptions of my process at every stage, so readers may determine transferability of my findings to their own contexts.

Dependability

Dependability was established, as described by Ravitch and Carl (2016), by ensuring that the data were consistent over time. In my research study, dependability was achieved by having a reasonable argument for how my data were collected. In addition, I ensured that the data were accurate, following the advice of Korstjens and Moser (2018), in that I had created clear interview questions as confirmed by an outside expert, and I used member checking to confirm the accuracy of the data. Methods for ensuring dependability included sequencing of methods and providing a well-articulated justification for my choices to ensure that I had generated a dependable data collection

plan (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the key to achieving dependability is a sound research design that proves reliable and with repeatable results.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the level of trust that the results of the research sample basing on experiences and words of the participants, rather than possible prejudices of the researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). An audit trail of the research process was the strategy that I used to establish the confirmability of my study's findings. As I analyzed my data, I created tables with a column for self-reflection or my thoughts, that continued throughout the process of analyzing my data. This provided me with a channel for expressing my opinions in a way that permitted me to remain objective in my findings.

Ethical Procedures

I obtained the approval (05-07-21-0673177) of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB ensured that my capstone proposal met university ethical requirements and guided me in protecting my participants from any potential harm. I provided informed consent to all participants and kept participants' identity confidential. I also ensured confidentiality of coaches and teachers by assigning each a code name and eliminating from the data references to their identity and to identifying information, such as their district or school. I kept study materials and data secure, with a digital file on a password protected computer, and any paper files kept in a locked drawer in my office. Study materials will be retained for five years, after which I

will destroy them by shredding paper documents and electronically wiping (not merely deleting) electronic files.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this research study was to increase understanding regarding the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. This study addressed the gap in practice in the field regarding understanding of the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. The results of my study have potential to inform future effectiveness of literacy coaches. Chapter 3 provided an account of how the research study was designed and conducted. The chapter described how a purposeful sample of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers was selected. I presented a plan for gathering and analyzing data from interviews that was conducted by telephone or Zoom teleconferencing. I described my resolution of ethical considerations, and support for trustworthiness of the results. In Chapter 4 I describe the results of my study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this research study was to increase understanding regarding the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. The study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: How do preschool teachers describe their perspectives of the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy?

RQ2: How do preschool literacy coaches describe their perspectives of their role in developing the literacy pedagogy of preschool teachers?

In this chapter, I describe the findings of data analysis and the results as they pertain to each research question. I begin with a description of the study setting and data collection process.

Setting

The setting for the study was one state in the midwestern United States. All the semi structured, in-depth, interviews were conducted via Zoom conferencing-online platform during the months of May and June 2021. I created Zoom invitations for the days and times each participant requested, and the links were copied and emailed to participants. Because I used Zoom, all participants and I were able to meet at our scheduled time despite our different geographical locations in the target state. The data were collected towards the end of the school year for most school districts in the target state. In the month of June, the targeted state had 8 to 9 days of record-breaking heat according to the weather stations, thereby resulting in some school districts ending their

school year early due to excessive heat. The conditions related to the heat and early school closure may have influenced prospective participants' decision to participate in the study. Despite these challenges, by adding a snowballing sampling strategy, I was able to recruit 10 participants for this study.

Data Collection

A total of 10 interviews were conducted with participants from six different public-school districts, from which five literacy coaches and five preschool teachers were invited to participate. Interviews included both teachers and coaches from the same district only once, in District E (see Table 1).

All participants were female and worked at the preschool level. All the coaches had coaching experiences in their districts for 2 years or less. The teachers had also experience working with a coach for 2 years or less. All participants had more than 5 years in the public-school early childhood setting; the coaches had worked as classroom teachers prior to their assignment to the coaching role. Although the state does have a job designation of "literacy coach" and although I intended to recruit coaches who held this specific job title, only two of the five coaches held the title "literacy coach." The other three were generalist coaches. All the participants spoke of the difficulty in connecting with each other as part of the coaching relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic, when school was disrupted, and much instruction was conducted online.

Table 1*Profile of Participants: School Districts, Coaches, and Teachers*

Schools	Coaches	Teachers
School District A	C1, C2	
School District B		T1, T2
School District C	C3	
School District D		T3
School District E	C4	T4, T5
School District F	C5	

I conducted single-session, individual interviews with all 10 participants. The interviews lasted for 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the answers given by the participants and how much they elaborated on their perspectives of the role literacy coaches in developing teachers' literacy pedagogy. All the interviews were conducted using Zoom online platform, and I used the recording function of Zoom to audio-record each interview. Following the interviews, I used support.apple.com, an external transcription service, to transcribe each recording. This speech to text transcriber provided clarity and distinctness of what was said by each participant.

Data Analysis

I began data analysis by transcribing verbatim the interviews. To begin analyzing the data from interviews of preschool literacy coaches and preschool teachers, participants' identifiers were removed and replaced with codes, such as C1 for the first

coach participant, T1 for the first teacher participant, and continuing numerically until all identifiers were replaced by a code name. I then read through the transcripts to get an overall impression of what participants said. I organized the transcripts into a three-column table, with the transcripts in the center column, with coach transcripts first, followed by teacher transcripts. I generated codes in the table's right-hand column by noting phrases or terms used by the participants that recurred across transcripts or seemed relevant to the study's purpose.

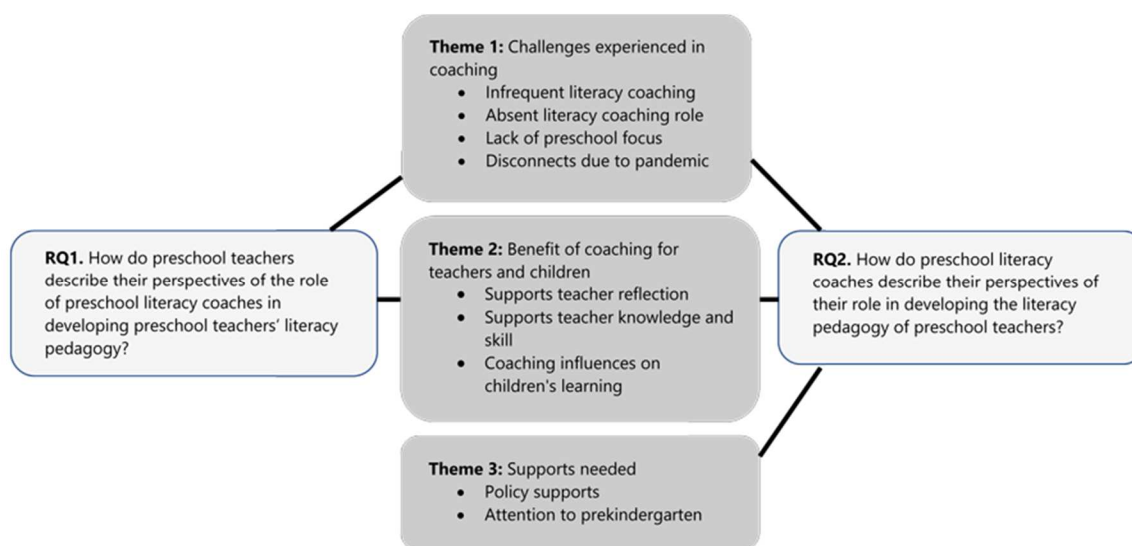
I read through the entire set of transcripts twice, so I could be certain of capturing all the codes from participant interviews. This process resulted in identification of 87 codes. I continued data analysis by creating another three-column table, and in the left column, all 87 codes were pasted. Next, they were rearranged and reordered individually as needed, grouping similar codes together. Then, for each set of similar codes, I chose a category name and entered it in the middle column next to the codes from which the category was derived. This process resulted in nine categories: infrequency of coaching, absent literacy coaching role, lack of preschool focus, disconnects due to the pandemic, supports teacher reflection, supports teacher knowledge and skill, influences children's learning, policy supports needed, and attention to prekindergarten needed.

I rearranged and reordered the categories and their associated codes, grouping categories together to demonstrate a main idea or theme the categories seemed to represent. I inserted the theme label in the right-most column. In this way, I used all the relevant data from the interviews, coding them, and then categorizing them, and finally reaching an understanding of the themes indicated data extracted from participants'

responses. In this way, I developed three themes of challenges experienced in coaching, benefit of coaching for teachers and children, and supports needed. These themes and RQs and their associated categories are presented in Figure 1. No discrepant cases were identified in the data set.

Figure 1

Themes and Categories That Emerged Regarding RQs



Results

In this section, I present analysis results supported by evidence provided by interview participants' input during the interviews. These results are organized by RQ and include references to relevant themes. The two RQs that guided this study differ only in their focus on preschool teachers' perspectives (RQ1) or on preschool literacy coaches' perspectives (RQ2).

Results for RQ1

RQ1 focused on how preschool teachers described their perspectives on the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. Two themes were reflected in the perspectives described by the five preschool teachers I interviewed: challenges experienced in coaching and the benefit of coaching for teachers and children. Supports needed was not a theme that emerged for teachers.

A key finding in teachers' perspective of literacy coaching was their rejection of the notion of dedicated literacy coaching. T2 said, "Not a literacy coach, but we do have a teacher coach." Similarly, T4 remarked,

In our district, we do not have a specific literacy coach for early childhood. So, there might be a literacy coach that is more geared towards elementary, upper elementary, and further. So, within early childhood, we might take some of their strategies for older elementary students and gear them down.

This finding contrasts the state's designation of literacy coaches for prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers as well as my expectation that the teachers in this study would be supported by a specialist literacy coach and not a generalist teacher coach. Another challenge was the limited frequency with which most teachers in this study said they worked with their coach. Their reports ranged from more than weekly to only once a year. For example, T1 said she met with her coach "weekly if not several times a week." However, T2 said, "I want to say we would meet her twice a month," which was echoed by T5: "Maybe twice a month depending on the scheduling." In contrast, T3 indicated, "I think it's like once a month," while T4 said, "We only get to see

them on PD [professional development] days, which is very rarely, and it's not every [PD] day, so I would say maybe once a year." In addition, the frequency of coaching sessions was affected by everyday complexities; T2 suggested, "And then it's like moving, moving, moving, and it's just like everything's so fast-paced and I think [everyone needs] more time."

According to all the preschool teachers, there are benefits to having a coach. T1 referenced how her coach helped her build her capacity: "It just helped me grow as an educator." According to some teachers, the coach has provided mentoring. T3 made specific reference to the words "mentor," "mentoring," and "mentored":

I think working with a coach is almost like mentorship, okay? It's kind of mentorship. And so, it's like you're molded into becoming your best, the best that you can be. So, you have someone who will come alongside you to guide you in that direction. Like it's almost like feedback. She gave you feedback on what it is you've done well, what it is you need to improve, and then how you can take it to the next level. So, it's almost like helping you become mentors for others also through the process.

According to teachers who participated in this study, the feedback, modeling, reflective practices, and observations that their coaches provided improved their teaching. T3 explained,

And then we look at the widely held expectations for the different age group and then try to make sure that the lessons that are taught are aligned with those standards. And that's why this reflective cycle is encouraged because then, it's like

when you're observed, they look at your teaching, are you teaching according to the standard?

T2 said she was able to gain knowledge from the feedback she received: “[My coach] helped me do that by always observing me. She would always schedule an observation, and then she'll take notes, and then we'll review it together to see what errors I did what I can make better.”

All five of the teachers were advocates for literacy coaching as a benefit for children. According to T1,

For that age group that we had, I think it was vocabulary and then just learning to love reading. They always, whenever they were at a center and found a book that was in that center, they would want to read it.

T4 also believed that coaching does influence children's mastery:

So, for me, my classroom and our goals look a little bit differently than a traditional classroom. Just because of the level of English that my students know or do not know. So, this year I worked a lot on vocabulary and something that our EL coach calls TPR, Total, Physical Response. So, when we might focus on a vocabulary word like cat, whenever we hear that word, we might make a cat scratching motion with our arm.

T2 mentioned the educational requirements in each subject area at each grade level that students are expected to learn, and teachers are expected to teach:

Whenever we meet, what we do is that we try to look at the standards and also the creative curriculum because that's what we deal with and then we look at the

widely held expectations for the different age group and then try to make sure that the lessons that are taught are aligned with those standards. And that's why this reflective cycle is encouraged because then, it's like when you're observed they look at the different-are you teaching according to the standards.

In summary, all the preschool teachers agreed on the possible importance of preschool coaches in developing preschool teachers' pedagogy. However, several teachers said they did not receive the services of a literacy coach, but only those of a general elementary grade coach who provided PD to all grade levels. In addition, while some teachers reported meeting with their coach weekly, others said they rarely saw their coach. As a result, some preschool teachers in this study described needing to adjust elementary grade literacy advice to meet the needs of their preschoolers or to manage without much coaching of any sort at all. Other teachers in the study were enthusiastic about coaching services that included support for reflective practice, observation by the coach, and coaches' modeling of teaching techniques. Teachers also reported that coaching was interrupted due to the COVID guidelines that were put in place by school districts.

Results for RQ2

RQ2 asked how preschool literacy coaches described their perspectives of their role in developing the literacy pedagogy of preschool teachers. All three themes emerged from the coaches, just as they did from the teachers: challenges experienced in coaching, the benefit of coaching for teachers and children, and supports needed.

The responses revealed that literacy coaches believed that there are difficult aspects of the job, challenges they have faced, or obstacles to fulfilling their role as a coach. C2 mentioned the difficulty of doing coaching work during the COVID pandemic:

So, I started being able to go into classrooms, but it was a very small capacity. I had to separate each building by a week due to cross contamination worries. And we have five buildings with teachers in them. So, I really was only able to see teachers once a month.

Additionally, C1 asserted that challenges existed due to administration policies and expectations:

But one of the challenges was this was the first year that our preschool teachers have been housed in elementary schools and guided by their principals. So there has been some communication disconnects there which have been kind of hiccups in our process. We're focusing on very strong Pre-K practices, which isn't necessarily what their leadership has been looking for because this is new and we're teaching K5 buildings how to do preschool. So, I think that has been the biggest challenge we've had other than COVID.

Moreover, COVID seemed to have been an issue with C2 as well. Her time was limited and the frequency with which she could observe, and coach had to change:

So, I started being able to go into the classrooms, but it was a very small capacity. I had to separate each building by a week due to cross contamination worries. And we have five buildings with teachers in them. So, I really was only able to see teachers once a month.

C3 expressed the benefits to teachers of being a coach, saying, “We used practice-based coaching to help them think about their own thinking and their own actions.” C1 referenced specific strategies use to benefit teachers:

So, we were kind of directed to support them in writing. We’ve done literacy walkthroughs of the classrooms to try to identify areas that need to be strengthened for next year by watching their practices by seeing a snapshot of what’s going on. And we’ll take that and kind of translate it into the mapping out.

C1, however, described her desire to focus on guiding rather than pushing her own viewpoint on the teachers:

I think personally, my coaching has a rather laid-back approach. I very much respect that every individual teacher and classroom has their own uniqueness to them. So, while I’m trying to build cohesion, I don’t want to directly tell anybody what they have to do.

C2 offered a similar response:

I really have enjoyed getting to know the teachers as individuals. I have really like to be a part of their professional journey. Because it is a journey no matter how many years you've been in the profession or how few years.

C2 believed coaches benefit children:

I’m finding out that this is such an impacting position to be in by working with teachers. I impact every single child because I’m working with the teachers and the educators who hold this, I’m finding out that this is such an impacting position

to be in by working with teachers. I impact every single child because I'm working with the teachers and the educators who hold this touch.

Coaches in this study suggested they would welcome more administrative support. For example, C4 discussed the need for more support from the district leave regarding early childhood literacy coaching:

I'll just say more support from the department of education. Would have been really helpful because we work in early childhood felt as though the support coming from the department were really more geared toward K through 12 and I was new to coaching. And so having a little bit more guidance from the Department would have been helpful.

Similarly, C2 mentioned the need for policy support and administrative leadership:

Honestly, early childhood is a world that's so confusing. And I feel like having those different leadership dynamics that are all at play either through the VPK or the School Readiness Plus or being run under community Ed or being run under SPEC. There are so many cooks in the kitchen who are trying to make good changes.

Additionally, C1 noted that because prekindergarten is housed in elementary schools with elementary principals, whose overall focus is on the elementary grades, building administrators give little or no attention to preschool curriculum goals or plan. C1 said,

But one of the challenges was this was the first year that our preschool teachers have been housed in elementary schools and guided by their principals. So, there has been some communication disconnects there which have been kind of hiccups

in our process. We're focusing on very strong pre-k practices, which isn't necessarily what their leadership has been looking for because this is new and we're teaching K5 buildings how to do preschool.

In summary, coaches' perspectives illustrate the challenges of influencing the development of teachers' literacy pedagogy and thereby impacting students' learning. The challenges of COVID and a lack of some administrators' knowledge of their role and early childhood literacy development created difficulties for them in implementing their jobs effectively. Coaches believed that the focus of literacy in most schools was based on the elementary curriculum and does not have a preschool focus. Second, they highlighted the importance of both establishing and developing an early childhood focus through the instructional nature of coaching. As some coaches modeled, observed, and implemented reflective practices, teachers were able to gain knowledge and skills. The third theme, building on the second theme, is the importance of developing teachers' skills and knowledge as an important facet of coaching influences on children's mastery. As a result, the frequency of coaching circles was crucial. Yet, coaches' coaching circles were interrupted due to COVID guidelines. Some coaches were only allowed to observe twice a month. These themes emphasize the challenges of coaching in the context of the prekindergarten.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In this study credibility was supported by interviewing both preschool teachers and preschool literacy coaches, resulting in data triangulation. Throughout the interviews, I carefully set aside past research knowledge, and my preconceived assumptions and

biases to reduce prejudice, as suggested by Yin (2016), I used reflexive notes to consciously address any potential bias and increase credibility of study results. Member checking, in the form of participant transcript review, was used to double-check the accuracy of the transcript data, adding to the credibility of this study. Participant transcript review was used to double-check the accuracy of the transcript data, adding to the credibility of this research work.

Transferability of results was supported by providing verbatim examples of participant responses, detailed description of the study setting, and clear explanations of the process by which I conducted the study, so that my study findings can be evaluated by readers, including school administrators and other researchers, in determining the transferability of my findings to their own contexts. I presented detailed descriptions of my process at every stage, so readers may determine transferability of my findings to their own contexts.

The study's dependability was ensured by collecting data from multiple sources and identifying parallels and discrepancies (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I documented every step of the research process by creating audit trails, which increased the study dependability. I also kept track of the coding process, which resulted in sub-categories, categories, and themes.

Finally, confirmability was ensured through the level of confidence in the study sample's findings, which were based on the participants' experiences and statements rather than the researchers' possible prejudices (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The study's descriptive quality was enhanced by including genuine statements from preschool

teachers and literacy coaches, which provided a full assessment of the participants' perceptions. Furthermore, data were collected, documented, evaluated, and presented in a suitable and correct manner to allow other people to reach the same conclusions.

Summary

The themes resulted from the data included challenges experienced in coaching, the benefit of coaching for teachers and children, and supports needed. The results indicated that preschool literacy coaching is uneven in delivery and implementation, and that preschool teachers and preschool coaches have quite different ideas of the value of this work. Many preschool teachers reported receiving little in the way of coaching, receiving coaching that was not focused on literacy development, and receiving coaching that was aimed at elementary grade children, not preschoolers. Coaches, however, were confident in the usefulness of their efforts and did not report the problems with coaching that many teachers raised. Both teachers and coaches described difficulty in providing and receiving coaching because of the protocols in place to control the COVID-19 pandemic. These results are interpreted in reference to the literature in Chapter 5, and implications for practice and recommendations for further research presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this research study was to increase understanding of the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers regarding the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. The goal of this study was to help to close the gap in practice regarding the role of literacy coaching at the preschool level in the development of teachers' literacy pedagogy.

Interpretation of the Findings

Although coaching was provided by the school districts in the targeted state during the school year, some preschool teachers who participated in this study suggested that their coaching sessions were ineffective in the development of their literacy pedagogy. The key findings indicated that preschool literacy coaching is uneven in delivery and implementation and that preschool teachers and preschool coaches do not agree on the value of this work. In the sections to follow, the findings are interpreted.

Preschool Literacy Coaching Is Uneven in Delivery and Implementation

Based on accounts of some participating preschool teachers, they received very little in the way of literacy coaching that was aimed at preschoolers, not elementary grade children. Coaches in some schools provided professional development, but participants in this study described it as a once-a-year event and focused more on elementary grade levels than the preschool. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), professional development is defined and studied as an element that is beneficial in changing teaching practices and improving student learning outcomes. Darling-Hammond et al. posited that to achieve effective professional learning, there needs to be a content-driven educational

plan or goal that incorporates a purposeful focus on program improvement and instructional methods. However, this appears to not be the case, as reported by preschool teachers in this current study.

The preschool teachers in the current study described their perspectives on the work of preschool coaches in developing preschool teachers' pedagogy as relevant to their teaching practice. However, several teachers said they did not receive the services of a literacy coach, but only those of a general elementary grade coach who provided professional development to teachers of all grade levels. In addition, while some teachers reported meeting with their coach weekly, others said they rarely saw their coach. As a result, many preschool teachers in this study described needing to adjust elementary grade literacy advice to meet the needs of their preschoolers or to manage without much coaching of any sort at all. Participants identified infrequency of coaching as one of the major challenges they experienced in literacy coaching.

These findings are similar to what previous researchers identified as challenges encountered by preschool teachers during instructional practice. For instance, Myers and Ankrum (2018) identified unpredictable frequency as a major barrier to instructional coaching. Given the inflexibility of their schedule and that of the literacy coaches, most participants in the study noted that they had limited access to literacy training. Comparable results were reported in a qualitative survey conducted by Neuman (2018). The current study findings also are supported by Shearer et al. (2018), who demonstrated that most literacy coaches had inflexible schedules compacted with their normal schedule that may be challenging for them to have enough time to train and coach preschool

teachers. Furthermore, previous researchers linked limited literacy coaches as a major challenge to preschool teacher coaching. As a further illustration, Schachter (2015) conducted a study to investigate the experiences of 35 preschool teachers during literacy coaching sessions. Schacter reported that difficulty in recruiting and maintaining qualified literacy coaches limited the effectiveness of coaching support for preschool teachers. Because of this situation, teachers had to rely on professional learning communities in which teachers facilitated their own learning and coached each other. The literature verified the assessment of teachers in this study that limited access to literacy coaches and uneven delivery of literacy training sessions compromised the quality of preschool teachers' literacy training.

Nevertheless, some prior research conflicts with the current results. While the current study results revealed that uncertainty of coaching frequency could become a major challenge to preschool literacy coaching practice, Peterson et al. (2016) reported that although literacy training coaches were random and unsystematic, teachers still had enough time to use those limited lessons to improve their pedagogy skills. In addition, Jones et al. (2016) indicated that limited access to coaches could no longer be considered a fundamental challenge to literacy coaching in the 21st century. They emphasized the need to use technology such as prerecorded sessions or virtual training that could promote enhanced preschool literacy skills. However, although some inconsistencies exist between the current study results and results of previous researchers, most of the current literature supports the use of literacy coaches and cites limited access to literacy

instructors and randomly scheduled literacy coaching sessions as one of the key barriers to teachers' literacy pedagogy (see Jimenez et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2016).

Some participants emphasized the benefits of literacy coaching among preschool teachers. Specifically, participants noted that preschool coaching improved their own reading, pronunciation, and writing skills. These improvements enhanced teachers' self-efficacy in instructing and directing students. Additionally, participants noted that literacy training effectively improved their overall coordination and collaboration with their students, which significantly influenced students' success. This study results also showed that some teachers believed preschool literacy coaching improved their pedagogical skills and effectiveness by empowering them to update their literacy skills as needed to instruct students effectively.

The above findings are consistent with the existing literature regarding the benefits of literacy coaching. For instance, Kalinowski et al. (2020), in their qualitative study on the benefits of literacy training and coaching, reported that teachers who attended literacy coaching sessions had enhanced knowledge of different literacy practices. In line with the results in this study, Parkinson et al. (2015) reported that literacy training and coaching improved teachers' interpersonal coordination and collaboration skills. Loftus-Rattan et al. (2016) also reported that literacy coaching empowers teachers to have confidence in their skills and their ability to instruct students. Such an improved knowledge base helps teachers have a strong self-efficacy and esteem in instructing students to positively enhance their academic outcomes.

Overall, the current study findings have been supported by previous literature. In particular, the current study revealed that literacy coaching has several benefits and challenges, which is aligned with findings from previous research. Furthermore, the current study adds to the existing literature regarding the benefits of literacy coaching among preschool teachers, such as improved interpersonal coordination, up-to-date skills, and improved self-efficacy (Lorio & Woods, 2020). The challenges identified include limited access to literacy coaches and unplanned literacy coaching sessions (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2016).

Lack of Preschool Focus in Preschool Coaching

Lack of preschool focus in preschool coaching was another theme that emerged from the data analysis process. According to study findings, participants underscored the limited focus on preschool coaching for instructors. Participants noted that instructional coaching was mainly focused on higher learning levels while preschool teachers continued to be ignored. In addition, participants underscored the need to implement instructional training and coaching programs for preschool teachers in order to improve their knowledge base regarding current instructional practices.

The current study findings are consistent with previous results that have also indicated a lack of preschool coaching. For instance, although Parkinson et al. (2015) found evidence of the importance of professional preschool teacher coaching on student outcome and instructors' self-efficacy, the investigators cautioned that limited studies focused on exploring preschool instructor coaching, its challenges, and its benefits. Loftus-Rattan et al. (2016) noted that while professional development and coaching for

teachers had received considerable attention from the scholars, most of their findings were consistent regarding the limited focus of preschool coaching. Jimenez et al. (2020) also noted that participants in the study shared that they received limited instructional coaching from mentors, limiting their instructional knowledge and reducing their sense of self-efficacy. Lorio and Woods (2020) also corroborated the current study findings. The investigators found that 75% of the participants in their study of 234 preschool teachers reported having not attended preschool instructional coaching in a year. Shearer et al. (2018) also supported the current findings when they reported that participants in their study had limited preschool instructional coaching programs compared to instructors from other levels of learning.

Coaching Perceived as Useful for Students

Participants noted that that preschool teachers' literacy coaching directly influenced students' outcomes. After completing the training, participants noted that they would implement similar guidelines to improve students' academic outcomes. Comparable results were reported by Maoining Tech (2001), who also noted that preschool teachers' literacy training improved students' performance when the new skills and knowledge gained by teachers were implemented in classrooms. In addition, March et al. (2020) found that improving teachers' literacy skills enhanced students' performance and literacy skills in reading and writing. Similar results were reported by Mraz et al. (2016), who found that training and coaching teachers in literacy skills were beneficial in improving their overall academic grades.

Coaches in the current study described their efforts as useful in developing teachers' literacy pedagogy. Preschool literacy coaches who participated in this study were confident in the usefulness of their efforts and did not report the problems with coaching that many teachers raised. Coaches viewed their role as instructional in nature. Through collaboration, modeling, and reflective practices, coaches believed they were able to help teachers gain knowledge and skills. This corresponds to Bandura's social learning theory, which suggested that people gain knowledge and skills from one another through perception, imitation, and observation. Coaches in this study claimed that they had specific techniques or methods they used to help teachers improve their literacy knowledge and pedagogy. These findings aligned with those of Hathaway et al. (2016), who reported that coaches listen to and include instructors as trusted team members, and they engage in mutual conversations, which are crucial for developing trust between the coach and the teacher, promoting teacher growth, and improving student learning.

Policy Supports Are Needed

The idea that policy supports are needed was another theme that emerged from the study findings. Most participant coaches noted the need for an effective policy such as structured coaching sessions to promote ensuring ongoing professional development. Coaches also noted the need to create research-based instructional procedures and help teachers implement these procedures. These findings are supported by those in a study conducted by Anderson et al. (2019), which indicated that ongoing mentorship programs were effective in teacher literacy training. Ansari and Pianta (2018) also recommended that policies be created to model effective instructional procedures. To achieve the

objective of teacher literacy training and coaching, Archibald et al. (2019) recommended that teachers should be encouraged to participate in self-reflection on teaching; read professionally; participate in professional meetings; and stay current with national, state, and local initiatives. Baker et al. (2018) also corroborated the current findings by stating that policy supports that assist teachers in overcoming problems they encounter in their classrooms is key to the effectiveness of teacher literacy training going forward.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this qualitative research study. Due to a global health pandemic ongoing at the time of data collection, face-to-face interviews were not possible, and therefore were replaced by interviews by Zoom teleconferencing. Because all literacy coaches and teachers in the target state usually conduct meetings and conferences via Zoom conferencing as part of their work, all were familiar with the teleconferencing platform. Because of the convenience of teleconferencing over traveling to an interview location, using Zoom may have increased my ability to locate coaches and teachers interested in participating in the study. However, some data may have been lost because of limited ability to see facial expressions and body language, which would have been more possible in face-to-face interviews.

A second limitation is that only female participants volunteered for this study, which precluded the perspectives of male educators. Interviewing male preschool teachers and literacy coaches may have uncovered more themes or different experiences. Finally, while all coaches were educated in early childhood education and previously

worked as preschool teachers, none of them confirmed being specifically certified in the area of early literacy.

Recommendations

The study findings presented an opportunity for recommendations for further research. For instance, the study was conducted in one geographical location. This limits the transferability of the study findings reading instructional coaching for preschool in other settings or the general population. Therefore, it is recommended that further research should replicate the study for a more diverse population from other geographical locations. Additionally, the study was limited by the target population and sample size. In particular, the current study was delimited to preschool teachers using a small sample size. Therefore, researchers should extend the current study findings using more participants and participants from a wider geographic region.

The current study also should be replicated after disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are several years in the past. Although school practices are often upset by local problems that might affect teachers and coaches, the pandemic caused disruptions throughout the state. Data in this study suggested that coaching and student instruction were different during the period of the study than they had been prior to that time. Therefore, future studies should replicate the current study findings under conditions that might more clearly reflect educational practice as it is intended by school districts.

Implications of the Study

The current study findings have several practical and policy implications for teachers, coaches, and other stakeholders in the education sector. First, the study findings indicated a lack of focus on preschool teacher literacy coaching compared to other levels of learning, as also found by Parkinson et al. (2015), which suggests that greater attention should be paid by administrators to the unique needs of preschool teachers. The inclusion of prekindergarten programs in elementary school organization must be accompanied by differentiation of the real needs of very young students and their teachers. Second, literacy coaching should be an explicit educational role, distinct from general coaching of teaching practice, if administrators wish to improve children's reading ability. In this study, although I intended to include literacy coaches, most teachers and coaches who participated did not believe literacy coaching was a role distinct from general coaching. Because literacy development is a complex task supported by reading specialists with unique training in reading instruction and because early literacy is critical to children's reading mastery, an increased focus by school administrators on literacy coaching might lead to greater reading success in students. Finally, coaches and school administrators may use the results of this study as the basis for a new program of regular training and literacy coaching programs for preschool teachers, as suggested by Horowitz Kraus et al. (2017). Such programs can equip teachers with up-to-date knowledge of literacy practices.

Study findings support the use of professional learning communities and weekly teacher roundtables as informal ways to improve literacy teaching. The findings of this

study may contribute to positive social change if school district administrators expand and improve coaching programs to better support prekindergarten teachers. Findings in this study indicate that greater reading mastery might result when prekindergarten teachers are supported in literacy instruction by knowledgeable coaches who meet with them on a regular basis and model best practices in literacy pedagogy. Positive social change will result when greater attention to prekindergarten literacy is embraced by teachers and coaches alike, and young children are supported in learning to read.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to increase understanding regarding the perspectives of preschool literacy coaches and teachers towards the role of preschool literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. The majority of school district reform efforts are aimed at raising teaching standards and improving student learning outcomes. Because excellent instruction is linked to improved student learning, efforts and investments to effect change have risen dramatically, with an emphasis on quality indicators and teacher practice enhancement (Jimenez et al., 2015). However, there was limited research on literacy coaches in preschool settings to develop preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy. This study aimed to increase understanding of the role of literacy coaches in developing preschool teachers' literacy pedagogy.

This qualitative research study was grounded in Bandura's social learning theory (1969). Learning, according to Bandura, occurs when people gain knowledge and skills from one another through perception, imitation, and observation. Because it focuses on the social dimensions of learning and coaching, literacy coaching is based on Bandura's

social learning theory. However, interviews of prekindergarten teachers and their coaches revealed that interaction between coaches and teachers was infrequent, not targeted to the needs of prekindergarten teachers, and often did not focus on early literacy. Although the coaches agreed that their work is beneficial to teachers' practice and to children's outcomes, prekindergarten teachers were less likely to credit coaching with improvements in their instructional practice. Coaching as an embodiment of social learning theory is a valuable mechanism for developing teaching practice, but it has yet to be fully realized as part of prekindergarten practice, particularly regarding literacy pedagogy. Literacy coaching for prekindergarten teachers, when it is fully implemented, holds great promise for increasing children's reading mastery and later school success.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Teachers

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. Before we begin, please confirm for me that you consent to being part of this study, and also that you agree I may audio-record our conversation today....

We're going to talk about your work with preschool literacy coaches. I want to hear whatever you wish to tell me about your experiences, so I can fully understand them. No one but you and I will know what you told me, or even that you were part of this interview at all. This should take us about 45 minutes. Okay? Let's begin.

1. Tell me about your experience working with a preschool literacy coach.

[Probing Questions:

- a. How frequently did your coach meet with you?
- b. How did you find out what the coach wanted you to know?]

2. Please describe what your literacy coach does to help you to improve the way you teach children literacy concepts?

[Probing Questions:

- a. Did your coach observe you teaching and give you tips?
- b. Did your coach demonstrate how to teach something?
- c. Did your coach help you think more about your teaching?]

3. How did your literacy coach help you identify specific areas of your literacy teaching that needed support?

[Probing Questions:

- a. Can you give me an example?]

4. What increases in children's mastery of literacy concepts were you able to accomplish after you worked with your literacy coach?

[Probing Questions:

- a. How much did you find your working with a coach helped you teach better?]

5. Please describe what did you find most helpful about working with your coach in improving your literacy teaching?

[Probing Questions:

- a. Tell me more about that.]

6. What changes would have improved your experience working with your literacy coach?

[Probing Questions:

- a. Tell me more about that.
- b. Can you provide some examples of...?]

7. What more can you tell me about your experience using a literacy coach?

[Probing Questions:

- a. Why do you say that?]

Thanks so much! I've really enjoyed our conversation today. I will transcribe the audio and email you the transcript so you can review it for accuracy. I will make any changes you think are needed. Have a great rest of your day!

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Coaches

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. Before we begin, please confirm for me that you consent to being part of this study, and also that you agree I may audio-record our conversation today....

We're going to talk about your work with preschool literacy coaches. I want to hear whatever you wish to tell me about your experiences, so I can fully understand them. No one but you and I will know what you told me, or even that you were part of this interview at all. This should take us about 45 minutes. Okay? Let's begin.

1. Tell me about your experience working with as a literacy coach with preschool teachers.

[Probing Questions:

- a. How frequently did you meet with your teachers?
- b. How did you find out what the teacher wanted or needed to know?
- c. How many teachers do you usually have in your case load?]

2. Please describe what you do to help a teacher improve the way they teach children literacy concepts?

[Probing Questions:

- a. How often do you observe the teacher teaching and give them tips?
- b. How often do you demonstrate to a teacher how to teach something?
- c. How often do you help a teacher to think more about their teaching?]

3. How do you identify specific areas of literacy teaching that a teacher needs you to support?

[Probing Questions:

b. Can you give me an example?]

4. How do you know if you are having a positive effect for teachers and for children by working with a teacher as a literacy coach?

[Probing Questions:

a. How much did you find your working with a coach helped you teach better?]

5. What did you find most helpful for teachers in improving their literacy teaching?

[Probing Questions:

a. Tell me more about that.]

6. What changes would improve your experience working with preschool teachers as their literacy coach?

[Probing Questions:

a. Tell me more about that.]

7. What more can you tell me about your work as a preschool literacy coach?

[Probing Questions:

a. Why do you say that?]

Thanks so much! I've really enjoyed our conversation today. I will transcribe the audio and email you the transcript so you can review it for accuracy. I will make any changes you think are needed. Have a great rest of your day!