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Effect of Book Selection and Independent Reading Time on Fourth-Grade Students' Reading Comprehension

Natasha Murray
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Walden University

College of Education

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Natasha Murray

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Effect of Book Selection and Independent Reading Time on Fourth-Grade Students'

Reading Comprehension

by

Natasha Murray

M.Phil., Walden University, 2021

M.Ed., University of Texas Arlington, 2013

BS, University of North Texas, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Walden University

May 2022

Abstract

The problem addressed through this study was the low levels of reading comprehension of literary and informational texts among fourth-grade students statewide. The reading workshop model and the guided reading approach are two different instructional methods used to teach reading to fourth-grade students at two school districts in Texas. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the difference in reading comprehension scores between fourth-grade students who participated in the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading approach for 1 academic year. Two research questions comparing reading comprehension scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness between fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading approach guided this study. The theoretical framework comprised Wigfield and Eccles's expectancy-value theory and their concept of achievement motivation. Reading comprehension scores on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness for fourth-grade students from two different school districts were analyzed using an independent-samples *t* test. The results indicated statistically significant differences in student scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts such that students taught using the reading workshop model scored significantly better than those taught using the guided reading approach. This study may benefit elementary instructional leaders by providing them with information regarding a program with the potential to increase students' intrinsic reading motivation and improve their reading comprehension, setting them on a path to academic success.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my beloved family. To my one-of-a-kind parents, Melissa and Delbert. You have been constant sources of unconditional love, encouragement, and guidance throughout my entire life. You have been extraordinary role-models since day one, and I am forever grateful for all you have done to help shape me into the person I am today. Thank you for creating a magical childhood where I learned anything is possible. I am so thankful Elliott gets to grow up making memories and being loved by the best Nanny M and Dooda. To my precious son, Elliott. I thank God every day for choosing me to be your mother. Raising you is my greatest joy, and you will forever be my biggest accomplishment. I hope you always follow your heart and passions because life is too short to spend time doing anything else. Finally, I dedicate this study to my husband, the love of my life, Mark. Thank you for loving me the way you do and for supporting our family while I pursued my dream of earning a Ph.D. Your integrity, strength, and dedication to our family are just a few of the qualities that I admire most about you. You provide us with daily doses of laughter, endless love, and fun adventures. Elliott and I are so blessed to call you ours.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Despite educators' ongoing efforts to strengthen reading instruction, there is evidence suggesting students have not achieved adequate literacy success (Walpole et al., 2017). According to The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2020), in 2019, 34% of fourth-grade students tested throughout the nation failed to meet basic reading levels. The 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), a worldwide reading assessment given to fourth-grade students every 5 years to monitor reading comprehension achievement, found the overall average reading score for U.S. fourth-grade students declined between 2011 and 2016 (Warner-Griffin et al., 2017). Moreover, the overall 2016 average reading score for U.S. fourth-grade students was lower than the average for 12 education systems: Russian Federation, Singapore, Hong Kong, Ireland, Finland, Poland, Northern Ireland, Norway, Chinese-Taipei, England, Latvia, Sweden, Hungary, and Bulgaria (Warner-Griffin et al., 2017). The 2016 PIRLS results may be more reflective of actual student performance than the anticipated 2022 release of the 2021 assessment results because data collected in 2021 will be affected by school disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Soemer and Schiefele (2018) found when students enjoy reading and are intrinsically motivated, they spend a greater amount of time reading, resulting in a strengthening of their comprehension and academic achievements. Since comprehension is an essential skill taught in elementary education, students should be given every opportunity to learn to appreciate literature and enjoy reading as proficient readers (Fraumeni-McBride, 2017). For students to demonstrate literacy achievement and

identify as readers, Barone and Barone (2018) suggested teachers allow students to choose their own reading materials and provide more time for independent reading during the school day. The reading workshop method allocates at least 20 minutes of daily independent reading time using self-selected books in an attempt to improve students' attitudes toward reading (Brannan et al., 2020). This is in contrast to the guided reading method, which relies on teacher-selected reading materials and a combination of writing, phonics, word study, and independent reading activities once the small-group guided reading lesson is complete (Bose, 2017).

In this study, I analyzed the State Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) scores for fourth-grade students from a Texas public elementary school that used the reading workshop model as a method of reading instruction and a matched Texas elementary campus that used the guided reading method to determine any differences in achievement in reading comprehension. The STAAR exam is the end-of-year standardized assessment given to students in Texas. The two campuses in this study, Campus A and Campus B, were similar in ethnic distributions and student populations (see Table 1).

Table 1*Fourth-Grade Subpopulations at Two Elementary Campuses from Different Districts*

Subpopulations	Campus A %	Campus B %
African American	26	17
Hispanic	36	17
White	32	33
Asian	3	20
Two or more races	3	13

In this chapter, I begin by presenting the background of the study. The focus of the problem and an overview of the purpose of the study are provided. The research questions and the theoretical framework that formed the basis of this study are then discussed. I also present the nature of the study and definitions of specific terms found in this study. The chapter concludes the assumptions, limitations, scope, delimitations, and a summary.

Background

According to Schiefele et al. (2016), the reading performance of early elementary students is a strong predictor of what their reading abilities will be in later years. Gentilini and Greer (2020) found early reading ability gaps only widen as students grow older. Student engagement and motivation in reading declines during the school years when students compare their abilities with peers and believe the teacher-assigned reading material is irrelevant for their lives (Wigfield et al., 2016). Moreover, Wigfield et al. (2016) found assigned texts can stifle students' intrinsic motivation to read; therefore,

children will only read when necessary in order to avoid the negative feelings they associate with the task. This has prompted educators to explore how to best support their students' academic achievement and strengthen the students' reading comprehension.

Because learning to read and reading to learn are major components of elementary education, teachers should provide students with a variety of reading options and materials that will allow students to take ownership of their learning (Fraumeni-McBride, 2017). Barone and Barone (2018) reported that when students choose their own books rather than having assigned texts from the teacher, their motivation and desire to read increases. Brannan et al. (2020) found giving students opportunities to make choices about what they read, providing ample opportunities for students to engage in independent reading, and making reading tasks relevant to students' lives promotes intrinsic reading motivation. I conducted the current study to address the gap in literature regarding instructional practices that support fourth-grade students' intrinsic reading motivation through student-selected reading materials and time for independent reading and how these strategies translate into improved reading comprehension and assessment scores.

Merga (2018) indicated the use of independent reading time during the school day contributed toward students' positive attitudes of reading. Engagement and reading for pleasure in the classroom are strongly connected to an increase in reading achievement (Merga, 2018). As students begin to enjoy reading for pleasure during the school day, the amount of time they pursue reading increases (Merga, 2018). According to Gentilini and Greer (2020), students show an improvement in reading comprehension when the value

of reading is reinforced in the classroom. Using pre- and posttest data, they found students showed growth in reading achievement when independent reading time during the school day was provided by the teacher.

The two instructional approaches found in this study are the reading workshop model and the guided reading approach. The reading workshop model includes three main components: a brief, whole group minilesson; independent reading time; and an end-of-workshop reflection (Cherry-Paul et al., 2020). Teachers allocate at least 20 minutes of independent reading time using self-selected books in an attempt to improve students' attitudes toward reading and give students the opportunity to practice their reading skills (Brannan et al., 2020). Unlike the whole group minilessons implemented during the reading workshop model, the guided reading approach includes differentiated lessons taught to small groups of students on the same instructional reading level using teacher-selected books (Bose, 2017). After the completion of small-group instruction, students are sent back to their seats to work on phonics, spelling, writing, or another extension activity (Bose, 2017).

While there is research suggesting specific practices, such as book choice (Hoffman, 2017) and independent reading time (Schiefele et al., 2016), contribute to increased reading motivation and comprehension in elementary-age students, studies are lacking that address fourth graders' academic performance on a test of analysis of literary and informational texts when the amount of allowed independent reading time varies. There is a gap in the literature examining fourth-grade students' reading comprehension

on standardized tests depending on daily independent reading time using self-selected books.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed through this study was the low levels of reading comprehension of literary and informational texts among fourth-grade students from two elementary campuses in Texas. In a summary report of the 2018–2019 STAAR test results, 33% of fourth-grade students did not meet grade-level reading standards for reading comprehension and an average of 37% of fourth-grade students from the two campuses in this study did not meet grade-level reading expectations (see Table 2).

Table 2

STAAR Reading Test Performance of Fourth-Grade Students From Two Campuses

Year	Texas passing %	Campus A passing %	Campus B passing %
2016	67	78	86
2017	66	68	74
2018	67	70	70
2019	67	51	75
2021	55	42	66

Lack of literacy is one of the greatest academic risk factors facing young learners; therefore, effective literacy instruction must be identified to foster academic success (Council et al., 2019). According to Tang et al., (2019), reading failure is measurable in three reporting categories: understanding and analysis across genres, understanding and analysis of literary texts, and understanding and analysis of informational texts. Boulhrir

(2017) argued that students are more successful in practicing comprehension strategies when they are allowed to read self-selected books. However, Walpole et al. (2017) and Kheradmand (2016) reported that reading instruction typically is based on texts assigned by the teacher. In addition, Fraumeni-McBride (2017) found that students who struggle with reading, including reading comprehension, are provided little time to read self-selected books. Reutzel and Juth (2017) recommended teachers dedicate 20 minutes of uninterrupted independent reading per day. Anderson and Ortlieb (2017) examined the effectiveness of independent reading and determined teachers of all disciplines should allocate reading time during their class in order to help support students' literacy development. Dawkins (2017) conducted a study of the self-selection process of books among 160 kindergarten students and found students were inspired to read more often when they were given the freedom to choose their own books than when they were assigned teacher-selected books. According to Erickson (2019), more research is needed regarding instructional methods used to support reading development among students who struggle with comprehension.

Research has been conducted on the growth of intrinsic motivation when students are given time during the school day to read self-selected texts (Soemer & Schiefele, 2018). Studies have also been conducted on the positive effect independent reading time and book selection have on increasing students' reading volume and improving their reading achievement (Williams et al., 2017). While empirical research has shown independent reading time and book selection are used in elementary classrooms to develop independent readers, additional research is necessary to explore how each mode

of instruction influences the reading comprehension of fourth-grade students on literary and informational texts on a standardized test.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the difference in reading comprehension scores between fourth-grade students who participated in the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading approach for 1 academic year. In the reading workshop model, student-selected reading materials are used and 20 or more minutes a day of dedicated independent reading time are provided to students to support their reading comprehension (Calkins, 2000). The guided reading method is a balanced literacy approach that relies on teacher-selected reading materials and writing, phonics, and word study activities once the small-group guided reading lesson is complete (Bose, 2017).

In this study, I analyzed the archival reading STAAR scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts for fourth-grade students from a public, elementary school in Texas that used the reading workshop model as a method of reading instruction and fourth-grade students from a matched elementary school in Texas that used the guided reading approach to determine any differences in student achievement in reading comprehension. The independent variable was instructional method, and the dependent variables were student scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts on the STAAR exam.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: What is the difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of literary texts between fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic year?

H₀1: There is no significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of literary texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

H₁1: There is a significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of literary texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

RQ2: What is the difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of informational texts between fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic year?

H₀2: There is no significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of informational texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

*H*₁₂: There is a significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of informational texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework grounding this study was Atkinson et al.'s (1956) and Wigfield and Eccles's (2000) expectancy-value theory and the concept of achievement motivation. Atkinson et al. developed this theory in an effort to understand the achievement motivation of individuals. They determined ability-related beliefs and expectancy for success play a prominent role in one's motivation to achieve. These beliefs were later expanded into the field of education by Eccles in the 1980s (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Wigfield and Eccles (2000) argued students' achievement of a task is influenced by their belief of how well they think they will complete the task and the value they place on it. Wigfield and Eccles found achievement value is measured by four components: attainment value, or the importance of doing well; intrinsic value, or the enjoyment gained from completing the task; usefulness of the task, or how the activity fits into a student's future plans; and cost, or what has to be given up in order to do the task. When students possess positive ability beliefs along with confidence for high levels of success, they are more likely to demonstrate greater performance and higher levels of motivation despite any obstacles that occur (Bandura, 1986). In the expectancy-value theory, importance is placed on students having strong self-efficacy toward an academic subject,

such as reading, along with perceived control and choice over their own learning because then they are more likely to value the task and engage in the activity (Wigfield et al., 2016). This theory aligns with the reading workshop model approach to reading instruction that students' attitudes and motivation toward reading are improved when they are given the opportunity to self-select books that are of interest to them (Calkins, 2000). Because students are intrinsically motivated to spend time reading self-selected books, they are engaged in the task and improve their reading skills over time (Calkins, 2000).

I chose the expectancy-value theory for this study because of my focus on the difference in reading comprehension on a subtest of analysis of literary and informational texts between fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic year. A more detailed explanation of expectancy-value theory and how it relates to reading instruction is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of Study

I conducted a quantitative, comparative analysis to determine any differences in fourth-grade student academic performance on a test of analysis of literary and informational texts following instruction using the reading workshop model or the guided reading approach for 1 academic year. The rationale for choosing a quantitative approach was to conduct a systematic empirical investigation to examine the relationship between variables and observable phenomena (see Burkholder et al., 2016). Creswell (2009) stated

a quantitative approach is the most applicable method of inquiry when looking at statistical data to form conclusions.

The key concept investigated in this study was reading achievement in fourth-grade students under two instructional methods. The independent variable was instructional method, and the dependent variables were student scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts on the STAAR exam. I analyzed archival numerical data to compare scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts of fourth-grade students in two school districts in Texas, one taught using the reading workshop model, which incorporated student-selected reading materials and 20 or more minutes for independent reading, and one taught using guided reading instruction, which incorporated teacher-selected reading materials and no specified time for independent reading. I expected to gather reading STAAR scores from at least 88 students per group (i.e., 176 students in total), drawn from four fourth-grade classrooms in the two neighboring school districts. A sample size of 72 was needed in each of the two groups to achieve a 5% margin of error (see Raosoft, 2020). An independent-samples *t* test was used to evaluate the subtest data from the 2018–2019 fourth-grade reading STAAR exam.

Definitions

Specific terms in this study were defined as follows:

Guided reading: An instructional method where the teacher works with a group of four to six students on similar reading levels. The teacher provides the same text to each

member of the group and then works through prereading, during-reading, and postreading activities (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Informational text: This subset of nonfiction builds and extends prior knowledge and uses text features, such as headings, charts, and graphs, to help readers understand the main topic (Liebfreund & Conradi, 2016). It is a genre that includes expository, persuasive, procedural, and media literacy texts.

Literary text: A genre of literature written about imaginary people and events (Parsons et al., 2018). It is a genre that includes fiction, literary nonfiction, poetry, drama, and media literacy.

Reading workshop: An instructional method with a consistent daily structure that includes a whole-group minilesson followed by independent reading time for students while the teacher works with individual students or small groups and ends with a brief reflection where the teacher reinforces the learning (Calkins, 2019).

Assumptions

I assumed all teachers of the reading workshop model and the guided reading approach implemented their program with fidelity. Because the study's independent variables of time for independent reading and level of student reading choice were linked to reading curriculum, teacher fidelity to the curriculum used in their schools was critical to the validity of my study results. It was not feasible for me to observe each teacher to ensure all lessons followed the curriculum correctly; therefore, I assumed every educator made a good faith effort to incorporate all essential components. Another assumption was that teachers in the two schools were similarly experienced and capable, so that student

learning was equally supported in both curriculum conditions. Finally, I assumed all tests were administered in the same way to all participants in the study using the STAAR direction manual. These assumptions were necessary in a study that relied on preexisting data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was a comparison of student achievement data in reading comprehension following instruction using one of two curricular schemes: student-selected reading materials with 20 or more minutes a day for independent reading or assigned reading texts with no specified independent reading time. This study was delimited to include achievement data from all fourth-grade students from one elementary campus who were taught using the reading workshop model and all fourth-grade students from one elementary campus in a neighboring school district who were taught using the guided reading method. Excluded from this study were achievement data from other schools in the region, schools in other areas of the country, other grade levels within the elementary schools, private or charter schools, and other methods of reading instruction. I also excluded data from school districts that received an F rating on Texas's educational accountability system from this study.

Limitations

One limitation that may have affected study results was my inability to confirm how teachers taught the curriculum and their fidelity to the school-designated curriculum. I assumed that teachers taught in the manner endorsed by their school districts and followed the curriculum as it was described by the school district. I addressed this

limitation by choosing two schools from two different school districts that received a passing and met standard rating for overall school performance according to the state accountability system because the state accountability system includes evidence of teacher compliance with district requirements.

Significance

One potential contribution of this study is it may assist elementary school administrators and teachers to make informed decisions regarding best practices in reading instruction. With almost 4 out of every 10 fourth-grade students not reading on grade level in Texas (NAEP, 2020), educators struggle to meet the needs of their diverse learners. This study may also benefit instructional leaders of elementary campuses who are considering adopting a program that addresses the potential to increase intrinsic reading motivation and the daily use of literacy skills in students. Positive social change may result from strengthening literacy instruction to increase students' reading comprehension. It is necessary for students to develop proficient reading skills in order to be prepared for the demands of the fast-changing 21st century professions (Boulhrir, 2017).

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the problem of low levels of reading comprehension among fourth-grade students based on the NAEP (2020) and the PIRLS (2016). The independent variable was instructional method, and the dependent variables were student scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts on the STAAR exam. I shared the research questions that guided this and the theoretical foundation of Atkinson

et al.'s (1956) expectancy-value theory. In Chapter 2, I will review current literature to examine research regarding student-selected reading materials, 20 or more minutes of daily independent reading during the school day, and how both factors influence students' reading comprehension and academic achievement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Low levels of reading comprehension of literary and informational texts among many fourth-grade readers formed the problem I addressed in this study. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the difference in reading comprehension scores between fourth-grade students who participated in the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading approach for 1 academic year. According to Parsons et al. (2018), elementary students' motivation to read is highly predictive of their reading success and growth. Although there are data that indicate self-selected texts by students (Boulhrir, 2017) and daily blocks of allotted time for independent reading (Merga, 2018) increase motivation, more research is needed on whether these factors positively affect fourth-grade reading achievement. In Chapter 2, I present the literature search strategies, the theoretical foundation of the study, a review of the extant literature on the topic, and conclusions concerning the gap in literature.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate current research articles relevant to the study problem and purpose, I searched Google Scholar and databases accessible through the Walden University Library database, including ERIC and EBSCO. Keyword terms were searched in various combinations, such as *book choice*, *elementary reading comprehension*, *fourth-grade reading*, *guided reading*, *independent reading*, *reading workshop*, *comprehension*, *self-selected books*, *silent sustained reading*, and *expectancy-value theory*. Many themes were revealed during my review, which led me to search terms, such as *instructional effectiveness*, *reading motivation*, *scaffolding*, and *teaching methods*. I focused my search

on peer-reviewed, scholarly journals published from 2016–2020; however, I also included a few older sources that were relevant to the study.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework grounding this study was Atkinson et al.'s (1956) and Wigfield and Eccles's (2000) expectancy-value theory and the concept of achievement motivation. Wigfield and Eccles found achievement value is measured by four components: attainment value, intrinsic value, usefulness of the task, and cost. Eccles argued that the extent to which an individual values a task and their beliefs on how well they will complete the task determines their performance, motivation, and choice (Wigfield, 1994).

Students' ability belief, or perception of their competence to complete a given activity, plays a prominent role in achievement motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In early elementary years (i.e., first grade through fourth grade), students have a strong sense of self-efficacy; however, their beliefs in their ability to be successful decrease as they move to middle school and high school (Wigfield, 1994). One reason students' motivation decreases and they resist engaging in reading tasks as they grow older is because educators begin to restrict the choice of reading topics and material (Wigfield et al., 2016). Moreover, students' appreciation of their competence increases because of changes in evaluative methods and increased feedback from teachers (Wigfield et al., 2016). Because Wigfield and Eccles (2000) found students' ability beliefs decrease as they get older, it is crucial educators implement a reading curriculum that fosters intrinsic motivation and choice.

The expectancy-value theory helped frame Neugebauer and Fujimoto's (2020) study of elementary school students' reading motivation. Neugebauer and Fujimoto found intrinsically motivated readers tended to score higher on reading achievement assessments because they read more often than students who do not value the task. Wigfield et al. (2016) studied elementary students' reading motivation and how it affected their reading comprehension and found the hierarchical nature of developing proficient reading skills caused students' reading achievement and motivation to be negatively influenced when slow growth or difficulties during the foundational stages of learning to read occurred. According to Wigfield et al., proficient reading skills are crucial to academic success; therefore, educators use of instructional methods that increase students' motivation to read, self-efficacy, and perceived autonomy is critical.

Many theory- and research-based reading curriculums are created to help teachers provide effective literacy instruction, such as the reading workshop model and the guided reading approach (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). In the reading workshop model, at least 20 minutes of independent reading time are allocated for the students using self-selected books in an attempt to improve their attitudes and motivation toward reading and give them the opportunity to practice their reading skills (Brannan et al., 2020). In the guided reading method, students work in teacher-led small groups and read their teacher-selected book aloud while the teacher actively monitors and records their reading behaviors, strengths, and miscues (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). After the completion of small-group instruction, students are sent back to their seats to work on phonics, spelling, writing, or another extension activity (Bose, 2017). These two methods of teaching reading provide

contrasts in pedagogical constructs of the role of teachers and students in the learning process and factors that contribute to reading achievement, including student interest and motivation.

I chose the expectancy-value theory as the theoretical foundation for this study because the study was focused on the difference in reading comprehension on a subset of analysis of literary and informational texts between fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic year. The expectancy-value theory connected to this study because the concept of achievement motivation was embodied in the reading workshop model, which was one of the instructional methods that formed the independent variable in this study. In the following section, I present the current research on the effect of decoding, oral language skills, book choice, and independent reading time has on elementary students' reading comprehension.

Review of Current Literature

The two approaches to reading instruction compared in this study are the guided reading approach and the reading workshop model. Using the guided reading approach, educators teach basic reading skills and comprehension through small-group instruction using teacher-selected texts (Hoffman, 2017). When educators use guided reading in their classrooms, they teach a scripted lesson to a group of homogeneous readers and listen to the students read an assigned book based on the students' reading level (Hoffman, 2017). Another approach to reading instruction is the reading workshop model in which teachers

provide independent reading opportunities during class time and allow students to read self-selected books (Fraumeni-McBride, 2017).

Before children can begin the cognitive task of comprehending text successfully, they must first acquire two basic reading skills: decoding and oral language reading skills (Spencer & Wagner, 2018). Children who develop these early literacy skills at an average or above-average proficiency level tend to exhibit stronger reading comprehension abilities as they grow older, whereas students who struggle in these areas generally have weak comprehension skills (Wawire & Zuilkowski, 2021). According to Vaknin-Nusbaum et al. (2018), students with poor reading comprehension are less motivated to read and practice their literacy skills than are more proficient readers. While basic reading skills and comprehension proficiency influence a child's motivation and desire to read, so do book choice and independent reading time (Troyer et al., 2019). Students who are given time during the school day to read books of their choosing may be more intrinsically motivated and engaged in their reading (Barone & Barone, 2017).

In the following subsections, I discuss each of the factors that affect students' reading comprehension, including decoding skills, oral language skills, and motivation to read. I follow that with a discussion of instructional techniques that may influence reading comprehension, including book choice and independent reading time.

Decoding Skills and Fourth-Grade Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a multifaceted, complex task that requires proficiency in underlying foundational skills (Spencer & Wagner, 2018). Decoding, one of the foundational skills, is the ability to understand the relationship of letters and their sounds;

it is a critical process in learning to read and, therefore, needs explicit instruction in order for early readers to acquire it (Wang et al., 2019). For most children, decoding and other essential reading skills are taught and assessed in kindergarten and first grade (Silverman et al., 2021). Students who have difficulty decoding words will have limited comprehension even if they can infer the meaning of the words through pictures and context clues (Silverman et al., 2021). Blick et al. (2017) suggested readers with poor decoding skills and average to above-average linguistic comprehension exhibit reading strategies used by typically achieving readers that help them determine the text. This skill gives them an advantage over readers who struggle in both areas (Blick et al., 2017). Ecalle et al. (2021) reported that children who are unable to decode words will never be able to extract meaning from a text. It is not until a student's ability to decode text improves and develops that their comprehension increases (Lonigan & Burgess, 2017). Kang and Shin (2019) argued that regardless of learning disabilities, decoding abilities can fully predict a student's reading comprehension achievement. Because decoding skill is a strong predictor of later literacy achievement, readers who acquire this core skill can successfully tackle more cognitively demanding tasks, such as comprehending complex texts (Wawire & Zuilkowski, 2021).

Despite increased federal and state efforts in literacy instruction and reading curriculum in recent years, the 2019 NAEP data indicated almost 34% of fourth-grade readers read below a proficient level (Hindman et al., 2020). One explanation for the approximately one third of struggling readers in fourth grade is the lack of reading training for preservice teachers of the primary grades (Hindman et al., 2020). Connor

(2016) asserted reading instruction is a complex and individualized practice, and without intensive training, educators are unequipped to properly teach it. The National Center for Teacher Quality found preservice teachers' lacked the preparation, coursework, and hands-on experiences needed to educate them on the science of reading (Hindman et al., 2020). Because elementary teachers may have little knowledge on the foundations of strong reading pedagogy, their classroom reading instruction may be ineffective and lack the intense focus required for the essential reading subskill of decoding that could result in decoding mastery prior to the start of fourth grade (Hindman et al., 2020).

As students enter fourth grade, teachers spend fewer instructional minutes on the relationship of letters and sounds and more time on the higher-level cognitive processes required for comprehension; students are starting the process of reading to learn rather than learning to read (Toste & Ciullo, 2017). According to a NAEP (2016) report, one third of fourth-grade students failed to meet grade-level reading proficiency. Kang and Shin (2019) suggested one explanation as to why fourth-grader students struggle to attain reading proficiency is because of their lack of prerequisite decoding skills. Toste and Ciullo (2017) found nearly 25% of fourth-grade students read with a high number of decoding inaccuracies and are unable to comprehend texts.

Oral Language Skills and Fourth-Grade Reading Comprehension

As children move through elementary school, the development of their reading comprehension can be largely predicted from their decoding and oral language abilities (Lervåg et al., 2018). While there are many frameworks for understanding how children learn to comprehend written text, the simple view of reading, proposed by Gough and

Tunmer (1986), is the most frequently cited theoretical framework for elementary students (Lervåg et al., 2018). According to this model, the ability to read and understand text is the product of both decoding and the combination of several oral language skills, such as listening comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, and inferencing (Lervåg et al., 2018). According to Kang and Shin (2019), Gough and Tunmer defined oral language skills as the ability to understand and interpret the meaning through the use of words and sentences. Lepola et al. (2016) asserted these skills are the essential building blocks to deciphering the meaning of text. Once a student has decoded a text successfully, the only roadblocks to reading comprehension are a student's oral language skills (Lervåg et al., 2018).

Oral language skills are considered a critical foundation to any child's reading success (Fricke et al., 2017). Manu et al. (2021) suggested students' oral language skills in kindergarten are powerful longitudinal predictors of their reading comprehension abilities in ninth grade. Moreover, according to Hjetland et al. (2019), the strength of a child's oral language skills is highly predictive of their reading comprehension. Fricke et al. (2017) found children typically enter elementary school with more developed oral language skills than decoding skills, so when there is an early detection of oral language difficulties, targeted interventions to improve oral language have shown to be effective. Hjetland et al. also determined that together, decoding and oral language skills account for 99% of the variation of reading comprehension; therefore, it is unlikely any other factors could explain the additional variation of a child's ability to comprehend text.

Motivation to Read and Fourth-Grade Reading Comprehension

Reading motivation is shaped by students' reading identities and their perceived ability to complete reading tasks successfully (Nevo et al., 2020). The stronger the reader, the more motivated they are to read (Barone & Barone, 2018). Schiefele et al. (2016) found a reciprocal relationship between reading comprehension and motivation. The more students began to understand and enjoy what they read, the more they chose to read in their spare time, gaining confidence and comfort in their reading skills (Schiefele et al., 2016).

According to Warner-Griffin et al. (2017), the PIRLS, an international comparative measure administered every 5 years sampling 4,425 students from 158 schools in the United States, reported that 80% of fourth-grade readers described themselves as either very confident or somewhat confident in their reading abilities and scored an average of 562 on the PIRLS reading achievement scale. The remaining 20% of fourth-grade readers reported a lack of confidence in their reading skills and scored around 496 on the PIRLS reading achievement scale (Warner-Griffin et al., 2017.) Barone and Barone (2018) suggested students who identify themselves as readers are more motivated to read inside and outside of school and demonstrate a significantly higher reading volume than students who read only when required to do so by their parents or teachers. Moreover, Barone and Barone found that because students who view themselves as readers are intrinsically motivated to read for pleasure, they tend to persist even when the reading gets difficult. Soemer and Schiefele (2018) suggested intrinsically motivated readers tend to read more often than those students who do not choose to read

for pleasure, so they become better readers over time because they develop the skills necessary to comprehend various texts.

Eckert et al. (2017) asserted a student's reading motivation is closely linked to the quality of their reading experiences within the school system, so that a teacher-created positive reading experience cultivates in children a love and enjoyment of reading. Classroom conditions support reading motivation when students are encouraged to read for authentic purposes (Erickson, 2019). In addition, Erickson (2019) found that reading motivation increases when elementary-age students exercise control over their book selections. Despite the consensus on motivation contributing to students' reading success, more studies need to be conducted on the relationship between reading motivation and specific reading curriculum and intervention programs (Boulhrir, 2017).

Book Choice and Reading Motivation

One factor in motivating students to read more often both inside and outside of school is giving them the autonomy to choose their own books (Taylor et al., 2019). Williams et al. (2017) argued that teachers foster intrinsic motivation in students when they allow their students to self-select books because students find meaning and enjoyment during their reading time when they can choose what to read. Fisher and Frey (2018) conducted research on increasing student reading volume that included 44 teachers at six different elementary schools and found when students were given the opportunity to select their own reading materials, they were more intrinsically motivated than students who were assigned reading materials by the teacher. After reviewing numerous studies conducted over the previous 24 years, Anderson and Ortlieb (2017)

concluded that students showed an increase in comprehension skills when they were allowed to self-select their books because they understood the content better and showed an increase in reading motivation. Ciampa (2016) studied intrinsically motivated readers and found because students were more intrinsically motivated to read books that they self-selected, they read more frequently and, therefore, developed positive self-perceptions of their reading abilities. Because of their positive self-perceptions, intrinsically motivated readers embraced challenges as an opportunity to strengthen their reading comprehension and improve their reading level.

Merga (2018) investigated the relationship between reading enjoyment in children and book choice and found children enjoy their reading experience more when they are given the freedom to choose their own reading material. Moreover, students appreciate having the opportunity during silent reading time to browse the classroom library for books of their interests and return the ones they do not find engaging (Merga, 2018). Taylor et al. (2019) studied the effects of self-selecting books within a sixth-grade classroom at one intermediate school and found student choice was synonymous with reading engagement. Students who chose their own books were more motivated to read for enjoyment more than they were when offered external incentives such as grades (Taylor et al., 2019). Dawkins (2017) conducted a study of the self-selection process of books among 160 kindergarten students and found students were inspired to read more often when they were given the freedom to choose their own books than when they were assigned teacher-selected books.

According to Louicks et al. (2019), reading intervention programs are beginning to embed the opportunity for struggling readers to self-select books, rather than being assigned books to read, because book choice has been found to inspire feelings of autonomy that positively influence students' reading motivation and enjoyment. Wolter (2017) reported that struggling readers are often assigned books to read by their teachers who assume they know the types of books that would interest their students, but when struggling readers are encouraged to browse bookshelves for reading materials that match their interests their attitudes toward reading are improved. Votypka (2021) investigated the reading achievement and motivation of 16 struggling readers in elementary school and found when students were allowed to choose their own books, their reading motivation and effort increased. Louicks et al. found developing autonomous learning skills, such as book selection, have a positive role in literacy engagement for below grade-level readers. According to Leathers (2020), many reading hurdles experienced by struggling readers in an elementary setting were removed when students were allowed to self-select series books. For example, Leathers found when students were permitted to read books that are part of a series, they became familiar with characters, settings, and plots and knew what to expect when reading the next book in the series, so the frustration of learning all new words was removed and students were able to comprehend the story more easily.

Dawkins (2017) also discovered students were drawn to books they found interesting and wanted to read books with characters who had similar physical characteristics as themselves. Knox (2019), in a study of diverse literature in classroom

libraries, determined two important qualities of allowing students to self-select their reading material: students have the opportunity to choose diverse, culturally affirming books in which they can see themselves in the characters they read, and students can choose books that give them insight into people who are different from themselves. Unfortunately, when teachers assign books to their students, they may not always foster student identities and oftentimes do not give students the opportunity to read about underrepresented or marginalized characters (Cherry-Paul et al., 2020). According to Ivey and Johnston (2017), one reservation teachers have in students self-selecting their books is fear their students might choose a book with troubling themes such as death, bullying, racism, or other real-life issues; however, they found students are drawn to these books and positively affected by the transactional reading that occurs. Students begin living vicariously through the characters' problems and dilemmas and, in doing so, consider their own lives and decisions (Cherry-Paul et al., 2020). When teachers assign books to their students or limit the types of books their students are allowed to read, students can go weeks without encountering characters or events they find relevant to their own lives (Cherry-Paul et al., 2020).

Another reservation in offering students freedom to choose their own books is the possibility a child may attempt a book that is too difficult for them to read (Weber, 2018). Weber's (2018) research was based on 403 elementary students in Grades Pre-K through 5 and examined the effectiveness of book choice. Weber found when students chose books in which they were unable to read the words or understand the content, they became frustrated and their reading motivation diminished. Williams et al. (2018)

conducted a study of 32 ninth graders and 29 eighth graders and found choosing a challenging book was not an issue for on grade-level or above grade-level readers. However, struggling readers became easily sidetracked by the difficult words and the laborious reading process and therefore engaged in off-task behaviors such as walking around the classroom, distracting other students, making non-language noises, and closing their eyes (Williams et al., 2018). When these struggling readers worked with their teachers to find appropriate books for their reading levels, the off-task behaviors decreased by nearly 25% (Williams et al., 2018). Regardless of reading levels, Fisher and Frey (2018), recommended teachers provide the opportunity to self-select books and be available to scaffold learning if students choose a complex text.

Weber (2018) found letting students select their own reading material is critical to stimulating reading, but suggested educators teach strategies, such as the five-finger rule, for the book selection process so that students do not disregard the difficulty level of books. The five-finger rule is one book selection approach in which students read the first page of a book and hold up a finger for each word they cannot read successfully; if they hold up five fingers by the end of the first page then the book is considered too difficult for their reading ability (Weber, 2018). Weber recommended encouraging students to discover books that match their interests and independent reading level in order to maximize the value of silent reading time. Tompkins (2016) defined independent reading level books as books that children can read 95% of the words successfully and comprehend the content without the help of the teacher. Merga (2018) found when teachers scaffold the book selection process and provide daily independent reading time,

their low achieving readers became engaged in their reading and were propelled to read more often.

Independent Reading Time and Reading Achievement

Merga (2018) defined independent reading time as the time when students in a classroom, or in some cases an entire school building, quietly read books to themselves. One independent reading program used in elementary schools is silent sustained reading, or SSR; (Brannan et al., 2020). Brannan et al. (2020) studied three second-grade teachers from Title 1 schools who implemented SSR daily and found the overarching premise of SSR is to provide extra reading practice during the school day because not all students have the opportunity to read outside of class. Williams et al. (2017) conducted a study on reluctant, struggling readers and found because SSR increases students' reading volume and reading practice, it can have a positive effect on their reading comprehension and achievement. One practice commonly associated with SSR is the limited use of evaluations or worksheets after independent reading time (Williams et al., 2017). Williams et al. found when teachers give students the opportunity to read their own books without the added pressure of a post assignment or posttest, they foster an appreciation of reading within their students.

According to Anderson and Ortlieb (2017), 52% of students reported independent reading time as their favorite part of the school day. Weber (2018) found when teachers offer independent reading time during the school day, students develop strong comprehension skills because of increased print exposure and reading volume. Providing independent reading time during the school day allows students to have an uninterrupted

amount of time, usually between 15 and 30 minutes, to read books of their choosing (Weber, 2018). There is not a recommended amount of time every teacher should follow because it varies based on the developmentally appropriateness of the grade-level and students' needs (Anderson & Ortlieb, 2017). Loh et al. (2017) studied the effect of building a successful reading culture in an elementary school and found a strong correlation between the amount of independent reading time provided in the classroom and student reading achievement. According to Loh et al., motivated readers tend to be engaged, proficient readers, therefore, creating a reading culture in a school involved developing strategies to motivate students to want to read.

Anderson and Ortlieb (2017) examined the effectiveness of independent reading and determined teachers of all disciplines should allocate reading time during their class in order to help support students' literacy development. When independent reading time is a nonnegotiable part of the school day, students read extensively, so not only does their reading comprehension improve, but their grammar skills, vocabulary, and spelling are also strengthened (Loh et al., 2017). Fisher and Frey (2018) found a positive correlation between a student's reading volume and reading achievement. Independent reading time gives students the opportunity to strengthen their reading stamina and practice their reading skills (Fisher & Frey, 2018).

Wolter (2017) found independent reading time during the school day gives students the opportunity to read in a nonlinear manner; students have the freedom to read ahead and to reread in order to better understand the book. When students have the autonomy to make mistakes and think deeply, they hone their reading skills and their

ability to think critically about a text (Wolter, 2017). According to Merga (2018), schools should actively attempt to include independent reading time during the school day because it supports the literacy development of all students no matter their reading level.

Other studies suggested limitations of independent reading time. For example, the National Reading Panel, a group charged with disseminating research-based practices on effective reading instruction, took a neutral stance on independent reading time claiming independent reading time does not lead to improved fluency like guided oral repeated readings does (Moses & Beth Kelly, 2019). Gürsoy and Şahin (2019) argued one drawback of independent reading time is the difficulty teachers have in monitoring the reading development of every student in their class. Gürsoy and Şahin found when students read quietly to themselves, teachers were unaware of the times they skip challenging words or confusing text and therefore, the teachers missed opportunities to provide reading support and instruction. Merga (2018) observed that some students stopped reading 10 minutes into the scheduled 20-minute independent reading time; when asked why they stopped reading, the students said they lost focus during independent reading time and did not want to read any longer. This highlights a need for daily opportunities of independent reading time in order for students to build their reading stamina (Merga, 2018). Another limitation to independent reading time during the school day is the need for sizeable classroom libraries with high-interest books from which students of all abilities can make selections (Moses & Beth Kelly, 2019). Moses and Beth Kelly found classroom libraries are an important factor to the success of

independent reading time so that students have easy access to books, but because of budget constraints, not all schools have funds to purchase this costly classroom resource.

Comparison of Two Teaching Models

Many theory- and research-based reading curriculums have been created to help teachers provide effective literacy instruction (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). The reading workshop model and the guided reading method are designed to develop independent readers. How these two curriculum models work may affect development of reading comprehension on standardized tests.

The reading workshop model includes three main components: a brief, whole group minilesson; independent reading time; and an end-of-workshop reflection (Cherry-Paul et al., 2020). During the minilesson, teachers use direct instruction to teach and model decoding strategies, oral language skills, and comprehension strategies to the entire class (Lain, 2017). Then, teachers allocate at least 20 minutes of independent reading time using self-selected books in an attempt to improve students' attitudes toward reading and give students the opportunity to practice their reading skills (Brannan et al., 2020). While students are reading independently, teachers walk around the classroom and confer with students either one-on-one or in small groups to provide feedback and deliver additional teaching points (Cherry-Paul et al., 2020). Finally, the reading workshop ends with a brief reflection time for teachers to consolidate the students' learning and for students to share highlights from their reading (Cherry-Paul et al., 2020).

Unlike the whole group minilessons implemented during the reading workshop model, the guided reading method includes differentiated lessons taught to small groups

of students; the groups are determined ahead of time and based on the students' instructional reading level (Bose, 2017). Teachers apply different mini lessons for each group to target their individual literacy needs (Bose, 2017). During this small group instruction, students read their teacher-selected book aloud while the teacher actively monitors and records their reading behaviors, strengths, and miscues (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). After the completion of small-group instruction, students are sent back to their seats to work on phonics, spelling, writing, or another extension activity (Bose, 2017).

These two methods of teaching reading provide contrasts in pedagogical constructs of the role of teachers and students in the learning process, factors that contribute to reading achievement, and instructional efficacy of methods to develop an essential skill. Cherry-Paul et al. (2020) studied the components of what makes reading workshop an effective instructional model in the elementary classroom and determined it equips students with the decoding and comprehension tools they need to successfully navigate the challenges of school. Durkin (2021) found implementing the reading workshop model in middle school classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic helped students foster reading identities when the world around them was full of unknowns. Donnelly (2019) studied guided reading and its differentiated approach to reading instruction and determined this form of ability grouping is demoralizing and can cause students to view reading as achieving levels rather than engaging in a story. Hoffman's (2017) research on leveling readers and providing teacher-selected books like in the guided reading approach, often denies students of reading books they want and can read. While empirical research has shown both the reading workshop model and the guided

reading method are two approaches to literacy instruction designed to develop independent readers, additional research is necessary to explore how each mode of instruction influences the reading comprehension of fourth-grade students on literary and informational texts on a standardized test.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I presented the literature search strategy used to complete the literature review. I shared Wigfield and Eccles's (2000) expectancy-value theory and their concept of achievement motivation and provided the rationale for why I believe it grounds my study. I described the current literature on the two foundational skills needed, decoding and oral language skills, before reading comprehension can occur. I also described the effect book choice and independent reading time have on students' reading motivation and reading achievement. I compared how the reading workshop model and the guided reading approach are used in elementary classrooms and differ in instructional approaches such as the use of independent reading time and book choice. While there are many articles about foundational reading skills and factors influencing reading comprehension, there is still a need to determine the effect book selection and independent reading time have on fourth-grade students' achievement on reading comprehension when teachers use the guided reading method or the reading workshop model. In Chapter 3, I will present the research design and methodology of my study in which I addressed a gap in the literature by comparing student achievement in reading comprehension following two instructional methods that differ in how books are selected and how much time students are permitted to read them.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the difference in reading comprehension scores between fourth-grade students who participated in the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading approach for 1 academic year. In this chapter, I present the rationale for choosing a nonexperimental quantitative research design, discuss the methodology of the study, describe the threats to validity, and conclude with a discussion of issues of trustworthiness and ethics and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

In this study, the independent variable was instructional method (i.e., either reading workshop or guided reading). The dependent variables were student scores on the two standardized subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What is the difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of literary texts between fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic year?

H_01 : There is no significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of literary texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

*H*₁1: There is a significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of literary texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method. RQ2: What is the difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of informational texts between fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic year?

*H*₀2: There is no significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of informational texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

*H*₁2: There is a significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of informational texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

I conducted a retrospective study, or *ex post facto* research, and examined the archival data of the results of the STAAR exam administered during the second week of May in the 2018–2019 school year; therefore, I did not need any time to manipulate the independent variables or the study setting. The rationale for choosing a quantitative design was to conduct a systematic empirical investigation to examine the relationship between variables and observable phenomena (see Burkholder et al., 2016). According to Towne and Shavelson (2002), nonexperimental designs are often used in educational

research when settings, such as classrooms, cannot be randomly assigned. Moreover, researchers using nonexperimental research design can advance understanding of educational problems and phenomena to make reasonable theories about structures of learning or behavior in an academic setting (Towne & Shavelson, 2002).

Methodology

Population

The target population for this study included all general education fourth-grade students from two elementary campuses in neighboring school districts in Texas. I gathered STAAR exam data from all 99 fourth-grade students enrolled in general education classes at Campus A and all 101 fourth-grade students enrolled in general education classes at Campus B. Data for students who were administered the Spanish-language version of the exam and those who were administered the alternative exam intended for students with significant cognitive disabilities were excluded.

Sampling

The data sets I received from the school districts included test scores of all fourth-grade students from the two campuses in this study, including those of English language learners who took the assessment in English and students with special needs who completed the spring administration of the standardized fourth-grade reading test. There was an alternative test developed by Texas for students with significant cognitive disabilities who were not included in the data set. There was also a Spanish language version of the test that included different reading passages and questions than the English version. I did not include the Spanish version in this study because the blueprint was not

comparable to the English version. According to Raosoft (2020), a sample size of 72 is needed in each of the two groups to achieve a 5% margin of error. I gathered data from 99 fourth-grade students from Campus A and 101 fourth grade students from Campus B (i.e., 200 students in total), so I met the sample size needed to establish the target margin of error in this study.

Procedures For Collection of Archival Data

Once I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Walden University, I requested permission from the appropriate directors at each school district in the study to retrieve all fourth-grade students' reading STAAR test scores,. They granted me permission and sent me the requested test scores.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

The two reporting categories on the fourth-grade reading STAAR test analyzed in this study were analysis of literary texts and analysis of informational texts. Questions on the fourth-grade reading STAAR test were written based on a standard or objective. The 2018–2019 administration of the STAAR test developed by Texas included seven reading passages with a total of 15 multiple-choice questions tested for understanding and analysis of literary texts and 13 multiple-choice questions tested for understanding and analysis of informational texts (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2018a). Students analyze, make inferences, and draw conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding is an example of one standard for the understanding and analysis of literary texts category from Texas's curriculum standards (TEA, 2019). The

following example is a STAAR test question that addressed one standard for the understanding and analysis of literary texts category:

Which theme is best supported by details in this selection?

F. Finding joy in personal work can lead to success.

G. Working with others is the best way to solve a problem.

H. Thinking creatively helps people achieve their goals.

J. Showing respect to the boss is an important part of any job (TEA, 2018b).

The following is an example of a question addressing one standard from the understanding and analysis of informational texts category:

What is the best summary of the section titled “How Humans Can Help”?

F. Beekeepers are people who try to keep bees healthy. Ian Snyder is a student who says this is very important. He participates in a beekeeping program at his school.

G. If children want to help honeybees, they should learn about honeybees and the plants that bees like. Many schools offer classes that help students learn about honeybees living in their area.

H. Honeybees like plants such as cabbage, sunflowers, and strawberries. People who want to help honeybees should try to grow plants like these.

J. Anyone can help honeybees. People can grow plants that honeybees like. They can also build beehives. Some schools are teaching students how to be beekeepers and keep bees healthy (TEA, 2018b).

According to the educational administrative authority, Texas contracted with an outside evaluator to develop an independent evaluation that included empirical evidence of the validity and reliability of the standardized assessment (TEA, 2016). According to the evaluator, the fourth-grade reading assessment matched Texas's blueprint of the assessment when disaggregated by the reporting category and standards. Moreover, this independent evaluation found the processes used to create the assessment were consistent with high-stakes test construction and the development of the test yielded valid and reliable scores; therefore, this outside assessment supported the validity and reliability of Texas's standardized assessment.

Data Analysis Plan

Before I began testing my research hypotheses, I screened the collected archival data for errors and checked for completeness. I used SPSS software to run an independent-samples t test to determine the difference for both school districts after a school year of reading instruction that included self-selected reading materials and 20 or more minutes a day of dedicated reading time or reading instruction that included assigned texts and no specified reading time.

I used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to run an independent-samples t test to determine the difference in analysis of subscale scores for literary and informational texts between both school districts after a school year of reading instruction using the reading workshop model that included self-selected reading materials and 20 or more minutes a day of dedicated reading time or the guided reading

method that included assigned texts and no specified reading time. In Chapter 4, I present mean differences to illustrate the differences in subscale scores.

Threats to Validity

According to Onwuegbuzie and McLean (2003), all studies in the field of education face threats to their internal and external validity. In this study, I considered sample augmentation bias and implementation bias as threats to internal validity and took them into account during data collection. Sample augmentation bias occurs when a student moves away from a school involved in a study or moves to a school involved in a study and, therefore, did not experience the curriculum or intervention the same length of time as the other students (Onwuegbuzie & McLean, 2003). Because I used de-identified data and did not have records of which or how many students enrolled or disenrolled throughout the school year, I assumed that issues of augmentation bias were similar in both districts and did not threaten equivalence in the data. Implementation bias stems from the likelihood not all teachers will implement an educational initiative or curriculum to its fullest extent due to numerous conditions, such as inadequate training, low morale, or lack of motivation (Onwuegbuzie & McLean, 2003). I addressed this threat to internal validity by choosing school districts that received a passing and met standard rating of an A, B, C, or D according to Texas's educational accountability system and excluded districts that received an F rating because the state accountability system includes evidence of teacher compliance with district requirements.

In this study, I also considered population validity a threat to external validity. It could not be assumed that the population from this study, 200 fourth-grade students from

two elementary campuses, represent the target population of all fourth-grade students; therefore, the findings can only be reasonably generalized to the target population (see Onwuegbuzie & McLean, 2003).

Ethical Procedures

For this quantitative study, I received permission to conduct the study from the Walden University IRB before commencing data collection. Once I received permission, I contacted the appropriate directors at each school district and requested de-identified student test scores for the 2018–2019 fourth-grade reading STAAR test. I used code names for the elementary schools and school districts in this study. All digital data were kept on a password-protected computer, and paper files were kept in a locked desk drawer. Other than my committee, I am the only person with access to the data. After completing this study, I will keep the data for 5 years, after which time, I will destroy all digital files using Eraser and shred all paper files.

Summary

I employed a nonexperimental, quantitative research design for the comparison of student achievement in reading comprehension following two instructional methods that differ in how books are selected and how much time students are permitted to read them. I collected archived assessment data and numerical data from the 2018–2019 fourth-grade reading STAAR test. For this study, I chose to use a probability sampling approach to form a sample size of approximately 200 fourth-grade students. SPSS software was used to evaluate the subtest data and determine outcomes using an independent-samples *t* test. In Chapter 4, I will describe the analyzed data and present the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the difference in reading comprehension scores on Texas's STAAR exam between fourth-grade students who participated in the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic year. The following research questions and corresponding hypotheses guided this study:

RQ1: What is the difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of literary texts between fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic year?

H_01 : There is no significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of literary texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

H_11 : There is a significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of literary texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

RQ2: What is the difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of informational texts between fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic year?

H_02 : There is no significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of informational texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

H_12 : There is a significant difference in STAAR subscale scores for reading comprehension of informational texts between fourth-grade students taught using the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method.

In this chapter, I describe the data collection process, including the time frame and discrepancies from the data collection plan presented earlier in Chapter 3. The results are reported using statistical analyses, including tables and figures when appropriate, and are followed by a summary of the answers to both research questions.

Data Collection

Once the Walden University IRB approval was granted (Approval No. 02-28-22-0970205), I contacted the director from Campus A's school district and the director from Campus B's school district to secure their consent for secondary data retrieval. The director from Campus A provided secondary data of fourth-grade students' test scores from the 2019 administration of the STAAR test approximately 3 days after I received IRB approval. The director from Campus B provided secondary data of fourth-grade students' test scores from the 2019 administration of the STAAR test approximately 7 days after IRB approval. There were not any discrepancies in data collection from the

plan presented in Chapter 3. Table 3 represents the baseline descriptive and demographic characteristics of Campus A and Campus B from the 2018–2019 school year.

Table 3

Campus A and Campus B Demographics for the 2018–2019 School Year

	Campus A %	Campus B %
Number of participants	99	101
Male	56	51
Female	43	50
African American	26	17
Hispanic	36	17
White	32	33
Asian	3	20
Two or more races	3	13
English is a second language	18	11
Economically disadvantaged	50	40

The sample in this study included fourth-grade students and teachers from two campuses in neighboring rural areas in Texas. Campus A and Campus B were not randomly assigned due to the use of previous, archival data for this study. I did not have any control of Campus A and Campus B student makeup. It was representative of the population from which it was drawn, and it was representative of populations in rural areas with similar demographic characteristics in Texas.

Results

The director from Campus A's school district gave me 99 de-identified fourth-grade students' reading scores and student demographics for the 2018–2019 STAAR assessment, and the director from Campus B's school district gave me 101 de-identified fourth-grade students' reading scores and student demographics for the 2018–2019 STAAR assessment. Campus A used the guided reading approach, and Campus B used the reading workshop model. I divided the scores used for this study into two reporting categories, analysis of literary texts (RC1) and analysis of informational texts (RC2), and analyzed them using an independent-samples *t* test.

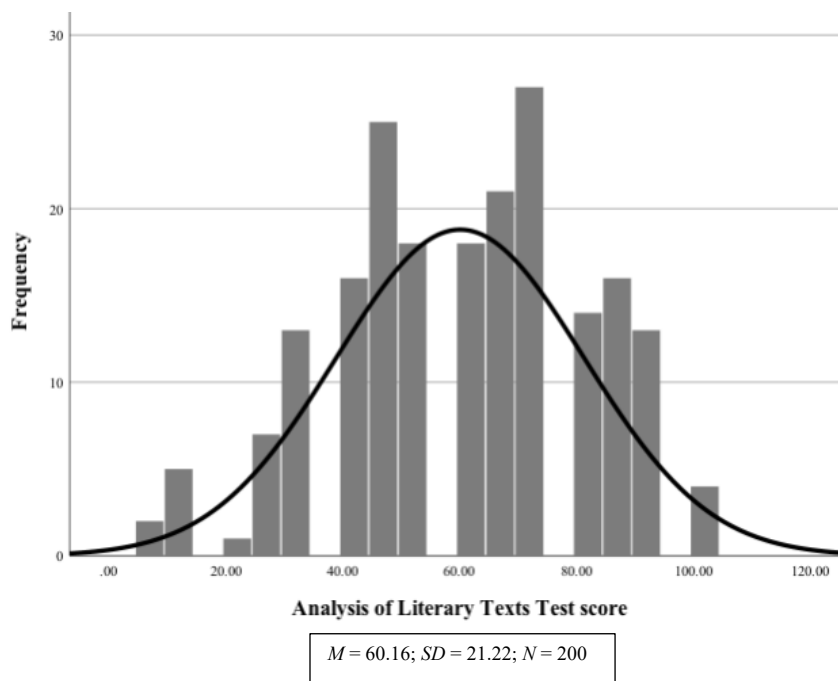
To perform an independent-samples *t* test for this quantitative study, I considered six assumptions (see Warner, 2013). The first assumption was having a continuous dependent variable. Exam performance (measured 0–100) is an example of a continuous dependent variable. The dependent variable for this study was student scores (measured 0–100) on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts on the STAAR test. The second assumption was the independent variable was categorical with two groups. The two instructional methods in this study, the guided reading approach taught at Campus A and the reading workshop model taught at Campus B, met this criterion. The third assumption was having independence of observations. There was no relationship between the participants in either of the groups, and the participants were different in each group. The remaining assumptions are discussed as they relate to the specific results for each research question.

Research Question 1 Results

The last three assumptions of an independent-samples t test were specific to each research question in the study. The fourth assumption was the lack of significant outliers in the two groups of the independent variable in terms of the dependent variable. As seen in Figure 1, no outliers were detected in the histogram of the analysis of literary texts for either campus/instructional method.

Figure 1

Histogram of Analysis of Literary Texts Scores of Campus A/Guided Reading and Campus B/Reading Workshop Combined



The assumption of normality was the fifth assumption. As shown in Table 4, I conducted a Shapiro-Wilk test to check for normal distribution. The results for both the reading workshop and guided reading groups for the analysis of literary texts scores ($p =$

0.002 and $p = 0.0150$, respectively) indicated nonnormality because the significance levels were less than the given threshold of .05. According to Warner (2013), the independent-samples t test is robust to deviations of normality, and if the sample sizes are greater than 50 and are nearly equal, only strong violations of normality could cause problems. Because the sample sizes in this study are 99 and 101, the robust t test could be conducted even without the data being normally distributed.

Table 4

Tests of Normality for Analysis of Literary Texts Scores

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	<i>df</i>	Sig.	Statistic	<i>df</i>	Sig.
Reading workshop	.125	101	.001	.956	101	.002
Guided reading	.130	99	.000	.968	99	.015

^a Lilliefors significance correction.

The sixth assumption was homogeneity of variances. According to Warner (2013), the Levene's test detects the equality of variances across variables. The output shown in Table 5 determined there was homogeneity of variances for analysis of literary texts scores, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p = 0.256$), which was greater than the 0.05 threshold.

Table 5

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances^a for Analysis of Literary Texts Scores

F	<i>df</i>	Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)
1.298	198	0.256	0.029

Note. Dependent variable: Analysis of literary texts scores.

^a Design: Intercept + Group + Sept + Group*Sept.

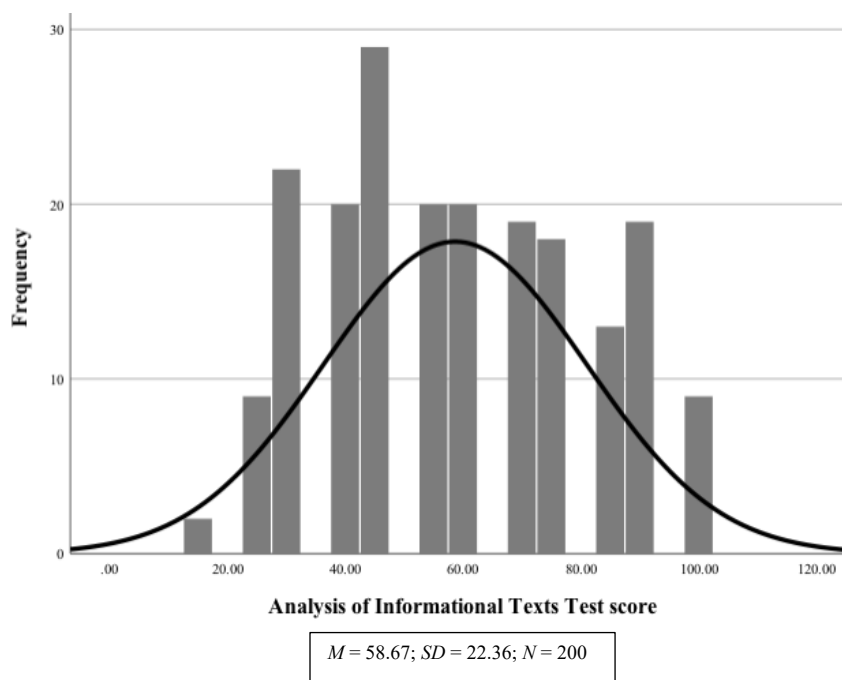
I conducted an independent-samples *t* test using SPSS to evaluate if there was a statistically significant difference between the mean analysis of literary test scores between students taught using the reading workshop method and students taught using the guided reading approach. The mean analysis of literary test scores for reading workshop is numerically higher than that for guided reading. The results of the independent-samples *t* test showed the mean analysis of literary test scores for reading workshop ($M = 63.40$, $SD = 20.39$, $n = 101$) and guided reading ($M = 56.85$, $SD = 21.65$, $n = 99$) was statistically significant [$t(198) = 2.20$, $df = 198$, $p < .05$]. Thus, the reading workshop scores on a test of analysis of literary texts were higher than the guided reading scores. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which suggested that there was no significant difference in the mean analysis of literary test scores between students taught using the reading workshop method and students taught using the guided reading approach, was rejected.

Research Question 2 Results

The fourth assumption was the lack of significant outliers in the two groups of the independent variable. As seen in Figure 2, no outliers were detected in the histogram of the analysis of informational texts for either campus/instructional method.

Figure 2

Histogram of Analysis of Informational Texts Scores of Campus A/Guided Reading and Campus B/Reading Workshop Combined



The assumption of normality was the fifth assumption. As shown in Table 7, I conducted a Shapiro-Wilk test to check for normal distribution. The results for both the reading workshop and guided reading groups for the analysis of informational texts scores ($p = 0.002$ and $p = 0.000$, respectively) indicated nonnormality because the significance levels were less than the given threshold of .05.

Table 6*Tests of Normality for Analysis of Informational Texts Scores*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	<i>df</i>	Sig.	Statistic	<i>df</i>	Sig.
Reading workshop	.130	101	.000	.955	101	.002
Guided reading	.154	99	.000	.938	99	.000

^a Lilliefors significance correction.

The sixth assumption was homogeneity of variances. According to Warner (2013), the Levene's test detects the equality of variances across variables. Homogeneity of variances for analysis of informational texts scores was met as shown in Table 7 ($p = 0.312$), which was greater than the 0.05 threshold.

Table 7*Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances^a for Analysis of Informational Texts Scores*

F	<i>df1</i>	Sig.	Sig. (2-tailed)
1.025	198	0.312	.004

Note. Dependent variable: Analysis of informational texts scores.

^a Design: Intercept + Group + Sept + Group*Sept.

I conducted an independent-samples t test using SPSS to evaluate if there was a statistically significant difference between the mean analysis of informational test scores between students taught using the reading workshop method and students taught using the guided reading approach. The mean analysis of informational test scores for reading workshop is numerically higher than that for guided reading. The results of the independent-samples t test showed the mean analysis of informational test scores for reading workshop ($M = 63.11$, $SD = 21.05$, $n = 101$) and guided reading ($M = 54.13$, SD

= 22.80, $n = 99$) was statistically significant [$t(198) = 2.89$, $df = 198$, $p < .05$]. Therefore, the reading workshop scores on a test of analysis of informational texts were higher than the guided reading scores. The null hypothesis, which suggested that there was no significant difference in the mean analysis of informational test scores between students taught using the reading workshop method and students taught using the guided reading approach, was rejected.

Summary

In this quantitative study, I examined the effect of instructional method on analysis of literary and informational test scores with an independent-samples t test using SPSS. The null hypotheses for both research questions were rejected because there were statistically significant differences in student scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts by students who were taught using the reading workshop model when compared to students who were taught using the guided reading approach over 1 academic year. Fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model scored higher on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts on the STAAR assessment than students who were taught using the guided reading approach. In Chapter 5, I will present my interpretation of findings along with the interpretation of findings in the context of the theoretical framework. A description of the limitations to generalizability and/or trustworthiness, validity, and reliability that arose from execution of this study will be shared. Recommendations for further research that are grounded in the strengths and limitations of this study and potential effects for positive social change will also be addressed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the difference in reading comprehension scores on the STAAR assessment between fourth-grade students who participated in the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic year. In this study, I used a nonexperimental, quantitative design for the comparison of student scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts between the two different instructional methods. SPSS software was used to conduct an independent-samples *t* test. A statistically significant difference was found between student scores for both analysis of literary texts and analysis of informational texts that indicated a positive effect of the reading workshop model on fourth-grade students' reading comprehension.

In this chapter, I present my interpretation of findings along with the interpretation of findings in the context of the theoretical framework. Limitations of the study that arose are shared. Recommendations for further research that are grounded in the strengths and limitations of this study and potential effects for positive social change are also discussed.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I present my interpretation of the findings in relation to the peer-reviewed literature shared in Chapter 2. While empirical research has shown the reading workshop model and the guided reading approach are two methods to literacy instruction designed to develop independent readers, the findings of this study indicated a statistically significant advantage in reading comprehension achievement on subtests of

analysis of literary and informational texts for students who were taught for 1 academic year using the reading workshop model, the instructional method taught at Campus B, compared to the guided reading approach, the instructional method taught at Campus A.

These two methods of teaching reading provide contrasts in pedagogical constructs of the role of teachers and students in the learning process and factors that contribute to reading achievement. The two instructional elements that I focused on as defining differences between the two instructional methods were independent reading time and book selection. Reader's workshop, the instructional approach used at Campus B in this study, is an instructional method with a consistent daily structure that includes a whole-group minilesson followed by independent reading time for students to read self-selected books and ending with a brief reflection where the teacher reinforces the learning (see Calkins, 2019). According to Weber (2018), when teachers provide independent reading time during the school day, such as in the reading workshop model, students develop strong comprehension skills because of increased print exposure and reading volume. Fisher and Frey (2018) found independent reading time gives students the opportunity to strengthen their reading stamina and practice their reading skills. While the reading workshop model and the guided reading method are designed to develop independent readers, the guided reading approach does not provide students with the opportunity for daily independent reading time. During a guided reading lesson, the instructional approach used at Campus A in this study, when students are not working in small groups with the teacher, they are working independently on phonics, spelling, writing, or other extension activities (see Bose, 2017). Loh et al. (2017) determined when

independent reading time is a nonnegotiable part of the school day, students read extensively, so not only does their reading comprehension improve, but their grammar skills, vocabulary, and spelling also are strengthened.

Book selection is another instructional difference between the reading workshop model and the guided reading approach. Taylor et al. (2019) found when students are given the autonomy to choose their own reading materials, they are more motivated to read both inside and outside of the school. Schiefele et al. (2016) suggested a reciprocal relationship between reading comprehension and motivation. The more students begin to understand and enjoy what they read, the more they choose to read in their spare time, gaining confidence and comfort in their reading skills (Schiefele et al., 2016). Eckert et al. (2017) determined students' reading motivation is closely linked to the quality of their reading experiences within the school system. In this study, Campus B used the reading workshop model for their daily reading curriculum, so students self-selected their own books during their daily independent reading time, whereas Campus A used the guided reading approach where students read teacher-selected books during their small-groups lessons with the teacher. One drawback to teacher-selected texts reported by Wigfield et al. (2016) was assigned texts can stifle students' intrinsic motivation to read, and therefore, children will only read when necessary in order to avoid the negative feelings they associate with the task. Erickson (2019) asserted that reading motivation increases when elementary-age students exercise control over their book selections.

In the expectancy-value theory, the theoretical framework grounding this study, Wigfield and Eccles (2000) proposed that students' ability beliefs decrease as they get

older, so it is crucial that educators implement a reading curriculum that fosters intrinsic motivation and choice. Two instructional differences between the methods in this study were independent reading time and book selection. As suggested earlier, these two factors affect students' reading achievement. When students independently read self-selected books during the school day, they become better readers over time because they develop intrinsic motivation and the skills necessary to comprehend various texts. In this study, I evaluated secondary data collected from two similar campuses from neighboring school districts and found a statistically significant difference between the reading scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts on the STAAR assessment. The fourth-grade students who were taught using the reading workshop model at Campus B scored higher than students who were taught using the guided reading approach at Campus A. According to Wigfield et al. (2016), proficient reading skills are crucial to academic success; therefore, educators use of instructional methods that increase students' motivation to read, self-efficacy, and perceived autonomy is critical.

Limitations of the Study

The sample from this study was derived from two elementary schools in neighboring, rural, public school districts with similar student demographics. This study is not generalizable to urban areas or other academic settings unless the curriculum implementation and student demographics are similar. Attendance rates, discipline records, class sizes, and instructional capacity of teachers are all factors that might make it difficult to replicate this study. Although I assumed teachers taught in the manner endorsed by their school districts and followed the curriculum as it was described, a

limitation of this study was my inability to confirm their fidelity to the school-designated curriculum.

Recommendations

The lack of literacy is one of the greatest academic risk factors facing young learners; therefore, effective literacy instruction must be identified to foster academic success (Council et al., 2019). Results of this study indicated that the reading workshop model, which allows students to self-select the text they read for 20 or more minutes a day, had a positive effect on fourth-grade students' reading comprehension scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts. My recommendations for further research are within the boundaries of this study and grounded in its strengths and limitations. I recommend additional studies be conducted to determine the effect of independent reading time and book selection on fourth-grade students' content literacy comprehension when reading texts in science and history classes. Further research might explore the transfer of comprehension skills learned from both the reading workshop model and the guided reading approach to other subject areas.

I also recommend this study be replicated using qualitative research methods to include teacher perspectives of the instructional practice used in their classrooms. While the current study included archival STAAR test scores to compare the effect of independent reading time and book selection on fourth-grade students' reading comprehension, the use of teacher interviews and questionnaires concerning their fidelity to the curriculum and perceived self-efficacy of teaching reading may provide additional insight into the testing outcomes.

Further research might focus on maintaining the effectiveness of the reading workshop model during the COVID-19 quarantine when students learned from home. Access to a wide range of books in classroom libraries is an important component to the reading workshop model (Moses & Beth Kelly, 2019). Yet, when students were learning from home during the pandemic their access to classroom libraries was limited. In addition, researchers might look at how reading achievement among fourth-grade students was affected when COVID-19 protocols, such as prohibiting students from sharing materials and checking books out from the library, were put into place when in-person learning resumed. A future study might also use the multiple regression of groups to analyze the relationship between a single dependent variable and several independent variables. For example, a future study could use multiple regression to predict reading comprehension of fourth-grade students using independent variables such as attendance rate, class sizes, and teachers' years of experience.

Implications

This study of the effect of two instructional methods, defined by contrasting emphases on book selection and independent reading time, on fourth-grade students' reading comprehension contains implications for positive social change. Findings suggest the reading workshop method, which allows students to self-select the text they read for 20 or more minutes a day, positively affected fourth-grade students' reading comprehension scores on subtests of analysis of literary and informational texts. With almost 4 out of every 10 fourth-grade students reading below grade-level in Texas during the 2018–2019 school year (NAEP, 2020), educators struggled to meet the needs of their

diverse learners. Positive social change will result from this study if elementary school administrators and teachers make informed decisions regarding best practices in reading instruction. This study may benefit these instructional leaders by providing them with information to help them adopt a program with the potential to increase intrinsic reading motivation and improve reading comprehension. Positive social change may result from strengthened literacy instruction that results in increased student reading comprehension that will prepare students for the demands of fast-changing 21st century professions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the difference in reading comprehension scores between fourth-grade students who participated in the reading workshop model and those who were taught using the guided reading method for 1 academic school year. I conducted an independent-samples *t* test and found statistically significant differences between student scores for both analysis of literary texts and analysis of informational texts that indicated a positive effect of the reading workshop model on fourth-grade students' reading comprehension. Results of this study indicated using a reading curriculum that provides independent reading time during the school day and gives students the freedom to choose their own reading material improves their reading comprehension and reading achievement scores. The reading performance of early elementary students is a strong predictor of what their reading abilities will be in later years (Schiefele et al., 2016); therefore, school district leaders should consider adopting the reading workshop model to better support the development of their students' reading comprehension skills. Because lack of literacy is one of the greatest academic

risk factors facing young learners today, increased reading comprehension achievement among fourth-grade students represents a positive social change.

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