

2023

## Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Intermediate Students' Experiences in Virtual Intensive Reading Classes

Denise Benjamin Tate  
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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Denise Benjamin Tate

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Intermediate Students' Experiences in Virtual  
Intensive Reading Classes

by

Denise Benjamin Tate

MSED, Walden University, 2008

BA, Columbus State University, 1986

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

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May 2023

## Abstract

The learning gap between intermediate students on grade level and those below grade level continues to grow. Intermediate students with below-grade-level reading comprehension skills struggle with informational texts and across-content material. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. The conceptual frameworks were Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and social learning and Epstein's model of parental involvement, which supports learning through interaction and support. The research questions included changes teachers observed in the reading patterns of their intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes, changes parents observed in reading patterns, and suggestions teachers and parents could offer to improve virtual intensive reading classes. Data collection for this basic qualitative study utilized Zoom audio-recorded interviews and transcription software tools and analysis will identify significant patterns. The results indicated that parents and teachers had different priorities. Parents focused on teacher response and communication, whereas teachers worked to solve dilemmas faced in virtual learning environments, such as attendance and some aspects of materials. Both groups should become receptive to each other's perceptions and work together to improve the conditions and experiences of their students. The potential social change lies in improving the learning experience and efficacy of virtual intensive reading classes for intermediate students by lessening the gap between students with and without reading difficulties, eliminating hurdles in other classes and high school, and having a higher graduation rate at high school.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this study to my beloved and departed grandparents. I am grateful to my grandmother, Isidora Ramos Perez de Garcia, who cared for and loved me from infancy. My grandfather, Vicente Garcia Villegas, supported me, encouraged me to read and write in Spanish, and taught me Creole. Hardworking and resilient, both inspired me to follow my dreams and mostly, to love learning. I miss them dearly.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
List of Figures .....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background of the Study .....	2
Problem Statement .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Research Questions.....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Nature of the Study .....	7
Definitions and Acronyms .....	7
Assumptions.....	9
Scope and Delimitations .....	10
Limitations .....	10
Significance.....	11
Summary .....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	14
Literature Search Strategy.....	18
Conceptual Framework.....	22
Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development and Social Learning .....	26
Rationale for the Application of Vygotsky’s Theory .....	28
Rationale for The Application of Epstein’s Model.....	34

Intensive Reading Instruction .....	37
Virtual Learning Environment.....	39
Components of a Virtual Learning Environment.....	42
Intensive Reading in VLEs Before COVID-19 Quarantine .....	44
Virtual Intensive Reading During and After COVID-19 Quarantine.....	47
Perceptions of Virtual Classes .....	51
Aspects of Teacher Interest Before the COVID-19 Pandemic .....	52
Problems Faced by Parents When Accommodating Virtual Learning .....	53
After the COVID-19 Quarantine .....	55
Summary.....	57
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	60
Research Design and Rationale .....	61
Role of the Researcher .....	64
Methodology.....	66
Participant Selection Logic.....	67
Instrumentation .....	68
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection .....	69
Data Analysis Plan.....	71
Issue of Trustworthiness .....	73
Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability .....	73
Ethical Procedures .....	75
Summary.....	76

Chapter 4: Results .....	78
Demographics .....	79
Data Collection .....	81
Recruitment.....	81
Interviews.....	83
Reflexive Memos and Journals.....	85
Unusual Circumstances.....	86
Data Analysis.....	87
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	92
Academic Gains.....	94
Student Behavior.....	96
Parent and Teacher Involvement .....	97
Remote Curriculum.....	99
Technology .....	102
Social Interaction .....	104
Communication.....	107
Resources .....	108
Attendance .....	109
Time Restraints.....	111
Supporting Research Questions and Sub Questions .....	112
Summary .....	121
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations .....	123

Interpretation of the Findings.....	124
Interpretation of the Findings in Relation to the Conceptual Framework .....	124
Vygotsky’s ZPD and Social Learning .....	125
Epstein’s Model of Parental Involvement.....	128
Interpretation of the Findings in Relation to the Literature Review .....	130
Limitations of the Study.....	136
Recommendations.....	137
Implications.....	138
Conclusion .....	140
Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer.....	170
Appendix B: Participant Consent Form.....	171

## List of Tables

Table 1 Vygotsky’s and Epstein’s Conceptual Theories Framework Alignment.....	25
Table 2 Qualitative Research Methods.....	62
Table 3 Alignment of Research to Interview Questions Read.....	66
Table 4 Participant Teacher Demographics and Logistics .....	80
Table 5 Participant Parent Demographics and Logistics .....	81
Table 6 Hierarchy of Themes, Categories, and Codes from Data Analysis .....	90
Table 7 Category and Codes for the Theme of Academic Gains .....	95
Table 8 Category and Codes for the Theme of Student Behavior .....	96
Table 9 Category and Codes for Theme of Parent and Teacher Involvement.....	97
Table 10 Category and Codes for the Theme of Remote Curriculum .....	100
Table 11 Category and Codes for the Theme of Technology.....	102
Table 12 Category and Code for the Theme of Social Interaction .....	105
Table 13 Category and Codes for the Theme of Communication .....	107
Table 14 Category and Codes for the Theme of Resources.....	108
Table 15 Category and Codes for the Theme of Attendance.....	110
Table 16 Category and Codes for the Theme of Time Restraints.....	111
Table 17 Codes Supporting Parent Perceptions.....	114
Table 18 Codes Supporting Teacher Perceptions .....	116
Table 19 Codes Supporting Sub Question 1 .....	118
Table 20 Codes Supporting Sub Question 2.....	119
Table 21 Codes Supporting Sub Question 3: Teachers .....	120

Table 22 Codes Supporting Sub Question 3:Parent..... 121

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Initial Key Search Terms..... 21

Figure 2. Relationship Between Vygotsky and Epstein..... 23

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Reading scores of intermediate-grade level (6-8<sup>th</sup>) students nationwide decreased while attending virtual classes during the COVID-19 pandemic (Abuhammad, 2020; Benkhider & Kherbachi, 2020; Domingue et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). Intermediate students with reading difficulties (RD) who attended virtual intensive reading classes during the pandemic may have fallen further behind their peers (Cramman et al., 2021; Domingue et al., 2021). The number of intermediate students in intensive reading classes increased to 24%, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020). The 2022 national reading scores dropped from 263 in 2019 to 260 (NAEP, 2022). Social change is needed to improve the learning experience and efficacy of online reading classes for intermediate students.

The education transformation from face-to-face to virtual learning changed students' learning habits and teaching practices (Benkhider & Kherbachi, 2020; Domingue et al., 2021). After the transformation, parents witnessed their students' experiences at home, while teachers witnessed students' experiences through teleconferencing, emails, phone calls, and academic performance (Dahl-Poplizio et al., 2020). According to an Educators for Excellence (2020) survey, 83% of polled intermediate teachers believed the shift from face-to-face to virtual learning presented a severe obstacle to instruction. Elgart (2020) found that 94% of teachers increased the students' workload but gave relatively easy assignments to compensate for the heavy workload. Moreover, other researchers also found that students' reading gap widened

during the pandemic (Abuhammad, 2020; Benkhider & Kherbachi, 2020). However, researchers have not explicitly examined the widening reading gap of intermediate students in virtual intensive reading classes from the comprehensive view of parents and teachers. Intermediate students with RD need support and monitoring from parents, who could motivate them to read (Mehigan, 2020; Zawadka et al., 2021). While supporting and monitoring students, parents can learn from teachers how to apply academic/reading strategies, provide feedback, track learning progress, and advocate on their students' behalf (Domingue et al., 2021; Kong, 2018). Auditing student progress can enhance parents' role in the educational process and address the gap in the literature.

### **Background of the Study**

The learning gap between intermediate students on grade level and those below is widening, according to a study by Bailey et al. (2021). The data demonstrated that 36.13% of eighth-grade students nationwide showed proficiency in 2017, and that score dropped to 34% in 2019 (National Assessment of Educational Progress, n.d.). Students with RD fell below online assignments' expectations (Kanniainen et al., 2019). This decrease was present before COVID-19, and Cramman et al.'s (2021) study revealed teachers' concern with the reading and math needs of students with difficulties. The achievement rate of students performing below level declined by 3% (Engzell et al., 2020). As a result of the pandemic, classrooms worldwide transformed into virtual learning environments (VLE), and at-risk students fell behind (Domingue

et al., 2021). The decline in learning gains was particularly evident in students with RD (Dorn et al., 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2022; Shen, 2020).

Some researchers found that challenges with online learning impacted the achievement disparity (Bouck & Long, 2020; Graham et al., 2021; Martinez-Lincoln et al., 2021). For example, not having assistive tools and the skills to use them deterred some students (Bouck & Long, 2020). Dontre (2020) highlighted digital distractions such as online games and social media, as deterrents to reading engagement. Others, like Benkhider and Kherbachi (2020) investigated students' lack of self-regulation and monitoring as culprits in low literacy scores for online reading learners. Their findings were synonymous with those of Chen et al. (2020), who explored the lack of parental preparation and support for online students with reading difficulties. Abuhammad's (2020) qualitative study focused on parent preparedness and support after the coronavirus quarantine. His findings included lack of technical skill and support, coordinating home and work responsibilities, and cost of digital accoutrements. As seen in these examples, the age of virtual classrooms, challenges associated with VLEs can complicate the learning process for intermediate students in an intensive reading class.

### **Problem Statement**

The social problem, on which the study is based, is that the learning gap between intermediate students on grade level and those below grade level continues to grow (Gilmour et al., 2019; NCES, 2020). The achievement level between intermediate students on grade level and those with RD is not only widening, but

enrollment in intensive reading classes is also increasing (Chapman & Elbaum, 2021). Compared to 2009, the number of intermediate students in intensive reading classes increased to 24% according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2020). After the COVID quarantine, virtual schools in the southeastern United States experienced increased student enrollment for various reasons including longevity, alternative, and convenience (Abernathy & Thornburg, 2021; Lieberman, 2020). Also, many parents sought virtual classrooms to remediate students' reading discrepancies (Chapman & Elbaum, 2021; Dhawan, 2020). Further, intermediate students must read at grade level to comprehend complex textbooks in middle and high schools (Ian O'Byrne et al., 2021).

To best understand the problem, literature on virtual intensive reading classes is needed (Dhawan, 2020). How parent and teacher perceptions differ related to intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes is not thoroughly understood. In response, this study will include an exploration of the parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes, as the parents and teachers play a vital role in the present situation. Because research on academic interventions at the intermediate grade demonstrates to lower the potential for middle school students to drop out of high school (Rose & Bowen, 2021), it justifies the need to understand better how to make interventions at the intermediate grade level more effective.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. Researchers have reported that students' reading gap widened during the pandemic (Domingue et al., 2020; Elgart, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Because parents witness their students' experiences at home and teachers notice students' experiences through communication and classwork, their different perceptions may lead to a holistic analysis. Exploring intermediate students' experiences, as perceived by parents and teachers, may uncover unique information on academic requirements and performance in virtual reading classes, as well as leading to changes in educational design (Martinez-Lincoln et al., 2021).

## **Research Questions**

Main research question: What are parents' and teachers' perceptions of their intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes?

Sub question 1: What changes in reading patterns did teachers observe in their intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

Sub question 2: What changes in reading patterns did parents observe in their intermediate-level children enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

Sub question 3: What suggestions could teachers and parents offer to improve any weaknesses or drawbacks observed in the intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

## Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework includes Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) and social learning and Epstein's model of parental involvement. Vygotsky supports ancillary activities, virtual and otherwise, providing help and support for students through interactive means (Vygotsky, 1978). Silalahi (2019) reported that Vygotsky's *Thought and Language* (1986) solidified his belief that students learn most through supporting and reinforcing others who master a skill. Vygotsky's work highlighted that students' dependence on interaction with a facilitator is crucial to digesting the material(s). Vygotsky's concepts relate to parental perception and their role in their students' experiences in virtual classrooms. All higher learning occurs through social interaction with parents, siblings, teachers, and all others who interact in their lives.

Epstein's model of parental involvement establishes conditions at home that support learning and helps teachers understand their families' different socio-cultural compositions (Epstein, 2011). Epstein's six types of parental involvement are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. The fourth type, learning at home, promotes the learning partnership between parents and teachers to support student learning achievement. Epstein's theory aligns with this study in that it endorses the exploration of parents' and teachers' perceptions of their students' educational experiences. Vygotsky's and Epstein's theories provide a comprehensive approach to parental

involvement, teacher collaboration, and potential coaching. I provide a more detailed explanation of these theories in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study employed basic qualitative research method strategies. Researchers use qualitative studies to understand particular lived experiences concerning a specific phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A basic qualitative study investigates experiences to understand a phenomenon, a combination of a process, or participants' perceptions, which result in rich descriptive accounts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I conducted semistructured interviews, one of the strategies used in qualitative studies, as a way to understand the perceptions of teachers and parents on intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. I collected data for the study through interviews, which enabled me to gather rich, in-depth, and contextualized information and to explore responses through follow-up questions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I interviewed and audio-recorded semistructured interviews with six parents and six intermediate reading teachers who taught virtual intensive reading during the pandemic. Since intermediate refers to sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, I interviewed two parents and teachers from each grade level, totaling 12 participants. I used audioconferencing software to record the virtual interviews and obtained verbatim transcriptions from Transcribe.

### **Definitions and Acronyms**

*CIL*: Computer and Information Literacy uses technology to create assignments and communicate with others from home (ICLS, 2018).

*FCAT*: The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test is a Florida-based standardized exam given to 3<sup>rd</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students to measure academic achievement in reading, mathematics, and science from 1988 to 2015 (FLDOE, n.d.)

*FSA*: The Florida Standards Assessment is the Florida standardized exam that replaced the FCAT in reading and mathematics (FLDOE, n.d.).

*Intensive Reading*: Intensive reading in Florida is a needed combination of research-based programs successful in literacy development (CPALMS, n.d.).

*Intermediate School*: Intermediate school refers to two to three middle grades, 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade (Mac Iver & Ruby, n.d.).

*NAEP*: The National Assessment of Educational Progress is a nationwide exam authorized by Congress and administered by a national statistical bureau to 4th and 8th graders (NAEP, n.d.).

*NCES*: The National Center for Education Statistics is a national organization that gathers data on education from K-12 to the collegiate level (NCES, n.d.).

*Reading Difficulties*: The term reading difficulties (RD) is used to describe students with reading comprehension difficulties. This challenge can manifest due to several issues (Vaugh et al., 2019).

*VLE*: Virtual Learning Environment is an online platform used in education. It provides an online space for teaching and learning, using digital inter and intra-personal delivery (Cramman et al., 2021; Dhawan, 2020)

## Assumptions

Assumptions can exist in research questions and responses within qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The integrity of qualitative research relies on the sincerity of the participants and the researcher(s)'s ability to conduct the study free from any biases related to the subject matter. For the present study, I assumed the participants were honest and ethical in their responses because their participation was voluntary. Specifically, my assumption that parents would be able to recognize changes in reading patterns was a concern. Per Patton's (2015) six types of questions, the questions sought knowledge, opinions, and values from parents I assumed were familiar with the different components of reading. For that reason, I probed and asked additional questions.

The theories' foundation corresponded with my philosophy (Burkholder et al., 2019) that social learning and parental support boost academic learning. Vygotsky's ZPD and social learning theory propose that ancillary activities in stages facilitate learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). I assumed the ancillary activities were equivalent to Epstein's fourth level, learning at home. In interviewing parents, I assumed that the group would be familiar with and recognize online social learning. Because teachers and parents have different realities, their experiences and perceptions will differ (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Also, I assumed that parents and teachers attempted to communicate and collaborate with the other party, which was a factor in this study.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This qualitative study explored parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. This study was voluntary, and I interviewed participants in a virtual setting. Participants approved the interview times and dates, and the audio recordings were confidential to ensure a safe and secure environment.

The delimitation factors were parents and teachers of intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes in the southeastern United States. I used purposeful sampling by asking participants if they were a parent or a teacher and the grade level of the virtual reading class. I did not exclude parents or teachers according to education or demographic status. This study did not cover elementary, high school, or other virtual classes.

### **Limitations**

Possible challenges and barriers included location, setting, participants, this study's criteria, and time. The availability of parents and teachers to participate in the study posed a challenge. Since I limited the study to intermediate students' experiences in the southeastern United States, it did not address primary or high schools. The conscious decision to interview participants in this region influenced the transferability of the results for different areas (Burkholder et al., 2016). Additionally, the study delved into students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes and no other subject areas. Finding only virtual intensive reading teachers at the intermediate level was possibly challenging.

Bias, teacher expertise, and audio recording of the interviews were limitations. Because I integrated technology in my previous reading classes, I avoided bias when collecting, coding, and analyzing qualitative data. Member checking and reflexivity journaling eliminated alternative explanations; however, self-reflection alone did not exclude subjectivity one hundred percent. I was constantly vigilant by questioning myself and reviewing the data analysis. These practices increased confirmability (Guba, 1981). All participating teachers, including myself, likely differ in professional development and perspectives, which is a limitation.

### **Significance**

This qualitative study is unique because it provided perceptions of parents and teachers of students' reading performances in virtual intensive classes. The study's results could improve understanding of the underexplored topic of the widening gap between intermediate students on grade level and intermediate students with reading difficulties below grade level in virtual intensive reading classes. A holistic exploration of parent and teacher perceptions could reveal information on students' experiences. It supports the parent-teacher partnership in virtual courses in the same way occupational therapists used telehealth coaching with parents during the pandemic (Dahl-Popolizio et al., 2020).

Researchers have previously examined parents' and teachers' perceptions (Cognia, 2020; Duman, 2018; Kong, 2018); however, they have not studied why a widening learning gap exists between intermediate and intermediate students with reading difficulties in virtual intensive reading after the pandemic. This is an important

topic to explore as the number of intermediate-grade students in intensive reading classes continues to increase (Chapman & Elbaum, 2021; Curriculum Associates, 2021). As the literacy gap continues from intermediate grades to high school, students will struggle with other subject areas in high school (Ian O’Byrne et al., 2021). Additionally, that increase in below-grade-level readers transfers to a rise in virtual intensive reading classes (Dhawan, 2020). The need for literature on virtual intensive reading classes will rise as schools nationwide utilize VLE to accommodate the number of students.

The study’s results could lead social change by providing information on areas of need in an intensive reading class in a VLE. Stakeholders and ed tech designers could use the findings to counteract weaknesses and increase learning gains, help decrease the achievement gap, and improve the role of parents and teachers within the virtual intensive setting at the intermediate level. The study’s findings might bring much-needed attention to virtual intensive reading classes for intermediate students. In turn, ed tech designers and virtual intensive reading developers could integrate functions necessary to improve circumstances in reading VLEs. School districts might use the data from the study to facilitate neighborhood and community outreach, requesting school leaders to intervene. Information from the study might also catalyze change in how teachers, schools, and parents communicate and collaborate. Continued research on intensive reading in a VLE could lead to the formation of educational policies to optimize the function of online learning. Also, addressing intermediate students with RD can have a positive impact on the graduation rate of those students

(Rose & Bowen, 2021). This study was significant because it could contribute important information about literacy in educational technology and adaptations to the current virtual reading curriculum.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 1, I introduced the cornerstones of this study: background, problem, purpose, and research questions. The conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, and acronyms supplied the details of the structural composition of the study. I also included the study's assumptions, limitations, challenges, and significance. In Chapter 2, I further explain the study's framework and provide the literature review organized by themes.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Virtual learning is now an option for students worldwide (Palvia et al., 2018); however, reading assessments for intermediate students show a decline in scores that correlates with the rise in virtual learning (NCES, 2020). The need for intensive reading classes increased to address the needs of students with RD. In 2019, thirty-four percent of 8<sup>th</sup>-grade students nationwide scored 263 in reading assessments (NCES, 2020). The score was four points below the national average of 267 in 2017. Thirty-six percent of 8th graders in 2019 performed at or above proficiency/grade level, accentuating the need to close the reading gap. The NAEP administers the tests every 2 years, but their officials canceled testing until spring 2022. Based on the national guidelines set by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the reading assessment scores show an increase in intermediate students scoring below grade level.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. Exploring intermediate students' experiences perceived by parents and teachers may provide unique information on their academic performance in virtual reading classes. The insight into the experiences of intermediate students with reading difficulties may contribute to changes in the design (Martinez-Lincoln et al., 2021) and method of virtual reading classes.

Researchers agreed that before the COVID-19 and the resulting quarantine, literature was scarce on online intermediate students with reading difficulties (Bippert,

2019; Harwood & Brett, 2019). After the quarantine, the disparity between students with reading difficulties and those without increased, especially among students in vulnerable populations, such as; students with varying capabilities, students of color, and those in low-income households (Cramman et al., 2020; Domingue et al., 2021; Dorn et al., 2020; Educators for Excellence, 2020; Engzell et al., 2021). The widening learning gap constitutes a problem for intermediate students with reading difficulties in a virtual reading class.

Current literature discusses the learning gap between students who read on and below grade level (Baye et al., 2018; Gilmour et al., 2019; Hanushek et al., 2019). Several theories propose to explain this phenomenon. Researchers use these strategies to explain the reading deficiency in middle school students, from lacking one-to-one, grouping, and whole-school approaches (Baye et al., 2018) to addressing varying academic capabilities (Gilmour et al., 2019). Despite findings in the current literature, no studies indicate a specific cause for this gap.

A reaction to the widening reading gap between on and below-grade-level students was the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. Congress passed the NCLB Act authorizing funds to K-12 schools to address the academic discrepancies (USDE, n.d.). The learning gap continues to widen because of school closures and the transition from brick-and-mortar to the virtual learning environment (VLE) during the COVID-19 quarantine (Abuhammad, 2020; Angrist et al., 2021; Benkhider & Kherbachi, 2020; Cramman et al., 2021; Dhawan, 2020; Domingue et al., 2021; Dorn et al., 2020; Engzell, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

Learning online requires different skills than in a classroom setting (Benkhider & Kherbachi, 2020; Goodwin et al., 2020). For example, to understand the reading material, students must focus on word content (Yang, 2021). Earlier studies proposed that students with reading difficulties did not demonstrate significant reading gains when in a VLE (Baye et al., 2018; Heinrich et al., 2019). Technological complexities (Rasheed et al., 2020), environmental distractions (Dontre, 2020), and digital distractors such as advertisements and games (Brun-Mercer, 2019; Dongre, 2020; Izati et al., 2021) can complicate the learning environment for students with reading difficulties. Students in a junior high school study agreed that learning online can be difficult due to online and external distractions (Izati et al., 2021). Since social media is a significant distraction (Singh, 2021), students need self-regulation or monitoring. Therefore, parental monitoring is essential because students wander digitally and become distracted by advertisements and “unrelated text” (Brun-Mercer, 2019, p. 6; Heinrich et al., 2019; Maxwell et al., 2021). Interviewing parents about this could deepen the understanding of distractions and can offer improvements with virtual intensive reading classes.

Researchers see a need to address learning gaps, such as academic loss from age fourteen to high school (Hanushek et al., 2019) because learning loss is a prevalent problem for intermediate students (Hurwitz et al., 2021; Wexler et al., 2019). Hanushek et al.’s (2019) literature study analyzed assessment results from 1954 to 2001 and found that academic gaps remain constant. They also found that gains from 14 to 17-year-old students dissolve (Hanushek et al., 2019). The achievement gap

between students on and below-grade level can lead to educational and income inequality (Bailey et al., 2021). Reading deficiency in the intermediate grades carries over to other content areas and limits the student's ability to grasp the material in science and mathematics (Wexler et al., 2019). Therefore, additional exploration of the reading gap between intermediate students is an ongoing need.

Maxwell et al. (2021) researched parental role and partnership in education since many students attend classes virtually part-time or full-time post quarantine. Since virtual learning was compulsory during the quarantine and is currently an option for intermediate students with reading difficulties, parental involvement has become an important part of the learning equation (Kasi et al., 2021; Kong, 2018; Raguindin et al., 2021; Tamboto et al., 2021). It appears that parents' perceptions of their involvement are a part of the solution, whether they are learning at home with the students (Vygotsky, 1978), parenting, communicating, volunteering, or collaborating with the instructors (Epstein, 2011). Because this study explores parent perceptions, it offers a holistic approach to "the online learning commitment of adolescent learners in secondary education" (Lawrence & Fakuade, 2021, p. 2556).

Chapter 2 has four sections: introduction, literature search strategy, conceptual framework, and literature review-related key concepts. The introduction restates the problem and purpose, and the literature search outlines the databases, key terms, and the iterative process in the search. The conceptual framework includes a discussion and rationale for the use of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and social learning and Epstein's model of parental involvement. In searching the databases, I

use these key terms: *intensive reading instruction*, *virtual learning environment*, *reading component(s)*, and *parent and teacher perceptions of virtual classes*. I define intensive reading instruction as a student with reading difficulties and differences in elementary, intermediate, and high school reading classes. I describe components of VLEs, digital applications for struggling readers, students' experiences in prior studies, intensive reading instruction before and after the quarantine, and student assessment data before and after the quarantine.

Finally, I discuss the perceptions of virtual classes by parents and teachers before and after the quarantine, which is the basis for this qualitative study. Parents and teachers play a significant role in a student's education, as they facilitate learning by being involved and engaged (Brown et al., 2019; Duman et al., 2018). Although some parents are concerned about using too much technology (Goshin et al., 2021; Kong, 2018), some studies suggest that parents view virtual education positively.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

My study topic is "Parent and Teacher Perceptions of Intermediate Students' Experiences in Virtual Intensive Reading Classes." I began my research with five subtopics: parental perceptions, teacher perceptions, reading intervention, online or virtual learning, and intermediate students. Attending webinars featuring a Walden librarian and learning how to navigate the online library were my first research steps. I then searched for articles on struggling middle school readers, eLearning challenges, intensive reading classes, and reading teachers. The search for articles started in the Walden Library, using ERIC and SAGE. Google Scholar alerts sends updated articles,

especially from renowned researchers like Mary F. Rice, Siu-Cheung Kong, and Kelli Bippert. The Social Science Research Network (SSRN) and Journal Storage (JSTOR) are functional in finding primary sources within the conceptual and theoretical framework. Registering with the Institute of Electrical and Engineers Xplore Digital Library offered me articles on technology and educational technology advances. Most of my articles are available in the following databases, in order, from where I pulled the most to least articles: ERIC, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, Taylor and Francis, SSRN, JSTOR, and the IEEE Xplore Digital Library.

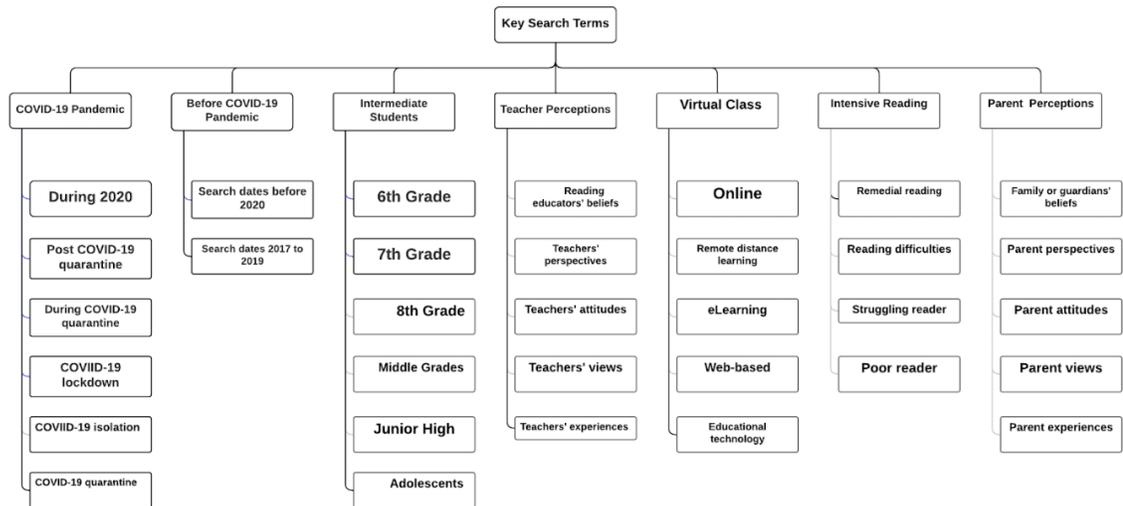
I maintain several accounts to access literature and studies. I have an account with SAGE and maintain a list of favorite journals such as *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *American Educational Research Journal*, *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *Educational Researcher*, *E-Learning and Digital Media*, *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, and *Journal of Special Education Technology*. I also subscribe to *USA Facts* for emails on quantitative education data and access to relevant information. Using a variety of databases secures knowledge saturation.

The initial literature search was challenging; therefore, meeting with the Walden librarian helped me in my search by introducing several strategies. Video conferencing with that librarian was helpful as well and took place on June 8, 2020. Then, I expanded the search by adding other disciplines in the options box. Using Boolean operatives allowed for synonyms and widened the search. I also placed

asterisk after irregular plurals and root words. It broadened the search using the root word or letters. I used it when searching using *educational technology\**, resulting in extra listings or articles.

Learning to manipulate the Boolean operatives was critical for this literature search. I used *remedial OR intensive reading intervention, middle school or junior high or 6<sup>th</sup> OR 7<sup>th</sup> OR 8<sup>th</sup> OR middle-level education OR intermediate OR adolescents, and virtual OR online learning OR eLearning OR remote* to get results. Another option was *virtual instruction OR online instruction OR web-based instruction OR distance instruction*. When searching parental perceptions, I used *parent perception OR parent attitude OR parent perspective OR parent experience OR parent view OR parent belief*. Replacing the word *teacher* for *parent* gave me a sense of equity in seeking literature from their perspectives.

This study investigated intermediate students' experiences in reading VLE before and during COVID-19. Therefore, using these key terms in the search provided ample options: *COVID-19 lockdown OR COVID-19 isolation OR COVID-19 quarantine and post-COVID-19 OR during COVID-19 OR 2020*. Some keywords for intensive reading in my searches were *remedial reading OR intensive reading OR struggling readers OR reading difficulties OR poor readers*. Adding a fourth search box reduced the likelihood of seeing results. Switching around the combinations increased the opportunity of finding extra articles. The different combinations uncovered other related articles and studies. I found that the searches finetuned the thematic scheme of the study.

**Figure 1***Initial Key Search Terms*

Drop-down Thesaurus, proximity searches, and using the asterisk were successful means of finding resources. When I paired terms like *online learning*, *eLearning*, *virtual classes*, *distance learning*, *remote learning*, or *web-based* with *intermediate students* and *intensive reading intervention*, the articles and studies were few and far between. Plenty of literature was available on elementary and high school students with disabilities. The expression, *reading difficulties*, was a breakthrough because not every intermediate student in intensive has a disability; however, students in an intensive reading class have reading difficulties. Pairing and switching around the key terms *intermediate students* with *reading difficulties* worked well. Using the drop-down menu in the Thesaurus search box also extended the literature search.

Proximity searches allowed me to search for articles where the two terms may appear together, next to, or within a certain number of words. One example of my Boolean search was *middle schoolers and virtual learning OR online learning OR e-learning OR remote learning and (reading difficulties OR reading difficulty OR reading disability OR reading problems or dyslexia) N5 online*. N5 told the library program to find one of the terms within the parenthesis no further than five words away from *online*. Twenty-five articles appeared.

Classifying articles and studies is critical to planning, writing, and completing my study. Therefore, I organized the literature by themes and developed a corresponding matrix. Table 1 is a visual graphic displaying each theme and subtopic for this study. Each theme has a matrix that lists articles or studies, proper citations, and main points addressing each theme. This practice enabled me to classify the literature into multiple themes when they overlap. For example, many articles and studies (Abuhammad, 2020; Benkhider & Kherbachi, 2020; Carter, Jr., 2020; Daugvilaite, 2021; Shen, 2020) overlap COVID-19 quarantine and parents' perceptions.

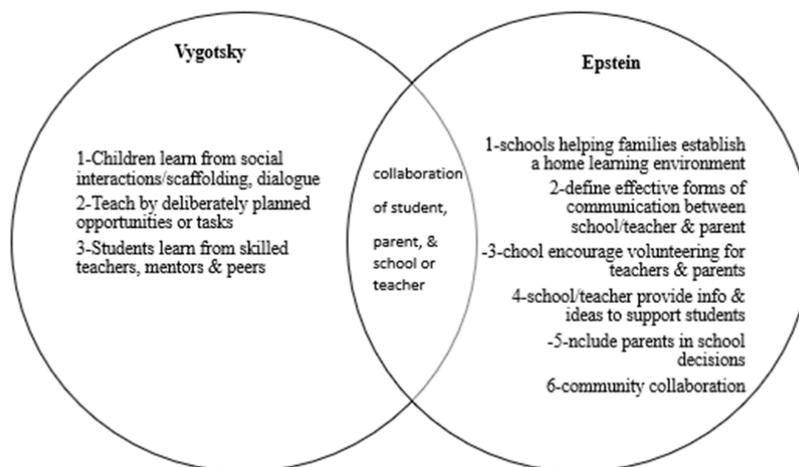
### **Conceptual Framework**

This study's conceptual framework includes Vygotsky's ZPD and social learning and Epstein's model of parental involvement since students with reading difficulties require support. Vygotsky supports ancillary activities, virtual and otherwise, that provide help and support for students through interactive means (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). In the model of parental involvement, Epstein

establishes conditions at home that support learning and helps teachers understand their families' different sociocultural compositions (Epstein, 2011; Kasi et al., 2021). Epstein's type four model, learning at home, furnishes families with homework policies, skills, and curriculum-based exercises for providing student support. Ultimately, students internalize their learning and become independent through parental support and ZPD (Graham et al., 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). While Vygotsky promotes cognitive learning through scaffolding and the assistance of teachers, knowledgeable parents, and skilled classmates, Epstein encourages teacher-supported parental assistance at home. Vygotsky's theory ZPD and social learning overlaps with Epstein's model of parental involvement with parental or mentor engagement. Both theories recognize and support the value of studying parents and their perceptions of their students' education.

## Figure 2

### *Relationship Between Vygotsky and Epstein*



Research studies use both theories in studying parental involvement. Tamboto et al. (2020) used both conceptual theories in their mixed-methods research on parent involvement during the quarantine. They accepted Vygotsky's "interconnectedness and interdependence of learning" (Tamboto et al., 2021, p. 37) as the foundation for parental intervention, especially virtual learning. Equally important, Akbari (2022) emphasized parental involvement differently; however, the parent must be confident and knowledgeable in the content area (p. 4). Even though the students in both studies are younger than intermediate students, Akbari (2022) deduced that preparing parents for mentoring virtual and home-school students is as important as being involved. I can examine the concept from parents' perceptions by interviewing them.

Since reading teachers' experiences, practices, and beliefs influence their instruction (Chapman & Elbaum, 2021), their perceptions of students' experiences in a VLE are meaningful. Furthermore, 67% of teachers surveyed and interviewed by An et al. (2021) agreed that synchronous online meeting via Zoom was impactful. Zoom meetings humanize learning (Kaplan-Rakowski, 2021) and allow online gaming activities (Neumann et al., 2020). The connectivity and social interaction offered by videoconferencing and other digital tools expand the classroom social dynamics into the virtual environment. Interviewing online teachers delves into their perceptions of students' experiences and adds data to a current phenomenon.

**Table 1***Vygotsky's and Epstein's Conceptual Theories Framework Alignment*

Foundational dogma of the conceptual theory	Research questions	Data Needs	Data Sources	Data Analysis
1. Zone of proximal development argues that students learn the most when guided/assisted in tasks just above their comfort level; assistance in a scaffolding task (Vygotsky, 1978)	What are parents' and teachers' perceptions of their intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes?	Participants' perceptions of students' experiences; advantages and disadvantages in virtual intensive reading classes; noticeable changes in academic performance	Semistructured interviews with a minimum of six parents (two from each grade level-6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , and 8 <sup>th</sup> )  Semistructured interviews with six online intensive reading teachers in middle school (two from 6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , and 8 <sup>th</sup> )	Understand the perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in intensive reading in a virtual environment, focusing on academic gains; increase scaffolding techniques in a virtual space; improve student learning for intensive reading students in a virtual environment.
2. Social learning theory attests that students learn and retain information best when learning through social interaction and not lectures (Vygotsky, 1986)	What changes in reading patterns did teachers and parents observe in their intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?	Participants observed an increase or decrease in reading competency in intermediate virtual intensive reading classes; any observable or measurable changes in reading practices of the intermediate students	Analyzing the answers and follow-up responses to the semistructured interviews with parents and teachers	Understand perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual social settings in an intermediate intensive reading class; capture the changes observed; scrutinize themes.
03. Epstein's model of parental involvement establishes that conditions at home support learning, and teachers can facilitate learning through collaboration (Epstein, 2011)	What suggestions could parents and teachers offer to improve the existing situation?	Participants' accounts on any collaboration, interaction, support, and materials that did or may facilitate learning in an intermediate students' virtual reading class.	Reviewing transcripts carefully; make sure the responses were properly placed into themes	Based on changes perceived by participants, changes in practice and overlapping of spheres of influence may facilitate learning and increase academic gains.

## **Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Social Learning**

Vygotsky was a Russian child psychologist who believed that social development played a decisive role in a child's cognitive growth (Vygotsky, 1978). He believed that thought and language acquisition developed independently per social interactions; however, these two functions meet and overlap, bringing forth "verbal and speech rational" actions (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 44). Peer-mediated reading called the critical reading of a text, helps students with reading difficulties (RD) decipher the meaning and answer questions (Wexler et al., 2019). Partner reading is a social interaction that benefits readers with different challenges. Mimicking fluency, discussing the questions, and explaining the narrative help students comprehend the text (Wexler et al., 2019). Because symbolism and language are social behaviors, Vygotsky's social learning theory asserts that cognitive development begins in the brain but matures through interaction with knowledgeable assistants (Silalahi, 2019).

Vygotsky's ZPD hinges on six elements: proper scaffolding, mediation, cooperation, imitation, a target goal, and a crisis. Silalahi's (2019) academic article explains that scaffolding allows the mentor to control the task, and mediation is when the mentor communicates with the learner (p. 177). Cooperation is the relationship between the mentor and the learner, and imitation is reenacting the desired task. Lastly, Silalahi (2019) describes a necessary crisis as the practice needed for learners to gain mastery. Students learn as they overcome challenges in the form of a crisis (Silalahi, 2019). Therefore, investigating students' experiences from those closest to them, parents and teachers, constructs a better understanding of learning in a VLE.

According to Vygotsky (1978), children learn from their environment from the day they are born, and their learning should correlate with their developmental level, of which there are three. They are the actual developmental level, the zone of proximal development, and the beyond-reach level. Vygotsky described these levels in *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (1978). The actual developmental level is the stage in which a student can perform a task independently; the zone of proximal development is when the task requires guidance and assistance. The ZPD level is how students internalize learning skills (Vygotsky, 1978; Graham et al., 2021; Wraga et al., 2021). The beyond-reach level is when the student cannot complete the task. His social learning theory postulates that help and guidance through the zone of proximal development arouse other learning processes, and this awakening occurs only during social interaction. Over time, these learning processes become instinctive and part of the student's developmental level.

Silalahi (2019) reports that Vygotsky's *Thought and Language* (1986) solidified his belief that students learn the most through dialogue and thoughtful intervention, not lectures. Vygotsky's theory suggests that social interaction employing adult assistance, scaffolding, and classmate collaboration awakens internal learning processes, the foundation of sequential learning. Scaffolding is the primary strategy of adult assistance; nonetheless, Silalahi (2019) outlined six elements of social interaction in her literature review: assistance, mediation, cooperation, imitation, target, and crises. Another research team, Tamboto et al. (2021), supports the social learning theory indicating that new knowledge becomes permanent through interaction

with adept classmates or mentors. Tamboto et al. (2021) and Raguindin et al. (2021) recognize mentors' role in Vygotsky's apprenticeship learning. The scaffolding tools make the task possible, and the repetition internalizes the new skill.

### **Rationale for the Application of Vygotsky's Theory**

Vygotsky's (1978) work highlights the impact of deliberate social interaction on student success. His scaffolding, support, and home mediation concepts relate to parent and teacher perception and their role in their students' experiences in virtual classrooms. According to his theory, learning comes primarily through the interaction mentioned above, and children learn symbolism and language from their social environment, which directly correlates with reading. Vygotsky's social learning development relates to this study because virtual intensive reading classes' online interactions (synchronous, or asynchronous) substitute for conventional social interactions (Harwood & Brett, 2019). Harwood and Brett's (2019) analysis maintained that Vygotsky's theory of ZPD describes learning as transformative and developmental. Researchers like Sorokoumova et al. (2021) defend that virtual environments require active learning to attain new knowledge (p. 1005), and the social learning theory supports this principle. Social learning development offers a framework to probe the dynamics of online intercommunication in a VLE. According to Harwood and Brett (2019), online learning "mediates human interaction" (p. 143); therefore, using it as a research framework is appropriate.

All higher learning occurs through social interaction with knowledgeable teachers, parents, and fellow students collaborating with the learner within a zone of

proximal development. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development focuses on tasks requiring support and scaffolding as social learning tools (Graham et al., 2021; Wranga et al., 2021). Sorokoumova et al. (2021) and Li et al. (2021) demonstrate the significance of guided practice, scaffolding, and social interaction. These tools give way to learned behavior, hence higher mental processes. Repetition breeds habit, leading to a higher cognitive mental function. Since reading is a cognitive process that entails decoding symbols and recognizing meanings, Vygotsky's theories uniquely apply to this exploration of intermediate students with reading difficulties and their experiences in virtual intensive reading classes.

Since virtual learning is becoming prevalent, researchers use Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development and social learning as their analytical framework. Harwood and Brett's (2019) studied the social dynamics, dialectic interactions, and literacy activity between professors and undergraduate students in an online social media group. They applied his theory and found that some professors had no clear outline of managing online interactions or dialogues, scaffolding, and revising online assessment tasks. Harwood and Brett highlighted that online pedagogy needs constant revision to support teachers and increase students' educational experiences without decomposing the learning process. Their qualitative research explored online social presence from the professors' perspectives. From a teacher's perspective, Vygotsky's apprenticeship learning is a process that requires deliberate scaffolding and tailored teaching (Harwood & Brett, 2019). In addition, Graham et al. (2021) prosed that the learner becomes independent by developing self-

regulation. Harwood and Brett (2019) recommend that future studies on virtual learning should concentrate on materials, text format, and the teachers' role in developing self-regulating behavior.

VLEs are an option for students and parents, and the need for applied practice and interaction in isolation are challenges. These key factors are the foundation of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and theory of social learning. Researchers believe the lack of active engagement in VLEs adversely affect students with disabilities (Graham et al., 2021; Sorokoumova et al., 2021; Wranga et al., 2021). Sorokoumova et al. (2021) applied the zone of proximal development theory when studying digital programs and products (p. 1003). The results revealed that the inappropriateness of some digital activities adversely affected elementary students with learning difficulties. However, Sorokoumova et al. (2021) attest that keeping in sync with a student's closest zone of proximal development and scaffolding it to attain higher-order thinking requires parental and teacher training (p. 1010). This group of researchers dealt with elementary students and believed meticulous monitoring is critical due to the spectrum of abilities (Sorokoumova et al., 2021, p. 1010). Although their participants were elementary students and they did not address reading difficulties, their study provides a structural foundation for this study. Their study highlights the role of Vygotsky's theories, active participation, and guided practice in the success of distance-learning classes.

Graham et al. (2021) applied Vygotsky's ideal of repetition within the ZPD and social learning to their research on fourth-grade students with writing difficulties.

Their research is relevant to this study because writing relates to literacy and reading. According to Graham et al. (2021), ZPD's scaffolding, led by mentors and reinforced by social interaction, generates internalized learning. Their study provides a foundation for formulating interview questions despite being conducted face-to-face because it addresses the same pedagogical theory. The questions reveal the parents' and teachers' roles in VLE. In this study, the parents' and teachers' perceptions provide insight into the experiences of intermediate students with RD in virtual classes.

A community of learners is the crucial component of Vygotsky's social learning theory, in which students work together or with their teachers or parents to gain new knowledge. In a study by Wranga et al. (2021), parents became mentors and active co-participants in building a compost heap. The learning task allowed students to learn via social interaction and engagement; teachers can use that opportunity to monitor the learning and gauge the ZPD. Kasi et al. (2019) interviewed parents. They found that 80% of parents gained ownership of the learning process from home to see academic gains. Because digital education should be within the closest zone of proximal development for students with reading difficulties, an investigative look at students' experiences in VLE is necessary. Although Wranga et al.'s (2021) research was face-to-face, they integrated digital activities. This study provides the key elements of social learning through meaningful and challenging online tasks.

This study relates to Epstein's model of parental involvement because it explores the role of others, such as parents and teachers, in a virtual intensive reading

environment. Epstein's model of parental involvement establishes conditions at home that support learning and help teachers understand their families' different socio-cultural compositions (Epstein, 2011). A qualitative study by Raguindin et al. (2021) focused on community, teacher, and parent collaboration during the quarantine, and it integrated the different types of Epstein's parental involvement. Of the six types (parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community), the fourth type promotes the learning partnership between parents and teachers to fulfill students' learning potential. Because students reflect their families, socioeconomic and cultural demographics, Epstein (2011) emphasizes the need for school personnel to become familiar with students' families and communities. School and home relationships encourage student engagement and family support, which generates social learning (Tamboto et al., 2021). Epstein (2011) believes that understanding the frame of reference of a child will facilitate educational partnership and assist the child in making academic gains, which links the theory to this study.

My study will interview selected parents and teachers about students' experiences, including reading patterns, mentor (parent and teacher) involvement, student interconnectedness with the virtual class, and engagement. Tamboto et al. (2021) interviewed parents of homeschooled students in first to sixth grade. They inquired about parental involvement (Epstein, 2011) and the students' relationship with their environment, a feature of Vygotsky's social learning. Furthermore, the authors discussed student success as the motivation behind parental involvement.

Although parental preparedness, time, costs, and resources are factors, Akbari (2022) surmised that increased parent involvement leads to increased student engagement. Homeschool students' relationship with their parents is a rudimentary yet effective precursor to Vygotsky's social learning and Epstein's theory of parental involvement. Although their students are younger than intermediate students, Tamboto et al.'s (2021) discovery is beneficial in this study because it demonstrates the connection between both theories.

With the advent of homeschooling and distance learning, Tamboto et al. (2021) focused on the interrelationship of homeschooled students with their parents for ZPD and parent-teacher partnership. The authors concluded that parents unfamiliar with teaching strategies coordinated and communicated with virtual teachers regularly. Tamboto et al. (2021) concluded that parental training and interpersonal communication with their teachers are ongoing. Additionally, the authors proposed that parental involvement and at-home participation improved with awareness. Accordingly, I may inquire about understanding school policies and communication between teachers, parents, and students regarding academic gains.

However, Kasi et al. (2021) and Raguindin et al. (2021) interest in parent-teacher partnerships peaked due to the transition from face-to-face to virtual learning during the pandemic. One group of parents in Kasi et al.'s (2021) study believed that volunteering and communicating with teachers was sufficient because the teachers are professionals. Kasi et al. (2021) found that parents expect teachers to behave as parental figures in the classroom, face-to-face, and VLE, which is critical. This

expectation could be a cultural element since the study occurred in Indonesia.

Therefore, I will address parental perceptions in the interview.

On the other hand, Raguindin et al.'s (2021) parents believe serving several roles, such as monitors, advocates, collaborators, and supporters, is best. Parents' involvement manifests differently (Sahin, 2019, as cited in Tamboto et al., 2021). Having this information beforehand helps me devise questions concerning the level of and the specific type of interaction perceived by parents and teachers of intermediate students in VLE. Even though Kasi et al. (2021) and Tamboto et al. (2021) did not refer to parental involvement in virtual intensive reading classes for intermediate students, the information provided helped develop interview questions.

### **Rationale for The Application of Epstein's Model**

Epstein's model of parental involvement relates to this study because it focuses on collaborating two adult groups, parents and teachers, who are the closest to most students. Epstein's (2009) model stresses quality partnership between parents and teachers and indicates that instructional and motivational support overlap improves attendance and achievement. My qualitative study focuses on parent and teacher perceptions of students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes to address the widening learning gap between students with and without reading difficulties. In this digital age, the parent-teacher partnership intensified through email and messaging through Learning Management Systems (LMS) (Kuusimaki, 2022). However, Kuusimaki (2022) expressed that few guidelines on what to share hinder intensive teacher-parent communication. The goal is to support all students through "respect,

trust, appreciation, and collaboration between and among adults who influence students' lives and learning" (Epstein, 2011, p. 11). A gap remains in the literature on intermediate students in virtual intensive reading classes, as these have only increased since the quarantine.

Epstein, Sheldon, and Chappell (2022) looked at flexible schedules and locations and how virtual learning during inconsistent school quarantines impacts parent-teacher collaboration. Their statistics revealed that communication with parents did not meet expectations, impacting parent involvement. Schools could only reach 31% of parents. Only 32 % of parents attended online workshops, and 35% gave input. These patterns were consistent in 161 other K-12 schools (Epstein et al., 2022). The study did not attribute learning loss solely to parental apprenticeship; however, it was a leading factor that requires thorough investigation. Suggestions and strategies learned can become helpful during natural disasters and war-torn regions where education is interrupted (Dhawan, 2020). Epstein et al.'s (2022) research conveys the need to address student learning loss due to digital shortcomings in education. Although the study addresses parent collaboration and apprenticeship with online learning, it did not address intensive reading classes in a VLE.

Parents provide the initial environment, and parents and teachers collaborate to support learners: the community, advocacy groups, and councils offer policy groups and a standard structure (Epstein, 2011). Epstein's (2011) belief that teachers need to understand the environment in which students live to suit their needs is the central idea of parental involvement. Overlapping spheres of influence are the underlying concept

of parental involvement, suggesting that students learn more when teachers, parents, and others in the community collaborate. The overlapping of spheres is the foundation of Epstein's (2018) literature study on the transfer of mentoring from teacher to parent and extends from meetings to an active role in activities. Epstein bases this concept on the need for partnership between three entities: teacher, parent, and community, and claims that each plays a role in a child's development. She refers to them as spheres of influence. Even though this study does not explore or include the community as a third variable, her theory of parental and teacher involvement is critical to her ideology. Therefore, Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence theory correlates with my investigation.

Students reflect their families' socioeconomic and cultural demographics; therefore, Epstein (2011) emphasizes the need for school personnel to become familiar with students' families and communities. Epstein (2011) believes that understanding the frame of reference of a child will facilitate educational partnership and assist the child in making academic gains, which links the theory to this study. Collaborating with parents shows appreciation and acceptance of different cultures and familial dynamics (Raguindin et al., 2021). the different demographics, family relationships, and parenting styles, acquiring cognitive strategies through parental support and social interaction reinforces learning development (Philominraj et al., 2022).

The dynamics of overlapping spheres of influence maximize parent/family involvement in a student's education, so Epstein's (2022) theory pertains to and supports my study on parents' and teachers' perceptions. The collective parent and

teacher perceptions reflect the different spheres of influence on intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. This collective data may highlight cultural or family differences that impact virtual learning. This range is evident when comparing Epstein et al.'s (2022), Philominraj et al.'s (2022), Raguindin et al.'s (2021), and Tamboto et al.'s (2021) results. The holistic approach in my study provides parent and teacher perspectives on the performance of intermediate students with reading difficulties as they navigate their courses. Even though my study does not explore or include the community as a third variable, her theory of parental and teacher involvement are critical components of Epstein's ideology. Epstein's (Epstein, 2011; Epstein, 2018; Epstein et al., 2018; Epstein et al., 2022) work and collaborative studies do not focus on virtual intensive reading students in the middle grades. Kasi et al. (2021), Kuusimaki (2021), Raguindin et al. (2021), and Tamboto et al. (2021) explored the need for parent-teacher collaboration for increased learning; still, their focus was not on the intricacies of virtual learning and the challenges of intermediate students with reading difficulties. There exists a gap that delves into a modern phenomenon.

### **Intensive Reading Instruction**

Statistics from the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE, 2019) revealed that only 54% of intermediate students passed the Florida Standards Assessments in reading. Consequently, the number of intermediate students in intensive reading classes in Florida increased. The rise of students with RD requires instructional programs to support them with reading difficulties through deliberate and strategic

preparation in complex skills: decoding, language, vocabulary, cohesion, and reading comprehension (Lovett et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022). Intensive courses are necessary and critical for students with reading difficulties because content-area textbooks and reading paraphernalia become increasingly difficult in middle school (Chapman & Elbaum, 2021; Wexler et al., 2019). In Florida, intensive reading is a daily requirement for intermediate students who score a Level 1 or 2 in the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA), formerly known as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), Reading exam (FLDOE, n.d.; The Florida Senate, 2016). Schools must monitor intensive reading students throughout the year by administering three diagnostic exams: baseline, mid-year, and end-of-year (FLDOE, n.d.). Middle school students with reading difficulties struggle in high school, graduate late, or never graduate (Johnson, 2018). Text complexity (Dahl et al., 2021; Wexler et al., 2019) and the lack of grade-level proficiency in students with RD (Chapman & Elbaum, 2021) are reasons for further exploration of intensive reading for middle school students with reading difficulties.

Per Section 1003.4156 of the Florida Statutes (FLDOE, 2018.), all intermediate students who score a Level 1 in the FSA Reading exam must attend a daily intensive reading class. However, intermediate students with a Level 2 select an intensive reading or content-area reading intervention; this choice is unavailable to elementary school students. If an intermediate student has scored a Level 1 or 2 for two consecutive years, that student must invariably attend a 90-minute intensive reading block to compensate for the reading deficiency. Intensive reading courses are pressing,

with only 33.58% of all 8<sup>th</sup> graders reading at or above proficiency. There is a prevalence of low proficiency in reading among middle schoolers in Florida (Chapman & Elbaum, 2021). The data decreased from 36.13% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders on grade level in 2017 to 34% in 2019 (NCES, 2021). This difference came from a four-point drop in the raw score, 267 to 263 (NAEP, n.d.). This raw data catalyzes for Florida schools to monitor academic gains in reading comprehension and the success rate of students with reading difficulties to close the learning gap.

After the pandemic, the achievement gap between grade-level intermediate students and students with RD widened due to declining passing percentage points ranging from -31.9 in mathematics to -2.3 in language arts and reading (Halloran et al., 2021). Engzell et al. (2020) revealed a 3 % decrease in learning and up to 60% of learning loss among students from disadvantaged homes. Although math suffered a more considerable decline than reading, the latter significantly declined within the following groups: students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged areas, and ethnic minorities (Dorn et al., 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2022; Shen, 2020). The coronavirus quarantine “magnified the educational disparities already experienced by students in high-poverty areas” (Anderson, 2020, p. 14) and struggling readers in the intermediate grades (Martinez-Lincoln et al., 2021).

### **Virtual Learning Environment**

With technological advances and growing access to Wi-Fi, virtual classes are popular among teachers, parents, and students. VLE is intrinsic to K-12 and higher education (Singh, 2021). Although blended courses are popular within school districts,

online K-12 education increased from 45 million in 1987 to 56 million in 2018 (NCES, 2021). The number of enrolled students surpassed five million in private schools and 50 million in brick-and-mortar schools (NCES, 2021). Among those enrolled in virtual classrooms are middle school students with reading difficulties: behavioral, learning, and communication obstacles. These students need academic support and a digital reading instructional design that abets reading comprehension. Since VLEs are the new medium of human interaction (Harwood & Brett, 2019), studying student engagement and attention is a factor in intensive reading online classes. Per Martinez-Lincoln et al. (2021), students' characteristics influence how they interact with online text; however, engaging activities like discussions with peers and teachers positively impact reading comprehension. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes.

Many challenges accompanied the rise in online K-12 education. Kanniainen et al. (2020) and Rice and Deschaine (2020) categorized these students' academic hurdles as self-regulation, lacking direct teacher-learner interaction, text complexity, and reading complexity. Reading comprehension requires complex cognitive skills such as phonemic awareness, phonic recognition, fluency, and vocabulary (Hall et al., 2020; Hayati & Puspitaloka, 2022). The reader must shift the skill and focus as the reading challenges arise (Carter Jr et al., 2020). The reading task becomes complicated for students with emotional, physical, developmental, and communicative difficulties. Virtual intensive reading classes for students in the intermediate levels require specific

instructional and procedural support (Graham et al., 2021) and monitoring to increase reading comprehension and decrease the learning gap between on and below-grade-level readers. Monitoring can come in the guise of teacher-student communication (Archila et al., 2022; Howe et al., 2019) and interaction and parent-student interaction (Tamboto, 2021).

Transitioning from face-to-face to digital requires adjusting educational components, such as digital tools, online student engagement, and policies (Heinrich et al., 2019). The efficacy of digital tools and assistive features depends upon the instructors' and students' knowledge and competence (Bouck & Long, 2020). These assistive tools scaffold the task, provide support, and maintain the students' focus on reading. Cognitive engagement keeps the reader's attention and minimizes distractions (Heinrich et al., 2019), such as other websites, social media platforms, and computer games (Dontre, 2020). Equally important are school policies regarding adopting technical devices, tools, and training for said technology (Williams-Buffonge, 2021). In addition, the instructional delivery should be engaging, entertaining, level-appropriate, and deliberate to captivate the middle school audience and their attention span (Bippert, 2019; Dhawan, 2020).

The information in studies by Bippert (2018), Dhawan (2020), Dontre (2020), and Heinrich et al. (2019) guide me in formulating the interview questions. Bippert's (2019) study focused on the student, teacher, and administrative perceptions of middle school reading intervention before the quarantine; however, it did not include parents. Nonetheless, the study introduces digital tools and questions analyzing their use in a

virtual setting. Bippert's (2019) study states differences in perceptions between and within groups (pg. 14). The questions used serve as a foundation for questions concerning digital tools and their application. Dhawan (2020) and Dontre (2020) dealt with the sudden shift from brick-and-mortar to virtual settings during the quarantine. Dhawan (2020) did not conduct interviews but found a lack of rigor, critical thinking, and problem-solving activities. Still, his study discusses a list of digital tools, online games, and activities that cover social interaction and digital dexterity for this study. On the other hand, Dontre (2020) used questionnaires emphasizing student engagement and digital distraction, which I can revise to interview parents and teachers concerning distractions, mobile phones, and engagement.

### **Components of a Virtual Learning Environment**

With a change of venue comes a revision in educational components, such as instructional delivery, digital tools, instructor-student engagement, feedback, and policies (Heinrich et al., 2019). Changes in educational components do not materialize in real-time to aid students with comprehension difficulties (Williams-Buffonge, 2021). Equally important is utilizing extra assistive tools such as sticky notes, highlighting, text-to-speech, font size features, and technology for the mobile, visually, and hearing impaired who may encounter comprehension difficulties (Bouck & Long, 2020). Intermediate students with RD need scaffolding and support as part of an intensive reading class, and digital tools are a required component of online instruction (Alahtani, 2021). Martin and Bollinger's (2018) interviewed online students about engagement with other students, the teacher, and the content and found teacher-student

interaction ranked the most important. Singh (2021) found that digital teacher-student interaction does not equate to face-to-face encounters and limits the impact of a teacher physically being there. These claims are not to say that feedback is not essential. Instead, feedback is integral to teacher-student interaction and is most effective in synchronous learning (Dhawan, 2020). Finally, teachers in an Educators for Excellence (2020) survey persist in impacting district policies on technology integration, while others rely on research supporting technology adoption (Williams-Buffonge, 2021).

Proficiency with digital tools and their applications plays a role in a virtual intensive reading class (Alqahtani, 2021). Teacher and student training are crucial for adequately integrating digital assistive tools (Singh, 2021). Abuhammad (2020) found that lacking technical training and support was a dominant barrier for parents during the COVID-19 quarantine. Teachers with little to no digital integration in the classroom faced technological setbacks. Huh and Reigeluth (2018) found that teachers lacked the skills to teach their students self-regulated learning, which facilitates and aids in online classes (Carter Jr. et al., 2020). Brun-Mercer (2019) concluded that students with reading difficulties must regularly engage and practice to become fluid online readers. Compatible assistive tools within a balanced instructional design benefit a virtual intensive reading class (Dhawan, 2020); student engagement and response are a big part of the process. Similarly, Archila et al. (2022) recommended further exploration into the role of online social interaction within instructional designs. The lack of literature on the relationship between virtual interaction, social

dynamics, and improved online literacy relates to this study exploring parent and teacher perceptions of reading students in VLEs.

### **Intensive Reading in VLEs Before COVID-19 Quarantine**

Before the COVID-19 quarantine in March 2020, Florida had the highest number of virtual schools, 219 (NCES, n.d.). However, four middle school students were enrolled in virtual school (NCES, n.d.). From 2015 to 2016, 57% of high schools offered online, and only 12.8% of middle schools provided online courses (NCES, n.d.). Sublett and Chang (2018) state that most high school online courses are intensive reading and math to accommodate graduation prerequisites. Consequently, high schoolers prefer virtual classes because of schedule flexibility, students' medical concerns, or individual preference (Washington et al., 2020). It was not until 2019 that the number of public schools that offered virtual classes rose to 79% (NCES, 2021). This increase was partly due to 95% of households getting Wi-Fi through a home computer (88%) or mobile phone (6%) (NCES, 2021). In one study by Tsai et al. (2019), students with reading difficulties were optimistic about their digital reading class. The researchers noted that the novelty of using a tablet computer for academic purposes motivated the students and noticed increased reading fluency. However, the intensive reading students in Tsai et al.'s (2019) study varied in abilities, so their results were not identical. Middle schoolers negatively associated in-school reading and writing and preferred reading for pleasure (Bal, 2018). This study justifies these conflicting studies and the lack of research addressing their reading difficulties within virtual classes.

Before the COVID-19 quarantine, VLEs were inaccessible for intermediate students with reading difficulties, making it challenging to practice. Grindle et al. (2020) measured the performance of six students with reading difficulties who took a virtual intensive reading class from 16 to 32 weeks and noted some learning gains. Grindle et al. found that the students made gains in reading fluency and comprehension, despite repeating several episodes up to nine times and having difficulty explaining short answer responses. The students in both studies experienced lower scores in writing and needed extra time for short answer questions. Additionally, a study led by Archila et al. (2022) reported that students within the spectrum of learning disabilities had solid and positive perceptions of their instructors (p. 63). The more time spent learning online, the better the participants performed (Archila et al., 2022). Their study correlates with Grindle et al.'s recent study, in which time spent learning online increased learning gains for students with reading difficulties. The more online interaction, exposure, and experience gained with online reading classes, the more comfortable students become with digital reading. Continuous practice for reading students is beneficial and sharpens targeted skills (Alqahtani, 2018; Kannianen et al., 2019). Courses are readily available in school districts and nationwide.

From 2018 to 2019, four intermediate reading students in Florida used virtual classes (NCES, n.d.). That number increased from one in 2014 (NCES, n.d.) to four in five years. Reasons for a slow increase were unavailable; however, Brun-Mercer (2019) claimed that face-to-face strategies, tools, and support do not meet the needs of struggling readers in a VLE. Brun-Mercer's in-depth search into a decade of online

reading supports her claim. Furthermore, Hayati & Puspitaloka, 2022) studied cohesion in online texts from three vendors and found that text complexity and support are crucial to reading comprehension for students with RD (p. 118). In addition, Kannianen et al. (2019) contend that a lack of online reading fluency and comprehension prevents students from synthesizing information. Students who participated in the Online Research and Comprehension Assessment study supported their ideas. Martin and Bollinger's (2018) study found that students in reading classes preferred peer discussions and working collaboratively online to write responses. Students wanted more prompts to support asynchronous online discussions (Martin & Bollinger, 2018). Although Maring and Bollinger's (2018) study did not address middle school intensive reading in VLE, the line of questioning would help me set up my interview protocol. My study intends to explore online reading classes by interviewing parents and teachers concerning student engagement with peers and the instructor.

Assistive digital tools and online features are a mainstay of online reading, but their usage and effectiveness in building reading comprehension skills in a VLE are complex (Bouck & Long, 2020; Singh, 2021). Some assistive tools are underused (Bouck & Long, 2020; Regan et al., 2019). Text-to-speech and read-aloud features are helpful to middle school students with reading disabilities. These features help students decode and read fluently (Wood et al., 2018), allowing the reader to focus on comprehension. However, these tools should be scaffolded and monitored to improve decoding and fluency. Even though text-to-speech and read-aloud digital tools

compensate for the lack of decoding and fluency skills, the impact of digital features in increasing reading comprehension is unclear (Pollack et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2018). However, digital annotative tools with highlighting, annotating, and recalling features facilitate reading comprehension (Azmuddin et al., 2020). Due to the complexity of reading, varying degrees of monitoring and scaffolding using digital tools and features are necessary to meet the needs of all students in a virtual intensive reading class (Fogarty et al., 2017). Therefore, investigating parent and teacher perceptions of students' experiences in VLE is essential to understanding digital interaction's relative importance and effect in intensive reading.

Students' autonomy at home led to a lack of motivation and self-regulation before the pandemic (Carter Jr et al., 2020) and blended classes (Rasheed et al., 2020). Lack of self-regulation and motivation challenged parents and teachers since classroom perks did not exist. Most parents were working, and few classes were synchronous due to digital limitations and skills, per Cognia Innovation Lab studies (2020). Distractions existed before the quarantine. Student mobile phone use and online games were temptations while the student worked on the computer at home or school.

### **Virtual Intensive Reading During and After COVID-19 Quarantine**

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic compelled schools worldwide to transition from brick-and-mortar to VLEs, and learning gaps became prevalent once students returned. The transition was a sudden disruption to teachers, students, and parents. Seventy-two percent said a lot, 26% said some, and 2% said a little (Educators for

Excellence, 2020). Only 14 % of teachers surveyed had a great deal of online learning experience, leaving 86% of the nationwide teachers surveyed with little to no experience with virtual learning spaces (Educators for Excellence, 2020). In countries where broadband Wi-Fi is not an issue, the Netherlands' scores unveiled a loss of "0.08 standard deviation or one-fifth of a school year" (Engzell et al., 2020, p. 2). Engzell et al. (2020) found that the learning loss and expanded academic gap are due to learning stagnation. This data coincides with findings from several research teams (Abuhammad, 2020; Benkhider & Kherbachi, 2020; Domingue et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020).

Benkhider and Kherbachi (2020) focused on schools and universities and, via interviews and surveys, found that students had to self-regulate without support. Students' autonomy at home led to a lack of motivation and self-regulation before the pandemic (Carter Jr et al., 2020) and blended classes (Rasheed et al., 2020). Lack of self-regulation and motivation challenged parents and teachers since classroom perks did not exist. Distractions continued throughout the quarantine, as revealed by Maxwell et al. (2021). Dontre (2020) discussed social media platforms' impact on studying in virtual spaces despite distraction from academic tasks. Although mobile phones are a mainstay of daily life, they offer students a quick escape from academic assignments (Dontre, 2020). Interviews disclosed parental trust in their students. However, they worried about distractions like game sites, texting, and inappropriate websites (Maxwell et al., 2021). These distractions challenge intermediate students with RD since reading comprehension requires multiple skills like decoding,

vocabulary, fluency, background knowledge, and focus (Dontre, 2021; Hall et al., 2020; Hayati & Puspitaloka, 2022).

Laeli et al. (2020) found that English Language Teachers (ELT) in Indonesia have a positive outlook on digital reading for struggling readers; however, they had little to no professional training on digital reading. Indonesia's study is comparable because of the high number of English language learners (ELLs) and diverse demographics in Florida. Additionally, the Indonesian research gathered data from area high and junior schools, the latter being equivalent to intermediate grades. Online teachers expressed their lack of experience and training as areas of concern (Laeli et al., 2020). This sentiment was also true for the Educators for Excellence (2020) survey, which reported that 30 to 40% of teachers had no experience with virtual teaching. Cognia Innovation Lab (2020) revealed in their study that most teachers focused on instructional activities to keep students engaged. I concede that professional development in online reading instruction is a common theme suggested in the literature.

Past studies demonstrated teacher-student rapport's positive impact on students' self-confidence, resilience, and academic engagement (Carter et al., 2020; Kaufmann & Vallade, 2020). Lack of physical proximity to teachers and their peers resulted in low emotional resilience and poor coping skills (Zhang et al., 2020), hampering academic motivation. Martinez-Lincoln et al.'s (2021) quantitative study found that self-paced reading programs and immediate feedback kept students' attention while reading. The interaction between teachers and online reading students

through directed activities, games, and break-out rooms can increase social presence and a favorable climate in a virtual class (Martinez-Lincoln et al., 2021). Bippert (2019) deduced that online socialization and instructional dialogue engage and motivate students. When Wexler et al. (2019) researched the use of critical reading of a text (CRT) in middle schools, they found that adaptations of this peer-mediated reading met the needs of students. Increased social interaction stimulates active learning (Vygotsky, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). For this reason, teacher perception of middle school reading students is a viable data source to explore these students' experiences in this medium, VLE.

Another aspect of online interaction and connectedness is the need for students to receive feedback and assistance with online tools. Only 60% of k-12 teachers believed that digital devices benefit social interaction and communication between teachers and students with disabilities (Duffin, 2021). This data suggests that middle school students with reading difficulties are less likely to experience classroom connectedness and teacher interaction. This analysis is essential because success in VLE is dependent upon engagement, communication, and feedback (Pollack et al., 2021). Before the pandemic, Peddibhotla and Jani (2019) found that feedback and active participation can increase confidence, allowing virtual learners to become active participants in their learning. Interpersonal communication and interaction are still the cornerstones of effective online instruction (Martinez-Lincoln et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers' and parents' viewpoints are necessary to understand their students' experiences holistically.

Equally important, technology is advancing at a high rate. Not all readers, parents, and teachers can locate, access, and manipulate the immersive reader tools: read-aloud, background color, font size, font color, text spacing, glossary, and highlighting parts of speech. Another factor is the lack of technology adoption and training due to slow policies (Williams-Buffonge, 2021). Thirty-five percent of middle school teachers reported little to no online learning experience (Educators for Excellence, 2020). Additionally, parents felt a lack of technical training, skill, and support with online learning was a barrier (Abuhammad, 2020). Parent-teacher collaboration and training (Akhari, 2022; Brown et al., 2019; Pollack et al., 2021) and reliance on digital features and tools can enhance learning gains in reading (Singh, 2021). Online learning is a permanent fixture in education due to the unpredictability of the world, hence catastrophes, pandemics, et cetera. Therefore, students, parents, and teachers must collaborate, communicate, and remain current with technological advances as these appear in the classroom.

### **Perceptions of Virtual Classes**

Teacher perceptions and attitudes about virtual classes are relevant and vital because teachers shape, maneuver, and facilitate learning in a VLE (Regan et al., 2018). As virtual classrooms become more prevalent, the number of K-12 online schools is increasing (Arnett, 2021). (Sublett and Chang (2019) found that more American high schools use virtual intensive reading programs to alleviate students' course load and increase the probability of graduation for students with disabilities. Therefore, further exploration into online intensive reading courses at the intermediate

level can focus on students' experiences in preparation for high school. Analyzing parental and teacher perceptions comprehensively explores intermediate students' experiences in a reading VLE.

### **Aspects of Teacher Interest Before the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Before the global quarantine, online teachers' perceptions focused on student self-regulation (Huh & Reigeluth, 2018), student engagement, and teacher communication tools (Paepe et al., 2018). Because at-home parents and mentors lack training (Raguindin et al., 2021), the collaboration between teachers and parent mentors should provide specific and deliberate support to intermediate students with reading difficulties (Epstein, 2011; Hayati & Puspitaloka, 2022; Rice & Ortiz, 2021). Teachers can guide parents by sharing research-based strategies and providing materials for references, such as hard copy books, DVDs, games, activities, and a point of contact. However, literature on intermediate students with reading difficulties in virtual classes is scarce. Regan et al. (2019) found that computer-savvy teachers believe using technology is great for differentiation and immediate response. However, Regan et al. (2019) also investigated blended-learning writing instruction classes and found that negative teacher perceptions hindered the use of technology in the classroom. The researchers detected those teachers were slow in adopting digital venues, with 85% not using any software in writing classes. Since teacher perceptions play a significant role in digital assimilation, exploring their perceptions of virtual intensive reading classes can usher in computer integration at the intermediate grade level.

Before the quarantine, researchers focused on intermediate students' difficulties reading in content-area textbooks: science and social studies (Heinrich et al., 2019; Wexler et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2018). Teachers stated that students reading online outside the VLE have greater reading comprehension (Heinrich et al., 2018). On the other hand, researchers like Bippert (2019) and Huh and Reigeluth (2018) surveyed teachers who stated that their practices impacted student motivation, engagement, and self-regulation skills. Education is learner-centered in VLEs; some teachers believe time management and self-regulated skills are essential to student success. The research group specifically focused on high schoolers (Bippert, 2019). This study depends upon teacher perceptions, as they are the cornerstone of positive and successful virtual learning. Teacher perceptions are essential, so obtaining current observations enriches the literature on VLEs for students with RD.

### **Problems Faced by Parents When Accommodating Virtual Learning**

Parent perceptions are valuable because parents can give meaningful information based on first-hand observation. A factor to consider in exploring parental perception is the parent's relationship with the adolescent. Sometimes parental control of students changes from elementary grades to autonomous in intermediate grades (Goshin et al., 2021). Goshin et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study but recommended a qualitative study to obtain a comprehensive and detailed outlook on parents' impact on intermediate students. Before the quarantine, parents expressed their frustration with digital and academic challenges (Duman et al., 2018; Kong, 2018), a sentiment shared by other studies after the quarantine (Abuhammad, 2020;

Kong, 2018). Rice et al. (2019) conducted a case study of a foster child in a virtual remediation class. The parent reported that she could not perform household chores while her child was online because her son required academic support (Rice et al., 2019). Furthermore, the parent reported feeling ill-prepared to assist the student (Rice et al., 2019). In that case, the study focused on one participant who is not an adolescent, justifying the need for more literature.

In Kong's (2018) study, parents felt unqualified to support their online students academically. They insisted on collaborating with teachers to ensure success at home. Researchers summarized that those parents selected schools with better academic programs, climate, and culture (Duman et al., 2018; Epstein, 2011; Rice et al., 2019). Duman et al.'s (2018) interviews indicated that parent-teacher collaboration is a priority when students enroll in virtual classes due to the need for academic and motivational support. School choice differs from state to state, and some districts couples school choice and parent engagement to ensure parental interaction and involvement in decisions and activities (Epstein, 2011). According to Chen et al. (2018), differences in perceptions were apparent between elementary and secondary school parents and socioeconomic groups. Secondary school parents with higher education communicated closely with the school and were more informed of school information (Chen et al., 2018). Chen et al. (2018) found parents of minority students and students in economically disadvantaged areas did not favor online education; parents worried about Wi-Fi and electronic devices. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, these services were not readily available to all students. The research team concluded

that parents felt ill-prepared to monitor and assist in VLEs (Chen et al., 2018). This sentiment was prevalent during and after the quarantine (Dorn et al., 2020; Educators for Excellence, 2020; Epstein, 2011; Kong, 2018; Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Epstein, 2011). Understanding parent perceptions is significant in reaching parents and gaining a comprehensive online view of students' experiences.

### **After the COVID-19 Quarantine**

Cognia (2020) found that some parents felt helpless during the quarantine, with 55% worried their students would not be ready for the next grade level. This information supported my interview question on whether or not the virtual classes helped and the reading changes observed. Parents reported that a lack of rigor and student boredom led to unpreparedness (Cognia, 2020), leading to the following interview questions: what insights did the parents learn, what suggestions they had, and how they would improve existing conditions. The background information and interview questions are essential to focus on my study because their responses and observations provide additional literature for understanding virtual learning.

Additionally, parents worry about possessing the digital savvy to assist their children (Horowitz & Igielnik, 2021). Elgart (2020) found that 95% of teachers polled agreed with the parents in Cognia's (2020) findings. However, 82% of teachers Cognia (2020) interviewed did not have the same concerns about rigor. Both results do not coincide; therefore, paying attention to these aspects in my study is essential.

The Educators for Excellence (2020) survey found that 95% of teachers facilitated distance learning, and 80% used digital tools only as needed. Twenty

percent of surveyed teachers used some traditional tools with their virtual students (Educators for Excellence, 2020). Yet, Singh (2021) asserts that digital technology has its limits; like Vygotsky, he believes “the process of teaching and learning involves human touch” (p. 29). Laeli et al.’s (2020) qualitative study revealed that teachers accept and welcome VLEs but lack “knowledge of reading online as a new literacy” (p. 324). These concerns imply parental anxiety with VLEs and the need for efficient teacher, parent, and student training on digital tools. Digital tools are another factor to consider when deciphering parent and teacher perceptions of students’ experiences. Focusing on digital features in my study will be another aspect that will help me understand teacher and parent perceptions. These studies enrich my knowledge so I may approach the research problem.

On the other hand, another research revealed that teachers’ self-confidence and self-efficacy positively impact online learning (Alzahrani, 2022; Kundu & Bej, 2021). An et al.’s (2021) findings also support teacher self-efficacy as a driving force. Teachers facilitate learning through various instructional strategies. Kundu and Bej’s (2021) mixed-method study revealed that role modeling, persuasive conversation, and coaching raised teacher and online efficacy. Teachers in the study felt they were effective in the VLE despite inconsistent Internet connectivity (Kundu & Bej, 2021). Their design will provide a framework that should help me in my study.

Parents and teachers shared concerns about technical and logistical hurdles (Abuhammad, 2020; Cognia, 2020; Educators for Excellence, 2020). It was evident to Abuhammad (2020) via social media postings that parents felt unprepared to handle

and monitor virtual learning due to a lack of computer skills and subject matter.

Horowitz and Igielnik's (2021) survey summarized that parents are equally divided on the benefits of face-to-face versus virtual learning. Nevertheless, the findings covered all grade levels and students of all capabilities.

At-home monitoring and support are the cornerstones of virtual learning (Horowitz & Igielnik, 2021). Several researchers agreed that working parents of K-12 students did not have the time to observe and supervise students (Horowitz & Igielnik, 2021; Maxwell et al., 2021). Although Lawrence and Fakuade (2021) conducted their qualitative research in Nigeria, the positive correlation between parent involvement and academic gains was evident. The researchers did not focus on intermediate students with RD. A comprehensive study on parent and teacher perceptions of this demographic's experiences is unclear. For this reason, further exploration into intermediate students with reading difficulties can benefit future virtual learners.

### **Summary**

This study requires literature addressing the themes and subtopics within the specific title, but quantitative data was the foundation. Because parents and teachers are adults closest to intermediate students, I seek their perception of intermediate students' experiences in VLEs. I strive to understand intermediate students are at the crossroads of K-12 education and are vulnerable to experiencing academic gaps (Carter Jr. et al., 2020; Rice, 2017; Wexler et al., 2019). The number of intermediate students in intensive reading classes increased to 24%, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2020). Since the national average decreased

by four points, the learning gap between grade-level intermediate students and those below widened. This data was substantial evidence for me to study intermediate students in VLEs. So, I sought additional informational data from the Florida Department of Education explaining how schools assign intermediate students to intensive reading classes. Intermediate students are at the crossroads of K-12 education and are vulnerable to experiencing academic gaps (Carter Jr. et al., 2020; Rice & Ortiz, 2021; Wexler et al., 2019). When schools closed, intermediate students with RD continued to face difficulties in virtual environments. Quantitative data is available for demonstrating the widening achievement gap in reading, but I want to explore, interpret, and understand the intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes.

Searching the literature was difficult at first; however, I sought articles in journals in educational technology and followed researchers renowned in that area. The observations and perceptions of parents and teachers give a holistic overview of the students' experiences. Their perceptions provide a holistic approach and view of the students. I will interview the parents of six intermediate students in virtual intensive reading classes and six virtual intensive reading teachers to explore the academic gap. I hope to uncover rich data on parent and teacher perceptions. Parents and teachers can provide information leading to a comprehensive look into the efficacy of virtual learning for intermediate students with RD.

I found that the existing literacy gap between intermediate students on grade level and those below grade level widened (Bailey et al., 2021; Engzell et al., 2021;

NAEP, n.d.). The reading gap was evident before the COVID-19 quarantine (Baye et al., 2018; Brun-Mercer, 2019) and continued to increase after the quarantine (Abuhammad, 2020; Domingue et al., 2021; NCES, 2020). Although there was a rise in virtual K-12 education, the literature lacks the parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students in virtual intensive reading classes. Now that VLEs are commonplace and an option for families (Dhawan, 2020), the need for literature on virtual literacy for intermediate-grade-level students in intensive reading classes is significant. This need justifies my study as I explore the experiences of intermediate students in reading VLEs.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The learning gap between intermediate students on grade level and those below grade level continues to grow (Gilmour et al., 2019; NCES, 2020). Therefore, more intermediate students are required to take intensive reading classes. Since digital technology is a part of everyday life, conventional classrooms have integrated its use into all educational activities (Singh, 2021), including: assessments, interactive programs, and learning management systems. Before the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing quarantine, students experienced learning in VLEs within their brick-and-mortar classrooms via blended learning (Alzahrani, 2022); however, the quarantine compelled K-12 schools to switch to virtual learning quite suddenly.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. Exploring this area of need may provide insight into improving learning conditions for intermediate students with reading difficulties enrolled in an online reading class. Exploring intermediate students' experiences perceived by parents and teachers may uncover unique information on academic requirements and performance in virtual reading classes. The inquiry may contribute more information on virtual reading classes for students with reading difficulties and may lead to changes in the design (Martinez-Lincoln et al., 2021).

In Chapter 3, I explain the research design and rationale to justify using the basic qualitative design. I will then present my role as the researcher and reintroduce the main research question, the sub-questions, and the interview questions as they

relate together. Also included is a discussion of participant recruitment, criteria, data collection, collection tools, and analysis. I end with a discussion of the ethical issues and concerns with trustworthiness.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

When exploring the meaning of human behavior and experiences, qualitative research uses descriptive data based on interviews and observations (Merriam, 2009; as cited by Burkholder et al., 2019). I investigated parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students in virtual reading classes. My study used interviews to create thematic data and sought to acquire in-depth information on virtual learning for students with RD in intermediate grades. This design best suited my query about virtual learning because the basic qualitative design investigated experiences in a process based on a thematic and theoretical foundation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The qualitative design requires the researcher to be the principle tool for collecting and interpreting data (Worthington, 2013). Finding meaning in people's social experiences is the basis for my study of virtual intensive reading classes for intermediate-grade students. Therefore, qualitative design was suitable for my study to explore parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual reading classes.

**Table 2***Qualitative Research Methods*

Basic Qualitative Designs	Description	My Rationale
Case study	Researchers use it to study a particular bonded unit via a deep examination for generalization (Burkholder et al., 2019). It encompasses a deep analysis of a phenomenon treated as an entity.	My study is not an in-depth examination and does not focus on one group. I interview parents and teachers of intermediate students in virtual intensive reading classes.
Ethnography	This design is like a case study because it examines a unit. However, it requires a lengthy cultural immersion (Burkholder et al., 2019).	The data for my study does not require an extensive or lengthy cultural immersion into a group.
Phenomenology	Researchers use this study to understand the lived experiences of a group (Burkholder et al., 2019). These studies seek an understanding of the lived experience of a cultural group due to a phenomenon. It tries to find the essence of a specific experience.	My research wants to understand shared lived experiences based on interviews rather than the essence of their shared experiences (Worthington, 2013). My study explores the students' experiences from the parents' and teachers' perceptions.
Narrative	This study extends with a beginning, middle, and end. This study aims at an individual rather than collective meaning (Burkholder et al., 2019).	My study seeks to arrive at a shared experience of parents and teachers rather than one group. My analysis uses one-on-one interviews with participants and not extended observations.
Basic qualitative	It investigates experiences to understand a phenomenon, a combination of a process, or participants' perceptions, resulting in rich descriptive accounts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).	This design method best suits my study because it investigates the participants' perceptions via interviews. Descriptive accounts from parents and teachers expand the literature on intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes.
Grounded theory	When no theoretical foundation exists in a researcher's area of interest, the researcher uses a grounded theory design (Burkholder et al., 2019). The design calls for total environmental control. This design develops a general and applicable theory for participants under the exact conditions.	My study wants to understand parent and teacher perceptions to meet the needs of intermediate students with reading difficulties. The intention is not to develop a theory but to explore the phenomenon.

Strategies adopted within a case study, ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and grounded theory were unsuitable for this inquiry (see Table 2). The case study design was inadequate, as it examines a bonded unit via a deep analysis and treats the phenomenon as an entity (Merriam, 2002). At the same time, I explored students' experiences in virtual reading classes from two angles, parent and teacher, and not as a bonded unit. This study did not require an in-depth analysis like a case study, ethnography, or narrative. Unlike an ethnography, my study did not require a lengthy cultural immersion (Burkholder et al., 2019) because the analysis came from a combination of interviews. Comparatively, the narrative design was also inadequate as it calls for extensive beginning, middle, and ending interviews and is unsuitable for observing recurring patterns in my study. The grounded theory approach was incompatible with this study as I did not build a theory based on the gathered data. The goal was to understand the parent and teacher perceptions by analyzing thematic patterns. Therefore, I felt that the basic qualitative design was the most suitable methodology I could use for this study.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. The following were the main research question and sub questions I intend to collect data for this study.

Main research question: What are parents' and teachers' perceptions of their intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes?

Sub question 1: What changes in reading patterns did teachers observe in their intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

Sub question 2: What changes in reading patterns did parents observe in their intermediate-level children enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

Sub question 3: What suggestions could teachers and parents offer to improve any weaknesses or drawbacks observed in the intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative data collection, the researcher engages directly with participants and relies on interviews for data (Saldaña, 2013). This dynamic leads to a relationship between the researcher and the data itself (Burkholder et al., 2019). The first task in my role as the researcher was to recruit and interview 12 participants. I needed two virtual intensive reading teachers from each intermediate grade, and two parents with students in virtual reading classes from each grade level: sixth, seventh, and eighth. My primary role was the collection of data, through establishing, scheduling, storing, and organizing the confidentially audio-recorded interviews. I secured the participants' anonymity by using letters and number-generated pseudonyms. I ensured confidentiality with password-protected storage, organization, transcription, and analysis. Additionally, I used Microsoft Word and Excel sheet encryption to secure report logs and cloud Internet storage.

Ten years ago, I was one of the pioneers of technology integration at my previous middle school when I taught eighth-grade science. My team leader was a

computer science major who recruited me to utilize Wikispaces, which all my students obtained and maintained throughout the year. Online reading assignments, tests, and digital notebooks were commonplace in my classes, which led me to collaborate with other teachers. Because I have extensive experience in educational technology and have taught middle school literacy, I practiced research reflexivity by documenting my beliefs and judgments before and during the research process. The use of reflexivity increased the researcher's awareness of bias and decreased subjectivity (Burkholder et al., 2019). I included a self-analysis checklist in the methodology recommended by Guest and MacQueen (2008).

Living in a rural area and being active in one's profession may lead to familiarity with a participant. The possibility was there since I am a sixteen-year veteran teacher using a purposeful sampling of parents and teachers. Because I am a classroom teacher with no leadership role, no ethical issues concerning power relationships were a concern. Interviewing a known person was not my intention, but it did not have to impact trustworthiness (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). Instead, having rapport may lead to rich data since the interview allows participants to vent their experiences. Whether I knew the participant or not, I developed rapport to elicit honest and rich data, as suggested by Burkholder et al. (2019). I built a connection with the participants by being welcoming, respectful, and grateful for their time, and by offering a confidential and safe environment (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, as cited by McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

## Methodology

I interviewed 12 participants, six of whom were parents and the other six teachers, for this basic qualitative design. This purposeful sampling included two teachers and parents from each grade level: sixth, seventh, and eighth. My goal was to explore their perceptions via purposeful sampling. Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommend purposeful sampling to obtain participants with a particular experience within the studied phenomenon. I created an interview protocol, including interview questions aligned to the research questions (see Table 3) to conduct semistructured interviews, which were audio-recorded on Zoom. Participants received a Zoom invite with the accompanying research questions, which will appear on Zoom chat during the interview. This way, participants viewed the questions during the session, which did not surpass 40 minutes. As the host, I disabled the camera and did not video-record the participants.

**Table 3**

### *Alignment of Research to Interview Questions*

Main question: What are parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes?	
Research sub-questions	Interview Questions
1. What changes in reading patterns did teachers observe in their intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?	1. What changes in reading patterns did teachers observe in their intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?
2. What changes in reading patterns did parents observe in their intermediate-level children enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?	2a. Did virtual intensive reading classes help your child improve? 2b. What factors contributed to their reading improvement? 2c. What were your child's comfort level navigating the virtual reading class? 2d. what role did you play in improving your child's reading?

- 2e. What suggestions would you offer to improve any weaknesses or drawbacks observed in the intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?
- 2f. Do you feel that you have the capacity, ability, and resources to help your child improve his/her reading levels?
- 3a. As a teacher, what are some concerns you have about virtual intensive reading classes?
3. What suggestions could teachers and parents offer to improve any weaknesses or drawbacks observed in the intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?
- 3b. What suggestions could improve intermediate-level classes' virtual intensive reading standards of intermediate level classes?
- 3c. Do you feel you have the resources and facilities to implement your suggestion to benefit the students?
- 3d. Is there anything further you want to add?
- 

### **Participant Selection Logic**

Participant recruitment and selection was the initial step to obtaining data. I needed 12 adult participants to meet the criterion. Six participants were teachers, and six participants were parents. I interviewed two teachers from each intermediate grade level, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Teachers must have been currently teaching or have taught virtual intensive reading classes in the southeastern United States within the last three years, which includes the year before the COVID-19 quarantine to be eligible for participation. Parents who had a student enrolled in a virtual intensive reading class in the intermediate grade levels in the southeastern United States within the last 3 years were eligible for participation. I also interviewed two parents from each grade level. No students participated in this study.

Purposeful sampling suits a basic qualitative design (Burkholder et al., 2019). I utilized purposeful sampling for my study because it best provided the participants who would meet the purpose of the study. Since the participants represented the

intended groups, I focused on in-depth data. My study focused on teachers having taught or teaching virtual intensive reading classes to intermediate-level students; therefore, their perceptions contributed to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Parents of students who were or are enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes met the criteria needed for the study. Purposeful sampling provided legitimate and significant data from valid participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The social media giant, Facebook, reaches thousands nationwide and provides abundant and diverse candidates for qualitative research (Franz et al., 2019). I created a page using a digital flyer to access and recruit potential participants; however, I limited communication to telephone and email; no exchange of information or friend requests occurred. After receiving the duly signed consent form from potential participants, I emailed each one a copy of the questions and scheduled an audio interview. The Zoom invite included my name, time, meeting identification number, and a hyperlink. The selection of the participants depended upon my receiving the consent forms. The first six parents to consent received the pseudonyms P (Parent)1 through P6, and the first six teachers received T (Teacher)1 through T6. After that point, the study referred to all participants using pseudonyms to keep them confidential and to protect their identities. I securely stored a master copy of the name and pseudonym assignments.

### **Instrumentation**

I intended to collect the perceptions of parents and teachers of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes, as parents and teachers are

privity to students' behavior and experiences from different angles (Duman et al., 2018; Henderson, 2021; Laeli et al., 2020). Therefore, I developed different but relative questions for each group. Semistructured, open-ended interview questions were the tools I used to collect the data. I created questions related to the main research question, as well as sub questions. The formulated questions were directly related to the focus of the study. I intended to understand the teachers' and parents' viewpoints, observations, suggestions, and opinions to understand what more is needed to raise the standards of the intermediate-level students' reading levels.

The main question was, what are parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes? I created three sub-questions from that main question: What changes in reading patterns did teachers observe in their intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes? What changes did parents observe in their intermediate-level children enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes, and what suggestions could teachers and parents offer to improve any weaknesses or drawbacks observed in the intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes (see Table 3)? These three sub-questions relate directly to the interview questions and supply answers to the main research question and sub questions. All the responses convey parent and teacher perceptions of virtual intensive reading classes, a topic that requires further discussion.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

My role was to recruit, interview, collect, store, organize, and analyze data, and to do so effectively, I relied on several software programs. I recruited using a digital

poster on LinkedIn and Facebook and the university's participant pool. The qualified candidates included parents with an intermediate grade-level student enrolled in a virtual intensive reading class in the southeastern United States and teachers teaching the course. I conducted individual virtual interviews with each participant.

After the IRB approval, I posted the digital recruitment poster on Facebook and LinkedIn. I waited to be contacted by potential participants and asked questions to meet the study's criteria. Once the participants qualified, I emailed the consent information and various interview times. I kept the parent and teacher interviews on separate but consecutive days. I briefly talked with each participant before the interview to build rapport. I then assured them of safety and confidentiality measures. I informed participants that I would email a follow-up summary of their responses for review.

I used three software programs: Zoom, Transcribe, and Microsoft office. First, I used Zoom Video Communications to host the one-on-one interviews to audio record the sessions in real-time without being face-to-face. The flexibility of using Zoom facilitated convenient interviews for the participants. I emailed the Zoom video invitations and the semi-structured research interview questions. The Zoom invitations allowed the host to schedule meetings without videos of participants but enabled the host to use the camera to display items, such as interview questions. For added security, I used a Zoom passcode. I labeled the audio recordings with pseudonyms and uploaded them to a password-protected virtual environment on my desktop for safekeeping.

Transcribe is an online transcription service that transfers audio and video recordings to written text. The software program uploaded the audio recording and automatically transcribed it. I downloaded the transcriptions to my password-protected desktop and uploaded them to a secure virtual environment. For confidentiality, transcribe automatically deleted all audio and video recordings after three days (Wreally, n.d.). Before that, all recordings were only accessible with the correct login information. Even so, I labeled all recordings using pseudonyms. Emailing a copy of the participant's responses eliminated the ambiguity before the pre-coding and coding stages.

Microsoft Word is the software program I used to download and upload the transcriptions. This program facilitated the transfer of qualitative data from Word to Excel spreadsheet to identify further and classify themes. After completing thematic classification and analysis, I converted transcriptions to a portable document format (PDF) for discussion in Chapters 4 and 5 of this manuscript.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

After transcribing the interviews, coding and analyzing the data required proper thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2013); the Transcribe software program transferred the audio to a written Word document. I uploaded the interview transcripts to a secure, password-protected virtual space. Familiarization with the content was the first step in analyzing qualitative data (Saldaña, 2013). I reviewed the data and generated a pre-coding system to describe the information. Pre-coding different feelings expressed in the transcripts helped pre-code the rich data (Saldaña, 2013). I was thorough and

reviewed this procedure to eliminate bias or haste. Then, I listed the phrases and terms that describe a particular emotion. The following step required turning these codes and sentiments into themes. Thematic coding can be complex because some words have different meanings for participants. For this reason, restating responses during the interview and emailing their responses to them was crucial for data validity and clarification (Burkholder et al., 2019). This process of member checking adds credibility to one's findings.

Microsoft Excel spreadsheet helped me categorize themes and responses per participant. The Excel spreadsheet included four and more columns for each interview question. The first column used the participant ID or pseudonym; the second column contained the question, and the third and more columns listed the themes identified earlier during coding. Although color-coded themes were helpful in the preliminary stages, using an Excel spreadsheet facilitated data analysis for me by categorizing the responses. The process also allows me to chart the responses for this dissertation. Lastly, I sent the participants a note of gratitude and a general study synopsis.

Even though I revised the thematic coding, outliers appeared (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Burkholder et al. (2019), outliers and other deviations sometimes reveal idiosyncrasies in human experiences and the range of data. To address outliers, I revisited the interview transcripts, Word documents, and PDFs to reassess the pre-coding process. Then, I reviewed the thematic codes for inconsistencies and errors. Sometimes, some thematic codes were too general, so I divided them into two codes. Another alternative was to rename the words and check my reflexivity journal.

Defining words was challenging since terms vary by region, culture, and operational definition (Saldaña, 2013).

### **Issue of Trustworthiness**

I addressed trustworthiness issues throughout the research by member checking, restating responses, reflexivity, and operational definitions. Member checking helps validate the participants' responses, dissects rich-content data, and reflects on my biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2013). Like member checking, restating responses allowed me to check their interpretation versus what I heard or audio-recorded. Trustworthiness was one of the reasons I practiced reflexivity. I maintained a journal in which I documented my perspectives and self-reflect at different points of the research process. The journal checked on subjectivity before and after collecting data (Givens, 2008). A recommended practice was to reflect upon my attitudes and biases related to the thematic codes and the operational definitions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2013).

### **Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability**

#### ***Credibility***

A thorough and accurate research process establishes credibility (Given, 2008). Applying strategies such as member checking, progressive subjectivity, and reflexivity (Burkholder et al., 2019) ensured the data was accurate and believable. I applied member checking after each interview transcription to confirm its authenticity. I maintained a reflexivity journal throughout the dissertation journey to lessen the impact of bias and subjectivity on the results. The journal included questions about my

background, relationships with the participants, values in virtual learning, feelings of anxiety or confusion, what meaning I got from the results, and procedural decisions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reviewing my reflexivity journal helped me check my subjectivity when analyzing the data. I revisited what I journaled and asked fellow research colleagues to challenge my analysis.

### ***Transferability***

Because I used purposeful sampling, transferability may not apply (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Purposeful sampling focuses on and reflects the findings of a particular population (Burkholder et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Although transferability is a quality aligned to quantitative studies, the rich context obtained by descriptive interviews lends itself to other studies. My study aimed to produce content-rich data, which, according to Guba (1981), may allow other researchers to transfer certain elements. However, the interview questions aligned with and came from the main research question, as shown in Table 3.

### ***Dependability***

Dependability refers to the reliability of the data obtained; in this study, it referred to the methods by which I obtained the results (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Design alignment and transparency, along with accurate interpretations, were two strategies I used. Alignment throughout this research design supported dependability because the structure provided a means to repeat the study (Burkholder et al., 2019). I detailed and documented procedures and ensured accurate analysis to establish dependability. The study design procedures I used were clear and recorded, allowing others to critique

and develop dependability (Given, 2008). I used member checking and referred to the reflexivity journal to ensure accurate interpretations and analysis of the findings. This practice protects against bias and subjectivity, increasing dependability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### ***Confirmability***

A detailed description of the coding process, categorization, and classification of data increased confirmability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I applied member checking and reflexivity as strategies to affirm confirmability. Maintaining confirmability in my study focused on securing operational definitions and proper thematic coding for accuracy (Patton, 2015; as cited by Burkholder et al., 2019).

### **Ethical Procedures**

The IRB approved my study. My approval number for this study was 11-08-22-0123303. A copy of the recruitment flyer form (Appendix A) announced the study voluntarily and featured a sample of the interview questions. The flyer listed eligibility, location, expectation, and anonymity. Participants received an assigned pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of this study and all involved. Teacher participants received pseudonyms T1 to T6, depending upon their order of response. Parents received pseudonyms P1 to P6, depending on their response order. From that point onward, I stored the participants' responses by their pseudonyms. All responses were confidential, from the audio recording, transcription, and PDF to the Excel spreadsheet. Only one master copy contained their names and corresponding pseudonyms, and I stored it in a password-protected virtual space. I also kept all

Microsoft Word documents and Excel spreadsheets using encryption. The consent form (Appendix B) included the eligibility, purpose of the study, procedures, a sample of interview questions, the privacy and confidentiality terms, and all my contact information. The form informed the participant that this process fulfills the Walden University doctoral requirements.

I encrypted all documents such as transcripts, Excel spreadsheets, the master copy of pseudonyms, reflexivity journal, portable document format files (PDFs), consent forms, and flyers. These records and audio recordings were on the hard drive of my password-protected device.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 3, I described a basic qualitative study that I used to explore parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experience in virtual intensive reading classes. I reviewed the problem, purpose, research, and three sub questions. Section two justifies my choice of basic qualitative method as this study's design and a table for quick reference. Due to its exploratory nature, my role as the researcher was primarily the instrument for selecting participants, data collection, and analysis. I also disclosed the alignment between the main, sub, and interview questions and a single table containing the interview questions. The following section describes participant recruitment through flyers, data collection via Zoom audio recording, and Transcribe software transcription. I sent the participants a copy of the transcript for member checking and uploaded an encrypted Word document and PDF. Once completed with pre-coding and coding, I loaded thematic codes and all transcripts onto an Excel

spreadsheet for an initial analysis of findings. To ensure trustworthiness, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, I maintained a reflexivity journal throughout the process and self-check on personal biases and perspectives. Finally, ethical issues of confidentiality take precedence when securing and storing data.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. I used a basic qualitative design. I interviewed parents and teachers with questions aligned with my three research questions, which are as follows:

Main research question: What are parent and teacher perceptions of their intermediate students' experiences in the virtual intensive reading classes?

Sub question 1: What changes in reading patterns did teachers observe in their intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

Sub question 2: What changes in reading patterns did parents observe in their intermediate-level children enrolled in virtual intensive reading?

Sub question 3: What suggestions could teachers and parents offer to improve any weaknesses or drawbacks observed in intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

In this chapter, I report the results of my basic qualitative study. I will also describe the study's setting, participants' demographics, recruitment, data collection procedures, and data analysis. As part of the procedures section, I include details relating to interviews, observations, reflexive journaling, archival information, and implemented changes. Evidence of trustworthiness and a detailed description of the study's results follow procedural details. Chapter 4 ends with a summary of this qualitative study.

### **Setting**

I used no single research site for this basic qualitative study because I recruited participants who lived in various parts the southeastern United States; however, I planned for six teachers and six parents. In the end, I interviewed seven teachers for a total of thirteen participants. I interviewed thirteen participants in Zoom, an online conferencing platform, as advertised on a digital poster on Facebook and LinkedIn. Organizational conditions did not influence the interpretation of this study's results because I did not partner with any single organization.

### **Demographics**

This section includes details on the number of participants, parents and teachers, teaching experience, and grade levels; however, the study concluded with seven intermediate-grade-level educators who teach virtual intensive reading classes and six parents of intermediate-level-grade students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes. The original plan required six teachers, with two teachers from sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade levels; however, the seventh teacher was eager to participate, had 10 years of experience as an educator, and had taught a combination of all three grades. Having extra participants helped in reaching saturation in this study.

All seven teachers' experiences ranged from 2 to 10 years, which added generalizability to the research findings. Descriptions of the data continue in the data collection section of Chapter 4. The demographics among the teachers varied (see Table 4). Participant teachers (Ts) 1 and 4 teach seventh grade with an average experience of 2 ½ years. Ts 2, 3, and 5 all teach sixth grade with an average

experience of 5 years. T6 teaches eighth grade with 5 years of experience. Only T7 teaches all three grades with 10 years of experience. I planned to have six parents and teachers but did not have representation from an eighth-grade teacher. Therefore, I accepted a seventh one, which allowed me to interview two teachers per intermediate grade level.

**Table 4**

*Participant Teacher Demographics and Logistics*

Participant Teacher Pseudonym	Teaching Experience in Years	Grade Levels	Gender	Zoom Interview Date	Interview Time	Brief Interview Summary Sent
T1	3	7	Female	11/25/22	11:37 am	12/05/22
T2	5	6	Female	11/25/22	1:00 pm	12/05/22
T3	4	6	Female	11/25/22	2:30 pm	12/05/22
T4	2	7	Female	11/26/22	1:30 pm	12/05/22
T5	6	6	Female	11/26/22	2:00 pm	12/05/22
T6	5	8	Female	11/26/22	3:00 pm	12/05/22
T7	10	6, 7, 8	Female	11/26/22	3:37 pm	12/05/22

I interviewed six parents of intermediate-grade-level students who had or were currently in virtual intensive reading classes. P3 and P6 have students in seventh grade. P1 and P4 have students in seventh grade, and P2 and P5 have students in eighth grade (see Table 5). I scheduled all the parent interviews for November 22, the week of Thanksgiving, because many parents and teachers were not working and available.

**Table 5***Participant Parent Demographics and Logistics*

Participant Parent Pseudonym	Student Grade Level	Zoom Interview Date	Interview Time	Brief Interview Summary Sent
P1	7	11/22/22	8:30 am	12/05/22
P2	8	11/22/22	9:35 am	12/05/22
P3	8	11/22/22	10:29 am	12/05/22
P4	6	11/22/22	1:01 pm	12/05/22
P5	7	11/22/22	2:03 pm	12/05/22
P6	6	11/22/22	6:30pm	12/05/22

**Data Collection**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved data collection on November 7, 2022. I received a notice on November 9, 2022, from the university's participant pool to post the study, which I accepted.

**Recruitment**

I also posted the digital flyer on Facebook and LinkedIn, but Hurricane Nicole landed in Florida then, and I received no participant inquiries. Therefore, I needed an incentive, such as a gift card. On November 14, 2022, I submitted a Request for a Change in Procedures to the IRB to include a \$25.00 gift card as a participatory incentive and removed the digital flyers. I received the board's approval on November 17, 2022, and revised the consent form and the digital poster. Two days later, I posted the revised digital flyer on Facebook and LinkedIn with my name, university email address, and cell phone number. I added hashtags such as #teacherfeedback, #distancelearningsurvey, #gradstudentstudy, #distancelearningstudy, #middleschoolparent, and #middleschoolteacher to gain interest and followers for the

study. I used the digital poster as a Facebook page to attract participants. My posts included the hashtags #middleschoolparent and #middleschoolteacher to gain interest and followers for the interviews.

I took specific steps before the interviews. Upon receiving an email inquiry, I asked participants if they were parents or teachers of intermediate-grade students who enrolled in a virtual intensive reading course. The grade level was another question because I needed two parents and teachers per sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Then, I emailed the consent form with simple instructions to respond with an “I consent” if interested. The same email asked for the date and time for interviews. The third communication between the participant and me included a Zoom invite and the appropriate interview questions, as these differed from parent to teacher.

After posting the digital flyer, I began receiving inquiries from possible participants. The process snowballed the week of November 20, 2022. Because I disengaged from work on Thanksgiving week, I took advantage of the opportunity to contact the first set of participants. Most of the inquiries came from parents; therefore, I decided to interview them first and on the same day. After the parents responded to the criteria questions and confirmed their consent, I emailed each parent participant to schedule an interview on November 22, 2022. I began documenting scheduled appointments on an Excel spreadsheet with each pseudonym, grade level, and contact dates. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, I interviewed all six parents. Parents P1 and P6 were working; therefore, they contacted me 10 to 15 minutes before their interviews to verify their

appointments. No interview went over thirty minutes, and I reminded parents to expect a follow-up email with an interview summary for their review and approval in a week.

T7 also taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grades; her interview expanded the data and helped reach saturation. Scheduling the teacher interviews was challenging because it was the day after Thanksgiving, and some teachers were busy. Yet, they agreed, and I planned and moved around the appointments to best suit their agendas. The primary data collection came from the audio recorded interviews; the secondary data collection came from my reflexive memos and journaling.

### **Interviews**

Once the participants entered the Zoom meetings at the agreed times, I thanked them and asked most of the demographical questions. I conversed with the participants as I prepared the close captioning feature. Therefore, before the audio recording and close captioning began, I added the demographical information to my typewritten notes. Using multiple computer monitors allowed me to type notes on a Word document as the interview went on. I conducted 13 virtual interviews using the Zoom Video Communications software to audio record and retrieve close captioning transcriptions. Data collection was threefold. I took notes on a Word document on my second computer monitor, Zoom recorded the audio, and I collected a copy of the closed captioning PDF.

Once the interviews were over, I needed to make a transcript from the audio recordings. Zoom provided time, which I used to maintain the interaction at under 30 minutes if possible. Zoom software offers close captioning transcripts, which I used

not to compare but to confirm the responses. After each Zoom email notification that the recording was complete was received, I downloaded the Zoom recording as an MP3 as a music file on my desktop. I uploaded it to the Transcribe software program. The Transcribe software then converted the MP3 to a PDF, which I stored alongside the typed notes as an encrypted file on my computer. I also downloaded a PDF copy of Zoom's closed captioning to the same password-encrypted folder on my computer's hard drive. I had three copies of each interview, adding credibility to the data since I converged the copies (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Names, mispronunciations, and utterances, such as ummm and ehhe, were omitted from the master transcription that I compiled in a Word document. I kept the master transcript in a file on my personal desktop computer. I replaced the utterances with ellipsis and recognized word misrepresentation due to linguistic nuances, such as accents and language. Some parents used terms like messenger for chat, interaction for interactive, in sync for synchronous, victimized for embarrassment, and submission for submitting assignments. Transcribing interviews is more than transferring a recording to a written format (McMullin, 2021). The transfer of ideas and experiences (Nelson et al., 2021) was my reason for handcoding. In the master Word transcript, I deciphered the main idea, broken sentences, and repeated dialogue. Compiling the final transcriptions took a few days because I needed the completed documents and summaries as soon as possible. Afterward, I sent a summary to each participant to ensure accuracy.

When I emailed the summaries, I instructed the participants to reply if any misrepresentation and errors occurred in the transcription of their interview.

Participants received a follow-up email to confirm their review. Only two participants, T7 and P6, sent a response. T7 expanded her response to suggestions to improve existing conditions in virtual intensive reading classes, and I added her comments to her response. P6 also called me. She used the term victimized to describe an embarrassed student. Yet, the mother meant that the student felt comfortable asking and answering questions without feeling victimized.

I then put text segments as quotes into an Excel spreadsheet. The Excel spreadsheet contained all the transcript data that was then ready for data analysis. I designed an Excel spreadsheet with columns entitled pseudonyms, participants, responses, initial code, final code, categories, themes, and memos. The columns repeat after each question. One Excel spreadsheet stores P1 through P6, and the other stores T1 through T7. A protected file contains the raw data and the encrypted Excel spreadsheets on a password-protected personal computer.

### **Reflexive Memos and Journals**

Another data source was my reflexive memos and journals that I maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process. The memos helped control my bias and subjectivity as I reflected upon the subject matter and participants' answers to each question. I journaled throughout most of the study, but my entries increased after receiving approval from the IRB. I facilitated journaling by using the speech-to-text feature on Microsoft Word. This feature allowed me to record my thoughts on academic gains, concerns about virtual intensive reading classes, suggestions, and contributing factors for success, and self-examination of my biases. The journal began

clinically with dates and daily occurrences but evolved into a diary-like pattern. I then copied and pasted the reflexive memo's text from the Word document onto the Excel spreadsheet. I continued to add reflexive notes during data collection. After I wrote the initial codes and the summaries, I sat at my computer and recorded my thoughts about each question. I also recorded my initial and final coding concepts and what they should look like in the journal.

### **Unusual Circumstances**

The only unusual circumstances were the loss of Internet service and Zoom malfunction. When interviewing P1 and P4, the Zoom connection failed on their end. I contacted both parents and helped them with troubleshooting. The parents reconnected and were able to complete their interviews; however, this brought to mind the need for reliable service when taking virtual classes. Unsurprisingly, one of P1's concerns was having an Internet connection. P1 also had concerns that the school device was faulty. When asked about suggestions and concerns, P4 stated that not all students could attend synchronous classes. The experiences with both parents confirmed a stable Internet connection's role in VLEs.

A similar incident took place with teachers T4 and T5. They conducted their interviews on their cell phones, and Zoom disconnected them. The disconnection could be due to a weak WiFi connection since one was visiting relatives, and the other was in her car for privacy. Internet connection and digital disparity challenges existed in the past (Dhawan, 2020) and still exist in 2022-2023 with Hurricane Nicole and the current electricity shortages in rural areas.

## Data Analysis

As Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended, I used thematic analysis because it is the most generic approach in basic qualitative studies. I applied the inductive approach to this qualitative study, allowing me to develop codes, categories, and themes from the participants' responses (Burkholder et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I chose to hand-code versus software programs because I wanted to spend my time and energy familiarizing myself with the data rather than the software (see Saldaña, 2013). Because this was my first qualitative study, I felt the humanistic approach was essential to capture verbal and cultural nuances (see Nelson et al., 2021).

With 13 interviews, this process was possible and pragmatic. I generated a codebook based on raw data. For this study, I utilized three coding methods: In vivo for the initial set, descriptive to simplify the last codes, and the focusing coding method for categories. My choice for the initial codes was in vivo coding, which I implemented to break down the raw data using the participants' words. In vivo coding uses the actual participant's quotes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2013). In the initial coding, I reviewed all 13 interviews seeking main ideas and taking short notes, which led me to 58 codes. After completing the initial set, I re-examined the interviews and the initial codes, using descriptive coding, and extended the codes as needed to obtain the final 41 codes. For example, I merged off-task with on-task behavior and parent training with parent support. Descriptive coding limited me to one to two-word headers, and some cases, three words (see Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). This coding method obliged me to keep the codes simple and less verbose. For

resources, I had different types of materials, which I merged into one single code, extra materials. I also conjoined a better attitude with an improved personality since one parent mentioned the latter.

Next, I worked on generating categories from the codes used. Focused coding is a method used to compare all the additional notes, short quotes, and two-word categories. I used focused coding as it allowed me to overlap patterns and organize the codes into categories. As the number of codes merged, I extended the headings of specific categories to accommodate the change. Being social was a significant concern for parents and teachers; therefore, I divided the codes and adapted them into two categories; social presence and social learning. Codes addressing parent and teacher involvement were a large group. I divided the codes into two categories: teacher and parent concerns. At the end of this phase of coding, I had 20 categories: reading, decoding, drawback, advantage, parent and teacher under involvement, learning experiences, subject material, curriculum, hardware device, social presence, social learning, parents and teachers under communication, hard copy, soft copy, other, missed class time, and teacher and students under time restraints.

Next, I grouped familial categories together into themes. Themes are the pinnacle of qualitative research (Saldaña, 2013) because they interlock to make sense of the explored experiences. One should group the categories to generate themes and use them to answer the research questions (Saldaña, 2013). Initially, I began with 14 themes from the parent data set: academic gains, student behavior, parent or teacher involvement, remote curriculum, technology, social presence, social learning, active

learning, literacy skills, feedback/reports, student behavior, communication, resources, and parent-teacher collaboration. The teacher data set shared the same themes with the parent, but additional ones arose: attendance, time restraints, preparedness, and the uncontrollable. At this point, I critiqued and reconsidered the themes and looked for overlapping relationships between themes. Saldaña (2013) referred to this process as “codeweaving” (p. 187). After analyzing the data, I blended the overlapping and related themes and ended up with 11. I further collapsed social presence and learning as categories under social interaction, leaving me with ten themes, 19 categories, and 53 codes (see Table 6). Once I completed the final list of themes, I completed the summary and quotes for each theme.

The act of “codeweaving” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 187) guided me in merging similar and related themes to avoid redundancy. Because the text segments coded as active learning were all in the context of academic gains, I combined these themes; the codes were reading outside the class and asking questions. Parent-teacher collaboration became a code within the theme of parent and teacher involvement. I could have reversed that process; however, involvement was a more general topic. Because participants referred expressly to literacy skills as improved literacy skills, it was best suitable as a code under academic gains. The coding process was iterative. As I revisited the transcripts and reviewed the data, I revised the themes, categories, and codes. Being prepared requires time, which is a primary concern for teachers. Therefore, I decided to make preparedness a code within the umbrella theme of time.

Finally, feedback and reports are communication between all parties: parent, teacher, and student. So, I placed it as a code below the theme of communication.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) referred to qualitative “data analysis as iterative” (p. 271). This continual process took four rounds of coding. Throughout the coding process, initial codes, final codes, categories, and themes sent me back the raw data. I read and examined the transcriptions, ensuring I did not overlook any portion of the responses. One strategy I used to analyze and organize data was the Alt F keyboard shortcut to find key terms throughout the data. Microsoft software was instrumental in my data analysis. Table 6 displays the hierarchy of themes, categories, and codes.

**Table 6**

*Hierarchy of Themes, Categories, and Codes from Data Analysis*

Themes	Categories	Codes
Academic Gains	Reading	Improved comprehension skills Reading out of class Asking questions
	Decoding	Improved performance Improved literacy skills
Student behavior	Drawbacks	Off-task behavior Missed assignments Idle online On other sites
	Advantages	Better attitude/personality
Parent & teacher involvement	Parent	Late afternoon meetings Parent training & support
	Teacher	Forum to collaborate Stakeholders must be involved
Remote curriculum	Learning experiences	Need enrichment More probing questions Not self-paced

More engagement/games

**Table 6 Continued**

Themes	Categories	Codes
Technology	Subject matter	Need more practice Received differentiated instruction Curriculum needs updating
	Platform	High-comfort level Orientation Mandated mini-course Parents need to track/monitor
	Hardware device	Help with devices Internet concerns Tech orientation
Social Interaction	Social presence	Shy students Outgoing Interactive with the teacher
	Social learning	More small group work
Communication	Parents	Meetings Newsletters and reports Response to feedback
	Teacher	Response to feedback More phone calls/chats
Resources	Hard copy	Materials in hard copy
	Soft copy	Diversity in materials
	Other	Teacher assistant
Attendance	Missed class time	Make-up assignments Illness Absences
	Teacher	More teacher planning Extra teacher training
Time restraints	Students	Fast-paced teacher More tutoring/practice

Discrepant data do not follow any patterns within the gathered material or my preconceived notions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). However, analyzing and including outliers gives validity to the results (Saldaña, 2013). This study did not present me with discrepant data. Parents and teachers may have had differing views on how much communication is necessary, the amount of involvement needed, and what active learning is. Nonetheless, both parties interviewed believe that communication, involvement, and active learning, among the other major concerns, are necessary for success in virtual intensive reading classes.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I established trustworthiness in the study by disclosing the accuracy of the data gathering and completing thorough data analysis (Adler, 2022). I ensured the data was accurate by converging the three transcripts: audio recording, close captioning transcript, and transcription. I worked hard to obtain rich data, a strategy I found by Ravitch and Carl (2016). I obtained rich data by converging transcripts from Transcribe, Zoom, and my notes. Then, multiple coding methods ensured precision in generating themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The reflexive memos on the Excel spreadsheets and journaling were practices Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Saldaña (2013) recommended to dispel biases when creating codes. In this section of Chapter 4, I described how I secured trustworthiness and credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

I provided credibility in my study by checking in with participants (Guba, 1981), reflexive journaling (Braun & Clarke, 2019), and maintaining a thorough

research process (Given, 2008). As Guba (1981) recommended, I checked for accuracy by emailing summaries of the responses to each participant. I documented my perceptions and opinions on the subject matter and the responses. Practicing reflexivity throughout the study helped me reflect on my views and teacher experiences (Burkholder et al., 2019). Journaling was private and documented speech-to-text, as I wanted to discuss my sentiments freely. I scrutinized my identity, experiences, and bias through self-examination when analyzing the transcriptions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Analyzing the data took time because I took special precautions to be unbiased.

Transferability refers to the generalizability of a study's results (Burkholder et al., 2019). This research characteristic is unsuitable for qualitative studies with purposeful samplings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I obtained quality-rich data from parents and teachers thanks to the triple transcripts. Even though I interviewed a purposeful sampling, the results may apply to or overlap with a similar population (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The transferability of results may vary depending on certain elements and circumstances (Guba, 1981).

I established dependability by aligning the research process from beginning to end (Guba, 1981). Although the data may not mirror another study, this study provided dependability by using the proper approach, design, and method, as explained in Chapter 4's data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thematic analysis was best for this basic qualitative study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used *in vivo*, descriptive, and focusing codes to maintain the authenticity of the participant's voices. I also used

hand-coding to maintain a humanistic approach. I aligned the study with detailed procedures that established dependability in this study.

Finally, I established confirmability by authenticating the data (Guba, 1981). I had the participants confirm their responses for authenticity, and I considered my biases when analyzing data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirming results was part of providing trustworthiness, credibility, and confirmability (Burkholder et al., 2019). Self-reflection enabled me to identify, accept, and manage my biases and personal and educational experiences. Consequently, I unearthed some unfamiliar attitudes and points of view because of the honesty of the participants.

## **Results**

In this section, I report the results organized by themes. In the summary, I will report the findings in support of the research question and sub questions.

### **Academic Gains**

The first theme was *academic gains*. This theme had two categories, *reading* and *decoding*. The reading category had three codes, and the decoding had two. Table 7 is a chart of the categories and codes for this theme.

**Table 7***Category and Codes for the Theme of Academic Gains*

Theme	Category	Code
Academic gains	Reading	Improved comprehension skills Reading out of class Asking questions
	Decoding	Improved performances Improved literacy skills

***Reading***

The first category of the academic gain theme was reading, referring to that skill or the art of reading. The codes under this category are improved comprehension skills, reading out of class, and asking questions. Parents stated reading out of class is an observed reading pattern. Six of seven teachers noted improved comprehension skills, and two parents observed that asking questions was an increased behavior in their children. For example, P6 responded, “I think he is more confidence... came from asking questions.” P5 stated that asking questions was her second most crucial factor in her daughter’s reading improvement.

***Decoding***

The second category of the academic gain theme was decoding, which refers to factors related to the analysis of words. Participants did not mention decoding; however, I used it to refer to literacy skills that describe breaking down words. Increased decoding skills facilitate fluency and other literacy skills and improve reading performance (Mehigan, 2020). Under this category, the codes assigned were enhanced performance and improved literacy skills. T2 responded, “Students

performing better in assessments; they are getting better at their reading skills...spelling, pronunciation, mastering of vocabulary.” T2 responded to the reading patterns she observed in her students. Decoding and reading were the critical categories that parents and teachers thought were factors that improved reading

### **Student Behavior**

The second theme was *student behavior*. Student behavior has two categories: *drawbacks* and *advantages*. The drawback category had three codes, and advantage had one code. Table 8 shows the categories and codes for this theme.

**Table 8**

*Category and Codes for the Theme of Student Behavior*

Theme	Category	Code
Student behavior	Drawbacks	Off-task behavior Missed assignments Idle online
	Advantages	Better attitude/personality

### ***Drawback***

The first category of the student behavior theme was the term drawback, referring to unacceptable behaviors that inhibit learning. Codes listed under drawback are off-task behavior, missed assignments, idle online and on other sites. These were the concerns of the teachers in the study. T4 and T7 specifically mentioned their concerns about missing classes and assignments in conjunction with missing students. According to T7, “At times, students are absent, and it was challenging...one must continue re-scheduling to help the student.” T3 added, “Being off-task is also a real concern in classrooms, so a management tool is a good option.” T4 stated she is

concerned about missing classes and making up the missing work. However, the parents did not mention missing classes. On the other hand, two teachers observed a difference in students' attitudes toward school and personality improvement.

### ***Advantage***

The second category of student behavior was an advantage. Advantage refers to positive outcomes regarding student behavior. T1 noticed, "Students improved in their responses to questions and tasks, more interactive, and a personality improvement." Although parents did not mention an attitude or personality improvement, P2's child enjoyed working online, and P4 noticed that having an extended online class with a lot of interaction made her child happy. Therefore, the children's attitude was cheerful and happy.

### **Parent and Teacher Involvement**

The third theme to emerge was *parent and teacher involvement*. This particular theme emerged from the ideals of participation from parents and teachers, hence the two categories: *parent* and *teacher*. This theme evolved from the main codes generated by parent and teacher responses. See Table 9 shows the categories and codes for this theme.

**Table 9**

*Category and Codes for Theme of Parent and Teacher Involvement*

Theme	Category	Code
Parent and teacher involvement	Parent	Late afternoon meetings Parent training & support
	Teacher	A forum to collaborate Stakeholders must be involved

### ***Parent***

The first category was *parent*. The parent category referred to any involvement from other parents or teachers with that group. Parents recommended late afternoon meetings between parents and teachers to discuss with the students how to support virtual learners. Therefore, late afternoon meetings were the first code assigned. Parents, like P6, mentioned that she needed more time after work to meet with teachers. When asked for suggestions, she responded, “More teacher involvement, phone calls, and communication with parents.” T7, T6, T5, and T4 agreed that more parent involvement requires more meetings, although they did not specify the meeting timeframe. T6 did mention a need for “Follow-up with parents and students to lower attendance issues.”

The second code under the parent category was *parent training and support*. In other words, any mention of parental training or specific support a teacher can render. T3 mentioned that orientation and training would benefit the parents; she referred to the educational platform. T4 stated, “Give more time for practice with the platform...especially orientation.” Parents also requested orientation. P1 and P3 asked for orientation for the students and themselves. P3 responded that getting support from teachers was easy; however, there was only one orientation session.

### ***Teacher***

The second category was teacher, referring to the particular needs of the participant teachers. The two codes under this category *need a forum to collaborate*,

and *stakeholders must be involved*. T6 and T5 suggested that frequent meetings and interaction with parents are compulsory. T5 first mentioned, “Have a forum where parents and teachers would interact.” T6 verified her response by stating, “Communication is key,” as her rationale.

The other code under teacher was *stakeholders must be involved*. Although it was not a common topic, three teachers mentioned it. T5 and T7 commented that all stakeholders must be involved. By other, they meant other school and district officials. T5 specifically identified various individuals at school, such as “principals, counselors, and coaches in talking to parents and students.” P4 said, “Involvement of all ... stakeholders should be involved so they can see what is going on.” Even though the roles requested differ from parent to teacher, participants considered stakeholders’ involvement essential.

### **Remote Curriculum**

The fourth theme generated was the *remote curriculum*. Remote curriculum had two categories: *learning experiences* and *subject matter*. Remote curriculum differed from the platform because the curriculum was literacy instruction and not the Internet or technological factors. Technology rose as its theme later on. Learning experiences had four codes, and subject material had three, as shown in Table 10.

**Table 10***Category and Codes for the Theme of Remote Curriculum*

Theme	Category	Code
Remote Curriculum	Learning experiences	Need enrichment
		More probing questions
		Not self-paced
	Subject material	More engagement/games
		Need more practice
		Received differentiated instruction
		Updating curriculum

***Learning Experience***

Learning experience emerged as the first category, referring to the students' learning experience as the parents and teacher saw it. Under this category, there were four codes. The codes were *need enrichment*, *more probing questions*, *not self-paced*, and *more engagement/games*. T1 first said, "Additional books in the platform for enrichment" were lacking. All teachers responded that they needed more resources at different levels. Parents and teachers agreed that students' questioning levels rose. Teachers requested that the curriculum include more probing questions, and parents wanted teachers to ask more questions. All the parents felt their children were asking and engaging more due to the line of questioning. P1 suggested there be a quicker response for students but was happy to be able to help with more straightforward questions.

Not self-paced, and more engagement/games were codes generated through a thorough analysis of the interviews. I named it engagement/games; however, parents did not encourage gaming. All parents, except P1 and P3, stated interaction with

teachers and classmates as fundamental to their children's increase in reading ability. P4 responded, "Interactive with other students, also one-on-one," contributed to the child's improvement. Therefore, they did not endorse self-paced learning. As for more engagement/games from the parents, only P5 mentioned this code. T2, T5, T6, and T7 noticed an improvement in reading due to engagement; it was a driving factor in learning gains. T6 stated that to keep her students on-task, she had to keep them fully engaged by using games. The need for more online activities was a common response for teachers.

### ***Subject Material***

Subject material was the second category, and it referred to using materials. The codes listed under subject material were *need more practice*, *received differentiated instruction*, and *updating curriculum*. P6 recommended more practice because it helped her child. Furthermore, four teachers endorsed more reading and orientation practice. T3 and T4 explained that more practice is needed before students move on to another lesson.

Differentiation in education means tailoring the lesson and techniques for varying capabilities and achievements (Asim et al., 2020). T4 stated her concern was addressing their different issues or needs. T3 mentioned different levels of understanding as one of her concerns with VLEs. P5 and P6 affirmed that their students' spelling improved; P6 discussed her child's writing gains. P6 referred to her son, "In terms of writing, he was able to record..he did it on his own. For him, it was easy." P6 meant recording his written responses to text questions in the online text.

Remote curriculum's last code was updating curriculum, referring to the online reading material used. T2 said that the curriculum needed more diversity in the materials. She said, "Some of the passages were old ...lacked modern historical figures." T4 mentioned that teachers have no control over the materials used. T5's response included all stakeholders needing an opinion on the materials listed. Updating curriculum is a code that overlaps with the stakeholders must be involved and the need for more resources. All three are interrelated since stakeholders' input is essential for changes in the curriculum and resources.

### **Technology**

The fifth theme was *technology*. This theme had two categories: *platform* and *hardware device*. The platform category referred to the learning management system and had four codes, while the hardware device category had three codes. I listed the hierarchy of categories and codes in Table 11.

**Table 11**

*Category and Codes for the Theme of Technology*

Theme	Category	Code
Technology	Platform	High-comfort level Orientation Mandated mini-course Parents need to track/monitor
	Hardware device	Help with devices Internet concerns Tech orientation

The platform category had four codes: high-comfort level, orientation, mandated mini-course, and parents' need to track/monitor. This category referred to all

topics relating to the online platform; some districts use particular Learning Management Systems (LMS). All parents except P3 reported that their children had a high-comfort level working in their VLEs. P1 responded, “I felt the child is comfortable, the platform is easy to navigate...questions were through messages.” P2’s daughter loved it; she said the child had a lot of interest, and it suited her best. P3 said her child maneuvered the platform easily, but the course only offered one orientation. Therefore, P1, P3, P4, and four teachers recommended another orientation. All expressed their need for either additional or longer orientation for students and possibly parents on maneuvering the platform.

T5 stated that the “mandated mini-course” would help students and parents practice uploading assignments, chatting, tracking, and monitoring. T7 recommended the need for mini-lessons in between all lessons and activities, including orientation. Parents did not mention mini-courses; however, P6 stated the need for “a lot of small practice and activities so students can become a pro.” Parents need to track/monitor was the final code for the platform category. Five of the six parents recommended tracking or monitoring to help students. Parents agreed that tracking or monitoring was a factor in their children’s success in the virtual intensive reading classes. P6 stated, “In terms of tracking, it helps find where the students need the most help.”

The second category was hardware devices. This category relates to concerns with the computer or laptop hardware. The codes were help with devices, Internet concerns, and tech orientation. These three codes are interrelated, as discussed. T3 stated that teachers need extra time to help students with technical problems, and T5

responded, “Platform accessibility problems are usually IT difficulties.” T5 commented that some of the platform problems could be issues of familiarity and not Internet and technical hardware. T4 said that the availability of hardware, such as mouse and printers, were a concern. The availability of these tools is beyond her control.

On the other hand, P1 said that the connectivity problems stemmed from Internet access and not the laptop. Internet connectivity and access presented issues for P1 and P3. P3 mentioned that her child used his device, and familiarity made it easier to use; however, the Internet was expensive and faulty. Therefore, tech orientation was in demand from parents: P1, P3, and P4. T1, T3, T4, and T5 mentioned a more extended orientation for the platform and tech support. T5 said, “Make for a longer orientation period,” in conjunction with T4, who felt “There should be more time for platform practice and orientation.”

### **Social Interaction**

The next theme was *social interaction*. This theme had two categories: *social presence and social learning*. The social presence category consisted of five codes, and social learning consisted of three. In this study, social interaction meant online engagement and social presence meant online personality (Baisley-Nodine et al., 2018; Kreijns et al., 2022). Social learning signified learning through interactive activity, where two or more communicate (Kreijns et al., 2022). See Table 12 for the complete list of categories and codes under the theme of social interaction.

**Table 12***Category and Code for the Theme of Social Interaction*

Theme	Category	Code
Social Interaction	Social Presence	Shy students Outgoing Interactive with the teacher
	Social Learning	More small group work

***Social Presence***

Social presence was the first category, and it had three codes: *shy students*, *outgoing*, and *interactive with the teacher*. Social presence refers to a person's online personality and behavior. P6 stated that VLEs allow shy students to express themselves without calling attention. She added, "I worried about him being too shy to ask questions in regular classes." T1 also mentioned that shy students shy away when the teacher moves too fast and the need to include emojis in the chat to encourage communication. T3 saw the need for more student presence and expressed the need to teach group work etiquette. Although only two of thirteen participants revealed their concern about shy students, every perception of intermediate students' experiences in a virtual intensive reading class was an important finding.

Outgoing was the second code. Positive behavior was a code above; however, positive behavior is unlike an outgoing personality. Therefore, I kept this code. P1 shared that her child was asking more questions, and P6 stated, "The virtual platform allows students to freely ask questions," P6 also shared that her son became more self-confident. P2 and P4 described that their children became more interactive with other

students. T1 and T5 found that some students were more interactive as the classes progressed.

The third code under social presence was interactive with the teacher. It is vital to online learning because virtual interaction impacts “earning and social outcome” (Kreijns et al., 2021). This code was separate because people behave differently one-on-one than in a group. Initially, P6’s son was not outgoing but felt comfortable with the teacher and asked more questions. Only one teacher, T1, expressed her experience with students becoming more outgoing. Yet parents found their children to be more interactive with teachers than before. P4 said, “They are a bit more interactive; they can chat with the teacher.” P2 mentioned, “The classroom functioned like a social media network,” where students interact and respond more.

### ***Social Learning***

Social learning was the second code under the theme of social interaction. Social learning has one code, *more small group work*. Social learning refers to cognitive learning through deliberate social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study, P3, P4, P5, and P6 contributed some of their children’s reading improvement on synchronous social interaction. P6 stated, “We need more group work for interaction and socialization.” P2 also suggested more group work with the teacher and other students. P5 shared that pronunciation and reading improved with interaction. Some teachers agreed. T5 saw more discussions in small interactive groups, and T1 expressed a need for extra digital functions for small group work. T3 stated the

importance of group work on and offline because “students understand learning from each other.”

### **Communication**

Communication is the seventh theme. This theme has two categories: *parents* and *teachers*. Parents wanted more communication; this category has four codes. The category, teachers, had two codes. See Table 13 for the hierarchy of categories and codes in the theme of communication.

**Table 13**

*Category and Codes for the Theme of Communication*

Theme	Category	Code
Communication	Parents	Meetings
		Newsletters and reports
		Response to feedback
	Teachers	Response to feedback
		More phone calls/chat

### ***Parents***

Parents was the first category under communication, and it had three codes: *meetings, newsletters and reports, and response to feedback*. Meetings referred to one-on-one and workshops available throughout the academic year. T6 expressed a need for frequent meetings for teachers, students, and parents; she said, “Communication is key to their success.” T7 also stated the need for regular meetings but added stakeholders. She explained that parents, students, and stakeholders could meet quarterly. P4 and P6 communicated their need for more meetings with teachers.

Furthermore, P6 revealed the need for meetings after work hours. T3, T6, and T7 supported reports; T3 encouraged parents to learn how to access these on the platform.

P5 recommended the use of bi-weekly newsletters and frequent phone calls for transparency. P6 requested “More teacher involvement, phone calls...communication with parents.” She preferred one-on-one communication rather than workshops. P2 wanted more interaction with the teachers as well. Finally, P1, P2, and P6 had concerns about prompt responses and feedback. Students received immediate help, but parents wanted more feedback. T2, T3, and T6 agreed that more feedback is always critical. However, P5 felt students and parents “Need more one-on-one interaction and feedback from me; not enough time.”

## Resources

The eighth theme in this study was *resources*. This topic refers to the materials for the course. This theme had three categories: *hard copy*, *soft copy*, and *other*. See Table 14 for the hierarchy of the theme.

**Table 14**

### *Category and Codes for the Theme of Resources*

Theme	Category	Code
Resources	Hard copy	Materials in hard copy
	Soft copy	Diversity in materials
	Other	Teacher assistant

### ***Hard Copy***

Hard copy was the first category in the theme of resources and referred to tangible materials. It had only one code, *materials in hard copy*. P4 mentioned her

concerns with no hard copy and mostly online material. The online materials satisfied the parents except for P4. P5 celebrated the materials online. However, T2 believed that “There should be more materials for student and teacher...some of the passages had older stories and lacked modern historical figures.” T4 recommended that parents print out some passages for their students.

### ***Soft Copy***

Although most parents believed the online materials were appropriate, T2 found they lacked diversity. T2 agreed and included that they needed updating. She found the passages did not represent all the demographics in her classes. T3 felt soft copy passages were appropriate, yet they lacked diversity. She said, “Additional books in the platform for enrichment, and more samples of different literatures.” T2 mentioned, “I feel that I have all the resources to make a difference in reading; most of their testing scores went up.” One parent wanted hard copies, and most teachers wanted diverse materials, literature, and enrichment.

### ***Other***

Only one teacher, T7, requested a teacher assistant. She expressed the need for an assistant to work in small groups and to help monitor activity. The assistant could help with students who missed classes or previous assignments.

### **Attendance**

Attendance was the ninth theme. This theme had one category, *missed class time*. Missed class time had three codes. See Table 15 for the list of codes.

**Table 15***Category and Codes for the Theme of Attendance*

Theme	Category	Code
Attendance	Missed class time	Make-up assignments Illness Absences

***Missed Class Time***

Missed class time was the only category. This category had three codes: *make-up assignments*, *illness*, and *absences*. All the codes reflect participants' concerns with intermediate grade-level attendance.

***Make-up Assignments***

Teachers expressed concern about missing and incomplete work due to missing a class, submission, and absences. T4 said, "I worried that...they could make up missing classes." T5 described missing work due to submission challenges, and T7 told me some students fell behind because they did not submit assignments. T5 suggested, "As part of admissions, make sure students can submit assignments." Parents did not mention missing work in their responses.

***Illness and Absences***

Missing class is a challenge. T7 stated needing extra tutoring time for sick and absent students. She said, "Missing students fall behind by not submitting their work." T7 described, "At times, some students are absent, and it is challenging; one must continue rescheduling to help the student." Another teacher, T4, admitted to worrying that "students could not keep up the pace." Teachers expressed their concern about

limited time to tutor sick and absent students. Attendance was not a concern for parents.

### **Time Restraints**

The final theme was *time restraints*. This theme had two categories: *teachers* and *students*. Each of the categories had two codes. Time restraints were a concern for parents, teachers, and students. Table 16 is a chart with the hierarchy of the categories and codes for this theme.

**Table 16**

*Category and Codes for the Theme of Time Restraints*

Theme	Category	Codes
Time Restraints	Teachers	More teacher planning Extra teacher training
	Students	Fast-paced teacher More tutoring/practice

### ***Teachers***

Teachers was the first category of this theme. It had two codes: *more teacher planning* and *extra teacher planning*. Teachers described the need for more time to plan and train. T3 told me, “More planning is always welcome; it takes a lot of work to prepare for online classes.” T1 expressed the same sentiment and described the need to plan small group work as time-consuming. T2 requested more curriculum training in the interview. T4 and T7 also shared that they need more time to plan and tutor. T2 and T3 revealed the need for additional training. T2 asked for curriculum training, while T3 stated, “Teachers need a lot of training with platform functionality.”

### ***Students***

The second category, students, had two codes: fast-paced *teacher and more tutoring/practice*. Teachers described how the lack of time affected students. T4 worried about students keeping up the pace because of missing classes and a fast curriculum. T2 felt the goals and time frame for the curriculum were not realistic. T7 said, “There should be specific tutoring time for sick and absent students.” She believed this arrangement could eliminate falling behind.

More practice was a concern for parents and teachers. T3 stated, “I worry that sometimes the student forgets what they have learned; they need more practice before moving on to another lesson.” T2 said that students could get better, but it takes practice. P6 recommended more online practices and “The use of a lot of small activities so that students can become a pro.” P3 suggested more practice on the platform and reading online would help improve her child’s reading.

### **Supporting Research Questions and Sub Questions**

The research questions drove this study, so I generated the themes and codes from the responses and aligned them to the questions. The main research question asked parents and teachers about their perceptions of intermediate students’ experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. From there, the sub questions asked teachers and parents about changes observed in the reading patterns of their intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes. The last sub questions asked teachers and parents for suggestions to improve the virtual intensive reading classes.

*Parent Perceptions Supporting the Main Research Question*

Parental perceptions differed from the teachers' perceptions. Overwhelmingly, parents felt synchronous contributed significantly to the success of their students in virtual intensive reading classes. Their students were comfortable using the platform, like a social media venue, to connect with their teachers and classmates. Parents played a role in their students' improvement by tracking, monitoring, and checking for comprehension by asking their students questions, but they needed more teacher support. Parents believed their students' attitudes and personalities improved due to synchronous small-group interaction and indicated students needed additional tasks and activities. Students were comfortable asking questions; therefore, parents identified more parent-teacher collaboration. Parents observed how students communicated with the chat function and suggested additional orientation to maneuver the platform and technical features. Overall, parents welcomed the virtual classes.

Most of the parents' recommendations centered around parent-teacher collaboration. They wanted more communication via newsletters, phone calls, and meetings, some being after work. Two areas needing teacher support and training were orientation on using the platform efficiently. They shared their need to access reports and track students more effectively. Parents asked for increased tasks and activities, such as homework. Some even suggested more diversity and hard copy materials to support their students.

**Table 17***Codes Supporting Parent Perceptions*

Interview Question	Themes	Codes	Number of Participants	Sample Quotes
2) What factors contributed to their reading improvement?	Social Interaction	Synchronous learning	6 of 6	P1- "connected with other kids through the platform; yeah, it was like social media; the class functioned like social media." P2- "other students connect through the same platform; the class functioned like a social media, like Snap Chat; it was very interactive." P3- "technology was a plus." P1- "I felt the child is comfortable, the platform is easy to navigate." P4- "he's comfortable, no complaints, he's involved, mostly online materials."
		Student Behavior	1 of 6	
	Academic Gains	Asking questions	2 of 6	
		Reading out of class	2 of 6	
	Technology	Improved skills	2 of 6	
		Track/monitor	1 of 6	
		Comfort level	2 of 6	
3) What was your child's comfort level navigating the virtual class?	Technology	Getting more comfortable	6 of 6	
	Communication	Asking for help	4 of 6	
		Using chat function	3 of 6	
		Getting feedback	1 of 6	
4) What role did you play in improving your child's reading?	Technology	Tracking/monitoring	5 of 6	P1- "I think getting to track a four-month period month by month... motivated them, team collaboration." P3- "I gave her the tablet I wanted to know what the child was learning" P4- "I monitor and ask questions to check for level of understanding; encourage." P1- "tracking; that would help me and other parents; more orientation on how to track her progress; internet access sometimes." P4- "Parent interactive with teacher;" P3- "More teacher -parent involvement." P1- "Yes, but need more books and tracking." P6- "More progress tracking... on the platform; time was limited..after work."
	Parent-Teacher Involvement	Parent support	6 of 6	
		Questions, checking for comprehension	3 of 6	
	Academic Gains	Chat function	2 of 6	
		Reports/feedback	3 of 6	
	5) Suggestions	Parent-Teacher Involvement	Parent-teacher collaboration	
More orientation			4 of 6	
Resources		Increase tasks/activities	4 of 6	
		Extra materials	1 of 6	
Communication		Newsletters	2 of 6	
		Phone calls/meetings	2 of 6	
6) Do you have the capacity and resources to help?	Resources	Diversity	2 of 6	
	Parent & Teacher Involvement		3 of 6	
		Supporting the student	3 of 6	
	Technology	Comfortable with platform	1 of 6	
		More time	3 of 6	
	Time Restraints	Newsletter/reports	3 of 6	
Communication	Track/monitoring			
Technology				

*Teacher Perceptions Supporting the Main Research Question*

Overall, the most prevalent code was improved performance. Teachers revealed that assessments alone did not measure the students' progress in reading comprehension. Overall performance improved, but progress in spelling, fluidity, positive social interactions in small groups, personality improvement, better attitude, and extra reading outside the classroom were also indicators of improvement in the virtual learning environment (VLE). In order of frequency, teachers selected improved performance and on-task as their perceptions of learning gains in their intensive reading VLEs. Asking questions, improved literacy skills, improved comprehension skills, and engagement were the codes retrieved from the raw data. Although all teachers did not use the same jargon, terms like spelling, pronunciation or fluidity, phonetic improvement, vocabulary, and writing fell under the literacy classification. Student behavior evolved from student behavioral concerns because positive and negative traits depend on the perspective. Remote curriculum and student behavior were the second and third in frequency. Social presence and social learning were second to last in frequency, whereas technology was last. Only one teacher mentioned it for the first sub question. See Table 18 for a summary of codes supporting teacher perceptions.

**Table 18***Codes Supporting Teacher Perceptions*

Interview Question	Themes	Codes	Number Of Participants	Sample Quotes
2) Some concerns you have about virtual intensive reading classes?	Attendance	Absences	5 of 7	T1-“Whether students prepare or look for answers..virtual space requires a lot of planning, time consuming.” T6-“The site is not always available...students not always on task so teacher has to engage them.” T7-“Missing students; some fall behind by not submitting work...are sick and miss class.”
		Illness	4 of 7	
	Time Restraints	More planning time	4 of 7	
		Need practice	6 of 7	
	Student Behavior	Missing work	1 of 7	
		Differentiated instruction	2 of 7	
	Technology	Diversity	4 of 7	
		Internet concerns	1 of 7	
	Time Restraints	Students keeping up with the pace	2 of 7	
		Parent involvement needed	3 of 7	
4) Do you feel you have the resources and facilities to implement suggestions?	Academic gains	Yes, students made improvement	4 of 7	T7-“We need more frequent meetings between parents, students, & stakeholders: we need to give them more feedback.” T4-“More learning opportunities or different activities in the platform; availability of tech tools for students.” T1-“I feel so; a lot of practice and orientation for me as well as the students worked well.” T7-“At times students are absent and it is challenging; one must continue rescheduling to help the student.” T1-“Make it user-friendly; chat function should be easy and fun.” T5-“Need more one-on-one interaction and feedback from me; not enough time.”
		No, need planning time	1 of 7	
	Time	No, tech tools needed	1 of 7	
		No, stakeholders involvement	3 of 7	
	Technology	No, stakeholders involvement	3 of 7	
		Parent & teacher involvement	3 of 7	
	Remote curriculum	Additional enrichment	1 of 7	
		No, more enrichment	2 of 7	
Resources	No, diversity	3 of 7		
5) Is there anything further you want to add?	Technology	Orientation	4 of 7	
		Absent	5 of 7	
	Student behavior	More fun chat function	3 of 7	
		Teacher training	3 of 7	
	Communication	More teacher planning.	3 of 7	
		Tutoring time	2 of 7	
		More practice	1 of 7	
		Absences	2 of 7	
		Idle online	2 of 7	
		Forum to collaborate	2 of 7	
	Time restraints	Forum to collaborate	2 of 7	
		Stakeholders involved	2 of 7	
	Student behavior	Stakeholders involved	2 of 7	
		Parent & teacher involvement	2 of 7	

*Sub Question 1*

What changes in reading patterns did teachers observe in their intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

The key finding for sub question 1 was that teachers observed student improvement in performance and literacy skills by being on-task, asking questions, and engaging through active participation and interaction with classmates and the teacher. The first category of the academic gain theme was reading, with improved testing scores. Overall, the most prevalent code was improved performance. Students improved their responses to reading questions, fluidity in reading, and positive social interactions. These factors were also indicators of improvement in the virtual VLE. In order of frequency, teachers selected improved performance and on-task as their perceptions of learning gains in their intensive reading VLEs. Asking questions, improved literacy skills, improved comprehension skills, and engagement were the codes retrieved from the raw data. Although all teachers did not use the same jargon, terms like spelling, pronunciation or fluidity, phonetic improvement, vocabulary, and writing fell under the literacy classification. Student behavior evolved from student behavioral concerns because positive and negative traits depend on the perspective. The last interview question directed to teachers asked about resources, and teachers suggested more parent and stakeholder involvement. Instructional enrichment was third with 2 out of 7. Although four teachers did not provide additional data, some described the need for more time for training and planning. I listed the results in Table 19.

**Table 19***Codes Supporting Sub Question 1*

Theme	Code	Number of Participants
Academic gains	Improved performance	5 of 7
	Reading outside of class	2 of 7
	Asking questions	3 of 7
	Improved literacy skills	3 of 7
	Improved comprehensive skills	2 of 7
Student behavioral	Better attitude/personality	2 of 7
	On task	5 of 7
Remote curriculum	More engagement	3 of 7
	Asked more probing questions	3 of 7
	Tracking remediation	2 of 7
Technology	Comfortable working online	1 of 7
Social presence	Improved social interaction with the teacher	2 of 7
Social learning	Improved social interaction with classmates	3 of 7

*Sub Question 2*

What changes in reading patterns did parents observe in their intermediate-level children enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

For sub question 2, the key finding was that parents observed improvement differently than parents. Academic gains was the most common theme. The top codes were reading outside the classroom and an increased line of questioning from their students. Parents observed more extracurricular reading and on-task behavior. Other observed factors at a lesser level were improved reading comprehension, literacy skills, more questioning, being on-task, interaction with classmates, interaction with the teacher, synchronicity, using more chat, using chat, reviewing work lessons and lessons, using more resources, and comfort level with technology.

**Table 20***Codes Supporting Sub Question 2*

Theme	Code	Number of Participants
Academic gains	Reading outside of class/increased reading	5 of 6
	Improvement in performance	2 of 6
	Improved reading comprehension	1 of 6
	Improved literacy skills	1 of 6
	More questioning	4 of 6
Student Behavior	On-task	2 of 6
Social Interaction	Small group work	1 of 6
	Interactive with the teacher	1 of 6
	More small group	1 of 6
Communication	Using more chat	1 of 6
Time restraint	More time for reviewing work and lessons	1 of 6
Resources	Used more resources	1 of 6
Technology	Comfort level	1 of 6

***Sub-Question 3***

What suggestions could teachers and parents offer to improve any weaknesses or drawbacks observed in the intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

The third research question asked teachers for suggestions to improve any weaknesses or drawbacks observed in intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes and improve their experiences. Table 21 shows the findings to support sub question 3 per teacher perception. In this study, teachers expressed the most significant needs: collaboration with parents, tech training for parents, more platform orientation to facilitate student monitoring, more tutoring time, and high student absences. To a much lesser degree, they expressed concerns about VLEs as

more student practice, social interaction in a group, some teacher training, and curriculum materials. Their problems with materials varied; they suggested more engagement, game-like functions, diversity, variety, and an overall updating. One teacher recommended getting a teacher assistant.

**Table 21**

*Codes Supporting Sub Question 3: Teachers*

Themes	Code	Number of Participants
Parent and teacher involvement	Need a forum to collaborate	5 of 7
	Parent training and support	3 of 7
Remote curriculum	Needing more practice	2 of 7
Technology	Tech and platform orientation	5 of 7
Social learning	Improved social interaction in the group	1 of 7
Communication	Meetings/follow-up meetings	1 of 7
	More chat	1 of 7
	More engagement/games	1 of 7
Resources	Extra materials	1 of 7
	Diversity in materials	1 of 7
	Needs variety	1 of 7
	Needs updating/revision	1 of 7
	Need a teacher assistant	1 of 7
Attendance	Absences	4 of 7
	Ill student	2 of 7
	Extra teacher training	2 of 7
Time restraints	Need tutoring time	3 of 7
	More teacher planning	2 of 7

***Sub Question 3: Parent Perceptions***

What suggestions could teachers and parents offer to improve any weaknesses or drawbacks observed in the intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes?

The third research question asked parents for suggestions to improve any weaknesses or drawbacks observed in intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes and improve their experiences. Table 22 shows the findings to support sub question 33 per parent perception. Parents suggested more responses from teachers, especially feedback. A third of parents recommended more phone calls or chats to communicate, more orientation on monitoring students' online progress, parent training, and teacher collaboration/support. Although parents did not mention late afternoon meetings in response to SQ3, they stated a need for communication and after-hours meetings when responding to the interview questions. Parents made no mention of student behaviors.

**Table 22**

*Codes Supporting Sub Question 3:Parent*

Theme	Codes	Number of Participants	Sample Quotes
Communication	Meetings	1 of 6	P1-“Tracking; that would help me and other parents; more orientation on how to track her progress; internet access sometimes.”
	Newsletters/reports	1 of 6	
	Response to feedback	4 of 6	
	Phone calls/chat	2 of 6	
Parent-Teacher Involvement	Parent-teacher collaboration	2 of 6	P4-“Parent interactive with teacher.” P3-“More teacher-parent involvement.”
	Late meetings	1 of 6	
	Parent training and support	2 of 6	
Resources	Hard copy materials	1 of 6	
Technology	More orientation	2 of 6	

**Summary**

This study's main research question examined parent and teacher perceptions of their intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. The

findings compiled found that these perceptions differed. The key finding for sub question 1 was that teachers observed improvement in student performance and, to a lesser degree, literacy skills by being on-task, asking questions, and interacting with other classmates and the teacher. Teachers mainly saw improvement in assessment scores. For sub question 2, parents observed improvement differently. They found that their students were reading more outside of the virtual class when compared to face-to-face classes. Their students read more and asked more literacy questions. Only a couple of parents noticed an overall improvement in performance and even less observed improvement in literacy skills.

The key finding for sub question 3 highlighted similarities and differences between parent and teacher suggestions. Parents and teachers requested more parent training, orientation on the digital platform, and some form of collaboration. Parents' main concern was the teacher's response to feedback; they voiced a need for communication. Teachers suggested a collaboration forum with parents and possibly other stakeholders, like principals and district representatives. More than half of the teachers recommended more tech and platform orientation and, to a lesser degree, parental support. One main difference between parents and teachers was the teachers' concern about student absences. Three-quarters of the teachers interviewed listed it as a significant concern. On the other hand, parents did not mention students' behaviors or absences during their interviews. Parents recommended overall teacher response to feedback as their number one priority. To a lesser degree, parents suggested more meetings with teachers, especially after work.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore parent and teacher perceptions of the experiences of intermediate students in virtual intensive reading classes. The intent was to explore areas of need to increase reading comprehension skills for intermediate students with RD enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes. The study centered on one research question and three sub questions. I recruited six parents and seven teachers from the southeastern United States via the university participant pool and social media postings. After interviewing them using Zoom video communications software, I hand-coded the raw data from the transcripts, typed-written notes, and closed caption transcriptions. I conducted a detailed examination to generate thematic codes. I conducted this study to explore and further understand virtual intensive reading classes' learning experiences and efficacy for intermediate-grade-level students. These results may contribute to changes in curriculum design (Martinez-Lincoln et al., 2021).

In Chapter 5, I reintroduce the study's purpose and findings. Then, I will discuss my interpretation of this study's findings in relation to the literature review and conceptual framework. Then, I will also discuss this study's limitations, recommendations, and implications. I concluded with a dialogue on the need for changes to improve the learning experiences of online intensive reading classes for intermediate students.

Parent and teacher perceptions of intensive reading students' experiences in VLEs differed. The key finding for sub question 1 was that teachers observed

improvements in their students' performance and, to a lesser degree, literacy skills by being on-task, asking questions, and interacting with other classmates and the teacher. Teachers mainly saw improvement in their assessment scores. For sub question 2, parents observed improvement differently. Their students were reading more outside of the virtual classroom as compared to when in face-to-face classes.

The key finding for sub question 3 highlighted similarities and differences between parent and teacher suggestions. Parents and teachers requested more parent training, orientation on the digital platform, and some form of collaboration. Parents' main concern was the teacher's response to feedback; they voiced a need for more communication. Teachers suggested a collaboration forum with parents and possibly other stakeholders, like principals and district representatives.

One main difference between the responses from parents and teachers was the teachers' concern about student absences. Three-quarters of the teachers interviewed listed it as a significant concern. Meanwhile, parents did not mention students' behavior or absences during the interviews. The parents recommended overall teacher response to feedback. A smaller segment of parents suggested more meetings with teachers after work.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

#### **Interpretation of the Findings in Relation to the Conceptual Framework**

I viewed parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate intensive reading students' experiences in VLEs through the conceptual framework. This study's conceptual framework was comprised of Vygotsky's ZPD and social learning and

Epstein's model of parental involvement because they support learning gains via social interaction and support. Vygotsky's ZPD theory states that an increase in student learning occurs when guided or assisted with tasks that push the student's comfort level (Vygotsky, 1978). He also wrote that children learn the thought process and language acquisition from their environment, specifically social interaction (Vygotsky 1986). Because this study relates to parents, I included Epstein's model of parental involvement. The model of parental involvement establishes conditions at home that support learning and help teachers understand their students' families (Epstein, 2011). Epstein believes that understanding a child's frame of reference facilitates learning through educational partnership. The conceptual framework provided a perspective through which I created questions, designed a study, and analyzed the data.

### **Vygotsky's ZPD and Social Learning**

The increased use of social presence in VLEs creates an environment for emotional connection (Kreijns et al., 2021) and could be a key component in increased social learning. Parents in this study suggested more parent-teacher collaboration and communication as keys to continued academic gains (see Table 22). Teachers also suggested parental involvement but focused more on practice, student attendance, and training for all parties involved: parent, teacher, and student (see Table 21).

### ***Main Research Question: Vygotsky's Theoretical Framework***

Through the main research question, I explored parent and teacher perceptions of their intermediate students' experiences in the virtual intensive reading class. Teacher responses did not directly confirm the SLT. Their focus on more tutoring

supported Vygotsky's specific and deliberate scaffolding and assistance; however, teachers recommended more enrichment activities that coincide with Vygotsky's ZPD theory that students should be exposed to and practice skills beyond their comfort level (see Vygotsky, 1978). On the other hand, teachers primarily focused on student attendance and training/orientation. Absent students cannot interact with learning, which indirectly supports the SLT. Most of the teachers responded that students needed more practice; however, they did not specify the practice, whether small-group, or whole-class virtual synchronous activities. Only a couple of teachers stated that virtual synchronous learning allowed the teachers to observe students and gave students extra practice. In stark contrast, the data demonstrated that all parents suggested synchronous learning was one of the main factors contributing to reading improvement (see Table 17). When one-on-one with the teacher is unavailable, students in small groups and parents at home can become a mentor (Graham et al., 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, parental requests for more collaboration with teachers could be the forerunner to scaffolding and mentoring at home.

***Sub Question 1: Vygotsky's Theoretical Framework***

In sub question 1, I asked teachers to share what changes they observed in their students' reading patterns, and teacher responses confirmed Vygotsky's ZPD theory of social learning. Only a couple of teachers observed increased reading skills alongside social interaction with the teacher. Less than half of the parents observed gains and increased social interaction with classmates. With most teachers noticing

learning gains with peer interaction, this finding collaborated with Vygotsky's student learning through social interaction.

***Sub Question 2: Vygotsky's Theoretical Framework***

In sub question 2, I asked parents to share changes they observed in their students' reading patterns. All except one parent noticed improved performance and increased reading outside the VLE. One-third of parents interviewed noticed increased small group work and teacher interaction. Even though parent responses to SQ2 did not directly confirm Vygotsky's theory on social learning, all of them mentioned the need for virtual synchronous learning for future classes, with some encouraging group work. Their suggestion for teacher feedback infers the parents' intent to assist their students at home. Also, increased questions from students indicate the students' need for assistance outside of the course. The interaction between parent and student may not be deliberate and specific as in Vygotsky's theory; nonetheless, teacher-parent collaboration may lead to proper scaffolding as in his ZPD of social learning.

***Sub Question 3: Vygotsky's Theoretical Framework***

In giving recommendations for virtual intensive reading classes, parent and teacher responses did not coincide. Parents suggested more collaboration, communication, and feedback between parents and teachers, as well as additional help with tracking and monitoring student progress. Conversely, teachers suggested more time for tutoring and planning differentiated lessons. The responses to this research sub question did not confirm Vygotsky's theory of social learning.

Sub questions 1, 2, and 3 were the impetus for the interview questions, confirming Vygotsky's theory of social learning. Some teachers, five of seven, suggested and requested more time to plan differentiated instruction and tutoring. Their suggestions coincided and confirmed Vygotsky's social interaction schema of a knowledgeable person assisting a learner.

### **Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement**

Epstein's (2011) model of parental involvement served as a framework because parents were participants in this study. This model relates to academic learning gains via parental interaction. The model includes six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. The findings relate to parents as their perceptions provided half the data on students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes.

### ***Main Research Question: Epstein's Theoretical Framework***

Parent, more than teachers, confirmed Epstein's model. While most teachers did not focus on parent involvement, two of seven teachers suggested more parent and other stakeholder involvement via meetings and forums. Their concerns, overall, remained on practice: diversity of materials, student attendance, reading practice, and teacher planning. However, parental consensus indicated that more parent-teacher collaboration is crucial to student success. In reviewing interview responses, all the parents suggested more parent-teacher collaboration and communication as key to continued academic gains (see Table 22). Parents wanted more help tracking and monitoring their students and digital assistance rather than academic support at home.

Nonetheless, Epstein's model of parental involvement includes effective communication, type two, as one of the six components of involvement. Parent responses confirmed the third type of the model of parental involvement, learning at home.

***Sub Question 1: Epstein's Theoretical Framework***

I asked teachers what changes they observed in their students' reading patterns. Teachers noticed improved assessment scores and literacy skills, such as comprehension, line of questioning, and behavior. Yet, teachers did not mention parental involvement. Furthermore, teachers later suggested having a collaboration forum and frequent lines of communication with parents and other stakeholders. These requests indicated a need for parental involvement to facilitate and improve learning gains.

***Sub Question 2: Epstein's Theoretical Framework***

Sub question 2 polled parents about what changes or patterns they observed. Because most parents observed increased reading outside of class, performance, and line of questioning, they confirmed the at-home monitoring segment of Epstein's third type of involvement. Parents also noticed improved student performance and an increased line of questioning from students. Since students asked more questions, this behavior indicates parental interaction in learning. Parents sent messages to teachers, but a parent mentioned the need for communication and meetings after work hours. Epstein's communication and learning at home models could improve if schools and teachers could schedule contact at more convenient times for parents.

### ***Sub Question 3: Epstein's Theoretical Framework***

I asked parents and teachers for suggestions. Most teachers suggested collaborating with parents and stakeholders in a forum and offered parental training and support. One of their most significant concerns was student attendance, which may convey a need for frequent communication. Teacher responses confirmed and supported three of Epstein's six types of parental involvement: communicating, learning at home, and collaborating. Three-fourths of parents wanted more teacher responses to questions and feedback but did not mention other stakeholders. Parental responses confirmed type three of Epstein's model, learning at home. These responses indicate the parents' intent to intervene and assist in learning. Their statements demonstrated an overlap between parents and teachers regarding communication. Both groups of participants acknowledged the need to work together, and even it served different purposes.

### **Interpretation of the Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

#### ***Parents***

Key findings from the parents in this study include:

1. Parents observed synchronous learning significantly contributed to their students' reading success.
2. Parents observed their students use technology and the platform comfortably.
3. Parents suggested more teacher support.
4. Parents believed their role should be tracking and monitoring their students.
5. Parents observed an improvement in their students' attitudes and personalities.

6. Parents suggested more parent-teacher collaboration and communication.
7. Parents suggested more orientation: platform and technology.
8. Parents suggested more tasks and activities for students.

Parents believed synchronous learning significantly contributed to their students' success. They described an increase in reading outside of the students' VLE. They described students reading materials whenever possible, even in their free time, especially the first days after a new lesson. One parent stated that her child would ask questions about the nonfiction passages, which led to additional reading. The high frequency of reading questions could be due to text complexity and the lack of proficiency many students with reading difficulties face (Dahl et al., 2021; Wexler et al., 2019). Another parent shared that her child's pronunciation improved, which supports the study by Kanniainen et al. (2019), in which fluency and word identification promotes reading comprehension. However, she did not explain if it was due to the audiobooks or small-group exchange. Parents found that the reading class held in a VLE was impactful and believed that social interaction contributed to their students' success. Vygotsky's social learning relates to these findings as it substitutes face-to-face with synchronous learning (Harwood & Brett, 2019), and the more students worked online, the more comfortable they became. Parents agreed that their students were comfortable using the devices, confirming previous studies (Archila et al., 2022; Grindle et al., 2020).

This study's findings confirmed Tamboto et al.'s (2020) study in that the foundation for parental intervention and support depends on the parent's knowledge

and expertise. Parents said they needed more training with the platform and digital help to monitor their students. They also wanted to collaborate and gain teacher feedback, reflecting the results of previous studies (Akhari, 2022; Brown et al., 2019; Pollack et al., 2021). Studies before and after the COVID-19 quarantine featured parental frustration with VLEs (Abuhammad, 2020; Duman et al., 2018; Kong, 2018). This study's findings confirm that the sentiment still concerns parents. Parents observed their students asking questions, corresponding with Vygotsky's ZPD concept of ancillary help. Therefore, parents' observations corroborate the need for social learning via virtual synchronous classes.

Learning online requires mastery in maneuvering the digital platform (Benkhider & Kherbachi, 2020), and parents in this study confirmed this. Benkhider and Kherbachi (2020) found that platforms differed in the virtual learning tools provided and how to track the learning and the teaching. Parents in this study shared that although they found virtual intensive reading beneficial to their children, they require more support, especially in tracking and monitoring. Additionally, previous studies (Carter Jr et al., 2020; Harwood & Brett, 2019; Reigeluth, 2018) assessed that students in VLEs need self-regulation or monitoring to remain focused on classwork. Parents in this study confirmed this, suggesting more collaboration with teachers and training on monitoring and tracking their students will ensure success. Some literature proposes that monitoring is crucial because distractions exist (Brun-Mercer, 2019; Maxwell et al., 2021). This study's findings confirmed what Epstein (2011), Hayati and Puspitaloka (2022), and Rice and Ortiz (2021) believe as parent-teacher

collaboration. It asserted that parent mentors could provide specific and deliberate support to their students. Another reason for teacher collaboration would be the lack of parent-adolescent relationships (Goshin et al., 2021). Although parents did not mention a lack of rapport with their intermediate-grade-level students, the possibility exists.

There were some unexpected outcomes. Parents did not refer to attendance issues, which could be a factor when parents are preoccupied with household chores (Rice et al., 2019) or work outside the home. Another reason why parents may overlook attendance could be that high absences were a pre-existing concern (Tate & Warschauer, 2022). Parents also noted increased reading outside of the VLE, which might indicate that parents were absent during virtual classes. Parents may work during the day since some parents suggested after-hours meetings with teachers. Based on the nationwide survey by Educators for Excellence (2020) 20% of intermediate-grade-level teachers took attendance when teaching online; 2% used other criteria to account for student attendance. Therefore, attendance appeared not to be a significant concern. Parents also found that their children's attitudes and personalities improved, which was unexpected. Although parents believe virtual intensive reading classes are beneficial, parents yearned for constant assistance and confirmation from their children's teachers, especially with VLEs. Parents reported their students demonstrating improvement; nonetheless, their perpetual need for teacher response superseded specific academic needs. In short, parents' primary concern was parent-teacher communication, whether by phone, chat, newsletters, reports, or late meetings,

as suggested in the study. The gap between reading students on grade level and those below might lie in the communication gap between parents and teachers.

### ***Teachers***

Key findings from the teachers in this study include:

1. Teachers observed that students needed more practice.
2. Student attendance was an overwhelmingly significant concern, mainly absences.
3. Teachers observed improved reading.
4. Teachers suggested more planning time
5. Teachers stated that materials lacked diversity.
6. Teachers felt parents and students needed more tech and platform orientation.
7. Teachers wanted more stakeholder involvement, especially parents.

During and after the quarantine, teachers felt ill-prepared to teach online due to digital distractions, lack of motivation, and self-regulation on the part of students (Carter Jr et al., 2020; Rasheed et al., 2020). Yet, this study's findings did not confirm those fears. Teachers' online teaching might have improved since the initial quarantine in the spring of 2020. Student attendance was the teachers' primary concern, unlike the participating parents. Based on these findings, students who miss classes fall behind and need additional support. Parental suggestions for after-hours meetings may indicate why teachers regarded attendance as their primary concern. If parents are working, students might not attend their virtual classes. Tate and Warschauer (2022) found that lack of physical inclusion and digital access sometimes facilitated absences.

Furthermore, teachers worried about the lack of practice and enrichment offered through their learning platforms. Confirming Laeli et al.'s (2020) study, teachers in this study also told of their interest in additional training and orientation.

Studies (Carter et al., 2020; Kaufmann & Vallade, 2020) reported increased academic engagement in cases where teacher-student rapport was positive. Virtual learning requires a “human touch” (Singh, 2021, p. 29). Yet, the teachers in this study did not mention or confirm rapport as a learning factor. This problem might not exist with this group of teachers because they established rapport with their corresponding parents or did not consider it a significant factor.

Social interaction (Bippert, 2019), increased social presence, and directed activities (Martinez-Lincoln et al., 2021) were elements of VLEs that improved learning gains. However, teachers in this study did not confirm these elements as indispensable factors. Self-regulation skills was another element teachers did not mention was self-regulation skills. Having self-regulation skills was an element the participating teachers did not introduce, but it was found in previous studies (Bippert, 2019; Carter Jr. et al., 2020; Huh & Reigeluth, 2018). These skills are students' different abilities to control their behaviors and feelings (Bippert, 2018). Parents mentioned improved attitudes and personalities; however, only one teacher made that reference.

The difference in perceptions between parents and teachers indicates that parents and teachers prioritized factors within the virtual intensive reading classes differently. I recommend a holistic approach to improve conditions within VLEs and

increase student productivity. When analyzing the results, I considered a couple of factors: parent work schedule and limited teacher time. According to Graham et al. (2021) and Sorokoumova et al. (2021), a lack of active engagement in VLEs adversely impacts students with reading difficulties. If teachers delay and do not strengthen social presence and rapport with students, they run the risk of students being idle, disengaged, or absent (Carter et al., 2020; Kaufmann & Vallade, 2020). In the literature, Kabilan and Annamalai (2022) suggested that higher learning institutions require much more planning time because social presence is necessary for VLEs. Teachers in this study requested more time for training and planning but not for developing social presence. They need more time to create engaging online lessons. Nonetheless, all educators, not just those in higher learning institutions, should develop cognitive, teaching, and social presence as they enhance cooperative, student-centered learning in a virtual environment (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study had several limitations. First, the parents who participated in the study were engaged parents concerned about their children's online education. These parents' experiences may differ from parents who are less engaged with their online students, whether they had to work outside the home or solicit babysitters. Parents and intensive reading teachers may not coincide with what improved performance looks like; their perceptions may differ significantly. Therefore, the findings reflected the unique experiences and might not be generalizable. The teachers who participated were full-time educators with ten or fewer years of experience. For that reason, the

teachers' experiences and perceptions might not reflect those who taught longer.

Because this was a basic qualitative study, it was not an in-depth examination of one bonded unit or group. One should not generalize findings to reflect all intermediate-grade level teachers in reading VLE (see Burkholder et al., 2016).

Distance in research studies can present limitations. Because the study focused on the southeastern United States, I was limited to digitally recruiting, vetting, and interviewing participants and relied on my participants' honesty. Only females responded to the recruitment, so all the participants were female. This coincidence was unintentional, and representing one gender in this study can be a limitation.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations for further research are based on the study's results and limitations. The first recommendation relates to the finding that parents and teachers in the southeastern region differ on improving virtual intensive reading classes. Parents suggested more teacher involvement through communication and synchronous learning. Conversely, teachers primarily requested better student attendance, more student practice, and diverse materials. Therefore, other studies could compare parent and teacher perceptions in different regions of the United States to see if there are regional differences. Getting an overall view of perceptions of students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes would offer a deeper understanding.

A phenomenological approach to this study would require fewer participants but repeated interviews. The phenomenological design allows participants from multiple areas, giving the study a more comprehensive range of lived experiences

(Burkholder et al., 2016; Patton, 2015). A researcher may use the narrative approach to explore one teacher's or parent's perception of an intermediate student's experience in an intensive reading class. That approach would render an in-depth look into the phenomenon.

Another recommendation related to the study's limitations is to focus on the perspectives of intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes. Their perceptions would deliver a view of the circumstances surrounding intensive reading online. The last recommendation relates to the grade levels. Another researcher could interview participants from only one grade level to see if the results are similar. Students may be at different developmental stages within sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

### **Implications**

Educational studies influence schools by contributing knowledge that addresses issues and impacts student learning. Some issues are online attendance, student engagement, student-teacher interaction, parent-teacher interaction, and tutoring. Low physical proximity to teachers (Tate & Warschauer, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020) and lack of rapport (Carter et al., 2020) can hamper students' academic motivation when learning in VLEs. Yet, it improved with a positive social presence (Kabilan & Annamalia, 2022). Social inclusion in an educational setting can boost a student's academic potential, especially in VLEs, where physical proximity is limited. Stakeholders, such as district facilitators, administrators, and teachers, may use data from this study to determine how to best invest time and funding into training and

communication and overlap between students' three spheres of influence: community, virtual school, and home (see Epstein, 2011). These partnerships between the three can drive new research and policies and improve practices in VLE, enhancing intermediate-grade-level students' experiences. Brick-and-mortar schools use a synervoice system if a student is absent. A possibility for decreasing student absences would be a phone messaging system that would alert parents if their student did not log in. District technology support and facilitators can compare different learning management systems and select suitable software that supports a more substantial social presence.

Research begets more questions and further studies that influence district and school leaders. For example, knowing that parent and teacher concerns differ, leaders could address these needs separately. Education departments could look at the data at the state level, call in researchers to confirm the condition and allocate funds to improve virtual intensive reading classes. States must face this dilemma with the rise of VLEs (Chapman & Elbaum, 2021; Dhawan, 2020) and the increase of intermediate students with reading difficulties (NCES, 2020; NAEP, 2022). Districts could provide much-needed outreach consultants specializing in home communication, setting up community meetings, and integrating school personnel. School leaders and principals could set up orientation and training online and face-to-face to accommodate parents.

In this study, I explored intermediate students' experiences from parents' and teachers' perceptions as a means to improve conditions and increase learning gains. This study may contribute to positive social change in several ways. At the individual

level, improving conditions and reading competency for intermediate students in virtual intensive reading classes will allow them to flourish academically across content areas and improve self-esteem. Bringing attention to this academic crisis can be a catalyst to research further. Improving VLE conditions for students with RD can potentially help close the learning gap between students below and on grade level. Since educational companies publish textbooks at grade level, students with RD may be able to pass state literacy exams, take more elective courses, and experience success in other core classes. Reading on grade level will open academic doors for students with RD. These students could have the opportunity to improve and possibly enroll in advanced courses, enhancing equity in education. Lessening the literacy gap between students on and below grade level minimizes the propensity of dropping out of school (Rose & Bowen, 2021). Social change is necessary to improve the learning experience and efficacy of virtual intensive reading classes for intermediate students. Students with RD may face fewer hurdles in other classes and high school and have a better chance of graduating from high school if circumstances surrounding intensive reading VLEs improve.

### **Conclusion**

The learning gap between intermediate students reading on and below grade levels widens. The national average dropped 2.13% from 2017 to 2019 (NAEP, n.d.), and as of 2022, the national reading average of eighth graders dropped from 263 in 2019 to 260 (NAEP, n.d.). Intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading

classes increased as parents followed the trend of VLEs in education (Arnett, 2021; Chapman & Elbaum, 2021; Dhawan, 2020).

This study's outcome was that parent and teacher perceptions differed on suggestions to improve intermediate students' experiences in VLEs. Based on the parents' observations, they wanted more synchronous learning and continuous platform/computer orientation for their children. Parents believed higher levels of engagement with their peers and teacher would boost understanding and increase positive online experience. They requested teacher support and collaboration to support their children and track and monitor their performances online. On the other hand, teachers focused on student behaviors, such as attendance and practice, and lack of time. Attendance indicates student success; with regular attendance comes practice. Therefore, regularly missing classes lowers the students' propensity to improve their reading skills. With more parents working outside of the home, some parents may not be aware of student attendance and not be available for daytime training with teachers or staff. So, planning after-hours live chats and teleconferencing could alleviate some VLE drawbacks.

Parent perceptions confirmed Epstein's model of parental involvement; parent-teacher collaboration is crucial to virtual learning because parents can be monitors and serve as an extension of the classroom. The parental monitoring and support concept complements Vygotsky's ZPD and SLT since parents can function as ancillary mentors and provide social interaction. With training and support recommended by parents, they can scaffold and provide the necessary practice for mastery. Parents

responded that synchronous was a factor that contributed to their students' positive experiences and academic success. That finding confirmed Vygotsky's theory of social learning since connectivity by videoconferencing expands VLEs social dynamics

Time was a primary concern for teachers, explaining the overwhelming situation with student attendance and illness. Absent students will need tutoring to make up the missing assignments. Teachers felt the materials did not offer enough enrichment for students who met their goals and diversity for students to relate to the reading passages. The more opportunities students have to succeed, the greater the experience. Teachers suggested more practice so students may attain mastery. The time needed to plan deliberate, specific, and diverse online activities is necessary to engage students and differentiate instruction.

To improve the experiences and boost the academic success of intermediate students in virtual intensive reading classes, the following stakeholders must collaborate. Teachers will need more time to plan, tutor, train, and meet with parents, who can serve as at-home mentors. If teachers delay and do not strengthen their social presence, interaction, and rapport with students, they run the risk of students being idle, disengaged, or absent. Equally important, trained parents could become an extension of the teacher and provide much-needed practice through social interaction. However, teacher rapport and relationship with students could boost productivity and academic reactivity. Students will still need to receive proper assistance from the teacher and go through the hierarchy of the six elements of social interaction:

scaffolding, mediation, cooperation, imitation, target goal, and crisis (Silalahi, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978) to increase positive virtual experience and achieve reading mastery.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer



PLEASE JOIN THIS IMPORTANT STUDY ON VIRTUAL LEARNING IN  
EDUCATION

I am a doctoral student researching virtual classes for students in intensive reading classes. If you are/were the parent or a teacher of a middle school student enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes in the Southeastern United States, this is an excellent opportunity to share your experiences in virtual teaching and/or learning.

- Eligibility: adult parent or teacher of a 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, or 8<sup>th</sup>-grade student, who attends or attended a virtual intensive reading class in the Southeastern United States
- Location: Zoom audioconference
- Expectation: 30-to-40-minute interview
- A follow-up 10–15-minute call to review the main points
- Confidential

Contact Information:

Denise B. Tate, a Ph.D. student at Walden University

## Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

## CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study about parent and teacher perceptions of intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. This form is part of an "informed consent" process to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to participate.

This study seeks 12 volunteers in the Southeastern United States who are:

- six parents of intermediate students enrolled in virtual intensive reading classes: **OR**
- six teachers with intermediate/middle school virtual intensive reading classes

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Denise B. Tate, a doctoral student at Walden University.

**Study Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature on intermediate students' experiences in virtual intensive reading classes. This exploration will provide parent and teacher perceptions for a comprehensive understanding of literacy classes online for students in intermediate grades.

**Procedures:**

This study will involve you completing the following steps:

- audio-recorded interview for 30 to 40 minutes and set up a follow-up phone call
- get the 10-15-minute follow-up call & summary of my interpretation

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. So, everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not. If you decide to join the study, you can change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as sharing sensitive information. This study will not pose any risk to your well-being with the protections in place.

This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. The study aims to benefit society by providing data to understand virtual intensive reading classes for intermediate-grade students. Once the analysis is complete, the researcher will share the overall results by emailing you a summary.

**Payment:**

Participants will receive a \$25.00 gift card.

**Privacy:**

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential within the limits of the law. The researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this data set with another researcher in the future, the data set would contain no identifiers, so this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. All forms and interview transcriptions are kept confidential on encrypted documents on a password-protected desktop.

Data is held for at least five years, as the university requirement. The researcher is only allowed to share your identity or contact information as needed with Walden University doctoral committee members, who are also required to protect your privacy.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You can ask the researcher questions by phone at \_\_\_\_\_ or email her at \_\_\_\_\_ If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at (612) 312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 11-08-22-0123303. It expires on November 7, 2023.

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the researcher or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact info above.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, reply to this email with the words, "I consent."