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Exploring the Experiences and Practices of Midwestern High School English Teachers

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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

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MA, Central Methodist University, 2013

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Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

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Abstract

The problem under study was that in a state in the midwestern United States, there was a disparity in reading scores between secondary schools of similar demographics. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies and approaches used by secondary teachers whose students' reading achievements exceeded those of other students. Shulman's pedagogical content knowledge and Bandura's theory of self-efficacy were used as the conceptual framework for the study. Data were collected from one-on-one interviews with 10 participants and analyzed with open coding. The findings indicated how to combine content and pedagogy; feeling efficacious about teaching had a positive impact on teachers' experiences and student learning; teachers need to love reading and their students, teachers need to employ a variety of daily lessons, teaching fundamentals, and metacognitive strategies regularly; teachers should only use technology when beneficial to learning, how to motivate students; reading should be reiterated in other subject areas but is not; outside of the individual school and district, professional development is beneficial; home life greatly influences students' reading achievement levels; and how there are many other factors contributing to students' reading achievement levels. These findings may be used to improve students' reading achievement and reduce poverty levels through allowing for increased educational success, higher education opportunities, and job choices as well as decreased dropout rates.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family for always loving and supporting me no matter the circumstances. It is also dedicated to all of the English teachers out there who are just struggling to survive. I see you and you are loved.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my friends and family who have supported me throughout this enduring process. Without you, I would not have had the fortitude to finish what I have started.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Every state in the United States has standards for students' learning objectives by subject area by grade, ending with seniors in secondary school. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides information about the expectations for learning English language arts. Even with the clear expectations provided by DESE, Missouri consistently scores in the middle of all the states for reading achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2022). Within Missouri, there is an achievement gap between lower and higher socioeconomic schools; however, research has shown that teaching best practices can aid students with lower socioeconomic status (Keith, 2018). Combining teachers' pedagogical and subject knowledge makes students more likely to succeed (Poch, 2018; Shulman, 1986,1987).

Because the combination of pedagogical knowledge and subject knowledge promotes students' success in all areas, including reading, then further research needs to be conducted to explain why there is a disparity in reading achievement between secondary schools in Missouri of similar socioeconomics. By exploring the experiences and practices of high school English teachers, I hoped to understand better why there is a disparity in reading achievement between secondary schools in Missouri. A deeper understanding of English teachers' experiences and practices may be used to predict how successful the students will be on assessments (see Mingo et al., 2020). Understanding best practices from secondary English teachers in Missouri may lead to closing the gap in practice from lower performing schools and elevate Missouri students to be more

successful in life. Elevating Missouri students' reading achievement may lead to more productive citizens and more positive life experiences for the community.

In this chapter, I provide the background research for the study, problem statement, and purpose of the study. The research questions, conceptual framework, and nature of the study are also discussed. I present definitions important to the study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations before concluding the chapter by describing the significance of the study and providing a summary.

Background

Research has shown that the implementation of various teaching strategies, such as metacognitive strategies (Muhid et al., 2020), computer-based learning environments (McCarthy et al., 2020), implementing an Accelerate Learning Program (Harrington & Rogalski, 2020), holding small group discussions (Heron-Hruby et al., 2018), focusing on the emotional health of students by employing a patient remedial approach (Miller et al., 2016), implementing text structure instruction (Roehling et al., 2017), using question generation (Stevens et al., 2020), employing linguistic strategies (Varga, 2017), and implementing collaborative learning styles (Wilfred, 2017) has improved students' reading comprehension. Therefore, an exploration of why there is a gap in reading achievement in similar secondary schools in a midwestern state in the United States was needed. A better understanding of the best practices of teachers whose students are more successful in reading achievement in similar secondary schools may aid teachers struggling to promote students' reading comprehension, thereby reducing the gap in practice.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was the wide disparities between reading test scores of secondary students in demographically similar schools in a state in the midwestern United States. This problem represented a gap in practice because the literature revealed that well-prepared teachers could effectively reach secondary students (see Clark et al., 2017; Mawyer & Johnson, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the strategies used by secondary reading teachers whose students outperform others on state tests and identify best practices other schools can use to raise reading performance.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do secondary reading teachers whose students outperform on state tests describe their strategies to ensure student achievement?

RQ2: What suggestions do secondary reading teachers whose students outperform on state tests have for other schools working on raising student achievement?

Conceptual Framework

As part of the conceptual framework of this study I used Shulman's (1986, 1987) pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) theory, which provided information on the need for teachers to combine their content knowledge with their pedagogical knowledge. Shulman stated the importance of teachers being adaptable in their pedagogical approaches based on their students' needs within their content area. Shulman's PCK theory addressed how teachers can best help their students be successful by encouraging

the combination of instructional strategies. Current researchers, such as Adoniou (2015) and Shing et al. (2015), have still found PCK to be a valid theory.

Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which provided information on how and why people appear to be self-efficacious in their respective fields, also informed the study. I combined Shulman's theory with elements of Bandura's theory because I wanted to understand how teachers use their knowledge to teach reading and how teachers' experiences may be influenced by their confidence and the effectiveness of their instructional choices. The two theories were appropriate to use as the conceptual framework for the current study because I wanted to discover the best practices of teachers with successful students and how the practices related to their experiences and instruction.

Nature of the Study

To answer the research questions about teachers' experiences with teaching reading, I used a basic qualitative approach to better understand why similar demographic secondary schools have differing reading achievement levels. Following Yildiz and Arici's (2021) interview protocol, I asked the participants open-ended questions during one-on-one, semistructured interviews using an online conferencing system, such as Zoom. The interview questions were informed by PCK theory and created with my committee's approval. The 10 participants were secondary English teachers from higher scoring secondary schools in a midwestern state in the United States. I first identified low- and high-performing schools and then interviewed teachers from the higher performing schools to determine the successful practices in these schools when teaching

reading. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed for data analysis to identify emerging categories and themes.

Definitions

PCK: The combination of teachers' content knowledge and teacher pedagogy to form best instruction practices (Shulman, 1986, 1987).

Theory of self-efficacy: The belief that an individual can achieve a goal or task usually influenced by past experiences, observation, persuasion, and emotion (Bandura, 1997).

Assumptions

I assumed all participants answered the interview questions truthfully and to the best of their abilities. Another assumption was that the teachers interviewed provided knowledgeable insight into best practices for reading instruction in secondary schools. I also assumed that the participants could explain the techniques and strategies implemented in the classrooms that they believed contributed to their students' success in reading achievement. These assumptions aligned with the basic qualitative approach taken to address the target population of secondary reading teachers in a midwestern state in the United States.

Scope and Delimitations

Within secondary schools, there is a great deal of pressure for students to succeed, particularly in reading. With this pressure comes a great deal of stress on teachers to improve their students' reading achievement. After reviewing the reading data provided by DESE, *Public School Review*, *Niche*, and NAEP, I concluded that many secondary

students were not reaching the reading levels for their grades. Typically, students with similar socioeconomic status achieve similar reading levels (León, 2022). However, I found a disparity between similar secondary schools in reading achievement in Missouri, which suggested that exploring current practices in reading instruction in the state was warranted to understand the struggles of students mastering reading comprehension. Using the PCK model and Bandura's self-efficacy theory as the conceptual framework allowed me to gather information on Missouri secondary teachers' educational and teaching background, content knowledge on teaching reading, and methods of meeting students' needs while instructing. The results of this study could help researchers, teachers, and school administrators in Missouri make more informed decisions or adjust teacher pedagogy to promote higher reading achievement among secondary students. In addition, the results of this study could lead to positive social change by being applied to educators' practices to improve students' reading achievement, setting the students up for success.

I reviewed and analyzed the PCK of the Missouri English teacher participants regarding their experiences and practices of instruction. The scope was limited to secondary English teachers in Missouri whose students were more successful on reading assessments and, therefore, had higher reading levels. This limited scope allowed me to focus on understanding the population of teachers who better meet the needs of their students.

The study findings may be transferable to other states or teachers who struggle with teaching reading because this is an issue across the United States. However, the

findings may not be transferrable to younger students because younger students have less development in their frontal lobes (Sung et al., 2021). The self-reported data focused on secondary English teachers' experiences and practices. I used the PCK and Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as lenses through which to frame the participants' reported experiences and practices. To aid transferability and mitigate researcher bias, I used a basic qualitative interview protocol (see Appendix B). I also asked the participants to review their statements after the fact to verify the accuracy of the data collected.

Limitations

A possible limitation of this study was the sample size of 10 participants (see Chou, 2018). Qualitative studies require more time for data collection, and this was a challenge in the current study (see McGrath et al., 2019). I made efforts to ensure that the materials were organized, the audio recording of the online conferencing system was prepared, and conducted the interviews. Another possible limitation could be the lack of truthful and honest responses during the interview process. I attempted to mitigate participant dishonesty by ensuring their confidentiality. According to Stahl and King (2020), credibility can be established by the researcher's consistency with data collection, analysis, and reporting results.

Significance

This study was significant because it filled a gap in practice related to better understanding how teachers' knowledge and effectiveness may influence their students' achievement when a similar curriculum is used. For example, the literature indicated that similar demographic schools should produce the same or similar student achievement

(León, 2022), but the local setting indicated otherwise. A better understanding of this phenomenon may positively affect school administrators, parents, students, teachers, and the community.

Summary

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the perceptions of secondary English teachers in Missouri regarding their PCK in teaching reading comprehension strategies. I analyzed how teachers use their PCK for differentiated instruction to set up students for success in their reading achievement, focusing on teachers' development and the foundation of their capabilities in teaching reading, identifying areas of improvement in teaching content, and explaining factors that contribute to the higher performing reading achievement of state and national assessments. In Chapter 2, I will review the extant literature related to the research problem.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Reading is essential for learning, which should be a significant concern for instructors and parents. The Programme for International Assessment (PISA) has shown that students in the United States average lower reading achievement than their counterparts in other affluent countries (León et al., 2022). The U.S. Department of Education (1998, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2022) revealed that students in a midwestern state score within the middle range of the reading assessments. The latest assessment in the same midwestern state revealed that students score at 45% proficiency in English language arts (Missouri DESE, 2020). When looking further into the research, I discovered that secondary schools of similar socioeconomic status had a wide range of reading achievement on state assessments, ranging from 40% to 82% reading proficiency. This revealed a gap in practice. The purpose of this study was to discover what methods and strategies English teachers in higher achieving schools use through the lens of PCK (Shulman, n.d., 1986, 1987) and the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). I hope a deeper understanding of the experiences and practices of the English teachers whose students outperform others of similar demographics may help other teachers throughout the midwestern state and other states develop their practices and lessen the reading gap.

The following literature review contains multiple sections. In the first section, I discuss the study's conceptual framework, which consists of Shulman's (n.d., 1986, 1987) PCK and Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy. In the second section, I synthesize the literature on the knowledge necessary for secondary English teachers to

positively influence their students' reading achievement. The third section contains an explanation of other possible influences on students' reading achievement.

Literature Search Strategy

To conduct the literature review, I searched various databases, primarily those accessible through the Walden University Library, for articles related to reading, PCK, self-efficacy, and possible methods and strategies to address the problem. The keyword search terms used included *reading*, *pedagogical content knowledge*, *content knowledge*, *teacher knowledge*, *teacher experience*, *strategies*, *methods*, *techniques*, *interventions*, *best practice*, *approaches*, *teacher*, *educator*, *instructor*, *reading levels*, *reading achievement*, *secondary school*, *middle school*, *high school*, *secondary education*, and *self-efficacy*. Some of the literature located was published before the last 5-year window required by Walden University, but these works contained valid information that provided value to the study. I determined that the rich information could be used and discussed in the literature review. A review of the studies revealed previous research on reading PCK, and its components, including self-efficacy; however, many studies were limited by country or age and did not address U.S. secondary reading teachers' PCK. My review of the studies showed there was limited extant research on the reading PCK and self-efficacy of secondary reading teachers in the United States.

Conceptual Framework

A teacher's self-efficacy in reading PCK instruction includes their content and pedagogical knowledge awareness of every student's needs. I used this knowledge to explore the experiences and practices of secondary reading teachers in a midwestern state

in the United States. First, using a basic qualitative interview protocol, I asked teachers to describe their best practices ideas. I then used the research and public information on students' achievement to create a triangulation. Finally, those data sources were combined to better understand how reading PCK and teacher self-efficacy affect students' reading achievement in a midwestern state.

PCK

It is difficult to understand why teachers are not viewed as professionals in the United States, but they should be (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Not only do teachers understand their profession, but they can also explain it to others (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Teachers are professionals who can explain what they are teaching, how to understand it, and why the students should know the materials (Adoniou, 2015; Shulman, 1986). During medieval times, the highest level of achievement in education was demonstrated by teaching the subject to others, and today, the highest level of educational achievement is completed through an oral defense of the subject matter (Shulman, 1986). Therefore, teachers should be viewed and treated as the professionals they are throughout society (Adoniou, 2015; Shulman, 1986).

Because teachers are professionals who understand their subject and how to teach it, they should be able to form their standards away from political or outside influence (Shulman, 1986). Testing teachers' knowledge and abilities through the outside influence of standards is not a new concept (Shulman, 1986). An example of a teacher examination from California in 1875 tested about 90%–95% on content knowledge and only 5%–10% on pedagogy in contrast with a teacher assessment from 1985 that focused on teaching

procedures over content knowledge (Shulman, 1986). This shows how a shift in influences from outside sources, such as political ones, should not be the guiding force in educational standards (Adoniou, 2015; Shulman, 1986, 1987) because these sources do not fully understand education and how teachers must not separate content knowledge from pedagogical knowledge (Shulman, 1986). When professional educators can create standards, society will benefit from the best teaching practices to better the future through more knowledgeable youths.

When society views teachers as professionals who influence the future of society, then great care will be taken when forming teacher evaluations. Professional educators should carefully develop teacher evaluations (Adoniou, 2015; Shulman, n.d., 1986, 1987) and let the combination of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge guide them (Shing et al., 2015). Teachers must adjust to fit the needs of the students (Shing et al., 2015), which means that evaluation scales rating teachers are incomplete because they might not correlate with the "form of the lesson being organized or delivered" (Shulman, 1987, p. 6). Society should have high standards of the teaching profession without standardization and without requiring the most intense evaluations imaginable because that leads to "injuring the teaching profession" (Shulman, 1987, p. 11). Blending content and pedagogical knowledge should guide educational professionals to form realistic teacher evaluations.

Perceptions and beliefs influence teachers' PCK (Bandura, 1997) as much as students' academic achievement. Reading is at the heart of learning; therefore, teachers must display a strong sense of content knowledge of the English language (Adoniou,

2015) and PCK (Carney & Indrisano, 2013; George, 2011; Griffith & Lacina, 2018; Shing et al., 2015; Shulman, 1986, 1987). Teachers must use their comprehension, transformation, instruction, evaluation, and reflection of methods to evaluate their PCK, particularly in reading (Shing et al., 2015). Once teachers have assessed their PCK, they can ensure their understanding of denotations, connotations, and interpretations to apply better and evaluate their students (Shulman, 1987). With the blending of teachers' pedagogical and content knowledge, teachers can better activate schema and reading understanding in their classrooms through the development of vocabulary and concepts, metacognition, awareness of text structures and genres, and engagement (Carney & Indrisano, 2013), which should also include the use of technology (George, 2011). Teachers can most effectively help their students with these varied reading complexities through explicit instruction (Behrmann & Souvignier, 2013). Teaching reading is a complex endeavor that requires much diligence from students and teachers to improve reading by understanding PCK.

Need for Good Reading Teachers

Society has an increasing demand for students to develop the necessary academic skills to be successful in the future (Harrington & Rogalski, 2020), particularly in English (Wilfred, 2017). With 40% of students entering 4-year postsecondary programs needing to take one or more remedial courses (Harrington & Rogalski, 2020), there is a need to help secondary students achieve academic success. Accelerated learning programs for high school students have been proven to be 66% more effective in preparing students for college than traditional college-ready programs (Harrington & Rogalski, 2020). Dual-

enrollment programs are the most beneficial for secondary students (Harrington & Rogalski, 2020). Wilfred (2017) found that first-year university students needed to be academically ready and promoted collaborative learning to increase academic readiness. The collaborative learning promoted and categorized by Wilfred involves creative thinking, problem-solving skills, and decision making to increase students' academic success. Overall, there is a significant need for increasing secondary students' academic success to increase their college and career readiness.

The PISA compares countries' students and their academic achievement in reading, mathematics, and science (León et al., 2022). The PISA emphasizes assessing reading proficiency due to its significance across curriculums (León et al., 2022). Miller et al. (2016) looked at the United States, Finnish, and Irish schools to see how these countries support struggling readers to improve reading comprehension in the United States and found that the Finnish focused more on social-emotional learning and did not wait until there were developmental concerns; teachers met weekly with an administrator for discussions, and interventions' success was not measured by individual skills but by overall reading performance. Miller et al. stated how Ireland wants students to be happy and social by focusing on the entire class over the individual. The researchers also discussed how the United States was data driven but needed to increase collaboration with teachers, parents, and administrators. With these ideas in mind, the United States can learn best practices from other countries whose students are doing well on reading assessments.

Teachers need to understand the basic constructs of language to effectively teach reading (Lin & Jiar, 2018; Porter et al., 2022). Some basic language constructs include phonemic awareness, letter–sound correspondences, decoding, spelling, regular and irregular high-frequency words, fluency, and comprehension (Porter et al., 2022). These elements contribute to the PCK that reading teachers need to successfully impart their knowledge to their students (Porter et al., 2022). Some elements, such as spelling, have been considered outdated, but spelling matters because it impacts reading and writing and helps students develop their encoding and decoding (Templeton, 2020). There are three layers to teaching spelling: visual, semantic, and etymologic (Templeton, 2020). Overall, literacy knowledge of the English language and basic constructs of the English language are needed for teachers to teach reading successfully (Lin & Jiar, 2018; Porter et al., 2022).

Not all teachers will be successful because there can be a substantial learning curve (Stevens, 2020), but teachers must take the time to learn for their students' sake. The United States should increase its teacher training through explicit instruction and clinical practice to increase students' overall knowledge of English, especially in encoding and morphology (McMahan et al., 2019). Because decision making is important for reading teachers (Griffith & Lacina, 2018), they should assess their students' reading progress through standardized tests and/or individual informal observations (Griffith & Lacina, 2018; International Reading Association, 2000). Teachers should use a variety of methods, approaches, and philosophies at different times; introduce new and difficult material by large group/direct instruction; and proceed to small group and individual

instruction and practice because teachers should know when to allow things to be student led or teacher led (International Reading Association, 2000). By having the freedom to assess and decide what is best for students (Griffith & Lacina, 2018), teachers will become more knowledgeable, leading to more successful students (McMahan et al., 2019).

Teaching Reading Strategies and Methods

When teachers activate prior knowledge and explain learning strategies in the reading classroom, students improve their reading skills. Because reading comprehension leads to students' academic success, teachers must understand the vital role of activating students' prior knowledge in their reading comprehension success (Lemov, 2017; Magnusson et al., 2019; Rosenstein et al., 2020). Activating prior knowledge creates connections between the students and the text, which leads to an increase in students' overall knowledge of facts that will set them up for future professional success (Lemov, 2017).

Along with activating prior knowledge, teachers must consider and value the importance of vocabulary and syntactic knowledge in reading comprehension (Rosenstein et al., 2020). Additional suggested reading comprehension learning strategies include read–write–discuss–revise (Lemov, 2017), modeling and sequencing (Magnusson et al., 2019), framing and contextualization (Magnusson et al., 2019), and semantic reading (Rosenstein et al., 2020). All strategies used in the reading classroom need to be introduced with explicit instruction and a thorough explanation if the students are to successfully use the reading comprehension strategies (Magnusson et al., 2019).

Activating prior knowledge appears to be at the core of instructional strategies for the reading teacher, but a variety of strategies can be used successfully in the reading classroom if adequately introduced to the students through direct instruction.

Reading comprehension strategies that should be used with struggling learners can also be applied to every student in every secondary classroom. Some reading comprehension strategies that should be used with secondary students with learning disabilities that can also be applied to other classrooms include activating prior knowledge, generating questions, visualizing, summarizing, identifying key details, analyzing, and synthesizing to identify important information (Poch & Lembke, 2018). Another reading comprehension approach teachers are encouraged to use is writing a topic sentence, identifying important information, numbering the pieces of identified information, developing sentences, organizing sentences using transition words, and writing an ending sentence (Asaro-Saddler et al., 2018). Data mining has been used with struggling readers to improve English reading teaching in college (Wan, 2022). Wan (2022) suggested starting easier and then teachers will know when to slowly increase the difficulty by constantly assessing their students' reading abilities. The same strategies that can be used in every classroom, regardless of the subject, should be emphasized with struggling students and students with disabilities. Giving students various methods to understand reading increases the students' likelihood of success (Asaro-Saddler et al., 2018 ; Lemov, 2017; Magnusson et al., 2019; Poch & Lembke, 2018; Wan, 2022).

Reading for learning is difficult for many students, but teachers can help mitigate the struggle by using strategies proven to promote students' understanding of texts.

Suppose teachers use explicit instruction to set clear reading objectives through guided questions, graphic organizers, note frames, summarizing, promoting writing strategies, and constantly assessing; in that case, students can better understand the expository or complex text they are reading (Roehling et al., 2017). Using picture books with any of these strategies can also help struggling readers, especially those in middle school (Hodges & Matthews, 2017). It is also imperative for teachers to remind students that reading is not a solitary endeavor but something that should be enjoyed and shared with others to promote interaction with each other and the text (Heron-Hruby et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2020; Xiaomei Sun, 2021; Yu & Zhang, 2022).

Developing a student-centered classroom helps facilitate these interactions through shared book reading (Sun et al., 2020) or the interactive reading model where the students are the protagonists and the teachers are the leaders (Yu & Zhang, 2022). These strategies can improve effectiveness and increase students' motivation and interest (Yu & Zhang, 2022) while simultaneously promoting autonomy and deeper learning through discussions and debates (Hodges & Matthews, 2017) that arise with student-centered methods. Another student-centered discussion method is using Socratic circles that promote specific student roles within the discussion (Xiaomei Sun, 2021). Teachers can use student-centered models appropriate for their classrooms to lead their students to a deeper understanding of reading for learning.

Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognition is a growing idea in education, and how it can be used to improve reading comprehension by implementing cognitive activities in the classroom (Lin Wu,

2019; Muhid et al., 2020; Varga, 2017). Lin Wu (2019) studied the metacognitive awareness of reading and reading comprehension of seventh and eighth graders in China. Lin Wu found significant correlations between students' gender, household income, teacher qualification, teacher experience, and reading comprehension. Because of individuals, families, and teachers' significant influence on reading comprehension, teachers need to improve their content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Lin Wu, 2019).

Reading comprehension is the key to learning (Muhid et al., 2020), and metacognitive strategies have been shown to improve reading comprehension (Muhid et al., 2020). Some metacognitive strategies that have proven to help 11th-grade students are advanced organizers, organizational planning, selective attention, self-management, comprehension monitoring, production monitoring, self-assessment, self-evaluation, and self-reflection (Muhid et al., 2020). Classroom discussions have also been found to promote the development of metacognitive skills (Varga, 2017). Using a Socratic question scheme has been shown to promote interaction between the text and the reader (Varga, 2017). Implementing metacognitive strategies into teachers' daily reading comprehension routines can improve their students' understanding (Lin Wu, 2019; Muhid et al., 2020; Varga, 2017). Reading teachers should adapt metacognitive strategies to their daily routine to promote best practices and classroom self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to succeed in various situations. A person's self-efficacy influences their control over their lives through motivation, overall

well-being, and personal accomplishment (Bandura, 1997). Although the sources of influence on self-efficacy are multifaceted, Bandura developed four main components of influence: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and emotional states. Developing a high sense of self-efficacy promotes many benefits to a person's life, including reduced stress, resilience, improved educational achievement, positive mental health status, and improved employee performance/status (Bandura, 1997). In addition, a positive sense of self-efficacy can improve a person's overall quality of life.

Teachers who have a sense of positive self-efficacy positively influence their students' reading achievement. Reading faculty can develop their teachers' self-efficacy during training, which will help prepare them for their future careers (Alan & Amaç, 2021). Maintaining a positive sense of self-efficacy throughout teachers' careers leads to the belief that all students can learn, improves collaboration, and engages students in their learning (Schmid, 2018). Self-efficacious teachers have better behavior management skills, set clear expectations, and create a positive classroom environment, which leads to improved student achievement (Acuña & Blacklock, 2022). A positive sense of self-efficacy improves not only a person's teaching but also their life.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

Preservice Teachers and Teacher Preparedness

Given teachers' significant role in students' learning, it can be understood that teacher preparedness plays a role in students' success. Preservice teachers must have a well-developed understanding of their content before they hope to impart knowledge to their students (Moon et al., 2019). With that in mind, preservice teachers need to develop

their literacy in math, science, or social studies (Hudson et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2019). Berger (2019) conducted a study of preservice math teachers in South Africa and found that they struggled with content knowledge, particularly reading math text. Berger discovered that reading to understand promoted the best outcome for the preservice teachers while the "avoider" was the worst and resistant to learning. Not only do these findings represent the need to increase teachers' content knowledge and literacy, but they also show an accurate representation of issues dealt with in each classroom setting.

There is a growing need to increase literacy among preservice teachers within their subject matter to impart their knowledge to their students successfully. Teachers must have pedagogical and content knowledge to teach successfully and have successful students (Moon et al., 2019). Because of this, teachers need to increase their spelling, grammar, punctuation, and phonics (Hudson et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2019). Moon et al. (2019) and Hudson et al. (2021) found a call for preservice teachers to undergo training in content areas and content literacy coursework. Because "well-designed materials and curriculum cannot replace teacher knowledge and does not fix any misunderstandings" (Hudson et al., 2021, p. 89) that preservice teachers and teachers may have, there is a need to increase teachers' pedagogical content knowledge.

Teacher training is paramount in increasing teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. On the other hand, teacher training is the most important aspect of students learning to read (Clark, 2017). Therefore, preservice teachers need better training with a balance of content knowledge and pedagogical components of reading instruction (Clark, 2017). Within teacher training programs, it is also recommended to have more in-class

experience (Jordan et al., 2018) to promote this balance of content knowledge and pedagogy. With more training and experience, preservice teachers can better help their future students succeed.

Technology and Reading

Technology has changed the way teachers teach. Teachers are rediscovering what literacy means in this digital age because databases provide more resources than were previously unavailable (McLean Davies et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has also contributed to a greater dependency on technology in education (Ata et al., 2021). Therefore, the need for teachers to increase their technological pedagogical content knowledge is at the forefront of education (Altun, 2019; Ata et al., 2021; Kolobe & Mihai, 2021). By promoting high-quality technological programs in the classroom and a positive attitude towards technological pedagogical content knowledge (Altun, 2019), teachers will improve students' engagement through self-paced reading exercises to increase their success in reading (Altun, 2019; Kolobe & Mihai, 2021). Because of this, those students with access to technology in the classroom will be ahead of those without access (McLean Davies et al., 2020). Technology is ever-changing, and teachers need to be aware of how this can positively affect their students' academic success, particularly in reading.

Technology is something that teachers can use to enhance students' motivation and feedback time. Many online reading programs target the most at-risk students who are struggling readers (McCarthy et al., 2020; McCray et al., 2018). Online programs can support motivation through a positive environment of individualized feedback, a

personalized reading selection, and immediate feedback (McCarthy et al., 2020; McCray et al., 2018). Online reading programs are continuously improving, and they are something that reading teachers should pay attention to help improve their students' motivation.

Using various technologies in the classroom can help students stay engaged and reinforce concepts taught in class. Olagbaju and Popoola (2020) found that audio-visuals improved reading comprehension and retention for secondary students in Gambia, especially if teachers used WhatsApp and YouTube. Likewise, Meunier et al. (2019) investigated teachers using the Actionbound open educational resource with fifth-year primary students in Belgium. They found that it promoted digital literacy skills and professional learning communities for teachers. Games are another technology that teachers can include in their classrooms to help with reading and immediate feedback (McTigue & Uppstad, 2019). However, teachers should not assume that students know how to use the technology and should understand that computer games do not replace teaching but promote good practice for students after they have learned concepts (McTigue & Uppstad, 2019). Teachers need to ensure that the technology used in their classroom aligns with their pedagogical and content goals to successfully implement technology use in the classroom (McTigue & Uppstad, 2019). Successfully using different technologies in the classroom relies on the teachers' understanding of technology combined with pedagogical and content knowledge.

Teachers' understanding and attitudes toward using technology in the classroom directly affect the inclusion or exclusion of educational technology. Vongkulluksn et al.

(2020) surveyed secondary teachers in the United States about their beliefs and perceptions of technology and found that time and cost were the most significant influences on opinions. If teachers believe the technology is not worth the time and money, they will not include it in their classrooms (Vongkulluksn et al., 2020). If teachers value technology in the classroom, they will include it in lessons (Vongkulluksn et al., 2020), but teachers may need more training for using online resources (McGrew & Byrne, 2022). Areas to improve teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge include instructional support, technical support, educational human resources, online pedagogy and assessment, and better collaboration (Sahrir et al., 2022). Because teachers' attitudes and understanding of technology affect how and how often technology is implemented in the classroom, teachers need to increase their comprehension to increase their students' success and motivation in reading.

Motivation

Students' motivation is crucial to their academic success, particularly in reading. In addition to the need for students to be motivated, teachers also need to be motivated. Leech and Haug (2019) found that teachers with higher intrinsic motivation have students who are more successful in reading. Most of the time, the motivation to read is based on the value of reading (Simmons et al., 2022). If teachers can help improve students' competence and related beliefs, they can improve their values of the tasks (Rosenzweig et al., 2018); this can predict students' engagement in reading (Rosenzweig et al., 2018). Therefore, teachers must develop ways to help their students increase their motivation.

Through best practices, teachers can help students increase their motivation to learn, which leads to a positive sense of self-efficacy. Concept-oriented reading instruction is one method to help with students' motivation and reading comprehension (Rosenzweig et al., 2018). This is one way to help students better understand new concepts through this active learning strategy and promote the desire to learn more (Rosenzweig et al., 2018). Students with more motivation are more likely to take rigorous courses (Simmons et al., 2022). Because the selection of classes students take starting as early as sixth grade can set them up for future success or difficulties, there is a need to take rigorous courses (Simmons et al., 2022). Motivation contributes significantly to teachers' and students' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Students will likely not be academically successful without the motivation to read, but teachers can help promote and improve motivation through their practices.

Reading Literacy in Other Subjects

Because there is a need for English teachers to be self-efficacious in their pedagogical content knowledge, there is the same need for every teacher of every subject to be self-efficacious in their pedagogical content knowledge. For example, science and social studies are two prominent subjects in which students can struggle with literacy due to the nature of the expository text (Mawyer & Johnson, 2019). In addition, developing students' spelling of vocabulary words within subjects has increased their knowledge of meanings (Mawyer & Johnson, 2019; Scammacca & Stillman, 2018). Therefore, teachers of subjects other than English must develop their teaching of reading comprehension strategies and all of its components, particularly in science and social studies, to ensure

their students' understanding of the subject matter (Mawyer & Jonson, 2019; Scammacca & Stillman, 2018; ter Beek, 2018).

When teachers increase their pedagogical content knowledge, they feel more self-efficacious, influencing their instruction process and improving student understanding (ter Beek, 2018). Some effective meta-analysis learning strategies implemented by secondary history teachers have been orienting, planning, evaluating, activating prior knowledge, defining difficult words, identifying main ideas, summarizing, reflecting on text, expectation strategies, adjustment strategies, and motivating strategies (ter Beek, 2018). Some effective strategies for secondary science teachers that help with literacy instruction are annotation, identifying important ideas, utilizing text structure and features, making inferences, and skimming (Mawyer & Johnson, 2019). English teachers can easily use these common strategies in other subjects, including science and social studies.

There is an increase in learning through reading in the middle grades (Stevens et al., 2020), and because of this, all teachers must be well-versed in their pedagogical content knowledge and teaching reading comprehension (Cheng-Chieh Chang, 2021). There is also an increase in reading via the internet, which can increase the difficulty for students due to nonlinear reading (Cheng-Chieh Chang, 2021). Internet reading can be more interactive, immediate, and aggregated and may provide accessible characteristics, which leads to an increase in scanning, keyword spotting, and reading selectively (Cheng-Chieh Chang, 2021). One strategy to help with this is using e-books that can be used for a much deeper exploration of the text (Cheng-Chieh Chang, 2021). Another

effective reading comprehension strategy middle-grade teachers use is question generation (Stevens et al., 2020). Students can create question logs when they pause throughout their reading to ask a question, find the answer, and then support it with evidence from the text (Stevens et al., 2020). Another strategy for developing teachers' literacy approaches in various subjects is implementing disciplinary literacy (Smit & Millett, 2021). Smit and Millett (2021) found that after a U.S. Army Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps sergeant underwent literacy training, he could combine discipline and literacy strategies into the U.S. Army Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps program, which increased his students' literacy. All teachers must understand that content knowledge must accompany general reading knowledge (Cai & Kunnan, 2018) for their students to succeed.

Reading to learn accompanies all subject matter, leading to the inseparability of content knowledge and reading knowledge (Cai & Kunnan, 2018); therefore, teachers must combine their content knowledge with pedagogical knowledge to confidently lead their students to success (Luque et al., 2020). Luque et al. (2020) looked at Spain's reading, math, and science teachers to evaluate their efficiency guided by examples from the PISA assessment. Luque et al. found that teachers must maximize their outputs by enhancing teacher input in reading, math, and science. Furthermore, reading to learn and reading comprehension is something that all students must understand; therefore, all teachers of every subject need to fully understand their content knowledge as well as reading pedagogical knowledge (Cai & Kunnan, 2018; Cheng-Chieh Chang et al., 2021;

Luque et al., 2020; Mawyer & Johnson, 2019; Scammacca & Stillman, 2018; Smit & Millett, 2021; Stevens et al., 2020; ter Beek, 2019).

Professional Development/Professional Learning

New and experienced teachers may need to be more efficacious about what they are teaching and/or how they teach, but pedagogical content knowledge helps with this. To help teachers integrate reading and writing into their curriculums and help with scaffolding, more practice and professional development are needed to help teachers effectively (Deshmukh et al., 2022; Doubet & Southall, 2018). Thai English teachers found that professional learning communities helped improve their knowledge, skills, and attitudes and improved their ability to teach English (Mejang & Suksawas, 2021). Likewise, expert teacher workshops were used for Chinese turnaround schools to help teachers with their knowledge, instructional skills, and professional dispositions (Liu, 2022). Liu (2022) found that teacher workshops build community and provide psychological counseling, and teachers can improve themselves or others through these experiences. Gupta and Lee (2020) interviewed fourth- and fifth-grade teachers to discover how professional development workshops impacted their classroom strategies. They found that not all workshop strategies were implemented, but the varying levels of content knowledge made it difficult to address everyone's needs. Teachers can actively increase their pedagogical content knowledge by attending workshops and conferences and joining learning communities (Gupta & Lee, 2020; Liu, 2022; Mejang & Suksawas, 2021). By participating in lifelong learning, teachers model learning for their students and can increase their success.

Schools need to invest more in the ongoing development of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge if they want to improve students' reading comprehension. Cilliers et al. (2022) found that teacher training and coaching in South Africa were 44%–55% more cost-effective when future gains were considered. Because reading comprehension strategies are not widely taught or understood by teachers in South Africa (Madikiza et al., 2018), more development in professional programs is needed. Multiple strategies must be understood for teachers to implement during the prereading, reading, and post-reading stages of teaching (Madikiza et al., 2018) to develop autonomous readers (Madikiza et al., 2018). In addition to South Africa needing to develop its teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, the United States needs to increase its teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. One way of doing that is through the professional learning of data literacy in reading and math (Filderman et al., 2021). Increasing teachers' data literacy can better address where and how their students are learning and struggling (Filderman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, schools have gone away from teaching phonics and grammar, but those schools are more at risk of failing in reading (Main et al., 2020). Teachers need to include phonics and grammar instruction to help students develop their decoding abilities and overall reading (Main et al., 2020). Developing teachers' reading strategies for implementation, data literacy, and inclusion of phonics and grammar can improve students' success in reading (Cilliers et al., 2022; Filderman et al., 2021; Madikiza et al., 2018; Main et al., 2020). Overall, teachers need to continue to develop their pedagogical content knowledge and can do so through continued professional learning.

Other Influences on Student Reading and Achievement

There are many influences to consider when assessing student achievement in reading. Reading comprehension issues could stem from foundational issues instead of fluency issues because foundational issues can create problems overall (Koriakin & Kaufman, 2017). Language comprehension equals reading comprehension (Koriakin & Kaufman, 2017), and students with low-language proficiency do not benefit from content knowledge (Min et al., 2022). Some test takers rely only on their reading ability, while others rely on reading ability and content knowledge, but the most significant predictor of achievement is a student's reading ability (Min et al., 2022). Foundational issues and overall reading ability contribute significantly to students' reading success.

In addition to foundational issues and reading ability issues, teachers and school leaders can positively or negatively affect students' reading achievement. Etim et al. (2020) studied North Carolina to see factors that negatively and positively impact students' reading and math achievement. They found that teacher turnover negatively affected students' achievement, and teacher experiences and students' daily attendance positively affected students' achievement. School leaders must constantly provide teachers feedback to give stability and evidence-based practices (Wijekumar et al., 2019). Another predictor of students' achievement is teacher rankings (Mingo et al., 2020). Because teachers know their students well due to the frequency of contact and building relationships, teachers can better predict student achievement than curriculum-based measures (Mingo et al., 2020). School leaders need to support their teachers in hopes of increasing students' academic success.

Parental involvement and respect for others' backgrounds also predict students' academic success. Children in the preschool years being read to by their parents in their mother's language is the best indicator of future success in vocabulary and linguistics, affecting overall reading success (Brooks, 2021). Once children reach primary school age and beyond, parental involvement can positively or negatively predict student success (Froiland, 2021). If parents are controlling or absent, it negatively affects student success (Froiland, 2021); if parents promote autonomy, it positively affects student success (Froiland, 2021). Teachers also act as role models for students and can help students navigate controversial and moral questions by objectively teaching different religions and worldviews (Unstad & Fjørtoft, 2021). Parents are students' first teachers and continue to influence their children's success in addition to teachers' influences.

Summary and Conclusions

Shulman's (1986, 1987) theory of pedagogical knowledge and Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy influence teachers' experiences and practices, possibly without teachers' full comprehension of why. Teachers can combine pedagogy and content knowledge to make difficult subjects easier for their students to understand (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Teachers with a positive sense of self-efficacy can influence their students for the better by promoting positivity and confidence (Bandura, 1997). Teachers must be as confident as they are in their pedagogy and their content knowledge (Adoniou, 2015; Carney & Indrisano, 2013; George, 2011; Griffith & Lacina, 2018; Shing et al., 2015; Shulman, 1986, 1987) to provide the necessary assurances to society that students are being taught from professionals who know how best to teach their students.

These professional educators must undergo the required training to be fully prepared to relay their knowledge to their future students. Once preservice teachers graduate and have their classrooms, they need to have learned the best reading strategies and methods to implement these strategies to promote student learning (Hudson et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2019). These reading strategies should include metacognition to promote student autonomy and buy-in for their learning by learning how to learn (Lin Wu, 2019; Muhid et al., 2020; Varga, 2017). By promoting autonomy, teachers can help promote students' motivation to learn (Bandura, 1977; Madikiza et al., 2018; Rosenzweig et al., 2018; Simmons et al., 2022), which will help the teachers feel more efficacious about their profession. One strategy that has been shown to help with motivation is including educational technology within the classroom (Atun, 2019; Kolobe & Mihai, 2021; McTigue & Uppstad, 2019; Meunier et al., 2019; Olagbaju & Popoola, 2020). Outside of the English classroom, teachers should also include technology, metacognition, promote autonomy, and reading strategies to promote best practices for comprehension and achievement (Mawyer & Johnson, 2019; Scammacca & Stillman, 2018; ter Beek, 2018). When teachers feel they need to learn new skills, further develop past skills, or help other teachers, they should engage in professional development or professional learning to further their careers and improve student learning and achievement (Cilliers et al., 2022; Deshmukh et al., 2022; Doubet & Southall, 2018; Liu, 2022; Mejang & Suksawas, 2021). In addition to teachers influencing student learning, parents or lack thereof, other students, student attendance, teacher turnover, and lack of fundamentals impact students' ability to read and learn (Brooks, 2021; Etim et al., 2020;

Froiland, 2021; Koriakin & Kaufman, 2017). All elements above greatly affect students' ability to learn and read, and the utmost care should be taken when considering the future of our nation and world.

With all the factors influencing student learning and reading achievement, it was unknown why students of similar socioeconomic backgrounds in a midwestern state have such a vast range of reading proficiency. I intended to discover the gap in practice and how to lessen the gap. In the next chapter, Chapter 3, I will explain my methodology, participation selection, data collection, and ethical procedures for conducting my study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teacher experiences and strategies with teaching reading in secondary schools that score well on the state assessments to understand what practices may work best with students in schools within similar demographics across the region. A basic qualitative approach was best suited to understand the participants' opinions and attitudes within their daily work lives (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, employing a basic qualitative approach allowed for using interviews to gather the participants' perceptions to understand the phenomenon's meaning.

In Chapter 3, I describe the research design, its rationale, and my role as the researcher. The chapter also includes a discussion of participant selection, instrumentation, procedures, and an analysis of the data. Finally, I review trustworthiness and the ethical procedures used for conducting interviews.

Research Design and Rationale

The two main research questions of this study are:

RQ1: How do secondary reading teachers whose students outperform on state tests describe their strategies to ensure student achievement?

RQ2: What suggestions do secondary reading teachers whose students outperform on state tests have for other schools working on raising student achievement?

To answer the research questions about teachers' experiences with teaching reading, I used a basic qualitative approach and followed the interview protocol by Yildiz and Arici (2021) to better understand why similar demographic secondary schools have differing

reading achievement levels. In one-on-one interviews held over an online conferencing system, such as Zoom. I asked 10 participants the questions listed on the interview protocol (see Appendix B). These participants were secondary English teachers from higher scoring secondary schools in a midwestern state. To recruit participants, I first matched low- and high-performing schools, and then among the matched schools, I interviewed teachers from the higher performing schools to determine their successful practices for teaching reading. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed for data analysis to identify categories for emerging themes and patterns.

Role of the Researcher

In a basic qualitative study, the researcher should construct questions in such a manner as to understand a phenomenon better (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The questions are formed by what the researcher wants to understand. The aim of this study was to understand the experiences and suggestions of secondary English teachers whose students are outperforming others of similar socioeconomic levels.

The educational setting for this study was secondary English classrooms in a midwestern state. I am a high school English teacher with no leadership role or influence over the participants. I interviewed secondary English teachers whose students outperform their counterparts in reading assessments. I did not include my employer school's setting in the interview portions of this study to avoid any potential bias or endanger the participants' confidentiality.

Being a teacher-researcher means that I needed to be vigilant in avoiding any possible biases from affecting the study's credibility, reliability, or validity. Because I

teach in similar environments as my participants, I began by acknowledging that I may have a bias when I conducted my interviews and that my participants may lack honest responses. To help mitigate this bias, I was diligent with the consistency of data collection, analysis, and reporting results (see Stahl & King, 2020). In addition, my nonverbal behavior was limited to help avoid leading questions and limiting my responses to the participants' answers. I needed to be cautious of my decisions as I worked on my study to eliminate bias as much as possible.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The phenomenon of interest was the experiences and practices of secondary English teachers whose students outperform others of similar socioeconomic levels in a midwestern state. I contacted the study site administration and teachers using email addresses and the internet. The participants' email addresses were either found on their schools' websites or were provided by other participants.

The inclusion criterion was secondary English teachers whose students outperform others of similar socioeconomic levels on national and state reading assessments in a midwestern state. The exclusion criterion was secondary English teachers whose students underperform or struggle on national and state reading assessments in a midwestern state.

When using the basic qualitative methodology, the sampling size has limits because more time is needed to collect and analyze the data than with a quantitative approach (McGrath et al., 2019). Due to the much smaller sample size nature of basic

qualitative studies, another perceived limitation could be the sample size and availability of participants who fit the narrow criteria (Chou, 2018). I determined that 10 participants were sufficient for this basic qualitative study. The sample came from midwestern schools where students outperform others of similar socioeconomic backgrounds. I first contacted administrators from the more successful schools to inform them that I would be contacting their English teachers. The email addresses from the schools' websites and other participants were used to connect with the secondary English teachers who met the inclusion criteria.

The open-ended, semistructured interviews provided an in-depth look into their practices and experiences. The limited sample size helped me to conduct the study promptly. Once I achieved data saturation, I no longer contacted other secondary English teachers who fit the inclusion criteria.

Instrumentation

Following a self-designed interview protocol, I conducted one-on-one, open-ended, semistructured interviews to determine secondary reading teachers' experiences with teaching reading in higher achieving schools in a midwestern state. My dissertation committee approved the interview questions before they were used to ensure they aligned with the research questions and conceptual framework. The interviews were audio recorded via the online conferencing tool. The audio recordings were transcribed for qualitative analysis and were used to identify categories for themes and patterns that emerged throughout the process.

Open-Ended, Semistructured Interviews

I conducted semistructured interviews and asked secondary reading teachers to describe the strategies and instruction methods that they considered their best practices. The interview questions were developed based on the literature review. A copy of the open-ended interview questions is provided in Appendix B. The interviews helped me identify the factors contributing to best practices for teaching reading to secondary students, which helped to explain how reading teachers in a midwestern state used their PCK to manage their practices.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once I discovered which schools of similar socioeconomic circumstances in a midwestern state ranked the highest in reading assessments, I contacted their administrators to inform them that I would soon be contacting their English teachers to take part in the current study. After completing this communication, I recruited 10 participants to partake in the study, using the schools' websites for teachers' email addresses and snowball sampling for additional recruitment. The participants did not receive any compensation.

Using the Zoom conferencing system was both time- and cost-effective. The technology helped me interview the participants and collect data that helped me better understand how PCK and self-efficacy affect these teachers' experiences and practices.

Once teachers who met the inclusion criterion agreed to the interviews, I reminded them of the purpose of the study and what to expect during the interview. The interview took no more than an hour of their time. I asked them to check their responses

via the transcript that I sent them for their records and accuracy. I followed the interview guidelines recommended by Seidman (2013) and Castillo-Montoya (2016) to ensure that I used a protocol and guide for my interviews (see Appendix B). I provided the open-ended interview questions to the participants beforehand via the consent form. The interviewees were asked to find a suitable location and time so that they would be in a quiet area away from distractions during the interview. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom because it allowed for the interviews to be synchronous, audio recorded, and was able to generate transcripts of the interviews after the fact.

I established rapport with my participants by welcoming them to the interview and reminding them of the purpose of the study, the expected length of time of the interview, and the interview methods. In addition, I reassured them of their confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms to protect their identities. A Microsoft Word document was used for the transcribed conversations, accompanied by a voice recorder on my computer. While conducting the interviews, I avoided bias by not allowing for expressive reactions to the participants' answers and avoiding leading questions or comments. I also avoided leading nonverbal and verbal behaviors if clarifying questions were required. The participants were reminded that I intended to gather holistic and genuine responses. The information collected described their experiences and practices regarding PCK and self-efficacy.

After the interview, I thanked the participant for their time and confirmed their contact information to send them a copy of their responses for their records. Then, I transcribed the responses and sent a copy of them to the participants. I gave the

participants 1 month to respond, and once participants could review and confirm the results, I entered the data into a Microsoft Word document. If the participants did not respond within a month of receiving the transcripts, I assumed that the information was correct and no changes were needed. Most of the participants enjoyed reading their transcripts and provided feedback.

Data Analysis Plan

I used a Microsoft Word document and Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to analyze the qualitative interviews. The data analysis program NVivo was used to detect word frequency. I used open coding to analyze the qualified teachers' responses by identifying common themes and patterns from the participants' responses. I sourced data from *Niche* and *Public School Review* to identify schools of similar socioeconomic backgrounds to identify which secondary schools scored the highest on reading assessments in a midwestern state. This information was used to determine which teachers to seek permission to interview and their email addresses were found through the schools' websites and through snowball sampling. The interview questions focused on their experiences, PCK practices, and feelings of self-efficacy.

Once the interviews were conducted, I transcribed them into a Microsoft Word document and sent them to the interviewees for a final participant check. The approved and/or adjusted checks and my notes were entered into a Word document to begin the coding process on Excel. Transcripts were entered into the same Excel document for the coding. To deduce themes and patterns, I needed several cycles of coding during which I looked for data patterns, themes, or categories for each question in the interview. The

data were used to build a narrative about how the teachers perceived their self-efficacy and use their PCK to better their students' reading achievement. Eliminating bias played a crucial role in analyzing the data. The elimination of bias was handled with integrity and ethics to ensure the study's validity by fully disclosing all the information provided during the interviews and not omitting data that presented a difference of opinion.

Trustworthiness

The lack of truthful and honest participants during the interview process might be considered a barrier to trustworthiness in this study. According to Stahl and King (2020), credibility can be established by the researcher being consistent with the collection of data, the analysis, and reporting results. Credibility was further established by having the participants review their interview transcripts for accuracy (see Seidman, 2013). I emailed a copy of the interview transcripts to the participants for their review before the reporting and coding stage of analysis. In addition, I was consistent in following the basic qualitative interview protocol and transparent with the data collection process to confirm the results (see Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

Basic qualitative studies should have the ability to be transferable and relate to similar settings (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). To ensure that this was possible, I followed the interview protocol, using the methods of Seidman (2013) and Castillo-Montoya (2016). I believe that the current study will be transferable in seeking out the best practices for teaching reading by interviewing secondary English teachers in a midwestern state to understand their experiences and practices. Fully disclosing the data collection process, how coding occurred, and the limitations help establish dependability

(Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Seidman, 2013). Establishing my credibility as a researcher and the study's dependability allows those who wish to replicate my research to do so.

Ethical Procedures

I was highly conscious of the ethical procedures throughout my study. This was imperative to maintain my integrity as a researcher as well as the integrity of my study. I did no harm, maintained the anonymity and confidentiality of my participants, provided informed consent, and had truthful and accurate participants by being consistent in my data collection and analysis (Stahl & King, 2020). The treatment of my human participants was not harmed before, during, or after my study. This included psychological and/or physical harm. I carefully reviewed the wording of my questions as well as avoided a negative or leading tone. Reassurances were given to the participants by telling them that the shared information would not be disclosed to their administration or others without their consent. If I noticed that participants were uneasy, I allowed them to cease the interview. Finally, I verbally thanked my participants for their contribution to my study.

The revealing or leaking of any identifying information about my participants will never be permitted to maintain their confidentially. My participants were assigned a number to remove identifiers during the coding phase. Data analysis did not include the names of the participants or their corresponding schools. In addition to giving numbers, I may refer to my participants as "participants" for confidentiality. Five years after the

conclusion and approval of my study, the research will be destroyed for the protection of my participants.

Obtaining informed consent (see Appendix C) from the participants was crucial for this study to maintain their protection and my own. Within the consent form, I outlined the purpose and nature of the study. A reasonable time frame of one-hour max for the interview was included to respect all participants' time. Allowing this kind of transparency dissuaded any concerns about participation in my study.

I wish to influence the pedagogy and practice of secondary English teachers in a midwestern state, so I had to attain and maintain proper and accurate information. I used field notes and participant checks via email to avoid misinterpretations, false statements, or skewed data analysis. Truthful and accurate data findings and analysis ensure the trustworthiness of my study. I presented all of this and gained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through Walden University and my approval number is 07-03-23-0986085.

Summary

This study was a basic qualitative study using open-ended interviews (Appendix B) to understand better English teachers' experiences and practices in a midwestern state. PCK and self-efficacy lenses were used to determine how these affected secondary students' reading achievement. Secondary English teachers whose students outperform others in reading achievement in similar socioeconomic schools were invited to participate. Participants who consented were interviewed in slightly less than 1-hour segments through an open-ended, semistructured interview.

Conducting a study with trustworthiness required ethical procedures and careful considerations. Trustworthiness began in the planning stages of the study and continued throughout the journey by being protective and supportive of my participants and myself. My responsibility was to ensure a safe environment that invited the participants to feel comfortable enough to produce truthful answers to attain quality data. Because ethical procedures were adhered to, questions about my study's integrity, truthfulness, validity, and accountability should not occur.

The next chapter will provide a discussion of the results of the study. This includes the setting of the study, data collection and analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. Research questions will be provided and answered in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this exploratory study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the PCK and feelings of self-efficacy of secondary English teachers in a midwestern state, which provided insight into best practices for teaching high school students reading. The two main research questions addressed how secondary reading teachers whose students outperform on state assessments describe their strategies and suggestions. These strategies and suggestions may be used for other schools looking to raise their students' achievement in reading. Data were collected from 10 participants through open-ended, semistructured interviews. A basic qualitative design was best suited for this study because it allowed the participants to explain and divulge their experiences and perceptions openly. This open dialogue provided insight into best practices for teaching reading in secondary classrooms. The participants were secondary English teachers from similar socioeconomic schools in a midwestern state. In Chapter 4, I explain the data collection and analysis processes, evidence of trustworthiness, and the findings from the study.

Setting

The setting of this study was secondary English classrooms in a midwestern state. The study took place during the summer and fall of 2023. The beginning of the school year may have influenced the number of interview participants. There were no changes to the instrumentation or the data analysis strategies due to this time frame of the study.

Demographics

Participants in this study were secondary English teachers in a midwestern state. All participants taught English classes at schools where students outperformed their counterparts in reading assessments. There were no minimum requirements for the number of years taught, and there was no age limit for participants. I sought willing participants who were honest about their experiences and practices.

Data Collection

Data collection began after I received Walden University IRB approval for this study on July 3rd, 2023. Data were collected between July and November of 2023 through audio-recorded interviews. Data collection concluded on November 9th, 2023.

Interviews

I sent email invitations to the potential participants, and three respondents initially consented to be interviewed. Through snowball sampling, I recruited seven more participants to the study. Once a convenient time for the interview was scheduled for both parties, a Zoom teleconference was scheduled, and participants were sent a meeting ID and a URL to log in to on the scheduled conference date and time. I recorded the interview audio on Zoom and saved a file to a password-protected local computer and a password-protected thumb drive after the conference. As the interviews began, I informed interviewees that their identity would remain confidential and that they may be referred to as a number or “participant” within the study. They were never referred to by name within the final storage of information.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was completed in accordance with IRB-approved interview protocols to maintain the integrity of the process. I took continued measures throughout the process to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

Open-Ended, Semistructured Interview

I followed the basic qualitative interview protocol suggested by Seidman (2013) and Castillo-Montoya (2016), and my preliminary analysis of the interviewees' responses began as a census. I reread the transcripts with no annotations or memos to become familiar with the results. The first read of the transcripts was completed so the interviews could continue to occur because there were 4 months between the first interview and the 10th and final interview. I read through the transcripts to gain a general understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions. With the second read of the transcripts, I began to recognize variations in the years of experience of the participants. With the third reading, I began to record memos and coding in an Excel spreadsheet after first trying to use the NVIVO analysis software.

The first round of coding and analysis began with looking at the transcribed Word documents. I began highlighting the questions on the Word document and then organized the Excel document with the participants' responses. Each participant had a sheet with their responses on the same Excel document. Once completed, I recorded my memos on the same Excel document. The memos I included were what I wondered, thought, was surprised by, what I might want to include in my classroom, or a comment that stood out to me as I read so that I could organize my first interpretations.

Once the memos were completed, I began the first round of coding. With the initial coding of the transcripts, I began to recognize patterns in the participants' responses. I went through the initial coding by participant and wrote a summary on the same Excel document for each participant's responses. Then, I went through a second round of coding by recording any meaning, concepts, or ideas I found based on each questions' summary. Once completed, every participant's interview was summarized in the same Excel document.

Once the coding for every interview was completed, I began organizing the codes by question and response. On a separate Excel spreadsheet, I highlighted the questions and copied the transcripts of the coordinating responses. Each participants' responses were given its own color to differentiate between the responses. Each question and coordinating response were then given its own sheet within the same Excel document. I read through every response for the given question and completed the coding by explaining the responses to the questions, providing a summary, and differentiating between participants' responses.

Results

I reported the results of this exploration of secondary English teachers' experiences and perceptions in a midwestern state through the lenses of PCK and the theory of self-efficacy. The open-ended, semistructured interview questions were guided by information provided in the literature review as best practices. I used an open coding system to identify themes and patterns that emerged from each question. Teachers who participated in the interviews are referred to as "participant" along with their

corresponding codes. This basic qualitative study sample consisted of 10 secondary English teachers in a midwestern state.

As the interviews began, the first thing I did as the interviewer was ask the participants again if they consented to be interviewed. Then, I explained to each participant that their identity would not be in jeopardy, so they would feel secure enough to be forthright in their responses. An explanation of how my series of interview questions were rooted in the conceptual framework was provided. Before moving onto the specific questions about best practices, I asked the participants four general background questions. The first question was how many years they had taught. Out of the 10 participants, the average number of years taught was 19.8 years, with 7 years being the shortest and 41 years being the longest. The second question was how many different schools the participants had taught at, with one being the least number of schools and the most common response. The highest number of schools one of the participants taught at was five different schools, and the average number of schools taught was 2.4 schools. Another background question I asked the participants was what grades and/or subjects they had taught during their years of service. All 10 participants had taught various levels and courses of high school English, and five participants also had middle school English teaching experience. The last background question I asked the participants was if their classroom instruction had changed over the years. One participant said that her instruction had not changed much over the years, and the other nine believed their classroom instruction had changed. Five participants explained how they had improved over the years and adapted their classroom instruction as necessary. These four

background questions helped the participants establish a rapport with me as an interviewer and feel comfortable enough to answer the interview questions honestly.

The first question I asked the participants about best practices was: “How do you combine your knowledge of content and your knowledge of pedagogy? What might that look like on a typical day.” All participants agreed that pedagogy and content knowledge cannot be separated because the students need to know the information, and the teachers are the experts who help them arrive at the destination; how the students get there is through pedagogy. Participant 2 said, “My knowledge of my subject helps me teach the kids what they need to know, and how the kids dictate how I present the information, so it’s kind of a combination.” Two of the participants specifically mentioned using project-based learning as a way that has helped them to combine their knowledge of pedagogy and the content. Other aspects of a typical day may include differentiation as needed, independent reading, small group reading, and whole group reading. The participants mentioned discussions as a major way of helping the students make the necessary connections between information pieces and helping them understand the historical and/or cultural knowledge of what they are reading. Remembering that secondary students still need to practice their fundamentals was also mentioned as an important part of the learning process and could be helped through engaging activities. These seemed to be the predominant ways the participants could combine their content knowledge and pedagogy on a typical day in their classrooms. Some of the aforementioned best practices appear simple at first glance but may be difficult to implement because they require experience necessary to understand what the students need and when they need them.

Figure 1 provides a concise visual representation of the perceived best ways to combine pedagogy and content knowledge on a regular basis in the classroom.

Figure 1

How to Combine Pedagogy and Content Knowledge

The second question I asked regarding best practices was: "How efficacious do you feel about your teaching? Meaning, do you feel as if you are the expert in teaching your content?" All participants felt confident in their content area but declared that teachers can always grow in the implementation process. Participant 5 said, "I feel like a braggart, but I do feel like I knew what I was doing, and I felt like the kids responded,

and we enjoyed each other's company." The students responded well to participants, which helped with the implementation process. Participant 7 claimed,

> Definitely with grammar. I mean, I am, I was teaching with a teacher, well here, and you know how the textbooks are sort of older textbooks, and there was only one grammar with answers, and she wouldn't, she had to have a grammar with the answers. So, I said, you know, give it to her. It's OK. But I'm shocked at the number of English teachers who don't know grammar because if you don't know grammar, you can't teach it properly, and it is so important to your future classes.

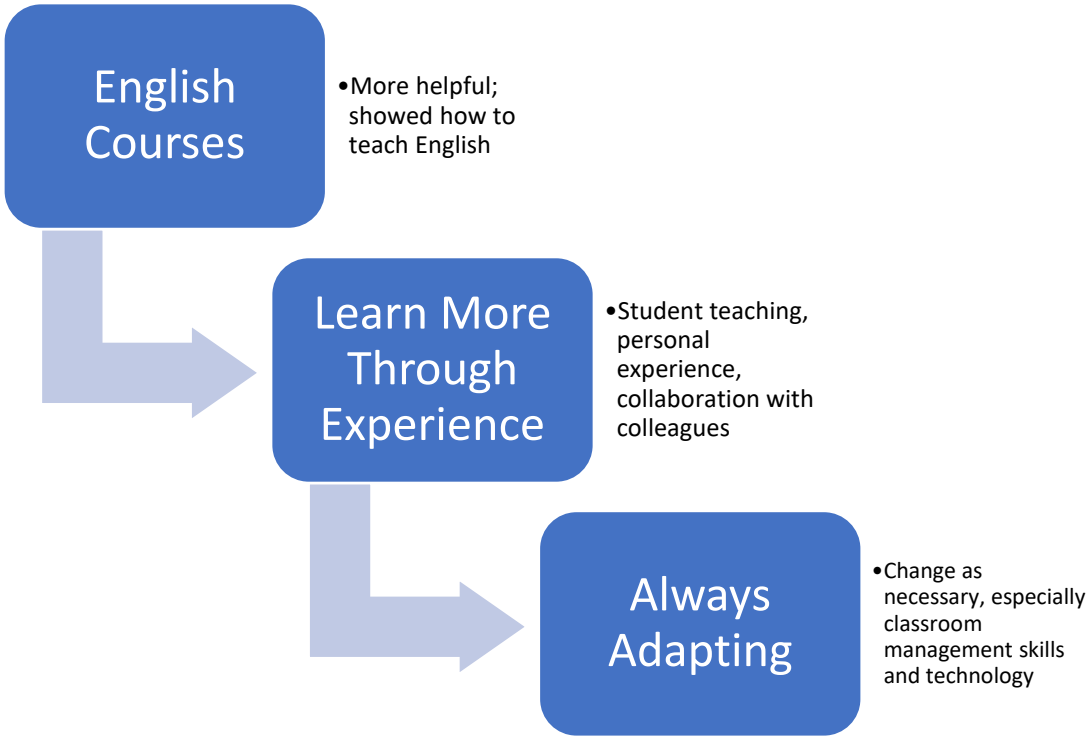
Participant 7 understands that teachers must be the experts in their content because they are the ones relaying the information to future generations. Feeling self-efficacious about your teaching content is imperative to the education profession, and this relates back to the two theories that grounded the current study: the theory of self-efficacy (see Bandura, 1997) and PCK (see Shulman, 1986, 1987). Teachers feeling confident about the content and how to teach it is necessary for students to be academically successful.

The third question I asked the participants about best practices was: "Do you feel like your college courses adequately prepared you for teaching? What do you find yourself using now that you learned while in college?" All participants claimed that they used something they had learned while in college, but they also claimed that their English courses were more helpful than their education courses. Participant 7 went so far as to say, "I had some excellent college teachers in English. My education courses were worthless." The participants recognized that it is difficult to answer this question because the education field is constantly changing, particularly with technological advancements.

Three participants specifically mentioned their classroom management college course, but one participant believed it was geared more toward elementary classes because the implementation of the practices taught did not work in her classroom. The participants agreed that student teaching, personal experience, and collaborating with colleagues were more beneficial than college courses. This finding shows how difficult it is to adequately prepare teachers for what they need to know in the field and why society must do so. One of the research questions was about developing a better understanding of best practices for teaching reading, which is why it is important to understand where teachers are finding those best practices to implement. Figure 2 is a visual representation of what the participants believe to have helped them discover those best practices for teaching reading in secondary schools.

Figure 2

What Is Useful in the Field



The fourth best practices question I asked my participants was: "In your own words, what defines a good reading teacher?" The overwhelming answer to this question was to love reading and love the students. Closely following was to make connections between the reading and the students. The participants agreed that analyzing where students are and adjusting accordingly is also very important to meet their needs. Participant 2 related teaching reading and meeting the needs of the students to brain surgery, saying,

> Reading is, teaching reading is like brain surgery. Except we can't open up the skull and see what's going on in the brain, so it might actually be harder than

> brain surgery… [s]o when you get to high school, right, the students have all taken a billion different brain pathways through their reading instruction. They all have different strengths and different holes in their instruction and different ways that their brain processes and different interests and different. I mean, by the time they get to high school, there's just like. It's almost impossible, right? Not, not completely. But it's just so difficult to, like, separate all of those strains and figure out exactly where the holes are.

One of the strategies explained to help with this is to relate the reading to real life lessons and interests of the students and sometimes process their learning out loud. In order to understand best practices for teaching reading, understanding what defines a good reading teacher is also necessary. This relates back to my second research question about what advice the teachers would offer to others who are teaching reading to secondary students. Overall, a love for reading and the students will guide good reading teachers along the right path which will help their students reach success in reading.

The fifth best practices question I asked my participants was: Could you please describe your teaching reading strategies and methods in as much detail as possible? The participants explained how the strategies and methods could vary by level and by each course they are teaching. By the time the students arrive at their secondary classes, they already understand the basics of reading. The participants described how they focused on the comprehension of the text and being able to analyze what the students had read deeply. Understanding the story's historical and cultural background knowledge is as important as vocabulary is to the students' comprehension of the text. Participant 1

described this as “frontloading” and uses it to various degrees in her classroom, depending on the students' knowledge base. It is important to remember that secondary students do not have all the background knowledge and vocabulary necessary to understand the text. Participant 9 described how the learning process was a process for her as a teacher:

> I just assumed the kids had more skills than what they had. And then I quickly learned, wait, I have to help teach some of these skills. So for me, that's a big thing that I've realized even last year was kind of a big wake-up call for me was a lot of these kids just don't have the vocabulary, and that can be a big roadblock for reading, especially more complicated texts.

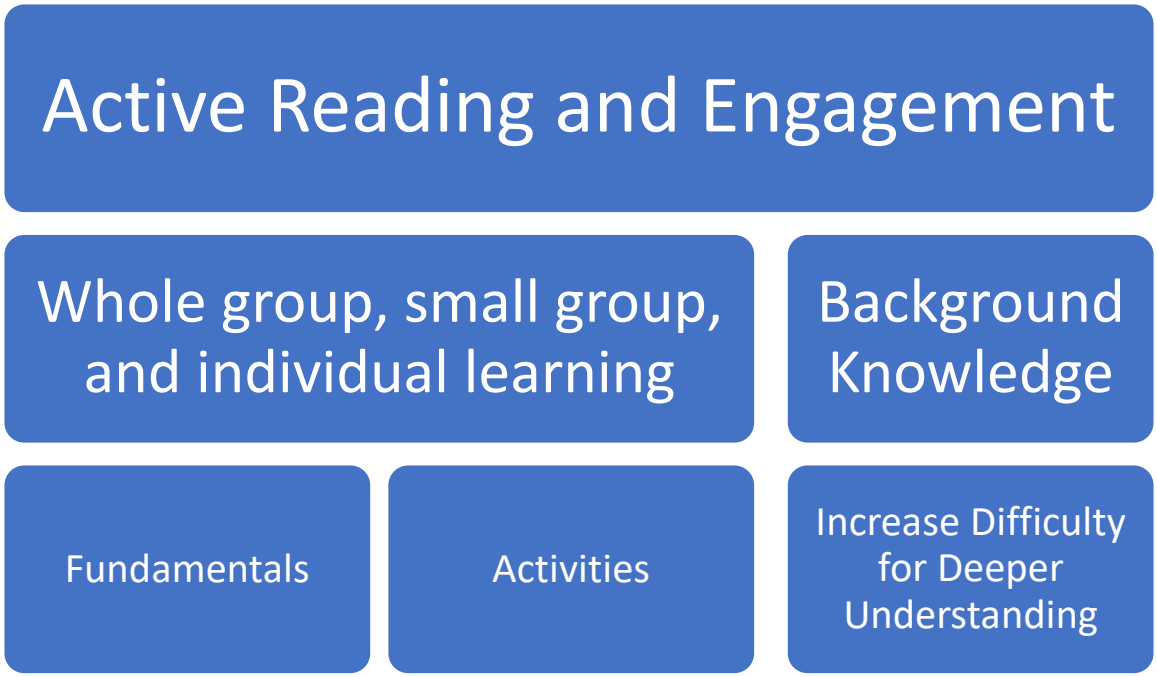
Teachers need to ensure the students’ comprehension levels of each text read. A strategy described for this is to hold the students’ accountable through questions or short quizzes. Half of the participants found that this was the central aspect of the students’ motivation. Once the teachers have focused on the text's comprehension, they can move forward to develop a deeper understanding. Participant 2 described comprehension as a movie in one’s mind and how the class can move forward afterward:

> But you know, just the comprehension is what's necessary and a lot of times, you know, I'll tell them with visualization it's, you know, it's like you got a movie going in your head. What does your character look like? And some kids have absolutely no clue that there's supposed to be a movie going on in their head as they're reading, and once they get that, then. The comprehension can start coming, so you know it's just it's being actively engaged with the text.

Actively engaging with the text helps the students' comprehension. This can be done through whole group, small group, or individual reading. The participants discussed how having discussions helps the students with comprehension and deepens their understanding as another way of holding them accountable for their reading. The participants found that actively engaging the students in the text is beneficial for the students who are not motivated by their grades. Ways to actively engage students in the text are through project-based learning, learning stations, and various activities where the students must participate. This information will help lead other teachers to discern their own practices and lead them to what is best for their students, which will help them to better understand best practices and implement them as they see fit in their own classrooms. Overall, students need to be held accountable and engaged in their learning. Figure 3 represents the responses of the participants about daily best practices for teaching reading to secondary students.

Figure 3

Daily Best Practices



The sixth best practices question I asked the participants was: Do you include any spelling, grammar, vocabulary, or other fundamental instructions regularly? If so, how do you implement them? Every participant said their instruction included spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. Spelling was not explicitly taught, but it was included as a standard, and the participants held the students accountable for spelling through the students' writing. Grammar and vocabulary were explicitly taught in all of the participants' classrooms. In the past, many schools have gone away from teaching grammar, especially in the high school setting. However, the participants found it lacking in the students' fundamentals and set out to fix the problem. Participant 2 noticed an increase in assessment scores by including grammar instruction:

> And what I have found in the past years is that grammar instruction has a direct positive impact on reading speed through reading fluency. So grammar, better grammar instruction leads to better reading fluency, which reads leads to higher reading speeds, and higher reading speeds are what is attributed to usually better test scores on things like ACT and stuff like that. Which are not the be all end all, but at the high school level, they really are important to a lot of our kids.

Participant 10 also described how her school had noticed a lack of grammar instruction and sought to fix the problem:

> And we actually only recently, in the last couple of years, went back to explicitly teaching grammar. We had moved away from it. We made a list of what it is we wanted our students to master, grammar wise, before they graduated.

Schools must include grammar in their reading instruction to help the students improve overall. Participant 7 said she noticed a difference in the students' ability to write more professionally and had higher reasoning skills through grammar instruction: "but they are professional, and they write professionally. Grammar is so important to reading, and by reading, you improve your vocabulary and your ability to reason." Grammar, spelling, and vocabulary instruction are necessary to improve students' reading abilities. The participants included this instruction primarily through daily warm-up sessions or bell-ringers. Vocabulary is generally associated with the literature and words one might expect to see on the ACT. The vocabulary warm-ups could be seen through various matching activities, using the words in sentences, or more specific activities such as the Frayer model; the students would then be formally assessed. Grammar was very similarly

implemented, with three of the participants assessing formally and all of the participants assessing grammar through the students' writing. Figure 4 represents just how important teaching fundamentals are for secondary students to be successful in reading.

Figure 4

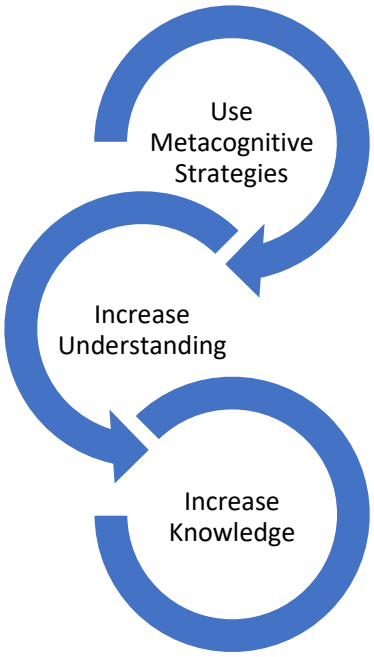
Importance of Fundamentals

The seventh best practices question I asked my participants was: Do you use metacognitive strategies in your classroom? If so, which strategies and how do you implement them? All participants explained how they regularly included metacognitive strategies in their classrooms. The participants explained how they increased the frequency of the metacognitive strategies for the younger students and struggling students. The predominant method of inclusion was through thinking aloud, primarily through guided questions and discussions. Dissecting the meaning behind the text and making personal connections helped with this. Graphic organizers, cooperative learning,

making predictions, encouraging creativity, and making revisions in writing were all specifically mentioned as a means of metacognitive strategies. Using metacognitive strategies in the secondary classroom is necessary to increase students' understanding. Increasing students' understanding will lead them to success in reading. Figure 5 shows how important it is for teachers to promote and use metacognitive strategies regularly so their students are able to increase their ability to learn.

Figure 5

Thinking About Thinking



The eighth best practices question I asked my participants was: Do you use technology in your reading classroom? If so, what technology and do you feel like it helps your students raise their achievement levels? The participants agreed that the students could quickly lose focus because of technology, so they try to make their classrooms less focused on technology and more on learning, even in one-to-one

environments. The primary use for technology was as a tool or platform, such as Google Classroom, PDFs, audiobooks, and the students' polished writing pieces. Some specific websites mentioned for the use of practice outside of the classroom were Commonlit, WriQ, and Quill.org. The use of technology for research purposes was also mentioned. When teaching stories and poems by Edgar Allen Poe, Participant 4 used technology to help set the mood of the stories:

> Now I had the only real thing I used technology for was to create the eerie music in the background, but I made the room cold, and I had the cap, the candles, and it was dark and that sort of thing. So just creating an environment that kind of feels different than normal.

There are various purposes behind the use of technology in the classroom, but overall, the participants believe that it can be more of a hindrance to learning. Participant 8 claimed:

> but I think that technology is currently more of an issue, more than it is helping them just because of how it has been utilized and everything that's available to them…I just feel like right now it's kind of being used as a crutch.

None of the participants were opposed to using technology in the classroom but were focused solely on helping the students without having technology distract them. This information is beneficial for teachers needing advice about what technology can help their students with reading.

The ninth best practices question I asked my participants was: How do your students stay motivated when reading? How do you help their motivation? All participants agreed on holding students accountable, which seemed to motivate the

students the most; this was done primarily through regular quizzes. Relating the literature to what the students understand and know was mentioned as a way of motivation because it shows the students that teachers have an invested interest in them and their well-being. Two participants discussed reward systems that they use in their classrooms. One participant used stickers as an incentive, and another had a paperchain hanging in her room to which the students could add a link once they had finished a reading achievement. These positive reinforcements were less formal and added to the relational aspect of the classrooms. Engaging in activities and projects also seemed to have an effect on students who were not motivated by grades. Student choice is a growing trend in education, but it has been found wanting. Participants 8 had added student choice to her instruction but found that students still struggled:

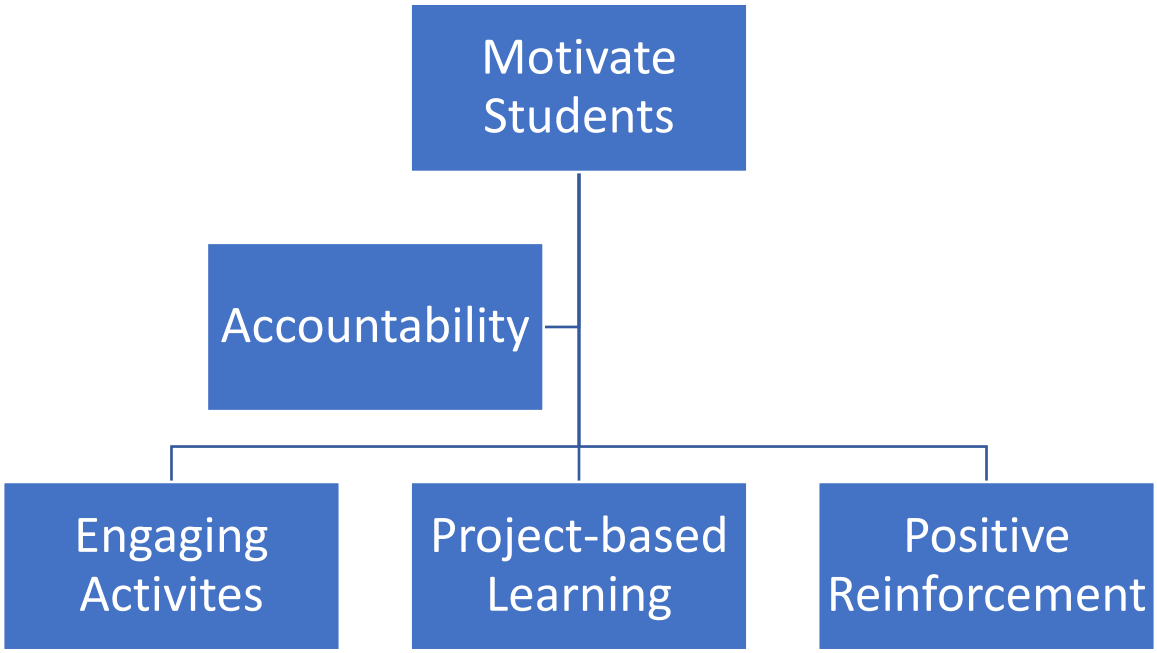
> I found that only four of, gosh, I think I only actually passed about 60 students, but only four had read it all the way through. So, given the choice to read a book that they would even be interested in, I feel like they still struggled through it. So I feel like without a grade involved or without a fun activity or a fun project that, it's really hard to motivate them.

Student choice does not appear to motivate as much as grades, activities, or a reward system. All participants described how difficult it is to motivate students and that the difficulty only increases as the students use more technology. Understanding students' needs and developing relationships with them can help teachers find ways to motivate them. Motivating students to read and learn will increase their understanding, which will

lead students to success. Figure 6 represents ways to motivate secondary students when reading based on the participants' responses.

Figure 6

How to Motivate Students



The 10th question I asked my participants was: Do you feel as if the importance of reading is reiterated in other subject areas? If so, which ones and how do they support reading? The participants believed that reading is not supported by other subjects and sometimes even discouraged by other teachers. Often, reading is only seen as an English problem because other subjects rely more on videos and lectures to relay the information to the students. For some subjects, such as math or physical education, reading may not be as applicable to students' learning, but some individual teachers have been known to the participants to support reading. Participants believed that history and science teachers have the best opportunities to support and reiterate the importance of reading with

history, which was mentioned six times, and science was mentioned three times. Overall, the participants believed that the importance of reading is something everyone should support, but they do not.

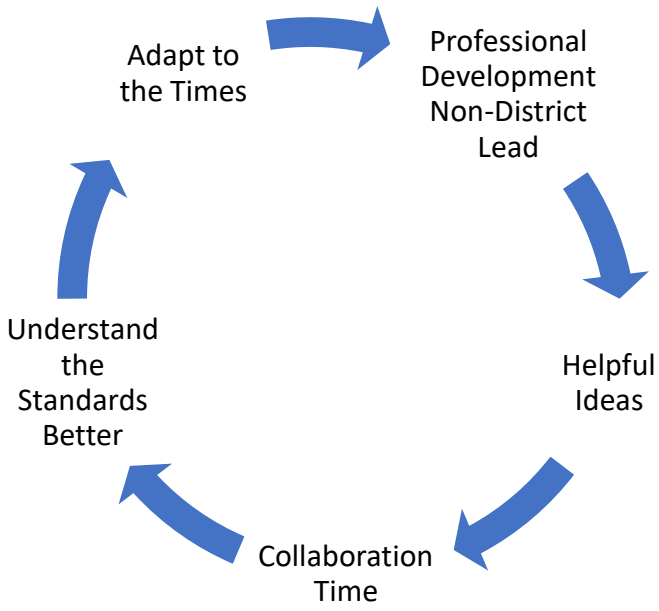
The 11th question I asked my participants was: How often do you attend professional development and professional learning specifically for reading or pedagogy? Do you feel as if these experiences have been beneficial in any way? The consensus of the participants was that the professional development held in-house was not beneficial but the conferences, videos, and readings that the teachers sought out were beneficial. Participants felt a little alone in seeking out content-specific professional development. Having opportunities to discuss and collaborate with other English teachers seemed to benefit the participants most because they felt they got the most out of those conversations. Participant 9 said:

> My best professional development is always talking to other teachers. That's the best, best way to get ideas. Best way to farm. Take a good idea from someone else, and tweak it to make it your own, and then put it into your classroom. That's, that's the best professional development that I ever did.

It appears that teachers need more time to collaborate with others who teach the same subjects and levels so teachers may learn from others what works best for their specific classes. Learning from other teachers will help to promote best practices for teaching reading to secondary students. Figure 7 provides a visual representation of professional development that benefits teachers' learning of best practices.

Figure 7

Right Kind of Professional Development



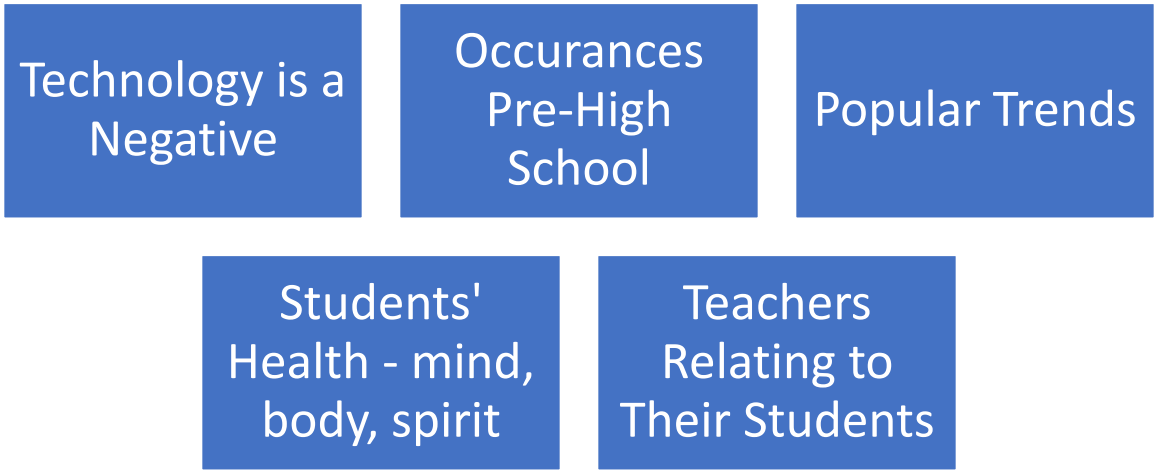
The 12th question I asked my participants was: Aside from what happens in the classrooms, what or who do you believe influences your students' reading achievement levels? Please explain. Overwhelmingly, the response was that a student's home life was the most significant outside influence on a student's reading achievement levels. Students' home lives influence what reading materials they are exposed to when they are young and what students are interested in or disinterested in learning. Home life also influences whether students become readers in elementary and middle school, which leads to the probability of students becoming readers or not in high school. Five participants exclaimed that students' peers were a heavy influence on students' reading achievement levels and wondered if students even read at all. Five participants also explicitly mentioned students' reading communities and exposure to reading materials as

influences. One participant said other teachers also contribute to students' reading achievement levels. In summation, the people involved in the students' lives influence students' reading achievement levels significantly. This is why everyone must do their part to increase students' learning and improve society.

The 13th question I asked my participants was: Are there any other factors that we have not discussed yet that you believe fluences your students' reading achievement levels? Two participants mentioned that technology has negatively influenced reading achievement levels because of the distractions it causes and how it is unhealthy. Three participants claimed that what happens leading up to high school, such as strong fundamentals and vertical alignment, greatly influences achievements. Participants mentioned what and who is currently popular amongst students twice as an influence. Another influence mentioned by two participants was the overall health and well-being of the student, mind, body, and spirit. Two participants reiterated the need for teachers to be able to relate to their students. All participants understand that many factors, both inside and outside of the classroom, affect students' reading achievement levels. Figure 8 is a visual representation of additional insights that the participants provided in regards to influences over students' achievement levels.

Figure 8

Additional Insights on Influences of Student Success



The last question I asked my participants was: Would you like to add anything else from your perspective? One participant emphasized the importance of teaching life lessons, such as accomplishing difficult tasks by making the text come to life. Two participants stated adaptability is vital for teachers as times change and students change yearly. Another participant stated that her background in special education had set her up for success in helping the struggling learners in her classes. In contrast, another participant emphasized holding students accountable so they are set up for success throughout the rest of their lives. Participant 1 claimed she had gone to school as a writer and left school as a reader. These perspectives provide insight into the experiences of best practices set in motion in schools where students outperform their counterparts on assessments.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility and Transferability

The credibility of my study was established by being consistent with my data collection, analysis, and recording (see Stahl & King, 2020). By being consistent with my basic qualitative interview protocol and data collection, I established my study's credibility (see Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). My doctoral committee and the IRB approved my open-ended semistructured interview questions to ensure all ethical standards were met. To further aid in the study's credibility of honest responses, I emailed each participant a copy of the transcripts so they could review their answers before I began the coding process. This helped ensure the legitimacy of their responses (see Seidman, 2013).

My study will be easily transferable due to my diligence in following the basic qualitative interview protocol. I further developed my study's transferability by explaining the process I went through to establish my questions, receive question approval, and the coding process.

Dependability and Confirmability

I helped to establish my study's dependability and confirmability by remaining consistent in my data collection coding process and being forthright about any limitation my study may have. I refrained from biases throughout the process by my doctoral committee's guidance, the IRB's approval, and the memos used during the coding process. Dependability and confirmability can be ensured through triangulation between

the literature review, the interview results, and public records such as state and national reading assessments.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to develop a deeper understanding of best practices for teaching reading to secondary students in a midwestern state through the perspectives and experiences of secondary English teachers at schools whose students outperformed their counterparts on state and national assessments. In this chapter, I presented information about obtaining my participants and how the data were analyzed through an open coding system. The data sources included 10 willing participants who understood the process and fit the criteria of my study. I presented detailed findings from my interviews and answered my two research questions.

In Chapter 5, I will summarize my study's key findings, interpretations of the findings, limitations, and recommendations for future studies. I will also discuss the implications this study has on a potential positive social change for teaching reading to secondary students in a midwestern state.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to deepen understanding of best practices for teaching reading to secondary students in a midwestern state through the perspectives and experiences of teachers from schools whose students outperform their peers. I found that a teacher's deep love for reading and the students' overall well-being was at the heart of students' reading achievements. Students' success in reading can also be helped through engaging activities, having deep discussions to further understanding, and holding them accountable for their learning. Increasing students' knowledge of fundamentals, such as grammar, spelling, and vocabulary, will also increase students' reading achievement levels. Teachers should incorporate life lessons by relating the text and information to students' lives. It is imperative to remember that the classroom is not the only influence on students' reading achievement levels but that a student's home life also plays a prominent role in their learning. If teachers wish to better their daily practices, then it is beneficial to collaborate with colleagues and attend professional development outside of the district. At the core of best practices for teaching reading to secondary students is a love of reading and the students as humans.

Interpretation of the Findings

The literature review in Chapter 2 aligns with the current study findings and offers a few variations. PCK, the belief that teachers must be experts in their content and how to instruct their content, was consistent with the current study results in that the participants confirmed that pedagogy and content knowledge must coincide and cannot be separated. The theory of self-efficacy was also confirmed in that the current study

participants felt confident and like they were experts in their field. Being self-efficacious leads to higher success rates in the work world (Bandura, 1997), and the participants of this study were successful in the fact that their students produced higher reading achievement levels than their counterparts.

Two slight variations from the extant literature findings made me question whether the participants found their college courses helpful and what defines a good reading teacher. All of the current study participants agreed that their English courses were helpful, but not their education courses. The variation comes in because previous researchers found how education courses can adequately prepare preservice teachers for their field. The other slight variation comes in when the current study participants explained how the two most important aspects of being a good reading teacher are love for reading and love for your students. Based on previous research, I had not considered love the most significant factor in a good reading teacher.

The participants in this study confirmed three aspects of previous research reviewed in Chapter 2. The current study participants used various strategies and methods that verified the literature review findings, such as differentiation of reading and reading instruction, having discussions to promote learning, understanding any background knowledge to be successful, and engaging in activities or projects to promote motivation. The literature review findings and the current study participants both stressed the importance of including instruction in fundamentals, such as spelling, vocabulary, and grammar, in secondary English classes. The other finding from previous research that the

current study participants confirmed was promoting metacognitive strategies in the classroom, particularly to the younger secondary students.

One slight discrepancy between previous research findings and the results of this study was regarding technology. One participant in this study mentioned the main benefit of technology being the amount of information and research available to the students, which is confirmed in previous research. However, the discrepancy lies in how the current study participants agreed that using technology in the classroom was more of a hindrance than a help. The participants viewed technology more as a necessary tool or platform but not as something where learning takes place.

Previous researchers discussed the importance of teachers and students being motivated and the importance of reiterating reading in other subject areas. Both of these findings were confirmed by the current study participants' responses. The participants agreed that motivating students could prove challenging but that holding the students accountable, including engaging in them in activities and potentially having a reward system/competition, can increase students' motivation. Participants also confirmed that there is a great need for other subjects to promote reading and that the best opportunities can happen in history and science classes but that this does not always occur.

Findings from the literature review and the participants in this study confirmed that professional development is beneficial and that students are influenced by many other factors outside of the classroom. The current study participants were specific about the outside-of-their-district professional development being helpful and the in-house professional development not being helpful because it did not pertain to their classes. The

findings in Chapter 2 and the participants in this study also confirmed that a student's home life is the primary outside influence of a student's success, but there are also many other contributing factors.

Limitations of the Study

As with any basic qualitative study, the number of participants could have been a limitation of the current study. This study had 10 volunteer participants. Another concern could be the level of honesty provided by the participants. Because I first established a rapport with participants by ensuring their confidentiality, not having any influence or power over them, and sending them the interview questions ahead of time, I believe the participants provided honest responses to the interview questions. I further diminished the limitations by providing an in-depth description of the research methodology to enhance the transferability of the study.

Recommendations

Remediating the number of participants by increasing the number of participants would be my primary recommendation, but I believe there are more ways to further this research as well. One way to expand this research would be to ask the participants to provide specific examples of what they meant by differentiation, project-based learning, and fun activities. These specific examples could provide other teachers with a platform to guide them towards better practices. Each best practices question could be further refined to gain more insight regarding specific examples in context for teachers looking to better their practices or for preservice teachers. Another recommendation would be to

see if secondary English teachers across the nation agree with the perspectives and experiences of their counterparts in a midwestern state.

Implications

There are several implications that this study could have, including an impact on positive social change. An immediate positive change could be seen in secondary English teachers who read this study because it could impact their practices or confirm what they do in their classrooms. This study could also influence preservice teachers and inform how they would like to approach their teaching eventually. When teachers implement best practices, it has the potential to positively affect the students' success. When students experience more success, they increase their self-efficaciousness regarding their learning. More students may graduate from high school and college by having positive self-efficacy, and motivated students may wish to contribute positively to society in their respective fields. The students could go on to become professionals in whatever they seek out. Although this study may seem small, it has the potential to make a positive impact on individuals and society.

Another strong implication could be for the methodologies of basic qualitative studies. Because I followed the basic qualitative study interview protocol, the validity and transferability of this study are sound. This study further proved how PCK remains a valid and credible theory within the educational field. The study findings also contribute to the belief that positive self-efficacy makes a difference in everyday life.

My recommendations for best practices would be for teachers following the examples others have set before them. My participants acknowledged how the ability to

adapt and vary instruction has proven beneficial for students' success as has relating the text to their lives and providing real-life lessons. Understanding and regularly including fundamentals, such as spelling, vocabulary, and grammar, in instruction is highly recommended for increasing students' achievements. Secondary English teachers who wish to better their practices should collaborate regularly and seek professional development that fits their needs. Teachers are not the only influences on a student's reading success, meaning that teachers should not carry all the burden when students are not as successful as teachers wish them to be. These recommendations can guide secondary English teachers to help their students become more successful in their reading achievements.

Conclusion

As students' reading achievement levels have decreased nationally, especially compared to other nations, I conducted this study because I wanted to understand what was occurring locally and how it affected students' reading achievement levels. I looked for schools in a midwestern state where students had higher reading achievement levels than their peers and wanted to understand what their teachers did differently that benefited the students; therefore, PCK and the theory of self-efficacy were used as the conceptual framework. Through these lenses, I found previous research about best practices for teaching reading to secondary students. The additional insight provided by the participants' experiences and perspectives proved incredibly enlightening and beneficial.

Rooted in best practices for teaching reading to secondary students is love. A love for reading and a love for the students have guided the participants in this study to seek out the best ways to help their students increase their achievement levels, self-worth, and a love for reading. Love taught the participants to relate the complicated text to the students' lives while teaching them difficult life lessons. Love guided the participants to collaborate and better understand how to teach their students. Love reminded the participants of the importance of fundamentals in English. Love led the participants to develop engaging activities and provided a platform for discussions where students feel safe enough to learn. A love of reading and a love for the students will guide secondary English teachers to their own best practices.

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Appendix: Interview Guide for Open-Ended Best Practices Interview

Exploring the Experiences and Practices of Midwestern High School English Teachers

Research Questions:

RQ1: How do secondary reading teachers whose students outperform on state tests describe their strategies to ensure student achievement?

RQ2: What suggestions do secondary reading teachers whose students outperform on state tests have for other schools working on raising student achievement?

Phenomenon of Interest

The phenomenon of interest is focused on how secondary English teachers in a Midwestern state explain why their students outperform their counterparts throughout the state by explaining teaching best practices.

Introduction to Interview

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my best practices research. I want to begin by saying that is no correct answer to any of the questions you will be asked. The study is seeking your perspective as a way to better understand best practices for teaching English within secondary classrooms so that others may learn from your best practices. This interview will take approximately one hour to take. This interview will be completely anonymous and confidential. Are you ready to begin?

Interview Questions

Introductory Questions	Let's begin by discussing some basic background information if you don't mind. How many years have you taught?

	How many schools have you taught at? What grades and/or subjects have you taught during your years of service? After teaching for _____ years, has your classroom instruction changed?
Transition Questions	Thank you. I would like to move forward and ask you questions from your prospective. My research is grounded by two educational theories: Pedagogical Content Knowledge and the theory of Self-Efficacy. How do you combine your knowledge of your content and your knowledge of pedagogy? What might that look like in your classroom on a typical day? How efficacious do your feel about your teaching? Meaning, do you feel as if you are the expert in teaching your content?
Key Questions	Do you feel like your college courses adequately prepared you for teaching? What do you find yourself using now that you learned while in college? In your own words, what defines a good reading teacher? Could you please describe your teaching reading strategies and methods in as much detail as possible? Do you include any spelling, grammar, vocabulary, or other fundamental instruction regularly? If so, how do you implement them? Do you use metacognitive strategies in your classroom? If so, which strategies and how do you implement them? Do you use technology in your reading classroom? If so, what technology and do you feel like it helps your students raise their achievement levels? How do your students stay motivated when reading? How do you help their motivation?

	Do you feel as if the importance of reading is reiterated in other subject areas? If so, which ones and how do they support reading? How often do you attend professional development and professional learning specifically for reading or pedagogy? Do you feel as if these experiences have been beneficial in any way? Please explain why or why not. Aside from what happens in the classrooms, what, or who, do you believe influences your students' reading achievement levels? Please explain. Are there any other factors that we have not discussed yet that you believe influences your students' reading achievement levels?
Closing Questions	Thank you so much for your time and contribution to research. I greatly appreciate your time and knowledge. Is that anything else that you would like to add from your perspective? I would like to follow up with you to review the transcript of our session. How best can I reach you?

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Closing the Interview

Thank you so much for your time and contribution to research. I greatly appreciate your time and knowledge. Is that anything else that you would like to add from your perspective? I would like to follow up with you to review the transcript of our session. How best can I reach you?