4-17-2024

Middle School Teachers' Perspectives on Fidelity Implementation of READ 180

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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EdS, Alabama State University, 2013

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

READ 180 was adopted by a school district in Southern Alabama (SDSA) in response to students' low state reading and comprehension scores statewide. However, after years of implementation, it is unclear whether the READ 180 curriculum and the instructional practices characteristics of the READ 180 have been implemented with fidelity across district schools, specifically at middle schools. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore fidelity of implementation of READ 180 instructional practices used by middle school teachers in SDSA. The conceptual framework guiding the study is Carrol et al.'s implementation fidelity theory, which focused on the degree to which a program or intervention was implemented. Semistructured interviews, documents, and observations, were used to explore 10 teachers' perceptions of READ 180 program, the implementation and fidelity of READ 180 strategies in the classroom, and the perceived strengths and barriers of READ 180. Open coding and inductive analyses were conducted with the data collected, and four themes were identified: (a) READ 180 is an adequate source to facilitate students' comprehension skills; (b) there is an inconsistency of fidelity and delivery of instructional practices; (c) there is a lack of teacher and administration buy-in/support and professional development/training; and (d) proper implementation of instructional practices leads to positive results. A professional development workshop and a READ 180 implementation checklist were developed for training. The results may help stakeholders in education benefit from increasing their understanding of implementation fidelity. This may potentially create positive social change in schools and instruction in the SDSA by enhancing teachers' delivery of instructional practices and students' reading and academic abilities.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to the educators who work tirelessly to impart knowledge and instill moral values in students. I dedicate this study to students who try their best even when life and learning obstacles are present. I also would like to dedicate this study to my family for their unwavering love and support. May God bless you in all your endeavors! Lastly, I dedicate this study to my daughter, Callie Belle, who has taught me, "I got this."

Acknowledgments

Thank you, Lord, for strengthening and providing me with new mercies every day.

My journey would not be complete without thanking my committee for their guidance, encouragement, and faith in me. Thank you, Dr. Torres Lugo and Dr. Dimarzo, for believing in me even when I doubted myself. Thank you to the faculty and staff for assisting me throughout my journey.

A special thanks to my family and friends who prayed, cried, and laughed with me through this process. I am grateful for you, and I love you.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) reported that 70% or more of middle school students in a school district in southern Alabama (SDSA) were scoring below grade level and displaying deficiencies in comprehension skills (U.S. News, 2022). In response, the SDSA adopted READ 180 (2022), a research-based computer intervention program designed to build "reading comprehension, academic vocabulary, and writing skills for struggling students in Grades 4 and up" (p. 1). However, after years of implementation, it is unclear whether the READ 180 curriculum and the instructional practices characteristics of the READ 180 have been implemented with fidelity across district schools, specifically at middle schools where the lowest scores have been reported (literacy coach, personal communication, June 5, 2019). This implies a gap in practice in the way district leaders and educational practitioners have implemented READ 180 instructional practices in middle schools.

Targeting reading comprehension and comprehension is pivotal to learners' success (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2022) reported that when students enter middle school, 65% are below grade level and display deficiencies in reading comprehension. Morel (2018) described how interventions targeting reading fluency, text structure, and an emphasis on vocabulary may help struggling middle school readers overcome reading deficiencies.

Rationale

The reading deficiencies at the SDSA middle schools were 5% over the 65% reading deficiency levels reported at the national level (NAEP, 2022). To address low academic achievement and a lack of proficiency in reading, the ALSDE directed school districts, including the SDSA, to adopt the READ 180 intervention program in middle schools. In 2017, ALSDE issued a directive that "district leaders should quickly identify, purchase, and implement with fidelity a coherent reading program to engage and challenge students in grades K through 8 … to rapidly increase student progress and raise academic standards in reading" (p. 2). READ 180 was piloted in middle schools in 2012 and fully adopted in four middle schools in 2018. The district leaders' plan was to incorporate the READ 180 program to raise students' academic scores and standards in reading; however, data have shown there are some instructional issues pertaining to implementation fidelity of the READ 180 program (ALSDE, 2017), suggesting that little attention has been given to how well teachers adhere to READ 180 instructional practices.

Using data from 2012–2017, the ALSDE noted issues related to instructional and implementation fidelity at the district level, which was the focus of the current study. The ALSDE district review noted that teachers have not implemented instructional practices and intervention programs with fidelity. The program thus far is "having minimal impact because students are often assigned to these programs without sufficient regard for their need" and "these programs are also plagued by their implementation by long-term substitutes who do not always use them properly" (ALSDE, 2017, p. 10). This concern

was voiced at a middle school principals' meeting held on May 22, 2019, where it was acknowledged and later discussed that the implementation of the READ 180 program was not being exercised with fidelity (middle school principal, personal communication, August 16, 2019). Furthermore, a middle school principal in the SDSA noted that practices of the READ 180 program were not being used correctly due to insufficient training on how to properly implement the program with fidelity. The middle school principal also stated that many other principals felt that the school district needed to provide teachers with more professional development on delivering READ 180 instructional practices (personal communication, August 16, 2019).

At the national level, understanding the implementation of programs such as READ 180 is also important. Reading comprehension skills have been identified as a national priority (Gowie-Melchoiri, 2022). According to Gowie-Melchoiri (2022), the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that in 2013, 17% of students in the United States struggled with reading comprehension and were reading below grade levels by the fourth grade. This number has been found to drastically increase to 65% by the time students enter middle school (Grades 6–8; Gentry, 2021). In a similar study, Sailor (2019) reported that, nationally, reading is a weakness and that 36% of middle school students are reading below grade level.

Reading comprehension skills are interdisciplinary, meaning that students who lack reading comprehension or are reading below grade levels may have difficulty with other content material such as science and mathematics. According to Chan (2018), at least 25% of struggling readers suffer in content areas such as math, science, and social

studies. The need to address the growing concerns of reading comprehension has become more and more pressing with approximately 40 school districts nationwide implementing READ 180 (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt [HMH], 2020). Through the proper utilization of READ 180, researchers have found an increase in students' reading comprehension skills. For instance, Fencl (2022) noted that 63% of students enrolled in READ 180 meet or exceed the reading growth target. In addition, over 40 published studies from 2000 to 2015 indicate that the program has been successful with "students of diverse backgrounds, including English learners, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and students of various ethnicities in California and across the nation" (READ 180, 2022, p. 7). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore fidelity of implementation of READ 180 instructional practices that are used by middle schools in SDSA.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined as they were used throughout the study:

Adherence: The measure or accountability of consistency of use when implementing an intervention or program (McKinley, 2016).

Differentiated instruction: The way teachers design their lessons and instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of students (Suprayogi et al., 2017).

Implementation fidelity: The degree to which a program or intervention is being executed (Carrol et al., 2007).

Instructional fidelity: The measure of identifying, applying, and executing research-based instructional practices (National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning, 2018).

Instructional practices: Teaching methods used to guide instruction and engagement in a classroom. Instructional practices are used by educational practitioners to increase students' academic learning (Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources, 2019).

Intervention: A teaching strategy or method used to aid students who are struggling with a skill or lesson (Response to Intervention, 2019).

READ 180: A blended learning intervention program that builds "reading comprehension, academic vocabulary, and writing skills for struggling students in Grades 4 and up" (READ 180, 2020, p. 1). The goal of the program is to increase these skills through an intervention program that individualizes instruction and addresses the needs of each student. The intervention program achieves its goal through the use of daily instructional practices that address text fluency and word recognition and provide guided instruction (READ 180, 2020).

READ 180 instructional practices: Teaching sessions consisting of three parts: whole-group direct instruction, small-group rotations, and whole-group wrap-up. The whole-group direct instruction is 20 minutes and contains instruction in vocabulary, reading, and writing. Afterward, 20-minute rotations of smaller groups perform activities to practice students' reading skills. During this time, students work closely with the instructor to grasp concepts and gain skills. Students also participate in independent

reading studies using workbooks, literature, and computer software. At the end of each teaching session, there is a 10-minute discussion with the whole group (HMH, 2020).

Reading comprehension: A reader understanding and actively explaining what is being communicated through text (Scholastic Inc., n.d.).

Struggling readers: Readers who exhibit deficiencies in phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (Auletto & Sableski, 2018).

Significance of the Study

The ALSDE directed the SDSA to use a reading intervention program known as READ 180 to address reading deficiencies in the state; however, little is known about the fidelity of implementation of instructional practices characteristic of the READ 180 program practiced by the educators in the SDSA. Studying this problem faced by SDSA may be useful because it may allow educational leaders and practitioners in the SDSA to reevaluate the instructional practices of programs used to benefit the students of the SDSA. In addition, studying this problem may promote a retooling of implementation fidelity and adherence and may be useful providing perspectives of teachers that may inform curricula and drive instruction in the SDSA.

In 2012, READ 180 was adopted in SDSA schools in response to students' low state reading and comprehension scores. Studies have indicated that reading is an interdisciplinary subject; teaching and applying reading skills in all core subjects will positively affect all levels of readers (Kenny, 2021). At the SDSA, it has been reported that more than 70% of students in middle schools are reading below grade level and displaying deficiencies in comprehension skills (ALSDE, 2022).

Educational practitioners and leaders of the SDSA have a duty to provide quality educational opportunities to all learners and adequately prepare students for 21st century jobs and careers. At the SDSA, an academic and career counselor for the school district mentioned that many students graduate and find jobs and careers; however, employers cite that retention rates of workers are low due to individuals not being able to comprehend instructions or apply basic literacy skills to a practice (personal communication, April 4, 2018). In contrast, Huffman (2021) noted that individuals between ages 16 and 21 who exhibit signs of illiteracy and a lack of fluency struggle to obtain and maintain employment. Similarly, Vega (2022) noted that students who experience reading deficiencies in secondary school will likely face challenges during their postsecondary education and future career. Thus, using READ 180 at the SDSA may help them fulfill its mission to "engage, educate and inspire our students to succeed in college, career and beyond" (SDSA website, 2023, p. 1). For this reason, it is important that districts provide a reading curriculum that enables students to acquire the necessary literacy skills, especially at the middle school level (Roddey, 2023). The current study's findings may be used to inform instruction, define learning goals, design and improve assessments, and provide instructional support to READ 180. The findings also may be of importance to educational practitioners, leaders, parents, students, and other stakeholders of education who provide students who are struggling readers with the tools needed.

According to Morel (2018), READ 180 has helped improve students' reading scores and academic achievement in other core subject areas such as science, social

studies, and math. Also, research has found that READ 180 has assisted in developing students' comprehension skills (Morel, 2018). Understanding how READ 180 is being implemented at the SDSA may help identify gaps and needs for ongoing professional curricular development for READ 180.

One way of understanding READ 180 fidelity of implementation is by examining its instructional practices. The READ 180 instructional practices consist of (a) 20-minute whole-group direct instruction addressing vocabulary, reading, and writing; (b) 20-minute small-group rotations to practice reading skills; and (c) a 10-minute whole-group wrap-up. Research has indicated that these instructional practices are to be used consistently and with fidelity (Morel, 2018). Therefore, understanding the level of fidelity during the program implementation may assist struggling readers in SDSA and further their academic success not only in reading but also in social skills and academic courses (Morel, 2018).

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore fidelity of implementation of READ 180 instructional practices used by middle schools in SDSA. At the local site, principals have expressed concerns about how teachers are implementing READ 180 (administrative assistant, personal communication, May 16, 2019). I aimed to better understand how instructional practices were being used to enhance reading comprehension and to provide insights about how to evaluate the program. The research questions that framed the study were the following:

RQ1: What are middle school teachers' perceptions of READ 180 and its instructional practices?

RQ2: How do middle school teachers implement READ 180 practices in their daily instructional practices to ensure that it is being taught with fidelity?

RQ3: What are the perceived barriers of READ 180 regarding program adherence and fidelity of integrating instructional practices in reading comprehension?

RQ4: What are the perceived strengths of READ 180 regarding program adherence and fidelity of integrating instructional practices in reading comprehension?

Review of the Literature

For this project study, I explored teachers' perceptions of READ 180 instructional practices and the perceived barriers and strengths of implementing the READ 180 program related to program adherence and fidelity of integration of instructional practices in reading comprehension in middle schools at the SDSA. I researched literature detailing the best strategies, interventions, and programs involving reading comprehension. In addition, I identified how fidelity and program adherence play major roles in implementing interventions and programs to deliver desired outcomes. This review of literature includes (a) the challenges of middle school students regarding reading comprehension, (b) READ 180 as an intervention, (c) the effects of using a reading intervention, and (d) the value of fidelity when implementing an intervention or program. Search engines such as ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, EBSCOhost, and Walden's Dissertations & Theses were used to research the literature. The literature indicates that reading comprehension among adolescents is an issue, and

implementation fidelity is an important factor when implementing a program; however, the literature did not identify the elements that may limit struggling readers' academic progress in reading.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework serves as a foundation and blueprint for a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The conceptual framework used in the current study was Carrol et al.'s (2007) implementation fidelity theory. The goal of implementation fidelity is to ensure instructional strategies and interventions are being exercised to their highest potential (Carrol et al., 2007). According to Carrol et al. (2007), there are five elements of implementation fidelity: (a) adherence to an intervention, (b) exposure or dose, (c) quality of delivery, (d) participant responsiveness, and (e) program differentiation. These five elements assist in establishing the primary focus of addressing the implementation fidelity of instructional practices used by educational practitioners in the SDSA.

According to Carrol et al. (2007), adherence to an intervention refers to how well a program is delivered to replicate its written formula or design. Carrol et al. noted that there are four subcategories of adherence: content, frequency, duration, and coverage. Carrol et al. (2007) also noted that "if an implemented intervention adheres completely to the content, frequency, duration, and coverage prescribed by its designers, then fidelity can be said to be high" (p. 4). Adherence to an intervention drives instructional and implementation fidelity that determines the outcomes of an intervention and is an important factor in the academic achievement of students (Carrol et al., 2007).

Exposure or dose refers to the frequency and duration an individual may receive during an intervention (Carrol et al., 2007). Carrol et al. suggested that exposure or dose is a major factor in implementation fidelity because it determines whether the duration and frequency of an intervention are being adhered to by the instructors. Researchers have noted that designers prescribe an amount of exposure or dose for participants to follow to achieve positive outcomes (Carol et al., 2007). When exercising implementation fidelity, researchers must consider the amount of exposure or dose participants may receive to determine outcomes of an intervention (Carrol et al., 2007).

Quality of delivery refers to the way an educator or volunteer may deliver an intervention or program (Carrol et al., 2007). Carrol et al. (2007) noted that quality of delivery is a crucial factor when implementing an intervention to its fidelity. Carrol et al. suggested that when implementing an intervention with fidelity, teachers must have extensive training, support, and materials to optimize the quality of delivery of an intervention. To have a high effect on implementation fidelity, quality of delivery depends on providing feedback and ongoing monitoring to the educational practitioners that practice and deliver the intervention (Carrol et al., 2007).

Participant responsiveness refers to the way a participant may engage or respond to a program or intervention (Carrol et al., 2007). According to Carrol et al. (2007), participant responsiveness is an important factor in examining and implementing implementation fidelity: "If participants view an intervention as being of no relevance to them, then their non-engagement may be a major cause of its failure or low coverage, thus implementation fidelity may be low." Carrol et al. stated that for implementation

fidelity of an intervention to be considered high, all participants involved such as administration, teachers, and students must be receptive to the intervention.

According to Carrol et al. (2007), program differentiation refers to the components of the program that may be modified to meet the academic needs of students. Researchers noted that support and other essential strategies may be used to increase implementation fidelity (Carrol et al., 2007). Carrol et al. suggested that program differentiation includes provision over monitoring, training, manuals, and guidelines/procedures. Carrol et al. (2007) stressed program differentiation may be used to optimize implementation fidelity.

The implementation fidelity theory was used to explain the role of implementation fidelity and fidelity of integration of instructional practices in reading comprehension (RQ3 and RQ4) at the SDSA. In addition, it was used to analyze data to help understand how middle school teachers were implementing the instructional practices outlined by the READ 180 (RQ1). RQ1 and RQ3 are aligned with the ideas of adherence, participant responsiveness, and exposure that the implementation fidelity theory focuses on maximizing an intervention's potential. Implementation fidelity theory guided the data collection procedures that inform readers of the perceptions of middle school teachers about the levels of fidelity of integration of instructional practices outlined by the READ 180 (RQ2). RQ2 is aligned with the basis of fidelity that adherence, quality of delivery, and program differentiation highlight as a factor in implementing an intervention. Moreover, implementation fidelity theory guided the interview questions that highlights how to integrate instructional practices characteristic

of the READ 180 program to its fidelity (i.e., RQs 1, 2 3, and 4) to assist struggling readers and students' reading comprehension skills.

The research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 established the foundation of the study and provide an alignment of guidelines teachers are to adhere to when implementing the READ 180 program. The instructional practices of READ 180 were reviewed in the form of a checklist to determine if implementation fidelity and adherence to guidelines characteristic of READ 180 were being enforced. The instructional practices of READ 180 that teachers must adhere to when using the program include a three-part teaching session including (a) whole-group direct instruction, (b) small-group rotations, and (c) whole-group wrap up. These instructional practices are suggested to be used on a consistent basis to ensure implementation fidelity (Ware, 2020).

Review of Broader Problem

Challenges of Middle School Students Regarding Reading Comprehension

Middle schools in the SDSA have reported that more than 70% of students reading below grade level and displaying deficiencies in comprehension skills. This pattern is also noted at the state level based on state standardized test results (Alabama State Department of Education, 2017). Yi (2023) noted students that exhibit difficulties in reading comprehension could potentially suffer from socio-economic and cultural disadvantages. Whereas Rush (2019) also indicated students that struggle in reading comprehension are identified as at-risk and this factor alone may negatively impact their future endeavors. Comparatively, Cox and Lee (2022) noted "UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) illiteracy results indicated that 781 million people could not read or write;

126 million were youths" (p. 1). Reports within the literature noted that students with difficulties in reading face not only academic challenges, but challenges in colleges and careers.

READ 180 as an Intervention

Due to students not performing and reading on grade levels, educational leaders have made decisions to incorporate interventions to assist in addressing this issue (Reynolds, 2022). One intervention that has been chosen by more than 10,000 schools all over the United States is the READ 180 intervention program (Reynolds, 2022). According to Bestill (2023), districts all over the United States have struggled with increasing students' reading levels to proficient grade level. Bestill (2023) then indicated that READ 180 was designed and adopted by many districts to address the reading difficulties and achievement gaps of middle school students. Similarly, Borges-Bostic (2020) noted that in a Northeastern school district, students exhibited difficulties in reading comprehension and that READ 180 was adopted as an intervention program.

According to Morel (2018), for struggling middle school readers to overcome reading deficiencies they must receive a reading intervention that involves reading fluency, text structure, and an emphasis on vocabulary. READ 180 (2023) is a blended learning intervention program that builds "reading comprehension, academic vocabulary, and writing skills for struggling students in Grades four and up" (p. 1). The intervention program contains direct instruction, vocabulary workbooks, various literature, reading skills, and computer software to fully engage students in academic learning (HMH, 2020).

HMH (2020) noted that each READ 180 instructional model teaching session lasts 90 minutes. Each teaching session consists of three parts: whole-group direct instruction, small-group rotations, and whole-group wrap up. The whole- group direct instruction is 20 minutes and contains instruction in vocabulary, reading, and writing. Afterwards, 20-minute rotations of smaller groups perform activities to practice students' reading skills. During this time, students work closely with the instructor to grasp concepts and gain skills. Students also participate in independent reading studies using vocabulary workbooks, various literatures, and the READ 180 computer software. At the end of each teaching session, there is a 10-minute discussion with the whole group. As a student participates in the program, the level of instruction is adjusted according to the student performance. Periodic progress reports on students' performance are used to assist teachers in creating and delivering individualized and differentiated instruction for the students (HMH, 2020).

The Effects of Using a Reading Intervention

Identifying and implementing a reading intervention is crucial to the academic success of students who struggle with reading comprehension (Auletto & Sableski, 2018; Maneka & Frankel, 2018). They also stated that researchers have been trying to improve reading instruction through interventions and programs in order to prevent further reading difficulties amongst students. On the other hand, there is the issue of instructional fidelity. What Works Clearinghouse (WWC, 2020) found that the READ 180 intervention program and instructional fidelity have positive effects on struggling readers. For example, there was an average increase of 6% in comprehension, 4% increase in

literacy achievement, and an increase of 4% in reading fluency made by students enrolled in READ 180 intervention program (WWC, 2020). Additionally, Hardin (2018) noted that students need reading skills such as identifying vocabulary, making predictions, reviewing texts, making text connections, decoding words, and establishing meaning within context. Proper instruction of these necessary skills is essential for effective and purposeful reading. The study found that 82% of READ 180 students exceeded their yearly target performance goal and achieved academic growth (Hardin, 2018).

To address students' reading comprehension needs, educational leaders have identified and implemented *READ 180* as a source to increase struggling readers' comprehension skills. Stratton (2018) noted that three out of four students exhibit an average growth of 30% in their reading comprehension skills using READ 180. Similarly, Simon (2020) indicated through intervention, guided practice from an instructor, and instructional strategies such as graphic organizers like the ones used in READ 180, students' reading comprehension skills increased before intervention and increased to mean values between 68.00 and 76% after the completion of the intervention (Simon, 2020). Furthermore, Reynolds (2022) denoted there was a correlation between a reading intervention and students' test scores. The study indicated through the use of READ 180 and other research-based strategies, 70% of students achieved grade level or above on the reading and phonics portion of the Strategic Adolescent Reading Intervention (STARI) assessment, which reflected a positive effect on students' reading comprehension and vocabulary. The research from the studies suggested that the READ

180 intervention, motivation, and cognitive skills contribute to reading competence (White, 2021; Reynolds, 2022; & Stratton, 2018).

According to Williams (2019), the READ 180 intervention program has helped struggling readers and lifted the program's participants' standards of learning (SOL) test's scores by 15%. READ 180 positive impact on struggling readers' comprehension skills was noted in other research as well. White (2021) noted middle school students enrolled in READ 180 improved their SRI Lexile scores by 41points (8%). Researchers found that READ 180 had a positive impact on struggling readers' reading comprehension skills (White, 2021). Additionally, Johnson (2023) indicated that there was significant growth from the beginning of the school term to the end of the school term by students who participated in the READ 180 intervention program.

A focus on increasing students' reading fluency and comprehension skills has gained national attention (HMH, 2020). As a result, district and curriculum leaders have found that reading interventions are necessary to address the reading needs of students. Russel-Walker (2020) noted district leaders in an Alabama school district implemented a yearlong literacy intervention for students who exhibited reading difficulties and displayed poor assessment scores. Findings indicated there was a correlation between the yearlong literacy intervention and struggling readers' test scores. The study 13.34% growth amongst African American male students (Russel-Walker, 2020). Russel-Walker (2020) found that through literacy intervention, struggling readers' comprehension skills were increased.

According to Karageorgos et al., (2020), reading interventions programs such as READ 180 increases students, lexile gains on STAAR-A Reading test. The study determined that there was a statistical significance in the growth of at-risk students' lexile gains on the STAAR- A Reading test. However, Riley (2022) denoted the reading proficiency level of at-risk students that participated in the READ 180 program remained at a constant of 50 to 54% in a school district in Illinois. In contrast, Hill (2023) noted that the READ 180 program coupled with direct instruction had moderate yet considerable effects on students reading scores.

Other analyses of data noted the academic reading growth of struggling students and indicated a correlation between READ 180 and struggling readers' comprehension skills. For example, Cooper (2021) noted there was a correlation between READ 180 and the scores of English learners (EL) and students who were proficient in English (EP). Findings from the study showed EL and EP students made a gain of 5.87 points on their post-test (Cooper, 2021). Conversely, other findings indicated that READ 180 coupled with additional resources such as parental support, teacher efficacy, and student motivation increase student reading comprehension skills (Ho & Lau, 2018; Gowie-Melchiori, 2018). For instance, Alexander (2018) noted building a curriculum or intervention where the learner is motivated, encouraged, and guided with practice from the instructor can enhance struggling readers' reading skills. Researchers clarified that a reading intervention alone will not bridge the learning gap of struggling readers (Alexander, 2018). Parra (2022) noted that one-on-one intervention instruction increased struggling readers' reading comprehension skills. Researchers also stressed that a

professional development that trains teachers for one-on-one instruction is needed for teachers to properly increase students' reading performance. Although the literature researched in this study reaches a general consensus that reading comprehension amongst adolescents is an issue, the literature does not agree on the exact elements that may lead to struggling readers' academic progression in reading.

Value of Implementation Fidelity When Implementing an Intervention or Program

Instructional and implementation fidelity is the idea of identifying, applying, and executing research-based instructional practices to the degree of accuracy (Wilhelmina, Lane, & Gage, 2023; Dow, 2018). Adherence is the measure or accountability of consistency one uses when implementing an intervention or program (Carrol et al., 2007; Wilhelmina, Lane, & Gage, 2023). Research has shown that implementation fidelity determines the outcomes of an intervention and plays a major role in the academic potential of students (National Implementation Research Network, 2019).

In a study about the evaluation of Check and Connect (C & C) intervention program, researchers examined the relationship between implementation fidelity, the intervention program, and positive outcomes of student learning. Goulet et al. (2018) reported a 14-point increase in student academic achievement and a marginal significant rate of .32 due to high implementation fidelity of each component of the C & C intervention program. Goulet et al. (2018) indicated that examining implementation and practices of an intervention is a way to understand the importance of fidelity and outcomes of a program on student learning. Moreover, Combs, Buckley, Lain, Drewelow, Urano, and Kerns (2022) stressed the importance of properly implementing

evidence-based interventions (EBIs), which are relatively non-specific content interventions with high fidelity. Combs et al. completed a 3-year study that sampled 1,626 middle school teachers across 14 states. The study examined three domains of implementation fidelity: adherence, student responsiveness, and quality of delivery. The data collected included observations and end of the year summative surveys. Researchers noted that interventions and strategies only benefit individuals when they are implemented properly through fidelity. The study denoted how a program's activities and practices can be implemented properly through the lens of the implementation fidelity theory. Combs et al. (2022) found that the implementation of fidelity theory provides a foundation for more comprehensive research about implementing programs and practices to high fidelity is necessary for a program to be effective. The literature indicated that exercising a program to high fidelity produces positive outcomes.

Implications

Results gleaned from the study implicated the need for additional training on READ 180 instructional practices, importance of implementation fidelity, and administration and teacher support to create and sustain positive social change in schools and instruction. Results from this study may be used to provide educational practitioners with skills to better provide students with a better-quality education, increase student reading comprehension skills, and prepare students for colleges and careers. Lastly, possible outcomes from the research may assist in furthering understanding how instructional practices are being used to enhance reading comprehension and achieve the outcomes of the READ 180 intervention program and may provide some insights about

how to later engage in the process of evaluating the program. I used the findings of the study to inform project goals, strategic agendas, and objectives of the READ 180 professional development workshop.

The findings assisted in creating a deliverable project such as a READ 180 professional development workshop plan that includes an implementation checklist, value placed on implementation fidelity, and administration/faculty support. Educational practitioners will be able to use the checklist to ensure teachers are adhering to the proper guidelines and instructional practices of the READ 180 program that will in turn optimize implementation fidelity. Educational practitioners will also be able to use the checklist to observe if teachers need additional training on implementing the intervention and if additional resources are needed to equip students with the necessary skills to flourish in reading.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

In this study, I aimed to explore the fidelity of implementation of READ 180 instructional practices that are used by middle schools in SDSA. Section 1 included the problem, rationale, and the purpose of the study. Section 1 also contained the significance of the study and four research questions that guided the study. The conceptual framework was Carrol et al.'s (2007) implementation fidelity and its primary focus is to ensure instructional strategies and interventions are being exercised to their highest potential. A literature review was conducted and indicated that teachers in the SDSA needed additional training on READ 180 instructional practices, importance of implementation fidelity, and administration and teacher support. In Section 2, the following elements will

be addressed: the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis

procedures.

Section 2: The Methodology

The focus of this study was to explore the fidelity of implementation of READ 180 instructional practices used by middle schools in SDSA. Section 2 discusses the connection between the identified problem and research questions. I also discuss the research design and approach for the study. Four research questions guided this exploratory case study:

RQ1: What are middle school teachers' perceptions of READ 180 and its instructional practices?

RQ2: How do middle school teachers implement READ 180 practices in their daily instructional practices to ensure that it is taught with fidelity?

RQ3: What are the perceived barriers of READ 180 regarding program adherence and fidelity of integrating instructional practices in reading comprehension?

RQ4: What are the perceived strengths of READ 180 regarding program adherence and fidelity of integrating instructional practices in reading comprehension?

Research Design and Approach

According to Yin (2018), a qualitative research design is an in-depth study of people's lives, a representation of various perspectives of people, or an examination of the environmental, social, and institutional conditions of people's lives, insights, and explanations of human behavior via the collection of various sources of data. A qualitative approach allows a researcher to use reflection and observation, apply inductive and deductive reasoning, collect data through interviews and observations,

identify patterns and themes, and form conclusions derived from the patterns and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). I used an exploratory qualitative case study design.

Creswell (2019) stated that a researcher could explore an event, individual, process, or activity in an exploratory case study design. I collected data about teachers' perceptions and interactions with the READ 180 intervention program using interviews, classroom observations, and documents as data collection tools. These data collection tools were used to provide an in-depth understanding of middle school teachers' perceptions of the strengths and barriers of the READ 180 intervention program in the SDSA and to construct an understanding of the experiences of their perceptions of READ 180 and its instructional practices.

When addressing the research problem, I considered but rejected other research approaches within the qualitative methodology. For example, the grounded theory approach was considered but dismissed because the approach focuses on deriving a theory from collected data. Moreover, the grounded theory approach is used when information about a research topic is scarce (Creswell, 2019). Ethnography allows researchers to investigate a culture. Given the purpose of the current study, the ethnographic design was not appropriate. Lastly, I considered phenomenology; however, the approach focuses more on the meaning of individuals' lived experiences rather than individuals' perceptions (Creswell, 2019).

I also considered a quantitative approach. A quantitative approach allows a researcher to review literature and theories, use deductive reasoning, form a hypothesis, collect numerical data, perform statistical analysis, and determine whether a hypothesis

should be accepted or rejected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). For the current study, the quantitative approach was not appropriate to explore and understand the integration of instructional and assessment practices outlined by the READ 180 program from the perspective of SDSA middle school teachers.

Participants

The setting for this exploratory case study was the SDSA, which operates as a K–12 school system with 51 schools educating over 30,000 students from various cultures. Currently, the SDSA has 38 Title I schools. Title I is a federal program designed to assist disadvantaged students in reaching their highest academic achievement. Four Title I middle schools throughout the SDSA were selected for the case study because the READ 180 program was adopted in these four middle schools in 2010 to enhance students' reading comprehension and raise proficiency levels in reading.

Description, Selection, and Justification of Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to explore and understand the integration of instructional practices outlined by READ 180 and to discover the program's strengths and barriers from the perspectives of middle school teachers in the SDSA. Purposeful sampling allows an investigator to discover, comprehend, and increase knowledge from the most knowledgeable individuals in the subject area (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This sampling technique contrasts with simple random sampling in quantitative research, which allows a researcher to generalize findings from the study using a random sample from a given population (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The criteria for the selection of teacher participants were based on teacher experiences with the READ 180 program. Teacher participants had to be middle school teachers who had 2–10 years of READ 180 teaching experience. Teachers with no READ 180 teaching experience were excluded. Ten middle school teachers agreed to participate. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a limited number of participants, such as 10, may provide enough information to answer the research questions and examine the data from an in-depth perspective. Creswell (2019) also noted that a limited number of participants may offer an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon.

Procedures for Gaining Access to the Participants

A researcher should have a sound procedure for gaining access to participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Before conducting the study and after Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I emailed the principals at the four Title I middle schools within the SDSA to obtain permission to gain access to the participants. The first step in accessing participants included asking principals to complete a letter of cooperation form to gain access to the site (see Appendix C). The letter of cooperation form included information such as the study's name, purpose, and access for consent. Once I obtained permission to access participants at these four middle schools, I began the recruitment of teachers. I informed the teachers that I had obtained their name and contact information from the public SDSA directory. Teachers who met the inclusion criteria received a copy of the informed consent form via email or a hard copy via face-to-face communication (see Appendix D and Appendix E). The participants were

informed through the consent form that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Establishing Researcher–Participant Relationship

Establishing researcher–participant rapport is an important skill to possess when conducting research. Yin (2018) stated that establishing a positive relationship with a participant creates a productive atmosphere for effective interviewing. To establish a researcher–participant relationship, I used honesty and integrity while conducting this study. Participants were presented with the study's information and strategies to keep their identity concealed and to maintain confidentiality. For teachers who voluntarily agreed to join the study and returned the consent form, I scheduled an informal getting-to-know-you activity to help establish a positive and trusting rapport with the participants. The activity was conducted through Zoom due to COVID-19 limitations and CDC guidelines at the time of the study. Procedures for developing positive relationships included the following: (a) setting up conferences with the participants to schedule and confirm available times for interviews and observations; (b) conducting a "getting to know you" activity; (c) communicating with participants in a respectful, professional, and friendly manner; and (d) creating a positive and comfortable environment with informal conversation without any judgment. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that establishing trustworthy relationships with participants is crucial when conducting a study.

Participants were given the guidelines of the study about the interviews and observations (see Appendix F). The participants were informed that the interviews would take 30–45 minutes and the classroom observations would last approximately 45–55

minutes. Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions were used to make the participants feel at ease and to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Open-ended questions paired with skillful probing questions can supply substantive information about a topic or experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, the interviewees' participation was acknowledged through sincere appreciation and profound respect. These skills were exercised to establish a positive relationship with the participants.

Measures of Ethics of Participants' Protection

The study began after obtaining approval from Walden University's IRB (approval number 07-17-20-0590775). Bogdan and Biklen (2016) stated that an IRB inspects proposals for proper informed consent and safety for individuals participating in a study. The IRB ensures the researcher has considered all potential risks, properly informs the participants about the risks, and incorporates strategies to mitigate these potential risks. In addition, the IRB makes sure the researcher is writing with academic integrity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). Each participant in the current study received a consent form designed to provide information about the study. The consent form included (a) the purpose of the study; (b) the procedures of the study; and (c) the voluntary nature of the study, which informed the participant that the study was optional and the participant could leave at any time; (d) the benefits and risks associated from their participation; (d) statements of privacy and confidentiality; and (f) contact information in the event they had questions about the study or questions about their rights as a participant.

No anticipated physical, emotional, or criminal risks were associated with the study. However, there was the possibility of a breach of confidentiality. To mitigate risks associated with confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms. For example, participants were labeled Teacher A, Teacher B, and so on to conceal their identities and to reduce the probability of inappropriate identification.

Interviews were streamed through Zoom using unique passcode-protected Zoom meetings; only users with the passcode could access the Zoom meeting. Data such as hard copies of the interviews, observational notes, and lesson plans were stored in a locked file cabinet, and the electronic data, such as interview transcripts and recordings, were stored in a password-protected computer that only I could access. Data will be kept for at least 5 years, as required by the university. After 5 years, the data will be destroyed by me.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, the researcher must identify the types of data collection methods that will be used to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2019). For the current study, I collected data using interviews, observations, and documents such as fieldnotes, lesson plans, and minutes from instructional meetings to understand the perceptions of middle school teachers teaching the READ 180 intervention program. I collected interview data from 10 participants. Six of the 10 participants agreed to be observed and provided documents such as lesson plans. The observation checklist (see Appendix B) was also aligned with the READ 180 implementation checklist of daily

practices and procedures. In this section, I describe how interviews, observations, and documents were used to collect data to answer research questions.

Data Collection Instruments

Interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that interviewing is an essential component of qualitative research; interviewing gives researchers a better understanding of a phenomenon. Interviews were used as one method of data collection in the current study. Qualitative interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with the participants, and the recordings were transcribed, coded, and analyzed by me (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Due to CDC and government guidelines to limit exposure to COVID-19, the interviews were streamed through Zoom using passcode-protected Zoom meetings; only users who had the passcode were able to access the Zoom meeting. The interview protocol consisted of 11 questions and probing questions and was developed by me using common knowledge about READ 180 (see Appendix F). This interview protocol was also shared with two doctoral-level educators who read the questions and confirmed clarity and usability to establish content validity. The interviews lasted 30–45 minutes. Due to participants' availability, three follow-up interview questions were used to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the follow-up interview, participants were able to elaborate on their responses about READ 180. The follow-up interviews lasted 15–45 minutes. Open-ended questions, paired with probing questions, can supply a substantive amount of information about a topic or experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The data collection process for collecting interviews started in October 2020 and lasted till January 2023. Each participant received a copy of the interview questions via email and was provided an individual Zoom link with a passcode to complete the interview (see Appendix G). The interviews were audio recorded through the Zoom media platform. I used Zoom's meeting option to generate and provide a transcript of the Zoom meetings. After each interview, I cross-checked the transcripts with the recordings to correct any discrepancies in the transcriptions.

I used member checking for credibility purposes. Member checking validates a participant's responses for accuracy (Creswell, 2019). After the interviews, each participant was contacted via email to review the transcript. A preliminary analysis of the data was also shared with participants. This form of member checking is used in qualitative research to establish credibility. During this process, participants were asked to review, amend, or clarify any statements used in the summary. Each participant was given 2 weeks to identify statement errors, clarify answers, and confirm their responses. This process provided the most authentic reflection of the participants' responses. Data were stored and protected on a password-protected computer. The hard copies were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Observations. I also conducted classroom observations for this study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the use of observation "offers a firsthand account of the situation understudy and, when combined with interviewing and document analysis, allows for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated" (pp. 160–161).

Before the observational collection process, I created a READ 180 daily implementation observational checklist aligned to the HMH READ 180 implementation checklist (see Appendix B). In addition to the observation checklist, I used field notes. Field notes allow a researcher to record many different forms of data observed during an observation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The field notes and checklist were reflected upon, analyzed, and themed as suggested by Creswell (2019).

The protocol used for the observation is shown in Appendix F. The observations lasted 45–55 minutes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the observations were conducted using the Zoom media platform, but the session was not recorded. The six participant teachers provided access to the virtual classroom. The teachers shared a passcode-protected link for me to log into the virtual READ 180 instructional classes.

The observations started in November 2020 and lasted through May 2021. I observed six SDSA middle school teachers' delivery of the READ 180 curriculum. Children were not observed and were not participants in this study. In the virtual classrooms, there were no cameras, and the faces of the students were not visible. During the observations, I used my READ 180 daily implementation observational checklist to ensure the daily routines and times of the READ 180 curriculum and instruction were met. The checklist details the phases and times allotted for instruction. The checklist also lists the activities each phase consists of. While observing, I recorded field notes to document the instructional procedures of teachers and changes/modifications of the procedures. After the observations, I transferred the field notes to the daily implementation observational checklist. In total, 20–25 field notes were taken for each

observation. The data from the field notes were then color-coded, electronically scanned, and stored in a Microsoft Excel file for organization. After completing this process, I saved and protected the data on a password-protected computer. The printed versions of the data were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Document Collection. According to Creswell (2019), documents offer a rich source of data and help researchers identify a particular phenomenon. Documents may include private or public records that are accessible to a researcher through permission (Creswell, 2019). For this study, I collected public and private documents such as lesson plans and minutes from principals' and instructional/strategic meetings. The public information included posts on the SDSA website and the SDSA Schoology page. The private documents were granted upon request from the teachers and principals. The documents were collected from November 2020–January 2023.

I reviewed lesson plans to understand the instructional practices of READ 180 better and to ensure the fidelity process was followed. I also used the lesson plans to detect and compare any deviations from the teachers' instructional process to what was listed in the lesson plan. Since district leaders and content specialists are regular participants in principals' meetings and contribute support and offer feedback, I used the minutes from the principals' meetings to understand how principals, district leaders, and content specialists felt about the READ 180 intervention program and how they supported the teachers' efforts in administering the READ 180 curriculum. The documents collected were electronically scanned to create a digital file stored on a

password-protected computer, and the hard copies were stored in a locked filing cabinet in a classroom.

Sufficiency of Data

This study's primary data sources included semistructured interviews with ten middle school teachers, classroom observations, and documents such as lesson plans and principals' and instructional/strategic meeting notes. Yin (2018) suggested that these data collection methods allow a researcher to gain extensive yet detailed information about their study. The data collected helped me in gaining a greater understanding about my study.

The interviews were used to understand middle school teachers' perceptions of READ 180 and its instructional practices as well as perceived barriers and strengths. The classroom observations were used to determine the implementation fidelity of how middle school teachers implement the READ 180 practices in their daily instructional practices. The classroom observations were necessary because the observations offered firsthand evidence of how teachers taught the instructional practices and procedures of READ 180. The interviews and documents were used to identify and elaborate on the perceived barriers and strengths of implementing the READ 180 program related to the implementation fidelity of integrating instructional practices in reading comprehension. The documents, such as principals' and instructional/strategic meeting notes, were vital because they noted administrators' and instructional leaders' thoughts on READ 180 and how it was being implemented throughout the four middle schools.

Processes for Generating, Gathering, and Recording Data

After receiving permission from Walden University's IRB and gaining access to participants from principals of various study sites, I invited individuals to participate in interviews about their experiences with READ 180. Each participant was sent an individual passcode-protected link to complete the interview. The interview protocol was used to conduct the interviews, which lasted between 30 and 45 minutes (see Appendix F). Each interview consisted of 11 questions (see Appendix G). The data collection process for collecting interviews started in October 2020 and lasted till January 2023. With permission from the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded through the media platform Zoom. The Zoom meeting option was used to generate and provide a transcript of the Zoom meetings. As the researcher, after each interview, I reviewed the transcripts with the audio recordings to ensure accuracy and amend any discrepancies in the transcriptions. As a form of member-checking, each participant was sent a transcript of the interview and an overview of the preliminary review of their data. This process allowed the participants to evaluate my interpretation of the data presented in the interview to establish validity and review for accuracy.

The observations started in November 2020 and lasted through May 2021. I observed 6 SDSA middle school teachers' delivery of the READ 180 curriculum. The observations were conducted using the media platform Zoom. I logged into the virtual READ 180 instructional classes using a passcode-protected link the six teacher participants provided. During observations, I used the observational READ 180 checklist to observe the implementation and adherence of the READ 180 instructional practices

and to capture if there were any deviations from the traditional, prescribed curriculum of READ 180 (see Appendix B). I recorded field notes during the observations to note changes in the READ 180 curriculum and my thoughts on the observations. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), using field notes allows a researcher to record many different forms of data observed during an observation. The field notes and checklist were reflected upon, analyzed, and themed as suggested by Creswell (2019). The data from the field notes were then color-coded, scanned to create a digital file, stored in a Microsoft Excel file for organization, and protected on a password-protected computer. The hard copies were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

The documents, including lesson plans and notes from principals' and instructional/strategic meetings, were collected from November 2020–January 2023. The lesson plans were reviewed to provide a greater understanding of the instructional practices of READ 180 and to ensure the process of fidelity was being followed. Notes from the principals' meetings were reviewed to understand how principals and instructional specialists felt about the READ 180 intervention program and how they supported the teachers' efforts in administering the READ 180 curriculum. The documents collected were electronically scanned to create a digital file stored on a password-protected computer, and the hard copies were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Because the data were collected through a combination of interviews, observations, and other documents, the inductive thematic analysis method was the most appropriate approach to use for the study. The collected material was categorized by the types of data (interviews, observations, field notes, and documents such as lesson plans

and minutes from principals' and instructional/strategic meetings. I then created a table of data sources (Appendix H) that organized the collected data by types of data and by participant, media source, and location/site. The table of data sources created was used to assist in the organization process, as suggested by Creswell (2019).

Once I completed the collection of my data, I organized and examined the data for reoccurring themes and ideas. To ensure my data analysis process was accurate, I uploaded my findings into the Delve software program to provide organization, identify commonalities, and categorize codes and themes. The data analysis method used for this case study was the inductive thematic analysis. An inductive thematic analysis allows a researcher to read through data, identify preliminary codes, and group codes into themes (Creswell, 2019).

Systems for Keeping Track of Data

Transcripts of audio recordings of interviews, field notes from observations, and documents such as lesson plans and meeting minutes were stored in a personal file cabinet only accessible by the researcher. In addition, the interviews were stored in the Delve Qualitative Analysis software program and password protected. I assigned participants pseudonyms (Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E, etc.) to conceal the identities of the interviewees. Each data set had its category in the file cabinet and was color-coded.

Role of the Researcher

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the researcher is "the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (p. 16). Therefore, I used reflection and

observation, inductive reasoning, collecting data through interviews and observations, identifying patterns and themes, and forming conclusions derived from the patterns and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). I performed this exploratory case study to explore the fidelity of integrating instructional practices characteristic of the READ 180 program in middle schools in the SDSA. I sought to identify how this study may assist in furthering understanding of how instructional practices are being used in the classroom and provide some insights about how to later engage in evaluating the program. Moreover, as the researcher, I highlighted how this study's findings may be used to inform instruction, define learning goals, design and improve assessments, and provide instructional support to READ 180.

As an educational practitioner in the SDSA, I do not have any judgment or power of authority over teacher evaluations and job performance. Throughout my tenure, I have developed many relationships with the educational staff of the SDSA. Consequently, objectivity and biases, such as my preconceived notions about a subject, could influence data collection and the relationships with the participants. Creswell (2019) indicated that being biased and not being objective misconstrues interpreted and collected data. However, as a researcher, it is essential to exercise appropriate ethical and confidentiality practices to adhere to the standards of scholarly research. My bias was having prior knowledge of the READ 180 program while serving in the SDSA. To mitigate potential biases, the interview questions were reviewed by English language arts (ELA) colleagues. During the research, I recorded all transcripts and used member checking and triangulation practices to avoid biases and ensure credibility. I practiced high ethical

standards and practices according to the IRB and adhered to the standards outlined in the

Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Research in for

the Human Research. I adhered to the core principles: respect for persons, beneficence,

and justice to the IRB. Therefore, my role as the researcher did not hinder the findings of

this study.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2019) described data analysis as a process in which the researcher

develops a general sense of the material collected and then applies a coding description

and themes about the central phenomenon. Data analysis not only assists in organizing

the thoughts and insights of data, but it also creates a better understanding of the vast

amount of information collected from participants and documents (Yin, 2018). In my

study, I collected data using interviews, observations, and documents such as fieldnotes,

lesson plans, and minutes from instructional meetings to understand the perceptions of

middle school teachers with experience teaching the READ 180 intervention program.

Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. Inductive thematic analysis is a

process in which a researcher reads through various forms of data and identifies and

codes emergent themes within the data (Yin, 2018). In this study, I did not use

predetermined codes or preconceived notions of what themes should emerge from the

data (Nowell et al., 2017). I created a code list (see Appendix I) to assist in the coding

process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke noted that coding is essential to

inductive thematic analysis. While analyzing the data, I used elements from Braun and

Clarke thematic analysis approach: (a) become familiar with data, (b) create initial codes,

(c) categorize codes with supporting data, (d) group codes into themes, (e) review and revise themes, and (f) write your narrative.

Coding Process

Interview and document data were coded both manually and using Delve software. Delve software is an online qualitative data analysis software. The following steps were followed to code the data. First, after transcription, I used color coding to help me familiarize myself with the data and to identify preliminary patterns for analysis and codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I then created a code list with 50 initial codes (see Appendix K). I then identified meaningful participants' quotes as supporting evidence and crosschecked them with the initial 50 codes.

Some aspects of the data collected, such as interviews, were analyzed using the Delve program; however, I manually color coded principals' and instructional leaders' phrases because those could not be uploaded to Delve. I reviewed and familiarized myself with the data gathered from the principals' and instructional/strategic meetings. I then categorized the phrases as supporting evidence of emergent themes.

Categories were manually identified and color-coded throughout the interview transcripts, observational data, field notes, and documents such as minutes from principals' meetings and instructional/strategic meetings. I reviewed and revised the themes to ensure that each theme was distinct, with no or minimal overlap with other categories. The revision process lasted till the final data collection data method was used. All data collected was used to create a rich, detailed narrative of the findings that will be later discussed in the data results section.

Quality and Procedures to Assure Accuracy and Credibility

Researchers need to establish the accuracy and credibility of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation and member checks/validation were employed for this case study to assure validity and credibility. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that triangulation enables a researcher to use various data sources such as observations, documents, and interviews to assure and increase a study's internal validity and quality. In qualitative research, triangulation is utilizing multiple data sources and methods to develop an understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2019). Member checks/respondent validation allows researchers to deliver the responses back to the interviewees to determine if the responses are credible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Reliability was established by data triangulation; findings from the interview data were triangulated against data gleaned from the document review. After the interview, interviewees were given transcripts, and they had two weeks to verify the information for accuracy. Also, the interviewees had the opportunity to add comments to the transcripts. In addition, participants were given a summary of my interpretation of the initial findings for member check purposes. Each participant's interview completed this process, which helped with validity and biases.

Procedures for Dealing With Discrepant Cases

Creswell (2019) mentioned that in a qualitative study, discrepancies must be considered due to specific and uncertain responses by participants. As a result, a researcher must perform rigorous procedures such as triangulation and member checks/validation to establish the validity of the study (Creswell, 2019). For my study, I

used semi-structured questions and probing to substantiate the participant's responses. While analyzing the data, I noticed a discrepancy in the response portion of one of the participant's interviews. For example, I needed clarification on what Teacher F was communicating in their response due to a technical glitch in the sound of the audio recording. I verified the discrepancy and provided clarification to the participant through member checking. I used member checks/respondents to validate the participants' responses. Moreover, triangulation was used to compare data, establish validity, and increase the internal validity and quality of the study. These tools were used to analyze discrepancies within the study.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore fidelity of implementation of READ 180 instructional practices that are used by middle schools in SDSA. The problem is that little is known about the fidelity of implementation of instructional characteristics of the READ 180 program in middle schools in the SDSA. In this section, I discuss the results in the context of the local problem. The data gathered for this case study were collected through interviews, observations, and documents from 10 participants. The data obtained from these sources were reviewed and analyzed through inductive thematic analysis. In this section, I describe the thematic analysis and context of derived themes and the RQs, and how the data supported Carrol's et al. (2007) framework of implementation fidelity theory.

Data for this project study was collected through ten semi-structured interviews, six class observations (due to COVID-19 and the closure of schools within the SDSA,

only six classroom observations were obtained), and a review of documents such as fieldnotes, faculty meetings, and lesson plans. I reviewed all lesson plans and notes collected from classroom observations and made additional notes to identify similarities, patterns, and themes throughout the data analysis process.

Through inductive thematic analysis of the data, the four most prominent themes that emerged are: READ 180 is an adequate source when increasing students' comprehension skills, there is an inconsistency of fidelity and delivery of instructional practices, there is a lack of teacher and administration buy-in/support and professional development/ training, and proper implementation of instructional practices lead to positive results. The themes identified from the data aligned with the RQs, and with the Carrol et al. (2007) framework of implementation fidelity theory.

According to Carrol et al. (2007), implementation fidelity helps determine the outcomes of an intervention and plays a significant role in students' academic potential. The implementation theory supports the importance of instructional and implementation fidelity. According to Carrol et al. there are five elements of implementation fidelity: adherence to an intervention, exposure or dose, quality of delivery, participant responsiveness, and program differentiation. These pillars function together to ensure instructional strategies and interventions are exercised to their highest potential. This section will offer a closer look into how the themes align with the research questions.

Findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 aimed to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of READ 180 and its instructional practices. The purpose of RQ1 was to evoke participant

responses that connected middle school teachers' perceptions of READ 180 and implementation. Proper implementation of READ 180 instructional practices is needed to increase students' reading and comprehension skills. Overall, the participants acknowledged that implementing the READ 180 instructional practices and properly following its instructional procedures to its fidelity were contributing factors in students' success in reading and comprehension skills and the functionality of the READ 180 program.

When asked, "What are middle school teachers' perceptions of READ 180 and its instructional practices?" Teacher I replied, "READ 180 is a great program. It [READ 180] is more than adequate than any other program we have ever had." Teacher I then stated that if each component of READ 180 is adequately implemented, positive results are achieved. Teacher B concurred by stating, "When the program is implemented properly, when teachers are receiving the appropriate training in the program, it works, and students make gains in reading and comprehension." In addition, Teacher J shared,

READ 180 is a program that has positive effects on students' comprehension skills. I am quite confident that READ 180 is an adequate source to increase students' reading skills. The intervention component addresses barriers such as various learning styles. Also, if you make the modifications, you can still implement those daily practices and procedures. When implemented to its fidelity, there certainly are positive results.

There was a consensus among the participants that READ 180 is an effective resource, and that when using and properly implementing the READ 180 instructional procedures

and practices to its fidelity, it not only engages and addresses the needs of the students but also creates a plan for students to grow in their reading and comprehension skills, which leads to positive results.

Minutes from the principals' meetings and instructional/strategic meetings highlighted that READ 180 was being used by ELA teachers within four middle schools in the SDSA that these teachers have been trained on READ 180 and its instructional practices. Notes from an instructional/strategic meeting highlighted that the district chose READ 180 due to its success rate displayed by a nearby school district as well as other districts across the nation. Instructional leaders and principals noted that the program is a good resource. However, principals and instructional leaders noted that improvements in its implementation must be made to improve students' reading comprehension skills and standardized test scores.

Findings for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 explored how middle school teachers implemented the READ 180 practices in their daily instructional practices to ensure its curriculum was being taught to fidelity. The purpose of RQ2 was to elicit participant responses that connected how teachers implemented the READ 180 instructional practices and what strategies and procedures are used to execute implementation fidelity.

Most participants shared that the implementation guide plays a major role in their delivery of instruction. However, upon observation of the participants' lessons, I noticed that some participants often strayed away from the implementation guide. In addition, I noticed that specific procedures aligned with the implementation checklist were not

completed during the lessons. Many participants voiced that they sometimes make accommodations and modifications to the lessons to address the student's specific learning needs and make the content more relatable. When asked, "How do middle school teachers implement READ 180 in their daily instructional practices to ensure it is being taught to its fidelity," Teacher I replied, "I spoke with teachers across the district that teach READ 180, and it seems like we all kind of doing something different. The practices are being used, but changes are being made." Teacher B mentioned that before COVID-19, "delivering the READ 180 instructional practices was different because to reach the comprehension levels of certain students, you would have to sometimes stray away from the guidelines provided by the program." Teacher B then stated, "Now, that we are living in an era of COVID-19, being consistent with those instructional practices has kind of gotten lost in the transition from face-to-face learning to virtual learning."

Most participants shared similar perceptions regarding making changes, modifications, and accommodations to the instructional practices of READ 180. Many shared that although the program is scripted, changes should be made to reach the individual student's needs. Teacher A expressed,

> We were told not to make changes to the program and to basically stick to the script. As a teacher, modifications have to be made according to the student. If you make adjustments when needed, you can still reach the desired outcome.

Teacher H stated, "… as you follow the implementation guide and implement those practices and procedures, I know we want to be consistent across the board, but it is still important to make modifications and changes to reach our kids." However, Teacher C

shared that teachers should follow the implementation guide, procedures and policies to its fidelity and "we need to be more consistency across the board. Each school should not be doing something different." Teacher J echoed those same sentiments in a follow-up interview. When asked about the implementation of the instructional practices, Teacher J stated, "…how can we be successful in implementing the program and its instructional procedures if we are not consistent? We have an implementation guide for a reason; we should still use it and get more training." All participants alluded that there is an inconsistency in fidelity and delivery of instructional practices. Furthermore, all participants discussed their daily routines of READ 180. When asked about the daily routine of instructional practices characteristic of READ 180, Teacher J mentioned,

> It starts with whole group direct instruction that usually lasts about 20 minutes and will contain, let us see, vocabulary, reading, and writing. Afterwards, three sets of 20-minute rotations of smaller groups perform activities to practice students' reading skills. Students can work with the instructor one-on-one. In addition, students participate in independent learner studies through vocabulary workbooks and various literature. Lastly, students access the computer software. Then, at the end of the teaching session, there is a 10-minute discussion with the entire group.

All participants voiced their experiences with the READ 180 program; however, how each teacher implemented the program, delivered its instructional practices, and made changes such as modifications and accommodations to the program varied.

Data gathered from the participants about how middle school teachers implement the READ 180 practices in their daily instructional practices revealed that the participants shared different views on administering the instructional procedures of READ 180. The interviews, lesson plans, and observations indicated that participants' ability to deliver READ 180 instructional practices to its fidelity may be influenced by their prior knowledge of English Language Arts (ELA) strategies that teachers may use in a general ELA course to meet a student's specific academic needs. The majority 6 out of 10 participants shared that they found it beneficial to make accommodations and modifications and add research-based strategies to the prescribed READ 180 curriculum to enhance students' reading comprehension skills.

Data from the principals' and instructional/strategic meetings revealed that principals and instructional leaders agreed that READ 180 paired with research-based strategies were needed to address students' comprehension deficits. The data highlighted that principals and instructional leaders stated that changes must be made to increase the fidelity of implementation of the READ 180 program; however, they did not express when those changes were to be made or how those changes were to be implemented. Notes from an instructional meeting revealed that instructional leaders completed a "walk-through" in February 2023 and noticed that the READ 180 instructional practices were being practiced within the four middle schools. However, the delivery of READ 180 instructional practices was inconsistent throughout the district.

Findings for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 explored the perceived barriers of READ 180 regarding program adherence and fidelity of integrating instructional practices in reading comprehension? The purpose of RQ3 was to obtain participant responses that not only identified perceived barriers to implementing READ 180 but linked perceived barriers to implementing the READ 180 to program to adherence and fidelity of integrating instructional practices in reading comprehension. When implementing a program or curriculum, some barriers may interfere with program adherence and implementing a program's instructional practices to its fidelity (Papworth,2021).

The data gathered from participants' interviews regarding the barriers when implementing the READ 180 program revealed a need for teacher and administration buy-in and adequate training on how to implement READ 180 consistently. When asked about some barriers when implementing READ 180, Teacher E expressed, "…one barrier I see is lack of support from the administration at the local school and district levels. A teacher cannot fully adhere to the program's procedures due to cuts in resources as well as classes and class time." As the interview progressed, Teacher E stated,

> As time passed, the implementation or fidelity of the program was not as important as it was when we first implemented the program. Even though it is a scripted program. I think we as teachers still need that support from them.

Teacher C stated,

> Another barrier is that sometimes you do not have the buy-in or support that you need from the administration because they do not know all the components or

instructional pieces that are readily available that they do not see. How can you

adhere to the READ 180 daily procedures if your administration dictates how and

when it should be taught? That could be a significant barrier.

The participants shared similar sentiments and perceptions about the importance and

value of administration and staff buy-in/support. The participants expressed the need for

administration and teacher buy-in and support. Teacher F shared that district and

administration presence and support are needed to implement programs properly. Teacher

G concurred when he asserted,

As a veteran teacher and an administrator, I see how teachers need administration

support or "buy-in" when implementing a strategy, program, or curriculum. As an

administrator, sometimes we are pulled in so many different directions. However,

we must support our teachers, especially when a specific plan or program has

been handed to them from the district to implement to its fidelity. We must value

its time, procedures, and policies as much as the district and teachers do.

The participants stated that there needs to be more administration and staff buy-in and

support. Most participants suggested that it is challenging to properly implement the

READ 180 program to its fidelity due to a lack of administration and staff buy-in and

support. Overall, participants shared that more administration and staff buy-in and

support could contribute to the success of the READ 180 program and students' reading

and comprehension skills.

When asked about the barriers, Teacher I stated, "administration and staff buy-in

would change the climate of the program." In a follow-up interview, when asked to

elaborate on the previous comment, she stated, "administration and staff buy-in is so important to any program or curriculum; it is important because administration and teachers provide the support needed to implement and execute a program properly. Everyone wants to feel supported; students as well as teachers."

Another barrier participants acknowledged was the need for professional development and ongoing training to implement a program adequately. Teacher A stated,

I think, on our side, we need more professional development. With us not having so much hands-on experience and a program that's new to some. . . I think if we have more time with the professional development and even after COVID-19 had hit, if we were able to say, hey, these are some things that I know we are going to struggle with, I think that it [professional development] would have put us a little bit ahead of the game.

When asked about a barrier when implementing READ 180, Teacher F stated, "Having more professional development on READ 180 would be good, and follow-ups from the district would be helpful. Team meetings and professional development opportunities should be made available if they want this program to make an impact."

The data regarding the perceived barriers teachers face when abiding to program adherence and implementation fidelity relate to Research Question 3. How teachers feel about the barriers and its impact on their ability to perform implementation fidelity and adherence were expressed during the interview process. All participants agreed that implementation barriers and how one responds to the barriers are crucial factors in delivering and ensuring that the practices are being taught with its fidelity. Most

participants suggested that it is challenging to properly administer the READ 180 instructional practices to its fidelity due to lack of training, certain scripted guidelines, scheduling conflicts, and administrative support, and teacher shortages.

Data from the instructional/strategic meetings highlighted some of the same barriers expressed by teachers that implement, and practice READ 180 daily. Notes from instructional/strategic meetings acknowledged that the scheduling of READ 180 instructional classes, teachers' delivery of READ 180 instruction, and how READ 180 should be incorporated after the impact of COVID-19 were identified as barriers of implementing READ 180 to its fidelity. Contrary to participants' interviews, data from the instructional/strategic meetings did not identify a lack of training and administrative support as potential barriers teachers face when implementing READ 180.

Findings for Research Question 4

Research Question 4 highlighted the strengths of implementing the READ 180 program regarding program adherence and fidelity of integrating instructional practices in reading comprehension. RQ4 intended to elicit participant responses that connected proper implementation and program adherence to teachers' perceptions of READ 180 strengths. READ 180 allowed teachers to further assist students in developing and supporting reading comprehension skills. Teachers shared that students with deficiencies in reading comprehension skills learn better when the READ 180 instructional practices are performed to fidelity and the program's guidelines and procedures are adhered to.

When asked about the strengths of implementing the READ 180 program as it relates to program adherence and fidelity of integrating instructional practice in reading

comprehension, Teacher H suggested that when the program is properly implemented consistently, the growth of students' gains in reading and comprehension skills is phenomenal. Teacher A shared,

> I have seen the students go into the program reading below grade levels and not fully comprehending what he or she have read. Then, you start noticing changes in their vocabulary and reading ability. The program really helps them in getting where they need to be with those reading levels. I like the fact that you know you have a child that might not be on the same level as others, but they all gradually show progress by the end of the year. One of the best things I've witnessed when implementing the program correctly is the gains students make.

Teacher E asserted,

> The READ 180 program addresses the skills students need to succeed in their ELA course. The various component addresses all learners and students are able to make gains in their ELA courses as well as their reading ability…at the beginning of the year, you see the students' levels, and you know it's going to change for the better. Mid-year, you start to see the growth. Then, at the end of the year, you see tremendous growth.

The participants shared in-depth information about their emotions and the positive results of using the READ 180 program to increase students' reading comprehension skills. Participants noted that there are growths in students' Lexile levels. Participants reported increases not only in students' reading comprehension skills and academic courses but also in students' confidence in reading and speaking. Overall, the participants suggested

that when used to its fidelity, the READ 180 program is a beneficial resource that increases reading comprehension skills in students.

Data from the principals' and instructional/strategic meetings suggested that students and teachers experienced success using the READ 180 instructional practices. Instructional leaders highlighted that data from a benchmark assessment displayed growth in students' vocabulary comprehension of informational text and identification of textual evidence. Instructional leaders contributed to the growth of the use of READ 180 and other research-based strategies and resources. Instructional leaders emphasized that more success and growth in students' reading comprehension can happen if everyone plays a part in ensuring the READ 180 practices are implemented daily to its fidelity.

Evidence of Quality

To address the credibility and accuracy of data, I followed the procedures of member checks and triangulation. Member checks/respondent validation allows researchers to deliver the responses back to the interviewees to determine if the responses are credible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This case study used triangulation and member checks/validation to establish validity, credibility, and impartiality. The process of triangulation and member checks/ validation were performed using interview transcripts and follow-up interviews. After each interview, interviewees were given transcripts of the interviews, and they had two weeks to verify information for accuracy. Also, the interviewees had the opportunity to add comments to the transcripts. I completed this process for each participant's interview to establish validity and accuracy and eliminate a and to mitigate biases.

Relationship to Findings in Literature

In this section, I will relate the themes derived from the participants' responses to the literature previously discussed in Section 1. The themes are READ 180 is an adequate source for increasing students' comprehension skills (Theme 1), there is an inconsistency of fidelity and delivery of instructional practices (Theme 2), there is a lack of teacher and administration buy-in/support and professional development/training (Theme 3), and proper implementation of instructional practices leads to positive results (Theme 4). Themes 1 and 4 and Themes 2 and 3 are discussed together, respectively.

Themes 1 and 4

Wells et al. (2021) stressed the importance of adequately implementing research-based interventions and strategies. Researchers noted that interventions and strategies only benefit individuals when implemented properly through fidelity. The study denoted how a program's activities and practices can be adequately implemented through the lenses of the active implementation framework and adherence. Wells et al. (2021) found that implementation fidelity provides a foundation for more comprehensive research on how implementing programs and practices to high fidelity is necessary for a program to be effective. The literature indicated that exercising a program with high fidelity produces positive outcomes (Theme 4). Participants shared that when using the READ 180 intervention program to its fidelity, they saw growth in students' reading comprehension skills and Lexile levels.

There was a consensus among the participants that when using and properly implementing the READ 180 instructional procedures and practices to its fidelity, it not

only engages and addresses the needs of the students but also creates a plan for students to grow in their reading and comprehension skills which leads to positive results. Overall, the participants suggested that when used to its fidelity, the READ 180 program is a beneficial resource that increases reading comprehension skills in students (Theme 1).

Theme 1 is aligned with RQ1 regarding teachers' perceptions of READ 180 and its instructional practices because participants shared their experiences about READ 180 instructional practices and its impact on students' comprehension skills. Participants shared that READ 180 was a great source for increasing students' comprehension skills (Theme 1). In addition, participants acknowledged that implementing the READ 180 instructional practices and properly following its instructional procedures to its fidelity were contributing factors in students' success in reading and comprehension skills and the functionality of the READ 180 program.

Theme 4 aligned with RQ4 in referencing the strengths of using the READ 180 program to its fidelity. Participants shared that properly implementing READ 180 instructional practices produces positive results (Theme 4). Participants noted that there is growth in students' Lexile levels. Participants reported increases not only in students' reading comprehension skills and academic courses but also in students' confidence in reading and speaking. READ 180 allowed teachers to further assist students in developing and supporting reading comprehension skills. Teachers shared that students with deficiencies in reading comprehension skills learn better when the READ 180 instructional practices were performed to its fidelity and the program's guidelines and procedures were followed.

Themes 2 and 3

McKeown (2022) suggested that teachers who receive proper training are more effective in delivering instruction that meets the academic needs of students. The participants in this study believed there was a need for professional development and continuous training to administer the READ 180 instructional practices to its fidelity successfully. The findings of teachers' notions that there is a need for professional development and ongoing training on READ 180 (Theme 3) align with implementation fidelity theory in that adherence drives instructional and implementation fidelity that determines the outcomes of an intervention stemmed from the idea that adequate training supports proper delivery of instruction (National Implementation Research Network, 2019). According to the participants, adequate training would benefit students' academic needs and teachers' content and resource knowledge. Participants also shared that a lack of professional development and ongoing training has resulted in the inconsistency of fidelity and delivery of READ 180 instructional practices (Theme 2).

Researchers noted that professional development that properly trains teachers on effectively using interventions and programs to its fidelity is needed for teachers to properly increase students' reading performance (Parra, 2022). In addition to the need for professional development and ongoing training, participants expressed that they face challenges such as a lack of administration and teacher buy-in, support, and professional development (Theme 3). Participants shared that the lack of administration, teacher buy-in, support, and professional development hindered implementing the READ 180 instructional procedures and practices to its fidelity. Participants shared that more

administration and staff buy-in and support could contribute to the success of the READ 180 program and students' reading and comprehension skills. Nevenglosky (2018) noted a connection between administrative support and program and curriculum implementation. Research suggested that positive administrative support plays a crucial role in the implementation fidelity of a curriculum (Nevenglosky, 2018).

Theme 2 aligned with RQ2, stating how middle school teachers implement the READ 180 practices in their daily instructional practices to ensure that it is being taught to fidelity. Participants stated that there is a lack of consistency in fidelity and delivery of instructional practices (Theme 2). Many Participants voiced that their delivery of READ 180 instructional practices differed from the prescribed curriculum of READ 180. Others said they followed the prescribed curriculum, including the implementation guide and scripted lessons. Data gathered from the participants' responses revealed that the participants shared different views on delivering the instructional procedures of READ 180.

Theme 3 aligned with RQ3 because teachers were able to raise awareness of those barriers that interfere with the implementation of a program and the fidelity of integrating instructional practices in reading comprehension. As a result of acknowledging those barriers, teachers felt uncertain about the implementation fidelity of the READ 180 instructional practices.

Participants shared that there is a lack of teacher and administration buy-in/support and professional development/training (Theme 3). Participants also expressed that a lack of administrative support results in scheduling conflicts when trying to

administer the full 90-minute teaching sessions properly and consistently. Participants stated that a lack of professional development and training hindered the fidelity of implementation of READ 180.

Relationship of Findings to Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study was Carrol et al. (2007) implementation fidelity theory. According to Carrol et al., there are five elements of implementation fidelity: adherence to an intervention, exposure or dose, quality of delivery, participant responsiveness, and program differentiation. This conceptual framework was used to investigate middle school teachers' perceptions of the instructional practices characteristic of the READ 180 intervention program and the instructional procedures teachers use to implement the READ 180 instructional practices to its fidelity.

Although there are 5 elements of the implementation fidelity conceptual framework, the participants' responses identified three of five of these elements: program differentiation, adherence, and exposure or dose. Program differentiation refers to the components of the program that may be modified to meet the academic needs of students. Adherence to an intervention refers to how well a program is delivered to replicate its written formula or design; exposure or dose refers to the amount of frequency and duration an individual/ individuals may receive during an intervention (Carrol et al., 2007).

Program Differentiation

According to the conceptual framework, as described in the program differentiation portion, sometimes there is a need to differentiate, make changes to programs to adequately address the learning needs of students. For example, the conceptual framework enclosed the need for teachers to make modifications and accommodations to the READ 180 instructional procedures and practices to assist students who display deficiencies in reading comprehension to become proficient. Teacher A stated, "I feel like as a teacher, modifications have to be made according to the student…You have to make changes to address the students' needs." In addition, teachers expressed that modifications and accommodations to the implementation guide and scripted curriculum allowed teachers to make the lessons more relatable to students and increase their reading comprehension skills.

Triangulation of observations and collection of documents including lesson plans, principals', and instructional/strategic meetings enabled me to analyze the role of program differentiation used by teachers in the SDSA. Through observations and reviewing of lesson plans, I noted some participants did not use the scripted lessons designed by READ 180. I observed that the prescribed READ 180 lessons were modified. At several participating sites, I noted the teachers made accommodations and modifications to the lessons. Notes from an instructional meeting suggested that instructional leaders encourage teachers to make modifications to the READ 180 lessons and create differentiated learning opportunities to meet the learning and comprehension

needs of every student; yet, they stressed the importance of being purposeful in planning and using fidelity when implementing a strategy or intervention.

Adherence

Regarding the conceptual framework implementation fidelity, participants alluded to adherence to an intervention. Teacher E shared that adherence to the READ 180 instructional practices was not being replicated. Teacher E stated, "A teacher is not fully able to adhere to the program's procedures due to cuts in resources as well as classes and class time." In this study, many participants stated that when one consistently adheres to the READ 180 guidelines and instructional procedures to its fidelity and incorporates changes to meet the academic needs of students, there are growths in students' reading Lexile level and reading comprehension skills.

Through triangulation of the observations and collection of documents including lesson plans, principals', and instructional/strategic meetings, I was able to get a better understanding of how adherence played a role in the SDSA teachers' implementation of the READ 180 intervention. Through observations and reviewing of lesson plans, I noted that many participants deviated from the prescribed curriculum of READ 180. Moreover, notes from an instructional meeting noted that although instructional leaders observed the READ 180 program being taught in the SDSA classrooms; many teachers were not adhering to the READ 180 practices and procedures to fidelity. Some principals revealed that certain factors hindered the full implementation of the READ 180 program; however, daily objectives were covered and the implementation of READ 180 instructional practices and other research-based strategies were implemented.

Exposure

According to the conceptual framework, exposure or dose refers to the amount of frequency and duration an individual/ individuals may receive during an intervention, and it plays a major role in implementation fidelity (Carrol et al., 2007). Many participants suggested that exposure or the number of times students received READ 180 instruction was negatively impacted due to scheduling conflicts. For example, participants expressed disappointment in the exposure or allotted time students receive with the READ 180 program. Teacher C stated, "On occasions, READ 180 class times are altered and sometimes even canceled due to scheduling conflicts." Participants expressed that the limited exposure of READ 180 instruction prohibited the implementation fidelity and success of the intervention program.

Triangulation of the observations and collection of documents including lesson plans, principals' and instructional/strategic meetings allowed me to examine the exposure of READ 180 intervention at participating sites in the SDSA. Through observations, I noted that sessions of the READ 180 instructional procedures were altered. Many of the prescribed 90-minute sessions were condensed to 25–30 minutes sessions. At some sites, participants shared that the READ 180 classes were only taught 2 to 3 times a week. Notes from the principals' and instructional/ strategic meetings, alluded to READ 180 classes being altered due to teacher shortages and scheduling conflicts. The triangulation of the observations, lesson plans, and principal's meetings allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the teachers in the SDSA implementation of the READ 180 instructional practices and procedures.

Project Deliverable

The data collected and analyzed allowed me to align the project with the needs of the SDSA middle school teachers. I was able to create a deliverable learning project such as a READ 180 professional development plan that includes an implementation checklist (see Appendix E) based on the four emerging themes: READ 180 is an adequate source when increasing students' comprehension skills, there is an inconsistency of fidelity and delivery of instructional practices and professional develop /training; there is a lack of teacher and administration buy-in/support; and proper implementation of instructional practices leads to positive results. The project details 5 days of training and a checklist that provides the daily plan, proper procedures/guidelines, and instructional practices of the READ 180 program.

Conclusion

In Section 2, I identified the qualitative research design for the study, the instrumentation, and the sampling used for the research. I discussed the connection between the identified problem and research questions. In addition, I examined the connection between the research and the chosen research design. Also, I linked the connections between participants' responses and the conceptual framework. Qualitative data collection methods such as face-to-face interviews, classroom observations, and field notes were used to gather information on teacher perceptions of READ 180 instructional practices and the policy and procedure of the intervention. Four themes emerged from the study and were used to create a project deliverable. Section 3 will provide details about the rationale of the project and a review of the literature that supports the project.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Using the study's findings and current literature, I developed a deliverable learning project, specifically a READ 180 professional development plan that includes an implementation checklist (see Appendix A and Appendix B). The professional development plan is designed for teachers, administrators, and district leaders. It includes 5 days of training and a checklist plan and proper procedures/guidelines and instructional practices of the READ 180 program. In Section 3, I provide details about the rationale of the project and a review of the literature that supports the project. The literature review focuses on the need for and importance of professional development, the effects of providing professional development, and the benefits of consistently following guidelines when implementing an intervention. In addition, Section 3 includes a project description with goals and a discussion of project implications.

My primary goal with professional development is to offer support to promote high-quality implementation and instructional delivery of the READ 180 intervention program. This is done by providing educational practitioners with a checklist to facilitate how teachers can monitor implementation fidelity and guidelines about instructional practices of the READ 180 program. Another goal is to increase the participants' knowledge of READ 180 and its procedures. Lastly, my final goal is to promote collaborative learning among teachers, administrators, district leaders, and content specialists.

Rationale

The current study was conducted to explore fidelity of implementation of READ 180 instructional practices used by middle schools in SDSA. Findings from the study indicate a need for additional training on READ 180 instructional practices in the SDSA. Results indicate educational leaders and other educational practitioners may benefit by increasing their understanding of the need for implementation fidelity and adherence for any program like READ 180 to be effective. The findings guided me in creating a professional development that will increase educational leaders' and practitioners' knowledge of implementation fidelity and equip teachers with the necessary tools to implement READ 180 instructional practices.

Review of the Literature

For an intervention or curriculum to be implemented properly, adequate training must be provided (McCarvy, 2019). Findings from the interviews with the SDSA middle school teachers provided support that continuous use of professional development opportunities is needed to adequately implement and properly deliver instructional practices characteristic of READ 180. To research the need for and importance of professional development, effects of professional development, and effects of consistently following guidelines when implementing an intervention, I performed extensive searches using search engines such as ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, EBSCOhost, and Walden's Dissertations & Theses.

Benefits of Consistently Following Guidelines when Implementing an Intervention

Focusing on increasing an intervention's effectiveness has gained much attention in the educational field (Crane et al., 2020). Studies have shown that when one consistently follows proper guidelines when implementing an intervention, desired results are achieved (Kingsbery, 2023). Similarly, Hanks (2019) noted that following proper guidelines can be applied to any field to achieve effective results.

McGee (2019) indicated that by properly following the guidelines and procedures of a math literacy intervention, students scored higher on a posttest than the pretest. Comparatively, Jarrett (2020) suggested that through consistent following of proper guidelines and procedures, the CHAMPS (conversation, help, activity, movement, participation, success) intervention program was successfully implemented in a southeastern Title I school district in the United States. This in turn led to a decrease of office referrals for negative behaviors among at-risk students across 17 campuses and a boost in students' academics. In contrast, Pierce (2020) noted that the Rachel's Challenge program was not successfully implemented at a middle school in South Carolina due to low fidelity of implementation and lack of consistency when following its guidelines and procedures, which caused little to no effects on bullying and climate of the school. Thus, highlighting the importance of professional development. These studies support my goal of creating professional development to improve the implementation of the READ 180 program.

Need for and Importance of Professional Development

Professional development offers growth in learning in various content areas. In addition, it provides a better understanding of pedagogy (Hart, 2023). Likewise, Moquin (2019) noted that professional development opportunities support teachers in their lessons and teaching experiences. According to Quinn (2019), practices of professional development supply educational practitioners with a great deal of information to make the best possible decisions regarding professional learning, which in turn makes teaching more effective in student learning. In the current study, many participants stressed the need for and importance of professional development.

Identifying the need for and importance of professional development is a primary factor in building an effective educational learning community. Alderman (2023) noted that educational practitioners such as school leaders and teacher coaches must provide teachers with training and other skills necessary for teachers to be effective in their classroom instruction. Moreover, Fagundes (2022) indicated that principals must use updated data to provide adequate and ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to be effective. However, Jones (2019) denoted that limited studies detail how principals lead and design professional development, which is a crucial element of a school improvement plan and enhances teacher effectiveness. In my study, participants expressed that in order for an intervention or strategy to be effective, educational practitioners must be willing to attend professional developments/trainings and collaborate using data to inform instruction.

Due to a lack of teacher effectiveness and other educational challenges, many educational practitioners have identified the need for professional development (Oberholzer, 2023; Osmani, 2021). Webb (2019) denoted that professional learning training needs to be offered to support instruction and provide research-based strategies and opportunities to model desired teaching outcomes. Lynch (2019) also indicated that educational leaders must utilize professional development opportunities to increase teachers' effectiveness and instructional practice. To provide a better teaching experience for educators, professional development must be supplied to both general and special education teachers to ensure that best practices are applied in classroom settings (Christie, 2019). In the current study, participants asserted that best practices come from effective professional development.

Effects of Professional Development

According to Gupta and Lee (2020), a professional learning culture must be established in a learning community to create an ongoing positive teaching and learning environment. A study found that ongoing professional developments led to a growth in effective teaching practices and instructional methods among teachers, which enhanced student academic achievement (Delva, 2023). Similarly, Austin (2023) indicated that high quality professional development is needed to ensure teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to implement strategies and interventions to fidelity. Beck et al. (2020) noted that ongoing professional development increases teachers' confidence, content knowledge, and implementation of a design curriculum and intervention. Furthermore, Cranston (2019) found that using professional development leads to increased teacher

knowledge and improved instructional practices. The research suggests that professional development contributes to teacher effectiveness and, in turn, increases student learning.

Foley (2020) stated that professional development improves a learning community's climate and culture. For example, a study performed in the Tennessee Public School System indicated that there was statistical significance between professional development and instructional improvements (Gronto, 2023). Professional development enhances leadership practices and improves school culture, which was measured by educators' responses on the principals' sense of efficacy scale, job satisfaction survey, and Tennessee education survey (Gronto, 2023). Comparatively, McGhee (2023) noted that supplying professional development that adequately addressed the unique needs of teachers led to a growth in teacher retention rates across middle schools in North Carolina school district and improved learning organizations' climate and culture. Hunt (2020) also denoted that efficient professional development, along with teacher collaboration and support, increases the morale of teachers and the quality of teaching, which in turn enhances student academic learning. Research suggests that adequate professional development is a critical factor in increasing teacher effectiveness and improving a learning community's climate and culture. In the current study, participants stressed that professional development plays a crucial role in creating effective teachers and delivering effective instructional practices.

Project Description

Participants expressed the need for professional development and continuous training on READ 180 at the district and school levels. As a result, a 5-day, 4-hour

professional development was created to promote learning of the READ 180 handbook, usage of effective strategies, implementation of fidelity, and collaboration among district leaders and teachers who deliver the READ 180 instructional practices. Participants will assess a daily evaluation of the training through a survey created in Google Forms (see Appendix J). To provide effective and purposeful training, the following items are required: a computer lab/media center, note pads, pens, highlighters, timer, set of READ 180 handbooks, implementation checklist, and computers with internet access.

Day 1 will start with the professional development facilitator reviewing the training's strategic agenda and learning objectives:

- The strategic agenda and learning objectives include information about the READ 180 framework, best READ 180 instructional practices and strategies, and implementation guide/checklist.

- A discussion of the significance of literacy and reading comprehension and an overview of the READ 180 intervention program.

- A discussion about district leaders, administration support, and teacher buy-in.

The following methods will be used to complete Session 1 of the trainings: team building activity, video snippets, and presentation with question-and-answer portions presented through Pear Deck.

A training segment will consist of data analysis of standardized test scores of various school districts currently using the READ 180 intervention program. To show relatable evidence, the demographics of the various school districts that use the READ 180 intervention program will be similar to the SDSA. Video snippets of teacher and

student testimonials from the program developer HMH's website will be presented in the training. During the share-out portion of Session 1 of the training, teachers will be given the chance to discuss how they implement the READ 180 intervention program and its instructional practices. In addition, teachers will share what additional support is needed to execute the READ 180 instructional practices to fidelity effectively. Later, teachers will share their experiences using the READ 180 intervention program.

Day 2 will consist of the READ 180 intervention program's alignment to the Alabama Course of Standards in English Language Arts and Writing.

- First, a review of the READ 180 intervention program will be provided.

- Teachers and others will browse the resources and articles provided by the READ 180 intervention program.

- The facilitator will address any questions or concerns about the program.

- An examination of READ 180 intervention program's framework, scope, and sequence will take place amongst the participants.

Day 3 will consist of the facilitator modeling the instructional procedures and practices of the READ 180 intervention program for the participants.

- Participants will be given an implementation checklist to review while the lesson is being modeled.

- The facilitator will guide the participants through two sample lessons. Each lesson will last 90 minutes.

- Each teaching session consists of whole-group direct instruction, small-group rotations, and whole-group wrap-up.

- The facilitator will open each lesson with a video resource that accompanies the lesson. The whole-group direct instruction is 20 minutes.

- Participants will explore the various vocabulary, reading, and writing resources.

- Participants will work in small collaborative groups to perform activities that students practice to increase reading skills. During this time, the facilitator will work closely with the READ 180 instructors to help them feel more comfortable with the instructional procedures and practices of READ 180.

- Participants will assess the READ 180 computer program. At the end of the teaching session, there is a 10-minute discussion with the whole group to discuss any concerns about the implementation and delivery of instruction.

Day 4 will consist of certain participants modeling a lesson of READ 180. The implementation checklist will be a reference guide to support the teachers.

- The facilitator will offer extra support, such as suggestions and the most effective strategies/practices to the participants.

- Any questions and concerns about the flow of instruction, delivery of instructional practices, and utilization of strategies will be addressed.

Day 5 will be a collaborative effort among the facilitators, administrators, and teachers sharing their experiences with READ 180 and offering insights to each other.

- Participants will navigate through their district- and school-level data results and devise a plan on how to use the data to drive instruction.

- A discussion of dates for the follow-up training will be conducted.

- District leaders and administrators will define the expectations for the READ 180 implementation, delivery of instructional practices, and hopes for academic and social change.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

Although the study's findings revealed a need for professional development opportunities and training, administration, and teacher buy-in were expressed as potential barriers to implementation fidelity. Several participants expressed the need to implement and continuously use READ 180 but that there is a lack of support from the district, administration, and some teachers. One solution includes providing district leaders, administration, and teachers with evidence of success, such as testimonials of students and teachers who have used the READ 180 and continue using the program. Other solutions include getting all stakeholders involved in a reading campaign and creating a learning environment conducive to collaboration and teamwork.

Another potential barrier is the expense of the training. As the participants expressed, the READ 180 training must be continuous to be purposeful and effective. The initial training suggested is a 5-day training. The 5-day training will require READ 180 resource materials, pens, notepads, highlighters, and snacks. Materials and other expenses, such as snacks, must be calculated. One solution to assist in covering the training expenses is to ask community stakeholders to donate snacks. In addition, district leaders and the administration of the hosting school will be asked to donate supplies to the training.

Project Timetable for Proposed Implementation

The projected timetable for project implementation is July 25–29, 2024. The 5-day professional development will begin at 8:00 a.m. and end at 12:00 p.m. The professional learning sessions will include modeling, discussions, and planning. In addition, the training will take place during the summer months, and teachers will prepare for the upcoming school year with activities and classroom organization. The projected timetable may assist in teacher support and buy-in because the strategic planning, lessons, questions, and concerns will be addressed before the upcoming school term starts.

Roles and Responsibilities

Researcher

After receiving approval from Walden University, the data collection and analysis results may be presented to offer a rationale for the professional development sessions detailed in the project. As indicated in the consent forms, those who participated in the study can obtain a copy of the results. The primary role of the researcher is to create a project that may benefit the stakeholders and students in the SDSA.

Project Facilitator

If district leaders or administrators request that the project be presented, I will serve as the project facilitator. I will have to collaborate with the district specialists, administrative leaders, and teachers to ensure that the READ 180 resources and other supplies are available during the professional development sessions. I will create a list detailing the necessities needed for professional development. Some necessities include approval of dates, agendas, times, presentations, a computer lab/media center, note pads,

pens, highlighters, timer, a set of the READ 180 handbook, an implementation checklist, and computers with internet access. The main role of the project facilitator is to provide support for the teachers and other stakeholders in their implementation efforts of the research-based intervention program.

Teachers

Teachers will have the responsibility of participating in the 5-day professional development sessions. Teachers are expected to be punctual, motivated, actively engaged, and respectful. They will be asked to collaborate in groups, share experiences and information, ask questions, and participate in activities during the workshop. Teachers will be expected to access the online portion of the READ 180 intervention program using their login credentials. Teachers will also be expected to complete an electronic evaluation emailed at the end of each professional development session (Appendix K).

Administrators

Administrators are expected to be present for each day of the professional development. Administrators are expected to be punctual, motivated, actively engaged, and respectful. When teachers witness administrative leaders actively engaging in professional development, they tend to take the training more seriously and admire the administrative leaders' efforts. One goal is to encourage collaboration among administrators and teachers while generating teacher buy-in. Administrators must collaborate with the facilitator to provide an adequate space for the session, computers with internet access, and a smart board. In addition, administrators must verify and approve the professional development sessions' dates, times, and agendas.

District Leaders

District leaders must be punctual, motivated, actively engaged, and respectful. In addition, district leaders are expected to support administrators and teachers during the sessions. Also, district leaders may be asked to monitor and offer assistance in the collaborative group share outs and activities. Lastly, district leaders will be expected to define the expectations for the READ 180 implementation, delivery of instructional practices, and hopes for academic and social change.

Project Evaluation Plan

At the completion of each session, an evaluation generated through Google Forms will be emailed to each participant (see Appendix J). The data will assist the project facilitator in modifying and planning for the following day. The evaluation will gauge learning trends, learning needs, and levels of participation/engagement. The evaluation suggested for the project are goal-based, formative, and summative methods.

Participants shared that lack of teacher buy-in, consistent collaboration between administration and teachers, and follow-ups from district leaders were barriers that hindered the implementation and success of the READ 180 intervention program. The hope is that the formative evaluation will create bi-weekly collaborative data planning and curriculum meetings. If this occurs, middle school ELA teachers and district leaders, such as accountability interventionists within the learning communities, will consistently meet and collaborate to review progress goals and make modifications if needed. In addition, a monthly three-question survey will be emailed to the teachers (see Appendix K). Sample questions include: (a) how has your implementation of the READ 180

intervention program improved; (b) what additional support would you like to have to improve your implementation of the research-based intervention program; and (c) describe the students' progress in the intervention program. The data collected from the surveys will be shared with district leaders and administrators to determine if additional support and training are needed. In addition, the responses/feedback will allow teachers to make any modifications to the upcoming lessons.

Finally, at the completion of the 2024–2025 school year, a final survey will be emailed to the middle school ELA teachers (see Appendix L). The main purpose of the summative evaluation is to observe if changes occurred because of the proposed project. I want to determine if ELA teachers properly implemented the READ 180 curriculum as prescribed by its makers. In addition, I want to know how the implementation fidelity of the READ 180 intervention program affected students' learning progress. The two-question summative survey would ask: Describe your experience implementing the READ 180 intervention during the 2024–2025 school year. Compare your students' comprehension skills from the beginning of the school year to the completion of the school year. Data collected from the survey will assist in determining if the proposed project produced positive outcomes in the SDSA or if additional support and training is needed.

Project Implications

When designing this project, possible project implications were stated as desired outcomes. Project implications are consequences or outcomes resulting from the

proposed project. The project was designed to have lasting effects on local stakeholders and a larger-scale social change.

Local Community

Once the professional development sessions are completed, participants will have the resources, skills, and knowledge to implement the research based READ 180 intervention program to its fidelity. Participants will be equipped with the best instructional practices prescribed by the READ 180 curriculum to increase students, reading comprehension skills. ELA teachers will be able to collaborate with administrators and district leaders, such as accountability interventionists and content specialists, to provide quality education for students and ensure that standards and curriculum are being taught to its fidelity. Lastly, teachers will create a learning environment that fosters active student engagement while increasing reading comprehension skills.

Administrators and district leaders will be able to create social and learning change throughout the learning community by consistently collaborating and providing support for teachers. They will be able to make instructional decisions and provide some insights into how to evaluate teacher performance and the READ 180 program. Administrators and district leaders will be able to analyze data to understand how instructional practices are being used to enhance students' reading comprehension and achieve the outcomes of the READ 180 intervention program.

Larger-Scale Change

The READ 180 intervention program has been implemented in other SA schools and throughout the United States. As previously mentioned, effective professional development is needed for any program to be implemented to its fidelity. The results and data shared from the project can be distributed to other school districts that may need guidance on properly implementing the READ 180 intervention program. The leadership team could offer professional development sessions to other school districts that have newly adopted the READ 180 intervention program. This will also create a line of communication for networking where school districts can share experiences, strategies, and resources to enhance students' reading comprehension skills and create an actively engaged classroom. In addition, this project could function as a model that supports curriculum fidelity when implementing programs. Lastly, this project could serve as a guide to provide students with a better-quality education, increase reading comprehension skills, and prepare students for college and careers.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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Section 3 outlined the professional development project, the evaluation plan, and the project implications. The goal of the project sought to provide quality support to implement the READ 180 intervention program effectively. While highlighting the benefits of properly implementing a program to its fidelity, the project seeks to eliminate barriers such as lack of teacher buy-in and administrative support, lack of professional development and follow-ups, and inconsistent instructional practices. Section 4 details the reflections of the project.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore fidelity of implementation of READ 180 instructional practices used by middle school teachers in SDSA. The READ 180 intervention program and instructional fidelity have positive effects on struggling readers (WWC, 2020). There was consensus among participants that when using and adequately implementing these practices, they not only engaged and addressed needs of students but also led to creating plans for students to grow in their reading and comprehension skills, which leads to positive results. Section 4 includes reflections about findings from this study. Also in this section, I detail the study's strengths, limitations, and recommendations for alternative approaches. In addition, I discuss scholarship, project development, leadership and change, and the importance of work. Lastly, I address implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Some of the project's strengths included consistent lines of communication and collaboration between teachers, administrators, and district leaders and a professional development that addresses concerns about the READ 180 program. According to participants, staff/administrative support, proper training, and ongoing professional development better equip teachers with necessary tools to implement READ 180 instructional practices and procedures adequately. Teachers may provide students with a better-quality education, increase reading comprehension skills, and prepare them for college and careers. Professional development opportunities that involve exploring content and information, learning strategies, and modeling and provide time to reflect,

practice, and identify positive outcomes for students is pivotal in terms of future planning and implementation of any intervention or strategy (Guskey, 2020; Ross, 2023).

This project may increase communication among administrators, district leaders and content specialists, and teachers by creating a continuous learning and engaging environment among participants. The project has the potential to update participants' perceptions about READ 180 and implementation fidelity. In the project, participants can be educated on READ 180 procedures, methods of improving implementation fidelity of READ 180, and research-based strategies to improve reading comprehension skills of students. Teachers who receive proper training are more effective in terms of delivering instruction that meets academic needs of students (McKeown, 2022).

While conducting this study, there were several limitations. A limitation of the project is that many administrative staff, district leaders and content specialists, and teachers may not participate or have the desire to participate in training due to lack of buy-in and support. Livingston (2021) noted that *buy-in* is the level of participation or investment and support. Support and buy-in influence the climate and culture of learning communities as well as success and fidelity of interventions (Livingston, 2021). During interviews, participants said there is a lack of support and buy-in among administrators and teachers. This may be addressed through data that support use of READ 180 strategies, individualized instructional progression monitoring of student mastery, and testimonials from surrounding districts who have adopted the READ 180 program into their curriculum.

Another limitation of this project is that it does not offer a guide on how to implement READ 180 procedures at grade-level standards in traditional ELA classrooms. Most participants expressed that modifications and accommodations had to be made to lessons to fully adapt READ 180 procedures in traditional ELA classrooms. This project does not include any workshop that directly demonstrates how to implement those READ 180 daily instructional strategies in a traditional ELA classroom. Grade-level standards are mandated by the state department of education, and professional development opportunities are designed and provided by the SDSA.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

In this case study, I explored teachers' perceptions of the READ 180 program. Participants expressed that READ 180 is a source for increasing students' reading comprehension skills. Participants also expressed that professional development and ongoing training are needed to implement the READ 180 program successfully and address inconsistency of delivery of procedures. Future studies should use quantitative data analysis to determine correlations between READ 180 strategies and student academic success in terms of reading comprehension. Quantitative data analysis can also be performed to demonstrate correlations between effective professional development and implementation fidelity.

Another approach was incorporating student, teacher, administration, and parent perspectives of READ 180 and its instructional practices. Data could be used to assess commonalities among stakeholders. Results could be used to create communication and

support among stakeholders. Moreover, results could be used to create a READ 180 parent guide to help parents assist students in navigating virtual learning paths.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Before this project development, I had only heard about READ 180, and I never had the chance to officially observe its instructional practices or understand the program's goal. In my research, I gained a deeper understanding of the READ 180 program. I learned it is an intervention program that is used to increase students' reading comprehension skills in Grades 4 through 12. Middle school teachers in the SDSA used READ 180 instructional practices and other research-based strategies to address students displaying deficiencies involving literacy and comprehension. Participants shared their perceptions of READ 180 instructional practices, barriers they face when implementing practices, and strengths of the program. Interviews, observations, and documents such as lesson plans and notes from principal and instructional/strategic meetings were used to understand how the READ 180 program was being implemented in the SDSA. Based on participants' responses, READ 180 is an adequate source to help increase students' reading comprehension skills; however, there is a lack of administrative support and inconsistencies in terms of instructional practices. Participants shared a desire for professional development and ongoing training to effectively implement the READ 180 program.

Project Development

Project development was based on the needs of middle school teachers in the SDSA. Many participants expressed that professional development and continuous

training are beneficial in terms of addressing READ 180 practices and implementation fidelity. I created a 5-day professional development session designed to equip teachers with skills to properly implement READ 180 instructional practices. After training, teachers will be asked to complete a survey to offer feedback and recommendations.

I learned how to listen to the needs of participants, gather materials and resources, and schedule and create a professional development session for administrators, district leaders and content specialists, and teachers. I learned that because education is forever changing to meet the needs of students, one must be willing to have a continuous growth mindset to evolve as a learner, project developer, and educator.

Leadership and Change

The doctoral program at Walden University has transformed me from a student to leader. It has allowed me to grow in terms of my learning and knowledge of current practices and assessments. Throughout the program, I have acquired best practices to have a more profound effect on student academic achievement.

My perspective on my leadership skills has changed. This program taught me that I have a growth mindset for learning and passion for helping other educational practitioners. In the past, I was unaware of my ability to lead and create projects that were designed to help other educators. Even though I have held certain positions in a leadership capacity, I was still hesitant in terms of my abilities. I am now confident in my ability to continue to lead committees and instructional teams and share my insights with colleagues to create positive social change.

Self-Analysis as a Scholar

Throughout my doctoral studies, I have matured in areas of research, critical thinking, and writing. I had to learn how to properly gather, analyze, and interpret research data to gain a greater understanding of a phenomenon. I had to learn to perform scholarly research by synthesizing articles, reviewing documents, and conducting interviews and observations. I have grown as a researcher and an academic scholar.

I am confident in my ability to assist stakeholders in providing better educational opportunities for students. My educational journey at Walden University has established a foundation for me to become a leader. Furthermore, I am in charge of creating positive social change throughout learning organizations and the educational system.

Analysis of Self as a Practitioner

In my stride of continuing to be a life-long learner, this study has transformed my thinking as an educator. Throughout my project study, I was able to build my confidence in my ability to be an effective educator by familiarizing myself with various methodologies and research articles. Researching scholarly articles allowed me to explore research-based methods recommended by practitioners. I gained a better understanding of practices and assessments aligned with the curriculum. As a lifelong practitioner, I can reflect on my previous thoughts of instruction, practices, and assessments in education and modify them with research-based practices to foster a more effective student learning environment.

My academic career as a practitioner has provided me with opportunities to share my newly found knowledge with other colleagues. Currently, I work in a Title I school

district whose goal is to create great minds through effective and rigorous learning. Recently, I have been given an opportunity to serve on the curriculum committee and present best practices in professional development to teachers throughout the district. My journey as a life-long practitioner has made me a better educator and enabled me to cultivate quality learning.

Analysis of Self as a Project Developer

As a project developer, I created a professional development that address the needs of teachers and assisted stakeholders in education, such as teachers, principals, and instructional leaders. The professional development was designed to help educators implement the READ 180 intervention program with fidelity so that it could be implemented consistently to promote student academic achievement. As a project developer, I had to learn to listen to individuals' needs and make the best decisions to produce quality teaching and instruction. As a project developer, I reflected on how I wanted to help and support others to increase students' achievement and better equip colleagues with effective resources.

<p align="center">**Reflection on Importance of the Work**</p>

Through reflection, I found the findings of my research very meaningful. I gave teachers a voice and others insight into teachers' perceptions of READ 180 instructional practices and the barriers and strengths teachers face when implementing the READ 180 program. Teachers' perspectives allowed me to reflect on my delivery of instruction and assessment practices and how I may increase the quality of instruction. I learned about the importance of implementation fidelity. For the current study, I examined 3 domains

of implementation fidelity: adherence, program differentiation, and exposure. I examined these 3 elements due to the participants' responses and what was noted as well as observed at the participating sites. Through further research of the implementation fidelity, I learned that each element of implementation fidelity: adherence to an intervention, exposure or dose, quality of delivery, participant responsiveness, and program differentiation work together to produce implementation fidelity in programs and interventions. This learning may be useful to myself and others as they adopt new programs and seek to provide quality education to students. My research will encourage other educators to use research-based strategies and consistently implement interventions, programs, and strategies to their fidelity. The findings are significant because the research suggests that when one properly implements the READ 180 instructional procedures and practices to its fidelity, it engages and addresses the needs of the students and establishes a foundation for students to grow in their reading and comprehension skills, which leads to positive results.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore fidelity of implementation of READ 180 instructional practices that are used by middle schools in SDSA. Further, this study obtained teachers' perspectives of READ 180 instructional practices and the strengths and barriers of implementing READ 180 intervention. Interviews, observations, and documents such as lesson plans and notes from principals and strategic/instructional meetings provided an in-depth understanding of fidelity implementation of READ 180 instructional practices. In addition, this study was guided

by the implementation fidelity framework, which supports the importance of implementing an intervention or program with fidelity to produce positive outcomes.

This project study may potentially increase knowledge about READ 180 instructional practices, the importance of implementation fidelity, and how the administration and teacher support create and sustain positive social change in schools and instruction. Positive social change can be produced by teachers participating in READ 180 professional training that equips them with skills to provide students with a better-quality education, increase student reading comprehension skills, and prepare students for college and careers. The best skills and practices presented in professional training will enable educators to make the best possible decisions concerning future professional learning, making teaching and instruction more impactful on student learning and creating a positive social change.

Possible areas for future research may include research on the most recent studies in furthering understanding how instructional practices are being used to enhance reading comprehension and achieve the outcomes of the READ 180 intervention program. Future research may provide some insights about how to later engage in evaluating the READ 180 program. In addition, future research may include exploring the other elements of implementation fidelity such as quality of delivery and participant responsiveness. Another possible area of research is an in-depth examination of program differentiation. As noted in the current study, changes within the program differentiation component of the implementation fidelity framework are not aligned with the standardized READ 180 curriculum. Future research could examine what are the expectations of program

differentiation, how those changes being made are to look, and whether those changes are in alignment with the implementation fidelity theory. Another area for possible research may include providing READ 180 and implementation fidelity training to other schools throughout the SDSA. The professional training could be installed on the elementary level and paired with other resources to enhance students' reading comprehension skills. With further research and modifications, this project study could be used in settings that struggle with implementation fidelity and as an example of how to properly host professional training with the support of all stakeholders in education.

Conclusion

For students exhibiting deficiencies in reading, READ 180 is a research-based intervention designed to increase students' reading comprehension, academic vocabulary, and writing skills (READ 180, 2020). In this study, participants expressed that READ 180 was an adequate source when increasing students' reading comprehension and academic achievement. Participants also stated that there was an inconsistency in fidelity and delivery of instructional practices, a lack of teacher and administration buy-in/support and professional development/training, and proper implementation of instructional practices led to positive results. However, participants also communicated that the program was only successful when implemented properly to its fidelity. Implementation fidelity provides a foundation for more comprehensive research on how implementing programs and practices to high fidelity is necessary for a program to be effective (Wells et al., 2021). Implementing the READ 180 instructional practices to its

fidelity provides direction for improving students' reading and comprehension skills,

creating a positive learning environment and promoting social change.

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Appendix A: The Project

Overview

- Day 1
  - Introduce framework and establish support
- Day 2
- -READ 180 alignment to course of standards
- Day 3
  - READ 180 Implementation Part 1
- Day 4
  - READ 180 Implementation Part 2
- Day 5
  - Collaborative effort

Day 1 – Introduction of Framework and Establish Support

- 8:00-9:30
  - Introduction to READ 180 framework
  - https://www.hmhco.com/programs/read-180
    - Team building activity
    - Significance of literacy and reading comprehension

- 9:30-11:00
  - Overview of READ 180
    - Data analysis
    - Teacher and student testimonials from various school districts (video snippets and research articles)
    https://www.hmhco.com/customer-success-stories
    https://www.hmhco.com/research/read-180-system-44-kipp-nyc
    - Discussion about district leaders, administration support, and teacher buy-in

- 11:00-12:00
  - Teacher discussion on how they implement the READ 180 intervention program and its instructional practices
  - Identify additional support that is needed to execute the READ 180 instructional practices to fidelity
  - Questions and Answers
  - Survey (Google Forms)

Day 2 – Program Alignment

- 8:00-9:30
    - Review of the READ 180 intervention program
        - Examination of READ 180 intervention program's framework, scope, and sequence
        https://www.hmhco.com/programs/read-180

        - Examination of the state's course of standards for grades 6, 7, and 8 in English Language Arts and Writing
        https://www.alabamaachieves.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2021-Alabama-English-Language-Arts-Course-of-Study.pdf
- 9:30-11:00
    - Browse the resources and articles provided by the READ 180 intervention program
        https://www.hmhco.com/blog/intervention-articles-resources-for-teachers
        https://www.hmhco.com/programs/teachers-corner
- 11:00-12:00
    - Questions and Answers
    - Survey (Google Forms)

Day 3 – READ 180 Implementation Part 1

- 8:00-9:30
    - Facilitator modeling of READ 180 instructional practices and procedures
        - Distribution of READ 180 implementation checklist
        - Lesson 1 (90 minutes)- participants will be actively participants in the lesson
- 9:30-11:00
    - Facilitator Modeling of READ 180 instructional practices and procedures
        - Review of READ 180 implementation checklist
        - Lesson 2 (90 minutes)- participants will be actively participants in the lesson
- 11:00-12:00
    - Questions and Answers
    - Survey (Google Forms)

Day 4 – READ 180 Implementation Part 2

- 8:00-9:30
  - Participants modeling of READ 180 instructional practices and procedures
    - Distribution of READ 180 implementation checklist
    - Lesson 1 (90 minutes)- participants will be actively participants in the lesson
- 9:30-11:00
  - Participants Modeling of READ 180 instructional practices and procedures
    - Review of READ 180 implementation checklist
    - Lesson 2 (90 minutes)- participants will be actively participants in the lesson
- 11:00-12:00
  - Questions and Answers
  - Survey (Google Forms)

Day 5 – Collaborative Effort

- 8:00-9:30
  - Collaborative effort among participants
    - Review district and school-level data results
    - devise a plan on how to use the data to drive instruction
- 9:30-11:00
  - Define the expectations for the READ 180 implementation, delivery of instructional practices, and hopes for academic and social change.
  - Discussion of dates for the follow-up training will be conducted
- 11:00-12:00
  - Questions and Answers
  - Survey (Google Forms)

Professional Development Evaluation

- At the completion of each session, participants will complete a daily evaluation survey.

- Evaluation surveys will be emailed to the participants.

- All evaluation surveys will be conducted through Google Forms.

- Results will be used to modify and plan for the following sessions.

Appendix B: READ 180 Daily Implementation Checklist

READ 180

Daily Implementation Checklist

LESSON	TEACHER	GRADE	DATE
_____	_____	_____	_____

PHASES	TEACHER GUIDE	STUDENT GUIDE	CHECK
PHASE 1	Whole Group Instruction: 20 Mins	Perform: Vocabulary, Reading, and Writing Activities	___
PHASE 2	3 Smaller Group Rotations: Each group is 20 Mins	Perform: 1 group-One –on –One Instruction 2 group-Activities that consist of Vocabulary, Literatures, and reading comprehension skills 3 group- READ 180 computer component	___ ___ ___
PHASE 3	Whole Group Discussion: 10 Mins	Perform: Discuss Lessons and Findings Answer any questions or concerns	___

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

Today's Date

Walden's IRB Office Designee

Dear XXX:

The purpose of this memorandum is to confirm that (*name of the Middle School*)

has given Mrs. Tommye L. Easterly, doctoral candidate at Walden University, permission

to recruit study participants for her study, "Middle School Teacher Perspectives on

Fidelity Implementation of READ 180." The purpose of this exploratory case study is to

explore fidelity of implementation of instructional practices characteristic of the READ

180 program used by middle schools in a school district in southern Alabama.

Tommye Easterly will recruit subjects by asking for access for consent via email and face
to face communications. Participants will receive a packet of information, including an
informed consent which will be returned to her by postal service (via a self-addressed,
stamped envelope). Tommye Easterly will also recruit participants through email. She
has permission to interview the participants, proceed with classroom observations, and
obtain any lesson plans pertaining to READ 180 instructional practices.

Should the Walden Institutional Review Board have any questions, please do not hesitate
to contact me directly at (*Middle School and Principal Information*).

Sincerely,

(*To be completed by the Middle School Principal*)
Name of Authorized Signatory
Title
Name of Performance Site

Appendix D: Invitation Email Script, for recruiting teachers

Hello, my name is Tommye Easterly. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University, and I am reaching out to you because I am completing a final project study to obtain my doctorate in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. The research project is called Middle School Teacher Perspectives on Fidelity Implementation of READ 180 and is designed to explore fidelity of implementation of instructional practices characteristic of the READ 180 program used by middle schools in a school district in southern Alabama.

If you voluntarily agree to participate in the study, it would require you to participate in one interview (interview will last about 30 to 45 minutes), consent to an observation of an READ 180 lesson (observation will last about 45 to 55 minutes), and release READ 180 lesson plan detailing the lesson that is being observed. Benefits of the study may assist in furthering understanding how instructional practices are being used to enhance reading comprehension and provide some insights about how to later engage in the process of evaluating the READ 180 program. Findings from the study may indicate the need for additional training on READ 180 instructional practices and differentiated instruction, which will create a positive social change in schools and instruction. Educational leaders and other educational practitioners may benefit from this research because the research implicates the need for implementation fidelity for any program to be effective. Risks may include minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as participation time, perception of being observed and evaluated, or breach of confidentiality.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate and withdraw from the study at any time. The data collected from interviews, observations, and lesson plans, will be kept confidential. Toward that end, please do not sign your name to the any of the documents or include any information in your responses that makes it easy to identify you. I will protect the confidentiality of the data provided by destroying audiotapes of interviews, using the pseudonyms, and etc. By signing and submitting the informed consent attached to this email, you affirm that you are at least 18 years old, a teacher with 2 to 10 years of READ 180 teaching experience, and that you give your consent for Tommye Easterly to use your answers in her research.

If you have any questions about this research before or after participating, please contact Tommye Easterly at tommye.easterly@waldenu.edu or (334) 549-1136. If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a participant in this research, please contact the Research Participant Advocate at my Walden University at 612-312-1210.

Appendix E: Face-to-Face Invitation Recruitment Script, for recruiting teachers

Hello, my name is Tommye Easterly. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University, and I am reaching out to you because I am completing a final project study to obtain my doctorate in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. The research project is called *READ 180*: Middle School Teacher Perspectives on Adherence and Fidelity of Implementation and is designed to explore fidelity of implementation of instructional practices characteristic of the *READ 180* program used by middle schools in a school district in southern Alabama.

If you voluntarily agree to participate in the study, it would require you to participate in one interview (interview will last about 30 to 45 minutes), consent to an observation of an *READ 180* lesson (observation will last about 45 to 55 minutes), and release *READ 180* lesson plan detailing the lesson that is being observed. Benefits of the study may assist in furthering understanding how instructional practices are being used to enhance reading comprehension and provide some insights about how to later engage in the process of evaluating the *READ 180* program. Findings from the study may indicate the need for additional training on *READ 180* instructional practices and differentiated instruction, which will create a positive social change in schools and instruction. Educational leaders and other educational practitioners may benefit from this research because the research implicates the need for implementation fidelity and adherence in order for any program to be effective. Risks may include minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as participation time, perception of being observed and evaluated, or breach of confidentiality.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate and withdraw from the study at any time. The criteria for the study is that you are at least 18 years old and a teacher with 2 to 10 years of *READ 180* teaching experience.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please contact Tommye Easterly at tommye.easterly@waldenu.edu or (334) 549-1136. If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a participant in this research, please contact the Research Participant Advocate at my Walden University at 612-312-1210

Appendix F: Interview/Observation Protocol

You are invited to take part in a research study about middle school teachers' perceptions of fidelity of implementation of instructional practices characteristic of the *READ 180* program used by the School District in Southern Alabama (SDSA). The researcher is inviting teacher participants who have 2 to 10 years of *READ 180* teaching experience. I obtained your name/contact info from the SDSA directory. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Mrs. Tommye Easterly, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You might already know the researcher as an educator in the SDSA, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:
The purpose of this exploratory case study is to explore fidelity of implementation of implementation of instructional practices characteristic of the *READ 180* program used by middle schools in a school district in southern Alabama.

Interview Protocol:
- The interviews will last about 30-45 minutes. Semi-structured interview questions and probing questions will be used to conduct the interviews.
- Each interview will consist of 5 to 11 questions.
- The interviews will be taken in a classroom at the research site after school hours (4-6 pm).
- The data from the interviews will be audio recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed and analyzed shortly after the interviews take place.

Observation Protocol:
- The observation will lasts about 45 to 55 minutes.
- The observations will take place in the participant's classroom or resource room during school hours (8 a.m. -3 p.m.).
   The use of field notes will be used to record data during an observation

Appendix G: Interview Questions

1. What are middle school teachers' perceptions about READ 180 and its instructional practices?

2. How do middle school teachers implement the READ 180 practices in their daily instructional practices to ensure that it is being taught to fidelity?

3. What are the perceived barriers of READ 180 when abiding to program adherence and fidelity of integration of instructional practices in reading comprehension?

4. What are the perceived strengths of implementing the READ 180 program when abiding to program adherence and fidelity of integration of instructional practices in reading comprehension?

5. How has your experience been in regards to teaching READ 180? Please explain.

6. How would a typical READ 180 lesson start and end? Please explain your routine.

7. Do you ever feel the need to modify the READ 180 lesson to address the specific needs of your students? Please explain.

8. If you could change or add to the READ 180 intervention program, what would it be?

9. Could you elaborate on some of the emotions you have when teaching READ 180?

10. What additional resources do you feel the district needs to better equip students with the comprehension skills needed to be not only successful on state standardized tests, but colleges and careers?

11. Do you feel READ 180 is an adequate resource to increase students' reading skills? Please Explain.

Appendix H: Table of Data Sources

Participants	Interviews, Observations, and Documents	Media Source Used to Gather Data	Location/Site
Teacher A	Interview	Zoom	School A
Teacher B	Interview, Observation, and Lesson plan, follow-up interview	Zoom	School B
Teacher C	Interview, Observation, and Lesson plan, follow-up interview	Zoom	School A
Teacher D	Interview, Observation, and Lesson plan, Follow-up interview	Zoom	School C
Teacher E	Interview, Observation, and Lesson Plan	Zoom	School C
Teacher F	Interview	Zoom	School B
Teacher G	Interview and notes from Principals' meeting	Zoom	School D
Teacher H	Interview, Observation, and Lesson Plan	Zoom	School D
Teacher I	Interview, Observation, Lesson Plan, and notes from Principals' meeting	Zoom	School A
Teacher J	Interview	Zoom	School A

Appendix I: Code list

Emotions, excitement, joy, anxious, communication/dialogue/collaboration, succeed, fidelity, lesson, district, properly/ correctly, changes, COVID-19, challenge, gains/ growth, increase, positive, impact, consistent/consistency, training, instruction, practice, class, factor, key, experience, resource, modeling, READ 180, gaps, reading, comprehension, learning, adequate, development/follow-ups/continuous training, professional, procedures, progress, monitor, consistency, modifications/ modify, restrictions, guide, implement, implementation, program, lack, support, assistance, intervention, teacher, strategies

Appendix J: Daily Survey

Completion of Training Daily Survey

Please submit feedback regarding the training you have just completed, including feedback on training structure, content, and instructor.

* Indicates required question

1. Training Name *

_____

2. Instructor Name *

_____

3. Knowledge Acquired *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Poor	Fair	Satisfactory	Very good	Excellent
Level of skill/knowledge at start of training	○	○	○	○	○
Level of skill/knowledge at end of training	○	○	○	○	○
Contribution of training to your skill/knowledge	○	○	○	○	○

4. Skill and responsiveness of the instructor *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Instructor was an effective lecturer/demonstrator	○	○	○	○	○
Presentations were organized and clear	○	○	○	○	○
Instructor stimulated participants' interest	○	○	○	○	○
Instructor effectively used time management	○	○	○	○	○
Instructor was helpful	○	○	○	○	○

5. Training Content *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Learning objectives were clear	○	○	○	○	○
Training content was well planned and organized	○	○	○	○	○
Training participation was appropriate	○	○	○	○	○

6. How would you gauge your level of participation during today's training

Mark only one oval.

○ Poor
○ Fair
○ Satisfactory
○ Very Good
○ Excellent

7. What aspects of this training were most useful or valuable?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. How would you improve this training?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix K: Monthly Formative Survey

Formative Monthly Survey

READ 180 Monthly Survey

How has your implementation of the READ 180 intervention program improved?

Long answer text

What additional support would you like to have to improve your implementation of the research-based intervention program?

Long answer text

Describe the students' progress in the intervention program.

Long answer text

Appendix L: End of the Year Summative Survey

Summative Survey

READ 180 Summative Survey

Describe your experience implementing the READ 180 intervention during the 2024-2025 school year.

Long answer text

Compare your students' comprehension skills from the beginning of the school year to the completion of the school year.

Long answer text