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Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Comprehension Among Fifth-Grade Students With Exceptionalities as a Result of the Pandemic

Paula Webb
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Paula Webb

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Comprehension Among Fifth-Grade Students With
Exceptionalities as a Result of the Pandemic

by

Paula Webb

EdS, Mercer University, 2017

MA, Mercer University, 2016

BS, Mercer University, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2024

Abstract

The problem addressed through this study is the low reading comprehension levels of fifth-grade students with exceptionalities (SwE) (e.g. dyslexia) in a local school district in Georgia. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE. The conceptual frameworks were the blended learning model and the constructivism model. The methodology of this research study was a basic qualitative design. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with eight fifth-grade teachers in a large school district in Georgia to investigate the reading foundational skills SwE are lacking that contribute to their low reading comprehension levels and recommendations for addressing the problem. The data analysis consisted of thematic coding of teachers' responses, and open and axial coding was used. The results identified the specifics about fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE. The findings of the data analysis included challenges with reading, students' prior knowledge and experiences, vocabulary challenges, phonic and phonemic awareness challenges. The findings included strategies to address the challenges: modeling proper reading techniques, supporting reading comprehension challenges, and increased parent communication. Other specific recommendations of the fifth-grade teachers were to increase the practice of vocabulary, sight words, phonics/phonemic awareness, and syllabication frequently with SwE to improve their low reading comprehension skills. School leaders and teachers can use the result to make informed decisions that could impact SwE reading comprehension, which could have potential implications for positive social change.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The instruction of students during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown halted the teaching of many reading skills crucial for success in reading comprehension. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to students with exceptionalities (SwE) in a local school district in Georgia. Additionally, this study inquired of the teachers how they are addressing this issue and their methods to improve the reading comprehension of their students. This research study analyzed the qualitative data to better understand students' gap in reading comprehension skills, as well as the reading instructional strategies teachers are using to improve the reading comprehension of SwE. The results were used to identify any gaps in practice to help make informed decisions to improve instruction and improve the students' reading comprehension.

This study is significant to research because it may contribute to closing the gap in reading comprehension of SwE since the pandemic. This research highlights the reading strategies presently utilized by fifth-grade teachers to increase the reading comprehension levels of their SwE. Because of the decline in reading comprehension, the emphasis of this research inquired of fifth-grade teachers regarding their perspectives of the reading strategies currently being used to increase reading comprehension of their students so that these strategies can contribute to the literature. This research will assist future researchers, administrators, and teachers to have a better understanding of the reading strategies teachers are using to improve reading comprehension among SwE.

Teachers and school leaders can use the results to make informed decisions to improve the reading comprehension instruction of SwE. The goal of this research was to improve the reading comprehension levels of SwE that were impacted during the pandemic.

The findings could lead to positive social change for SwE by increasing their reading comprehension levels through understanding the reading strategies proven to increase reading comprehension based on current teachers' perspectives. The struggles students have presently will continue to become more difficult in their futures if nothing is corrected to address this decline in reading comprehension. This could impact their future educational journey or their careers. The research was conducted to discover the reading strategies used by fifth-grade teachers to improve the reading comprehension of SwE. This research included exploring fifth-grade teachers' perspectives of the reading strategies that could increase reading comprehension since the decline of reading comprehension since the pandemic. This research could have the potential to assist teachers in understanding the reading strategies that could impact the reading comprehension of their SwE, which in turn could impact the educational journey and future careers of this student population.

This chapter includes background information about the struggles students are having with reading comprehension according to the fifth-grade teachers and what they are doing to address this issue. In addition, this chapter includes a description of the problem, the purpose, and the significance of this study. The research questions, the conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance are discussed in this chapter as well. In

Chapter 2 is the literature review. Chapter 3 includes the research method. The results are discussed in Chapter 4. Discussion of the results, conclusion, and recommendations is in Chapter 5.

Background

SwE in a large school district in Georgia struggled with reading comprehension prior to the pandemic shutdown. The lack of effective reading instruction during the pandemic shutdown compounded the issue. Estoque (2022) found that reading instruction during virtual learning for students in lower elementary grades ushered in considerable complications. Present fifth-grade students missed crucial foundational reading skills needed to be successful with reading comprehension to understand the informational knowledge presented in texts for upper grades. Furthermore, this issue was intensified because the following school year was virtual. SwE struggle with virtual reading instruction considering the home distractions, being unable to focus on the reading instruction, and many other factors. Addona and Evitts (2022) expressed that teachers were competing with home distractions, which led to less learning opportunities for students. According to Alves and Romig (2021), virtual reading instruction for students with learning difficulties can be problematic during online instruction. According to a fifth-grade content reading teacher:

All of my students are struggling with reading text attributed by many factors.

Many of my students are reading significantly below grade level. The students are decoding and segmenting words. They struggle with phonics, such as ae, ie, ou.

Some of my students are struggling with manipulating sounds to read grade level text. (personal communication, October 2021)

Since there is a gap in reading comprehension compounded by the pandemic shutdown, fifth-grade SwE struggle to meet their current academic needs. The goal of this research was to discover the reading strategies fifth-grade teachers are using to address the decline in reading comprehension during the pandemic and make informed changes to instruction to close the gap in practice, which could lead to improved reading comprehension. The focus of this research was what the teachers are doing to address the decline in reading comprehension to identify any gaps in reading instruction. The results of this research can be used to provide recommendations for administrators and teachers to assist in improving the reading comprehension of SwE based on the perspectives of fifth-grade teachers.

Problem Statement

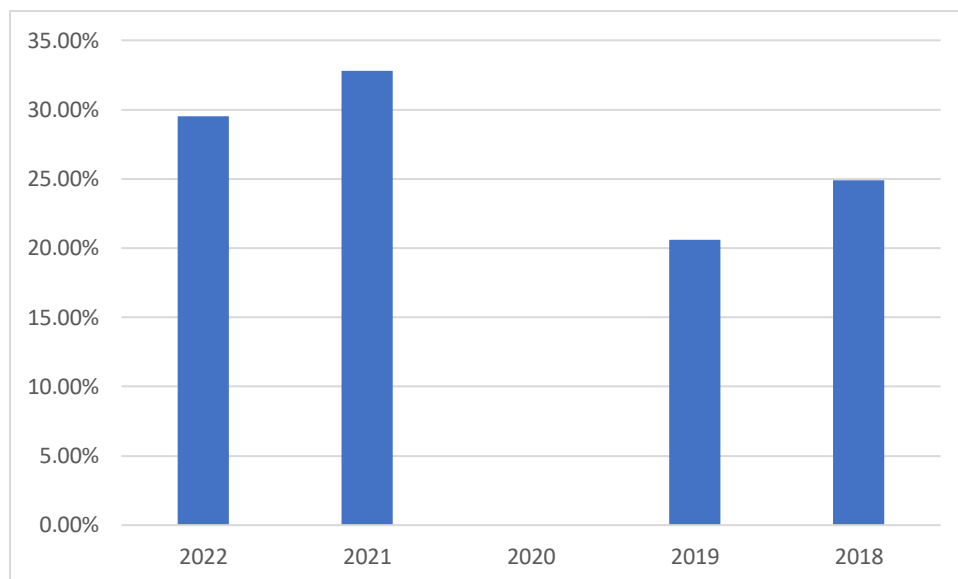
The problem addressed through this study is the low reading comprehension levels of fifth-grade SwE in a local school district in Georgia. During virtual learning following the pandemic shutdown, according to Estoque (2022), reading instruction provided many challenges for teachers and students in lower elementary grades. Heiman (2021) stated that reading instruction, during virtual learning, presented challenges attributed by the difficulties with student engagement. Students lost instructional time of foundational reading skills during the COVID-19 shutdown of 2020. Piasta et al. (2020) claimed that students who have not learned the foundational reading skills will continue to struggle with reading comprehension. Foundational reading skills provide students

with the skills they need to be successful in fifth grade with comprehension of reading informational texts. Currently, students in the local school district have missed approximately 2 years of foundational reading instruction, including those who are in fifth grade. Studies have shown about a third of the students in earlier grades are lacking in basic reading standards since the pandemic (Goldstein, 2022). This basic qualitative study addressed this problem by exploring teachers' perspectives of the reading strategies they are currently using to improve reading comprehension among SwE.

Figure 1 shows data retrieved from the Georgia Department of Education for the local school district on students who scored below grade level in the years between 2018 and 2022 for the Georgia Milestones Reading Assessment. In 2018, students who scored below grade level in reading was 24.9%. Students who scored below grade in 2019 was 20.6%. In 2020, there were no data reported due to the pandemic, and this assessment was not administered. Following the pandemic, in 2021, the students who scored below grade level in reading was 32.8%. The students improved slightly in 2022 with 29.5% scoring below grade level. There was a definite decline on the Georgia Milestones Reading Assessment after the pandemic according to the numbers reported.

Figure 1

Georgia Milestones, Students Below Grade Level in Reading



Note. Georgia Milestones data; no data reported for 2020

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE in a local school district in Georgia. In addition, I sought to understand what teachers are currently doing to close this achievement gap to identify any gaps in practices and opportunities for improvement. The nature of the research study was focused on qualitative data to determine the reading strategies teachers are using to increase reading comprehension among SwE. The teachers were interviewed to collect data regarding their perspectives of the gaps in reading comprehension and how they are addressing the issue of low reading comprehension among SwE. Additionally, a literature

review was conducted to research the strategies that have been demonstrated to improve reading comprehension.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes when teaching reading to SwE?

RQ2: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their challenges when teaching reading to SwE?

RQ3: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their suggestions when teaching reading to SwE?

Conceptual Framework

The concepts that support this study included Xu et al. (2020) collaborative model of blended learning for the cultivation of qualified preservice English teachers. In addition, Gao (2021) utilized constructivism theory to teach vocabulary to improve reading comprehension through active learning, utilizing students' input, collaboration, and hands-on activities. Piaget (1896–1980) and Vygotsky (1896–1934) deemed that students learn through actively participating in their education making it individualized for themselves through the constructivism theory. The logical connections between the framework presented and this study are the ability to improve reading comprehension of SwE using the blended learning model theory and constructivism. The blended learning model involves whole group, small group, and independent reading to meet the needs of reading instruction. The goal of this study was to examine what reading comprehension skills teachers feel students are lacking and what teachers are doing to address low

reading achievement. Specifically, the data collection and analysis were grounded by the blended learning model as well as constructivist learning principles to determine any gaps in instruction that need to be addressed to improve reading achievement. Other research based on best practices was also considered and included in the literature review.

The blended learning model uses whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent reading opportunities. According to Xu et al. (2020), the blended learning model improves student engagement and teachers are able to individualize their lessons to meet the needs of their students. The blended learning model engages students utilizing whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent reading opportunities. This research study focused on the needs of SwE to address the decline of reading comprehension since the pandemic. Fifth-grade reading teachers have been struggling to address the academic demand to provide fifth-grade reading instruction and foundational reading skills simultaneously. Based on Hudson et al. (2021), upper elementary teachers need to have training to provide effective foundational literacy instruction to their students. Additionally, the expectation of this research study was to provide an understanding of the barriers fifth-grade teachers are encountering with reading comprehension and what they are doing to address this issue.

At the beginning of the pandemic, instruction was completely parent initiated with teachers providing students with assignments only. Estoque (2022) stated that parents became the primary reading instructor during the pandemic. Students did not receive whole group, small group, or individual remediation during this time. The following school year, the school district was completely virtual. Students received whole group

instruction, but they did not receive small group or individual remediation. According to a program supervisor at the school district,

The type of instruction provided beginning in March of 2020 was asynchronous. The students would receive the weekly assignments to complete each week. This form of education was the new normal for students until the end of the school year. The educational format changed the following school year (2020–2021) to synchronous and asynchronous learning. The teachers would provide direct instruction during the synchronous through our CTLS platform. The students would access their assignments through this platform. During the asynchronous learning, the students would complete their assignments. During August 2020 to October 2020, the teachers reported many of their students did not sign on for instruction nor complete their assignments. In October, the school district offered face-to-face instruction for those parents who chose to send their children to school. The virtual option was still offered during this time period. (personal communication, July 2023)

A school district parent stated that:

In March 2020, my daughter did not receive instruction from her teacher. She would receive the assignments from her teacher. I would help her complete the assignments, then I would email back to her teacher. This continued until the end of the school year. The next school year was done differently. Beginning in August 2020, my daughter would sign on to a Zoom meeting with her teacher for her lessons. Then, [my daughter] would complete her assignments with my help.

This continued until they offered face-to-face option in September 2020.

(personal communication, July 2023)

According to Xu et al. (2020), the blended learning model is a collaborative model that supports the effective implementation of reading instruction through: (a) establishment of a collaborative model, (b) application of enriched virtual instruction in English reading, (c) application of task-driven coordination, (d) application of on/off site tutoring, and (e) data collection and analysis. Xu et al.'s theory was applied to address the research questions and to determine what barriers teachers of SwE are facing with reading comprehension and what they are doing to address this issue. Another theory used was the constructivism theory that guides the practice of educators in reading instruction. In constructivism theory, students participate in many learning activities to gain new knowledge (Gao, 2021). This theory guides educators in meeting the academic needs of students through reading instruction and dispositions. The constructivist learning principles captivate students through the development of concepts and principles. This learning theory leads students in the learning process in the development of reading comprehension and understanding their learning processes.

The learning process in reading comprehension develops through learning the foundational reading skills and vocabulary development. According to Gao (2021), the expansion of vocabulary could assist in enhancing students' reading comprehension abilities. The goal of teachers who have students with low reading comprehension is to determine the exact skill in reading students are struggling with in the hopes to improve their area of weakness. Additionally, teachers assist their students to learn the process of

learning to guide them in understanding their areas of weakness in reading comprehension. The concepts and principles of the constructivist learning principles assist teachers in understanding the development of reading skills to advance reading comprehension of their students.

Nature of the Study

This basic qualitative study design utilized semistructured interviews to explore teachers' perspectives of the interventions they are using to improve student reading comprehension. The nature of this research study was to collect qualitative data to determine the gaps in students' reading comprehension since the pandemic based on the perceptions of fifth-grade teachers and the methods they are using to address this issue. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), one-on-one semistructured interviews permit researchers opportunities for conversations, to ask follow-up questions, and to acknowledge the participant's responses. Qualitative research includes open and axial coding, data analysis, and reporting of the results, which is detailed in the methodology section. In a basic qualitative design, the data collected were analyzed to discover the foundational reading skills fifth-grade students are lacking and what teachers are implementing to address this issue. The results of this basic qualitative study may provide recommendations to administrators and teachers to increase reading comprehension among SwE.

Definitions

Blended learning theory: A theory that uses whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent opportunities to develop knowledge (Xu et al., 2020).

Constructivism theory: A theory indicating that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals or learners (Gao, 2021).

Coronavirus disease, or COVID-19: A mild to severe respiratory illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.).

Metacognition: Awareness of one's understanding of their own thought process (Block, 2008).

Pandemic: An epidemic occurring on a scale that crosses international boundaries, usually affecting people on a worldwide scale (Lockett, 2020).

Reading comprehension: The act of understanding what an individual is reading; the act is not simple to teach, learn, or practice (What is reading comprehension? 2018).

Reading strategies: Broad term used to describe the planned and explicit actions that help readers translate print to meaning, strategies to improve decoding and reading comprehension skills (Reading Horizons, 2022).

Students with exceptionalities (SWE): Students with educational disabilities under one or more of the Individuals Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) categories, such as intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, speech or language impairments, visual impairments, and/or emotional disturbance. The students who qualify under these categories need additional support to meet their specific educational needs (IRIS, n.d.).

Virtual learning, distance learning, online learning, digital learning: A system for learning and teaching using the internet and special software (Virtual learning environment, n.d.).

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made regarding components affecting the reading comprehension of SwE during the pandemic. First, there are gaps in practice with the method of reading instruction that was delivered during the pandemic. Reading comprehension is the ability to comprehend what is being read and provide meaning to what is read. Many factors contribute to not understanding what is being read, such as foundational reading skills. Some of the foundational reading skills to be successful with reading are phonics, segmenting words, and reading fluently. These foundational reading skills taught in early elementary grades must be acquired for students to be successful with informational texts, which is crucial in the upper grades.

The next assumptions were that teachers accurately identify the gaps in achievement and that there are strategies being used to close this gap in reading comprehension. This gap in reading comprehension was compounded for SwE during the pandemic of 2020. The following school year, students were in virtual learning situations. In a large school district in Georgia, some students signed on and participated in their education, some students signed on and did not pay attention to the lessons, some students signed on and left the screen off, and some students did not sign on to their virtual classrooms. Several teachers reported this during virtual school meetings. These situations impact education, especially for fifth-grade students. They missed crucial foundational reading instruction taught during second grade and third grade, which can impact their reading comprehension.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study focused on eight fifth-grade teachers who provide instruction to SwE. The location of the study concentrated on a large school district in Georgia. Each semistructured interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The focus of the study was the perspectives of fifth-grade teachers on interventions they are using to address the decline in reading comprehension of SwE. This study is crucial to provide recommendations for administrators and teachers to make informed decisions of the best approach to use with their students to increase reading comprehension levels based on teachers' statements.

Limitations

There are limitations that are uncontrollable in the process of research studies. The limitations addressed while conducting this research study were the participants, limited information on the topic, time constraints, and researcher biases. Finding participants was limited due to many factors, such as willingness and dispositions. The willingness and the dispositions of the participants presented issues to conduct the semistructured interviews. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, information on the topic could be limited in conducting thorough research. The time to conduct the research of current fifth-grade teachers of students greatly impacted during the crucial foundational reading skills was during this current school year before the students move on to the next grade level. These limitations were minimized as the best possible method to obtain the most accurate qualitative data.

Significance

This study is significant in that it can contribute to filling in the gap in special education focusing on reading comprehension among SwE. Grimm et al. (2018) stated that teaching of reading strategies could reduce difficulties students have with reading comprehension. The expectation of this study was to make an original contribution to the field of special education practice through discovering reading strategies currently used by fifth-grade teachers that increase students' reading comprehension levels. The recommendations of this research provide administrators and teachers methods and interventions to increase the reading comprehension skills of SwE. Students will need to master reading comprehension earlier than later because reading informational text is prevalent in fifth grade and on. This research will support professional practice through providing educators with effective reading strategies to assist in improving students' reading comprehension skills.

The assertion of this research study aligned with the problem statement discussing the problem students are having with reading comprehension because limited reading instruction was provided during the pandemic. The potential findings of this research could lead to positive social change for SwE. The struggles students have will continue to become more compounded in their futures whether in attending college or their careers. I researched current literature to discover evidence-based reading strategies to increase student reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is a significant skill in most careers; therefore, students mastering reading comprehension is crucial in their education. This research provides all administrators and teachers with reading strategies to help SwE

develop the skills needed to be successful in their educational journey and their future careers.

Summary

Current fifth-grade SwE have missed critical, foundational reading instruction during the pandemic shutdown. SwE struggle with reading attributed by various factors, which could contribute to the success of understanding what the student has read, according to Flores-Gallegos et al. (2021), such as foundational reading skills. This basic qualitative study investigated teachers' perspectives of the foundational reading skills students are lacking and how they are currently addressing the issue. SwE struggled with reading comprehension prior to the pandemic; however, this issue was compounded following the pandemic shutdown and virtual learning the following school year. The purpose of this research study was to provide recommendations to administrators and teachers so they could potentially increase their students' reading comprehension.

In Chapter 2, I present a detailed discussion of the collaborative model of blended learning theory and constructivism theory. The collaborative model of blended learning theory is elaborated in more detail, explaining the educational instruction models used to increase reading comprehension. The educational instruction methods presented by the theorists Piaget and Vygotsky state that students are active participants in their education, and this is examined in Chapter 2. In addition, constructivism theory will be discussed in Chapter 2. These theories discussed in the following chapter will provide an understanding of how to increase reading comprehension among SwE. Finally, a full

literature review of the current literature was conducted to investigate the strategies that have been demonstrated to improve reading comprehension among SwE.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted reading comprehension of fifth-grade SwE because there was limited foundational reading instruction. The focus of this research was to examine fifth-grade teachers' perspectives on the foundational reading skills SwE are lacking. Additionally, this study attempted to understand how teachers are addressing the decline in reading comprehension since the pandemic. To understand the significance of this decline in reading comprehension, I conducted a search of literature on associated topics. The literature review topics included innovative articles and current peer-reviewed articles concentrated on virtual learning, reading comprehension, and reading strategies.

In this literature review, I considered the reasons reading comprehension declined and how to improve the reading comprehension of fifth-grade SwE. This study utilized a conceptual framework to analyze the gap in practice that has caused a decline in reading comprehension during the pandemic. The conceptual framework included Xu et al.'s (2020) use of the collaborative model of blended learning theory to address improving reading comprehension through focusing on methods to improve reading instruction. Furthermore, Gao's (2021) constructivism model was used to focus on improving reading comprehension. Extensive research was conducted on foundational reading skills and reading strategies that assist students in becoming successful readers. These foundational reading skills are crucial in reading comprehension when informational reading is necessary in the upper grades.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature for this research study was obtained through the Walden University Library's databases. These databases included Eric, Education Source, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis Global, and Teacher Reference Center. About 100 peer-reviewed articles were reviewed. The keywords for searches included *reading, reading comprehension, reading instruction, reading strategies, foundational reading skills, emergent literacy, constructivism, constructivism theory, blended learning, blended learning theory, pandemic, COVID-19, virtual learning, digital learning, online learning, e-learning, distance learning, blended learning, and constructivism*. The terms were searched separately and in various combinations. The principal guideline for the literature review was to access each peer-reviewed article that was published within the last 5 years or substantiated as the most recent. The focus was on literature associated with decline of reading comprehension and reading strategies to improve it.

The open-source reference management software Zotero Connector was used to organize, summarize, and cite peer-reviewed articles and books. This literature management software helped me to group the articles by topics. The information for this review was gained through the Walden University's courses. Additionally, the Walden University Library document request was used for articles that were more difficult to obtain.

Conceptual Framework

Current fifth-grade SwE missed crucial reading foundational skills during the pandemic. Therefore, this issue has created a gap in practice that needs to be addressed. Instruction was parent initiated with assignments teachers provided at the beginning of the pandemic. Instruction through whole group, small group, or individual remediation was not existent during this time. The following school year, the school district was completely virtual with whole group instruction and individual work time on their own. Students did not receive small group nor individual remediation to address their areas of weaknesses. According to a school district program supervisor,

The type of instruction provided beginning in March of 2020 was asynchronous. The students would receive the weekly assignments to complete each week. This form of education was the new normal for students until the end of the school year. The educational format changed the following school year (2020–2021) to synchronous and asynchronous learning. The teachers would provide direct instruction during the synchronous through our CTLS platform. The students would access their assignments through this platform. During the asynchronous learning, the students would complete their assignments. During August 2020 to October 2020, the teachers reported many of their students did not sign on for instruction nor complete their assignments. In October, the school district offered face-to-face instruction for those parents who chose to send their children to school. The virtual option was still offered during this time period. (personal communication, July 2023)

A school district parent stated:

In March 2020, my daughter did not receive instruction from her teacher. She would receive the assignments from her teacher. I would help her complete the assignments, then I would email back to her teacher. This continued until the end of the school year. The next school year was done differently. Beginning in August 2020, my daughter would sign on to a zoom meeting with her teacher for her lessons. Then, [my daughter] would complete her assignments with my help. This continued until they offered face-to-face option in September 2020.

(personal communication, July 2023)

The conceptual framework that guided this study was Xu et al.'s (2020) collaborative model of blended learning and Gao's (2021) constructivism theory to promote reading comprehension. Additionally, Gao expanded on the workings of the theorists Piaget (1896–1980) and Vygotsky (1896–1934). These constructivist theorists believed active participation of students in their education provide more significant results. The framework of this research provided the avenue to search for literature that helped understand the reading foundational skills students are lacking and strategies that can improve reading comprehension of SwE through the theories of blended learning model and constructivism.

Blended Learning Model Theory

The literature on blended learning theory indicates there is no clear explanation of this theory and how it is applied in educational setting (Cronje, 2020). However, the concept of blended learning theory is to meet the academic needs of all students utilizing

different methods (Yang & Bai, 2020). According to Singh et al. (2021), Sir Isaac Pitman in the 1840s established a distance education course that was the first instance of blended learning theory being applied in education. Presently, Hrastinski (2019) described blended learning as an “umbrella term” (p. 564). However, even though there is “little consensus” on the definition of blended learning (Cronje, 2020, p. 115), there are definite attributes corresponding to the blended learning theory (Halverson & Graham, 2019). The method of using blended learning in educational settings depends on the academic field applying this theory.

Blended learning has expanded how the field of education applies this theory (Anderson, 2020). Xu et al. (2020) outlined blended learning as whole group instruction, small group instruction, and independent reading opportunities. Based on Yang and Bai (2020), blended learning theory incorporates some form of technology with the instructional practices already established. According to Hrastinski (2019), the basis of this theory is to use a variety of instructional methods to meet the needs of students. Hinkelman (2018) described blended learning theory as increasing in acceptance of incorporating technology to improve student engagement.

According to Anthony (2019), teachers will need to be more “flexible and responsive to students” (p. 42) while blending technology into their instructional methods to create optimal learning opportunities for their students. The COVID-19 pandemic made it necessary for teachers to be inventive to provide instruction through virtual learning opportunities via Zoom (Roberts-Graham, 2022). Therefore, the current literature describes blended learning theory as incorporating some form of technology to

provide a quality learning experience for students. The integration of technology should foster investigative communities to extend online learning opportunities for students (Hrastinski, 2019). The focus on learning opportunities for students should be the direction of applying the blended learning method, according to Cronje (2020).

The information age promotes students' willingness to learn online acquiring certain skills using technology (Yang & Bai, 2020). Singh et al. (2021) described the "best of both worlds" in using "different technologies and web-based tools" (p. 145) in implementing blended learning theory in the instruction of students. According to Xu et al. (2020), blended learning theory improves student engagement, and teachers can individualize their instruction to meet the educational needs of their students. Blended learning encourages individualization based on the views of teachers (Sorbie, 2015). Raymond (2019) expressed that the advantage of using technology in blended learning produces the opportunity to "individualize instruction" (p. 3).

Anthony (2019) suggested that blended learning proposes the opportunity for teachers to demonstrate flexibility and receptivity and engage students in learning opportunities. According to Singh et al. (2021), blended learning presents opportunities for teachers to integrate technology through intriguing educational possibilities. The benefits of using technology, through blended learning, is the ability to customize instruction to meet the academic needs of students (Sorbie, 2015). Additionally, Halverson and Graham's (2019) research on blended learning promotes student involvement and learning. Finally, technology provides learners with the opportunity to access their education "anytime, anywhere" (Yang & Bai, 2020, p. 485), therefore

creating lifelong learners to better prepare students for future changes in their educational paths or careers.

In blended learning, teachers increase the use of technology in their classrooms and continue to integrate technology to meet the academic needs of students (Xu et al., 2020). Yang and Bai (2020) found that the benefit of using online learning in the classroom has the potential to enhance the successfulness of learning from the online platform. Furthermore, blending technology in the classroom provides teachers the opportunity to provide individualization for each student and provides flexibility for the method of instruction (Yang & Bai, 2020). According to Anthony (2019), teachers are able to establish “flexibility and responsiveness” (p. 42) during their instruction, which enhances engagement and learning. Cronje (2020) described that method of instruction would not impact the education of students. However, the COVID-19 pandemic provided challenges for teachers and students that impacted their education and the decline in reading comprehension.

Constructivism Theory

The constructivist theory, according to Yu (2022), is encouraging in meeting the academic needs of students. Piaget (1952) and Dewey (1981) are two theorists who pioneered constructivist theory. These theorists believed students design their own learning through interaction of knowledge presented to them. Piaget developed the principles of the learning process of students (Gao, 2021). These principles are “1. knowledge is constructed, 2. people learn to learn, 3. learning is an active process, 4. learning is contextual, 5. knowledge is personal, 6. learning exists in the mind, and 7.

motivation is key to learning” (Western Governor’s University, 2020, p. 1). Whaley et al. (2019) discussed that culture is significant in the classroom as students learn from each other.

Through analyzing the literature on constructivism, the consensus is that students construct their own meaning from the knowledge they gain (Gao, 2021). In accordance with Farkas and Jang (2019), an individual student develops their understanding of new knowledge in the constructivist theory. Yu (2022) described students as constructors of meaning from the new knowledge they gain as they investigate concepts. This construction of knowledge is conducted through a multitude of procedures as they develop meaning in the learning process (Whaley et al., 2019). The understanding of new knowledge in constructivist theory, according to Owens-Christenson (2013), is developed through prior knowledge, experiences, reflection, and collaboration to construct meaning. These learning principles reinforce the students as they focus the knowledge of concepts develops. Students construct their knowledge through previous experiences (Western Governor’s University, 2020).

The method through which students are able to learn depends on background knowledge and previous experiences (Western Governor’s University, 2020). In the constructivist theory, students interrupt knowledge that is complex and construct this knowledge into abbreviated parts to better understand the concepts (Yu, 2022). Students are “active constructors” (Gao, 2021, p. 443) of meaning from knowledge gained. This knowledge is only constructed within students (Yu, 2022). Students are able to learn from their fellow classmates in the construction of the concepts they are learning (Gao, 2021).

In the classroom, each student is unique with their own personal experiences (Western Governor's University, 2020). Whaley et al. (2019) signified that for students to construct their knowledge, they must rely on their individual experiences. The use of technology can promote learning opportunities in constructivist theory (Moon et al., 2020). However, the method they use in the classroom depends on previous experience with technology and how they are implemented (Moon et al., 2020). Background knowledge and previous experiences have the potential to be developed when teachers set high expectations for their students (Whaley et al., 2019).

Students are participants in constructing meaning of the knowledge presented to them through various learning activities (Gao, 2021). Teachers need to develop learning environments that encourage cognitive and social development, (Farkas & Jang, 2019). Moody et al. (2018) believed students learn from their peers who are more knowledgeable of concepts, which promotes their cognitive and social development. Cognitive and social development is gained through personal experiences and social relationships (Scaggs, 2018). The communication between teachers and students and students and students is illuminating in transferring knowledge and information (Gao, 2021).

Teachers enter the classroom desiring to make an impact on the education of their students (Whaley et al., 2019). Motivation is key to developing students' reading comprehension skills (Farkas & Jang, 2019). Technology, such as an iPad, can be motivating for students to improve reading comprehension through reading activities, (Moon et al., 2020). For effective reading instruction, the teacher can incorporate the use

of an iPad, which has the potential to improve reading comprehension skills of students (Moon et al., 2020). The students are motivated with positive relationships with their teachers in developing reading comprehension through encouraging reading instruction (Whaley et al., 2019). The constructivist learning theory leads students in the learning process in the development of reading comprehension and students' understanding of their learning processes.

Difficulty With Reading Instruction During the Pandemic and Virtual Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020 required the instruction of students proceeded to be virtually in hopes there was not a disruption in the students' education (Heiman, 2021). As reported by Addona and Evitts (2022), teachers had to make adjustments in their instruction, lesson delivery, and the assignments to provide a quality education during the virtual learning era. Teachers had to be inventive in using technology to meet the academic needs of their students, as stated by Mourlam et al. (2022). The transition to virtual learning, since the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated how the teachers were not prepared to meet the academic needs of their students during this era (Stephen & McCormick-Pritchard, 2021). These teachers, during this period of time, found themselves being inventive in their approaches to teaching and evaluating (Ionita & Pastae, 2021).

The immediate transition from face-to-face to virtual learning created many challenges for teachers, parents, and students, as claimed by Stephen and McCormick-Pritchard (2021). According to Mourlam et al. (2022), teachers discovered themselves not prepared to teach virtually as they had during face-to-face instruction. Johnson (2023)

reminded the reader of how virtual learning transformed the method teachers provided instruction. Stephen and McCormick-Pritchard (2021) described virtual learning as distinguished with several consequences. The results of this interference in instruction are still transpiring (Colvin et al., 2022).

The framework of virtual learning, during the COVID-19 pandemic, had several issues affecting the quality of instruction, such as technology and other distractions in the home (Ionita & Pastae, 2021). Based on Stroupe and Christensen (2023), the teacher provided more instruction with less student-to-student interactions within the virtual platform. Unfortunately, numerous students did not have dependable resources and/or internet (Alves & Romig, 2021). Additionally, the immediate transfer from face-to-face to virtual learning had other issues, such as the families need for food, housing, and health needs (Mourlam et al., 2022). The students who had access to devices and internet still encountered technology, internet, and platform issues, based on Ionita and Pastae (2021). Furthermore, the disconnection issues of the virtual platform, whether the technology or internet, compounded the issue because teachers were unaware of the instruction the students received or not (Ionita & Pastae, 2021).

Students learning is more effective in the face-to-face model (Estoque, 2022). Therefore, the transition to completely virtual instantly was challenging for teachers and students (Estoque, 2022). According to Alves and Romig (2021), the students were provided technological devices and hot spots by many school districts so they could access their education virtually. During this period of virtual learning, the students were not able to focus on the instruction (Ionita & Pastae, 2021). Addona and Evitts (2022)

expressed that the teachers were competing with the distractions at the home which was out of the teachers' control.

Based on Alves and Romig (2021), the instruction, during virtual learning, was more teachers communicating facts for the students to learn and understand; then, the students would practice the skills independently. This independent skill practice was considered asynchronous learning, also known as self-learning modules, which limited the interaction amongst peers and the teacher for immediate feedback (Ionita & Pastae, 2021). These self-learning modules became the method of teaching students the skills they needed to master (Estoque, 2022). The self-learning modules and virtual learning situation made providing special education services difficult for those students who needed remediation (Colvin et al., 2022). Also, Colvin et al. (2022) stated the students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual learning are at a higher risk of learning disorders if their academic needs are not met.

Interaction and Engagement During Virtual Instruction

During the virtual instruction, the interaction between the teacher and students became less of a conversation between the two which is prevalent in the face-to-face interactions that lead to reduced learning control (Ionita & Pastae, 2021). Additionally, Ionita and Pastae (2021) stated that the teacher was unaware if they were communicating with a student or just a blank screen. Consequently, the teachers providing reading instruction was more complicated in the virtual learning environment (Estoque, 2022). Heiman (2021) reported the students' reading comprehension declined during virtual learning, due to the lack of student involvement with the text. In accordance with Ciullo

et al. (2018, p. 67), the “peer-remediated reading intervention” in the face-to-face model of instruction increased reading comprehension and engagement which were lacking throughout the virtual learning platform.

Parents During Virtual Learning

During virtual learning, the students received reading instruction from their parents in the self-learning modules (Estoque, 2022). Furthermore, Estoque (2022) suggested that teachers needed to collaborate with the parents to effectively provide reading instruction to their children. During the asynchronous instruction, the students had to complete their own reading assignments independently; sometimes the parents provided assistance with the assignments, and some did not (Alves & Romig, 2021). During this unprecedented time in educational history, the teachers needed training to provide reading instruction to meet the academic needs of all their students (Johnson, 2023). The students’ decline in reading comprehension was evident in the data reported in 2019 and 2022.

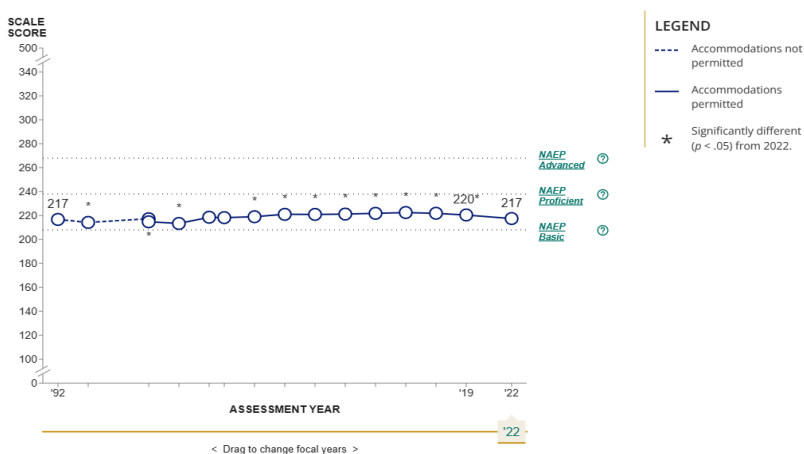
Reports on Reading Proficiency in 2019 and 2022

In Figure 2 and 3, the data shown were retrieved from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and from the local school district on reading proficiency in 2019 and 2022. In 2019, the United States national trend of reading proficiency averages of the students indicated 220 as compared to the average scores in 2022 was 217 in Figure 2 (NAEP, n.d.). There was an approximately 2% decline in the reading proficiency scores. For the state of Georgia in Figure 3, the decline was similar. The students in the state of Georgia had an average reading proficiency score of 219 in 2019

(NAEP, n.d.). As compared to the 2022 average reading proficiency scores, it was 216 (NAEP, n.d.). This was an approximately 2% decline for the state of Georgia in reading proficiency scores. Pursuant to the NAEP reading proficiency as indicated in Figure 2 and Figure 3, the score is 240. It is apparent with the score that the national average and state average are still significantly below proficient level in reading. In 2022, the average reading score of the students was approximately 10% below the proficient level.

Figure 2

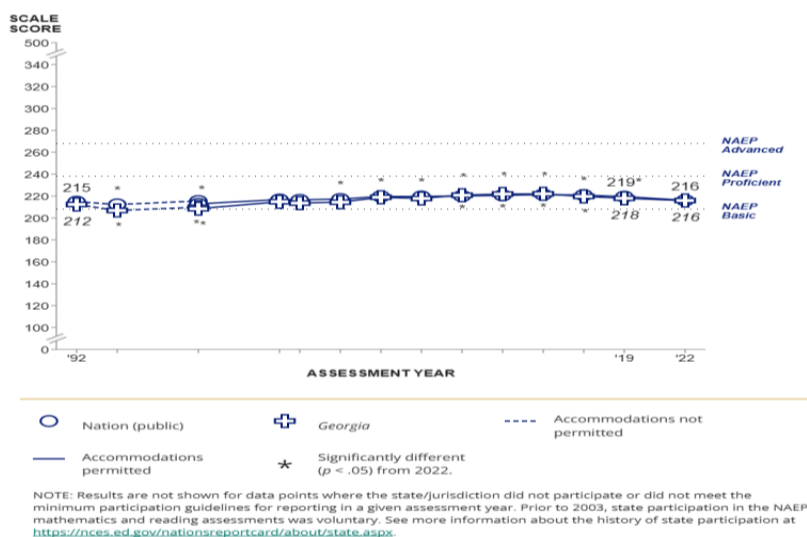
Trend in Fourth-Grade NAEP Reading Average Scores



Note. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, n.d.)

Figure 3

Trend in NAEP Reading Average Scores for Fourth-Grade Public School Students in Georgia and Nation



Note. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, n.d.)

Complexity of the Reading Process

The reading process is complex and is contingent on a collective of ingredients for students to be proficient in reading (Flores-Gallegos et al., 2021). Chow et al. (2021) described the complexity of reading acquisition involves the students in mastering the diverse reading foundational skills. Bentahar and Alalou (2022, p. 379) listed some of the factors in the complex reading process, such as “the reader’s language proficiencies, age, motivation, linguistic-cognitive ability, and learning environments. Additionally, the complex reading process, according to Flores-Gallegos et al. (2021), “requires multisensory processing, graphical phonological codification, short- and long-term memory, executive functions, and motor and cognitive responses” (p. 1). Chow et al.

(2021) explained that the diverse reading foundational skills as “maintenance, retrieval, manipulation, and transformation of verbal and visual input” (p. 2).

Reading Instruction During Virtual Learning

During the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual learning, the teachers and students in the elementary grades had challenges with reading instruction and acquisition with the reading foundational skills (Estoque, 2022). According to Vaughn (2019), the teachers had to be flexible to provide effective literacy instruction. This literacy instruction is vital for the progression through the reading levels of each student (Johnson, 2023). The advancement through the reading levels involves the proficiency in “phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension” (Estoque, 2022, p. 9). Vaughn (2019) suggested that teachers need to “invent structures or modifications” (p. 3) to reinforce the students’ learning because of the unforeseeable factors affecting education, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

For Students to Become Proficient Readers

Once the students become accomplished readers, they will be able to focus on fluency and comprehension (Johnson, 2023). The students with learning disabilities sometimes encounter difficulties with the basic reading foundational skills (Mize et al., 2019). In accordance with Alves and Romig (2021), a reader is fluent when they have mastered the basic reading foundational skills. Students who read efficiently can comprehend the text they are reading (Mize et al., 2019). The NAEP (n.d.) expressed that students who are proficient readers are able to locate and recall important information from the text.

Teaching Students to Become Proficient Readers in the Virtual Learning Era

The instructional environment does influence the teaching of reading concepts and the foundational reading skills including other factors as well (Bentahar & Alalou, 2022). Ciullo et al. (2018) indicated that the special education teacher, during this era, encountered complex responsibilities to meet the academic needs of their students. Teachers and special education teachers of beginning readers must emphasize skill development and reading strategies for their students to become successful readers (Estoque, 2022). Based on Missall et al. (2019), the teachers need to identify proficient readers so the students' progress in reading development. Additionally, these teachers must identify the non-proficient readers to address their weaknesses in reading. During virtual learning, the teachers could use the *Breakout Room* feature on the Zoom platform to provide individualized reading instruction for those who were struggling (Alves & Romig, 2021). In the local school district in Georgia, the options for *Breakout Rooms* were not available to provide individualized instruction for those students who struggled with reading.

Importance of Mastering Reading to Improve Comprehension

The concepts transpiring from the exploration of literature included the importance of mastering reading skills and strategies to increase reading comprehension. The students, according to Estoque (2022), benefitted from the face-to-face interactions in the classroom, which involves listening, speaking, and writing to make connections with the text. Ramzy and Bence (2022) expressed that the intricate processes of teaching students to read involve multiple cognitive actions for a student to become a proficient

reader. The professional world requires those who are skilled with reading (Stetter, 2018). Therefore, reading, based on Rose (2019), is an important skill for students to master since it will benefit them throughout their life.

Sanders et al. (2019) reiterated the essentialness of mastering reading comprehension skills for students to succeed. Additionally, Capin et al. (2021) expressed that success with reading affects the students' academic success and later in their life. The students who struggle with reading tend to be associated with dropping out of school, unemployment, and failure in college (Benner et al., 2022). Consequently, the students who do not master reading and writing possibly could struggle with "future employment and economic success" (Benner et al., 2022, p. 837). Congruent with Calet et al. (2019), the students who struggle with reading have significant educational outcomes if the issues are not addressed.

Students in special education have general deficiencies with reading (Stetter, 2018). Pindiprolu and Marks (2020) declared that students who have not mastered reading by the third grade have less chance to "succeed in the content areas and graduate from high school" (p. 116). The SwE experience discomfort which can negatively influence them in mastering the reading content (Rose, 2019). Therefore, students who have difficulties with reading will struggle in all academic areas (Nugen, 2019). According to Lovett et al. (2022), the students' comprehension of text depends on the "orchestration of a myriad of distinct cognitive, linguistic, affective, analytic, and interpretive operations" (p. 558).

Literacy Instruction

For the success of our students, it is essential for teachers to focus on literacy instruction (Benner et al., 2022). Based on Ramzy and Bence (2022), literacy instruction is a “delicate dance” (p. 18) the teachers engage in as they implement reflection and adjust their instruction to address the needs of their students. Teachers have many obstacles in providing effective literacy instruction to meet the educational needs of their students (Shifflet et al., 2020). Grimm et al. (2018) expressed that students benefit when interventions are provided early to alleviate future reading complications and disabilities. The development of efficient reading comprehension instruction depends on group size and the method the instruction is provided, as claimed by Martinez-Lincoln et al. (2021).

Students who struggle with reading and/or comprehension would profit from foundational reading skills instruction to address their areas of weakness (Sanders et al., 2019). Latson (2019) conveyed that teachers struggle to find methods to aid their students with reading comprehension. As stated by Sponaugle (2023), teachers provide incentives to encourage their students in meeting their reading goals, which will help increase reading comprehension. The students excel in reading when they are able to choose the text that piques their interests (Pratt et al., 2022). The teachers anticipate their students who have difficulties in reading to focus on skills and strategies to increase reading comprehension, so they are prepared for middle school and high school grades (Wanzek et al., 2020).

Deficiencies in Reading

Student achievement in reading competency could be influenced by deficiencies in reading skills (Sponaugle, 2023). The reading instruction in upper elementary grades, indicated by Wanzek et al. (2020), shifts from teaching basic foundational skills to reading comprehension instruction of various texts. During reading instruction, SwE benefit when the teacher secures their attention to obtain their active engagement with the text (Rose, 2019). In addition, Rose (2019) described the importance of asking and answering questions to maintain student engagement. Mastery in reading skills affects students' abilities to perform "everyday tasks, workplace success, communication with one's doctor, reading a menu, or understanding directions" (Nugen, 2019, p. 14).

Suggestions for Reading Success

Jiang and Logan (2019) suggested that elementary teachers need to provide "explicit, systematic instruction targeting language skills, such as vocabulary skills, comprehension monitoring, and text comprehension" (p. 2,825). According to Grimm et al. (2018), the students' ability to read text efficiently depends on their precise decoding skills. Additionally, Calet et al. (2019) stated students who read accurately and fluently include "suitable pauses, stress and intonation, and appropriate phrasing" (p. 75). For students to be proficient readers, they must master several concepts, such as "concepts of print, phonological awareness, word studies, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension," (Ramzy & Bence, 2022, p. 14). In accord with Toole (2023), teachers must be trained to progress their students in reading fluency and comprehension by equipping them with strategies for them to be successful with reading.

Students' Prior Knowledge and Experience

Students access their prior knowledge as they read and comprehend the text. Cox-Magno et al. (2018) disclosed the process of understanding text involves “combining current knowledge with new knowledge” (p. 197) and knowing the information that is important for comprehension. Nath (2018) declared reading comprehension involves a “conscious awareness” (p. 196) while the students access their prior knowledge during reading. Additionally, Nath (2018) expressed the students accessing their prior knowledge are indicators of an experienced reader. During the process of reading, the students use context clues as they relate the information in the text to their prior knowledge and experiences; therefore, they can comprehend what they are reading (Ramzy & Bence, 2022). Wherefore, SwE demonstrate limited prior knowledge and experiences that dramatically affect their ability to relate to the text, according to Rose (2019).

Effective Foundation for Reading Success

In the future, the success a student has with reading depends on a well-built reading foundation (Cox-Magno et al., 2018). For a student to be successful later in life, it is essential for them to master foundational reading skills (Grunke, 2019). According to Ramzy and Bence (2022), the development in reading foundational skills is complex. Therefore, SwE possibly had not mastered those reading foundational skills, such as phonemic awareness (Alves & Romig, 2021). Based on Piasta et al. (2019), these foundational skills are essential for students to master for success in reading: “vocabulary, print awareness, letter knowledge, and phonological awareness” (p. 224).

Bazis et al. (2022) stated that reading has a correlation with the students mastering the foundational reading skills and reading proficiency.

Reading instruction, indicated by Ehri (2020), of the foundational reading skills empowers the students through the reading development process. Ramzy and Bence (2022) described the reading foundational skills instruction and word knowledge helps bridge the students from decoding words to the comprehension of text. The instruction of language skills is essential in reading comprehension as well, based on Calet et al. (2019). Ramos (2019) described the importance of the continuation of “phonic-based practices and phonemic awareness” (p. 18) is needed to progress students in reading comprehension of text. Identifying struggling readers in the elementary years is crucial to focus their phonological processing skills (Grimm et al., 2018).

Students decode words, as explained by Grimm et al. (2018), using the letter-sound correspondence to decode words in text. The instruction of phonics in the classroom assists the students in progressing their decoding skills (Ramos, 2019). According to Alves and Romig (2021), teachers must provide instruction on decoding skills to improve reading comprehension of their SwE. Shifflet et al. (2020) reinforced the importance of phonological awareness instruction to increase students of all cognitive abilities to assist in developing their reading comprehension levels. The SwE in fourth and fifth grade who struggle with reading comprehension would benefit from the instruction of the reading foundational skills to progress them through reading levels (Ciullo et al., 2018).

Engagement and Developing Meaning of Text

Student engagement involves a systematic learning process which includes the foundational reading skills (Cox-Magno et al., 2018). From the point of view of Santoro et al. (2016), the engagement of students in reading text through the development of vocabulary acquisition and thinking can increase their “deep comprehension” abilities (p. 283). This “deep comprehension” is for the reader to construct meaning from the text (Santoro et al., 2016, p. 283). During literacy instruction, Ramzy and Bence (2022) suggested for teachers “to attend to each students’ resources, beliefs, values, and habits of mind” (p. 14) as they develop their lessons in reading instruction. Grunke (2019) described the importance of engaging students with the text, so they can construct meaning from what they have read.

Reading Strategies Instruction

The intricate cognitive process of reading involves using multiple reading strategies to comprehend text (Toole, 2023). These strategies are beneficial for SwE in the early elementary years, based on Colvin et al. (2022). As stated by Nath (2021), reading strategy instruction is crucial in assisting students with expanding their comprehension skills. Therefore, Ciullo et al. (2018) indicated the need for more reading strategy instruction to progress the comprehension skills of their students. Students have an advantage from reading strategy instruction through expanding their “self-regulation skills” (Sanders et al., 2019, p. 340).

Supporting Students With Reading Strategy Instruction

The students benefit from the incorporation of evidence-based reading strategy instruction to increase their reading comprehension skills (Sanders et al., 2019). Grunke (2019) suggested the reading strategies should be manageable and uncomplicated for students to apply while they are reading. In line with Martinez-Lincoln et al. (2021), the instruction of evidence-based reading strategies may not benefit all students; however, the process involves finding the specific strategy that will work for each student. These students will need more comprehensive evaluations and support with reading strategy instruction (Vaughn et al., 2018). According to Capin et al. (2021), teachers will need to develop reading profiles of their students which will display their areas of strengths and weaknesses in reading, and this would help the teachers to develop reading strategies to address those specific weaknesses in reading. Wanzek et al. (2020) described the reading strategies the teachers implement must keep the students' weaknesses in mind as they plan their lessons.

Teachers of students who struggle with reading need to allocate crucial time searching for reading strategies that would benefit their students (Smith, 2019). Therefore, Smith (2019) discussed the need for reading strategies to be implemented in the instructional plan to progress the students' reading comprehension. Teachers need to combine reading instruction and strategies to alleviate the scheduling constraints (Bazis et al., 2022). Grimm et al. (2018) suggested teachers must conduct reading inventories to determine the students' areas of weakness in reading and the interventions that will address those needs. For example, Sponaugle (2023) explained the importance of

students collaborating with each other as an effective method of increasing the reading comprehension skills of their students.

Professional Development on Reading Strategy Implementation

The implementation of reading strategies in the classroom requires the teachers to receive training and support to provide quality reading instruction for their students.

Sponaugle (2023) suggested that teachers need the establishment of professional learning opportunities to produce proficient readers through proper reading strategy instruction.

Based on Smith (2019), the teachers profit from these reading strategy professional learning opportunities to progress all of their students' reading levels. For the implementation of reading strategies, the teachers need coaching in the procedures to effectively deliver reading strategy instruction for their students (Smith, 2019). Ciullo et al. (2018) explained the requirement for teachers to receive continued support in the proper implementation of reading strategies.

Research of the Literature of Suggested Reading Strategies

The following strategies were discussed in the literature, such as re-reading text, gradually increasing reading levels, peer-assisted reading, and independent choice reading opportunities. The consensus of the literature under their own specific sections will be discussed in more detail further, such as modeling, metacognition, word study/vocabulary instruction, technology, and phonics/phonemic awareness.

Benner et al. (2022) described the significance of using reading strategies to develop the students' reading fluency and comprehension. Rose (2019) suggested that teachers need to provide their students with text at their independent reading level and

progressively extend their reading levels. As claimed by Mize et al. (2019), peer-assisted reading has the potential to develop fluency in students who struggle with reading. The teacher providing the students' choices of text is an independent reading strategy that assists students in developing reading comprehension (Sponaugle, 2023). Calet et al. (2019) suggested teaching students to read with expression can assist struggling readers in comprehending text meaning.

Modeling Proper Reading Techniques

The teachers modeling the proper techniques of the reading process and the application of reading strategies is crucial for students' mastery in reading proficiency (Ramzy and Bence, 2022). For effective instruction of reading strategy applications, the teacher will need to model how to use it for the duration of their reading of text (Grunke, 2019). Alves and Romig (2021) detailed that the teachers will present the reading strategy during their instruction and model the strategy in action while they are reading text. According to Estoque (2022), modeling encompasses the cognitive processes while reading, such as questioning the meaning of text or difficult words. The teacher can model summarizing the text as they collaborate with the students (Alves & Romig, 2021).

Role of Metacognition in Reading

Metacognition instruction has enhanced reading comprehension in students (Lu et al., 2022). Additionally, Lu et al. (2022) described metacognition as the process of a person understanding their thinking process and ability to actively engage in their learning process. Congruent with Pratt et al. (2022), metacognition involves the students' reasoning and their awareness of executing the reading strategy while they are reading

text. During the metacognition process, the students utilize their background knowledge and experiences to understand the text they are reading (Block, 2008). According to Nath (2021, p. 194), metacognition incorporates “knowledge about cognition and regulation of cognition.” The students’ understanding of their metacognitive processes during reading has demonstrated improvement in reading comprehension (Lu et al., 2022).

The contribution of metacognition strategy instruction is to improve “language proficiency and reading efficiency” (Nath, 2021, p. 196). Furthermore, Nath (2022) stated metacognition is “more about self-awareness” (p. 197) during the reading process. Pratt et al. (2022) expressed that metacognition progresses over time; therefore, this strategy instruction is crucial in advancing the students’ reading comprehension. In addition, students from all varieties of social economic status benefit from metacognition strategy instruction to absorb information from the text (Pratt et al., 2022). Teachers of SwE must assist their students in understanding their own metacognitive process for them to succeed with reading comprehension (Rose, 2019).

Technology Integration

The utilization of technology in the classroom has improved the students’ reading proficiency (Sponaugle, 2023). Based on Alexander (2020), teachers must be aware of “when and why to employ technologies” (p. 594) in their reading instruction. Technology may support students in reinforcing phonological awareness skills (Shifflet et al., 2020). Tablets, such as an iPad, are instruments that teachers can use to promote reading proficiency (Mize et al., 2019). Stetter (2018) stated that technology is an effective method in assisting students with reading comprehension.

Word Study/Vocabulary Instruction

The process of reading incorporates the identification of words accurately (Avsar Tuncay & Dedeoglu, 2019). Gao (2021) expressed the significance of word studies/vocabulary instruction since word recognition is crucial for “language expression and language applications” (p. 442). Word studies are essential methods for students to identify words and comprehend their meaning (Ramzy & Bence, 2022). Additionally, the students understanding of words involves them knowing sounds of each letter and being able to blend them together to make recognizable words (Pindiprolu & Marks, 2020). Avsar Tuncay and Dedeoglu (2019) described the procedures of literacy instruction incorporates teaching the students how to recognize the written words in text.

Moody et al. (2018) stated that reading and language arts programs should include vocabulary instruction. Vocabulary instruction, according to Jiang and Logan (2019), is significant for students to progress in reading comprehension. The reading process involves the students’ reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and studying words (Ramzy & Bence, 2022). Gao (2021) described vocabulary instruction as a significant concept for students since it “affects their listening, speaking, reading, and writing” skills (p. 442). Therefore, Grunke (2019) expressed the significance of vocabulary instruction in developing the SwE word knowledge and advancing their reading comprehension.

Phonics Instruction and Phonemic Awareness

During phonemic awareness instruction, the teachers prepare their students to segment and blend the individual sounds in words (Ehri, 2020). This type of instruction is powerful for students of all ages by providing them with skills they need, according to

Rehfeld et al. (2021). Most teachers, based on Sanden et al. (2022), think phonics instruction is a crucial skill to teach to expand the students' ability to read text. Reading instruction should include phonics which can be individualized to meet the needs of each student (Fletcher et al., 2020). Ehri (2020) stated that phonics instruction provides students with the "knowledge and skills" (p. 545) that are required for students to be able to segment and blend words.

On the account of reading progression being critical for academic success, instruction in phonemic awareness is imperative (Paige et al., 2023). Students use their prior knowledge of familiar words to decode unfamiliar words during phonics instruction (Ehri, 2020). Additionally, Rehfeld et al. (2021) expressed the importance of teaching graphemes as part of the phonemic awareness instruction. Based on Ehri (2020), the students will not need to decode written words once they have committed them to memory. Therefore, students struggling to decode words take away their "cognitive resources" that could have been applied to reading comprehension (Rehfeld, 2021, p. 1256).

Fletcher et al. (2020) explained that teachers need to provide instruction on "grapheme-phoneme correspondence rules" (p. 1,256) in company with word meaning instruction. Indicated by Ehri (2020), students need to decode words "by saying the phonemes corresponding to graphemes and blending them to pronounce the words" (p. 556) in the text. Additionally, students need to learn "onset-rime, syllables, and morphemes" to help them decode unfamiliar words (Ehri, 2020, p. 556). Benner et al. (2022) stated that students will be able to segment and blend multisyllabic words through

separating the words into smaller sections. Phonics and phonemic awareness instruction has proven to assist students to eventually “read words from memory” (Ehri, 2020, p. 548).

Summary and Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and virtual learning in 2020-2021 made providing reading instruction and remediation difficult for teachers and students. The interaction and engagement that was present during the face-to-face instruction was limited during virtual learning instruction. Based on Ionita and Pastae (2021), the interaction became more of providing facts which orchestrated less control of the learning of their students. The parents became the primary reading instructor during the pandemic and that was if they were available to assist their children in their education. Considering the complexity of the reading process in the early elementary grades, reading instruction should involve teaching multiple reading foundational skills (Chow et al., 2021).

During this era, the teachers and students experienced many challenges with reading instruction and reading acquisition (Estoque, 2022). Students who are presently in fifth grade would have needed to master the reading foundational skills that were taught during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown and virtual learning. Additionally, special education teachers had limited opportunities to remediate for those students who struggled with reading fluency and/or comprehension. The students mastering the foundational reading skills was crucial for their academic success in fourth grade, fifth grade, and beyond. According to Benner et al. (2022), students who struggle with reading could possibly struggle with “future employment and economic success” (p. 837).

Literacy instruction is important for students to master so they can become proficient readers. However, students struggle with the basic foundational skills which affects their ability to read fluently and comprehend text (Sponaugle, 2023). Many researchers provided suggestions on the best methods to improve reading comprehension. Cox-Magno et al. (2018) explained students use their prior knowledge and experiences while learning new knowledge. In addition, students who have a solid understanding of the reading foundational skills can be proficient in reading (Piasta et al., 2019). Furthermore, students need to become engaged with the text to develop an understanding of the meaning the text is attempting to convey (Grunke, 2019).

Reading strategy instruction is essential to assist students to increase their reading comprehension capabilities. Students will need continued support in the proper techniques of applying the reading strategies. Additionally, the teachers will require professional development opportunities on the reading strategies that have been proven to aid their students in reading comprehension. The most common reading strategies suggested in the literature were modeling, metacognition, technology integration, word study/vocabulary instruction, and phonics/phonemic awareness. The teacher modeling the reading strategy and the thinking process (metacognition) while they are reading aids in the students understanding of how to use the strategy. The use of technology in the classroom can be utilized to promote the students' reading comprehension. Word studies and vocabulary instruction combined with phonics and phonemic awareness instruction has the potential to increase reading comprehension as well.

Teachers encountered many challenges since the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual learning. The decline in reading comprehension of the students displays the effects of this issue. Mourlam et al. (2022) described the teachers as not prepared for this immediate shift in education. According to Ionita and Pastae (2021), teachers and students experienced difficulties with technology, internet, and the digital platforms. Furthermore, teachers were competing with distractions at home (Addona & Evitts, 2022). These distractions at home made it difficult for teachers to teach and students to learn.

Are the reading strategies used by the teachers effective and are these strategies being taught properly to the students? Are the reading strategies taught to teachers in professional development learning opportunities effective? How can teachers use computers in the classroom to teach reading strategies? Is the students' disposition affecting their use of reading strategies? Finally, would the integration of language expansion application improve reading comprehension?

Chapter 3 has a thorough outline of the research method applied to conduct the research is provided. The methodology topics included the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection, instrumentation, and data analysis plan. The trustworthiness of the methodology was investigated. In describing the recruitment of the participants, ethical procedures were addressed to protect their confidentiality and verify the findings.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE in a local school district in Georgia. In addition, the methods teachers are currently using to close this achievement gap were examined to identify any gaps in practices and opportunities for improvement. Through the comparison of the framework, literature review, and methodical reasoning, this study was an investigation of teachers' perspectives of the foundational reading skills students are lacking and the methods teachers are currently using to address the decline in reading comprehension. This assisted me in understanding the evidence-based reading strategies that have shown to improve reading comprehension of students. In this chapter, I provide a description of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodology, the trustworthiness, and the ethical procedures this study followed.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions that directed this research were as follows:

RQ1: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes when teaching reading to SwE?

RQ2: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their challenges when teaching reading to SwE?

RQ3: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their suggestions when teaching reading to SwE?

Qualitative researchers use this design in hopes of gaining an understanding of participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A qualitative researcher hopes to understand the phenomenon from the participants' point of view. Therefore, a basic qualitative research design was relevant for this study to explore fifth-grade teachers' perspectives of factors contributing to fifth-grade SwE struggles with reading comprehension and an intensive literature review on the same topic. Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained that researchers utilize literature reviews to understand the relevant information on the topic they are researching. A basic qualitative research incorporates the "interpretive, material practices to make the world visible to transform the world" (Crawford, 2020, p. 81). The problem addressed through this study was the low reading comprehension levels of fifth-grade SwE in a local school district in Georgia. The findings of this research study might enlighten administrators and other teachers of the best reading strategies to increase students' reading comprehension.

The selection of the participants in this basic qualitative study aimed to use purposeful sampling due to it providing "context-rich and detailed" information on the descriptions of this specific population (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 83). The fifth-grade teachers were the purposeful sample in this study because they have context-rich and detailed information on the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on their students' reading comprehension. The lived experiences of the sample size selection were to get an in-depth understanding of the participants' point of view (see Crawford, 2020). The fifth-grade teachers have lived through the experience of their students struggling with reading comprehension since the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this population had crucial

information about their students' reading capabilities and the decline in reading comprehension.

The data collection process in qualitative data develops throughout the research, therefore providing the researcher a better understanding of the phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Fifth-grade teachers were interviewed to gain an understanding of their perspectives of the foundational reading skills fifth-grade students are lacking and the reading strategies teachers are using to address the decline in reading comprehension. According to Spry and Pich (2020), data collection in research assists a researcher in understanding where and when the information collected should be used to answer the research questions. The qualitative data collection in this research will fill a void in the literature by investigating teachers' perspectives to answer the research questions (Twis et al., 2019). This basic qualitative study will contribute to the literature to address the gap in reading comprehension in special education practice and the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on education.

The data collection method included the use of semistructured individual interviews to gain an understanding of the perspectives of the participants selected (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In addition, Lambert (2012) stated that individual interviews assist the interviewer to understand the interviewee's attitudes, opinions, and feelings on a topic. The individual interviews of fifth-grade teachers assisted in understanding their attitudes, opinions, and feelings and exploring fifth-grade teachers' perspectives of the factors contributing to the decline in reading comprehension among fifth-grade SwE. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), one-on-one semistructured interviews will permit

opportunities for conversation, ask follow-up questions, and acknowledge the participant's responses. These semistructured interviews with fifth-grade teachers included open-ended questions regarding the foundational reading skills their students are lacking and what they are doing to address it as related to the blended learning model and constructivist learning principles as well as other best practices.

Through this basic qualitative study, the focus was to improve the reading comprehension of fifth-grade SwE. This research provides an understanding of reading strategies to increase the reading comprehension skills of students in special education. The COVID-19 pandemic presented educators with the task to improve students' reading comprehension since the decline after the shutdown and virtual learning the following school year. Teaching students the foundational reading skills the students need to succeed in reading was limited during this recent impact on educational history. Reading comprehension was difficult for most students in special education prior to COVID-19 and the gap only increased more since the pandemic. NAEP reported the reading proficiency level at 240. In 2019, NAEP reported that the nation and the state of Georgia was approximately 10% below the reading proficiency level. According to Hammerschmidt-Snidarich (2019), there are a concerning number of students in upper elementary grades who are not proficient in basic reading skills. Reading comprehension is a significant skill for students to master to be successful in future grades and in employment opportunities.

This research will support professional practice through literature in providing administrators and teachers with evidence-based reading strategies to assist them in

improving their students' reading comprehension skills. This research study's problem, purpose, and research questions aligned with the qualitative research design to understand the barriers contributing to the decline in reading comprehension of fifth-grade SwE. The qualitative method was used to conduct this research to attempt to provide awareness of fifth-grade teachers' practices addressing the decline in reading comprehension.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in this research process was that of an interviewer. As the interviewer, I explored the thoughts of fifth-grade teachers in a local school district in Georgia. This process helped me to understand the viewpoint of the participants and their students' struggles with reading comprehension. As a qualitative researcher, I served as the data collection manager (see Burkholder et al., 2020). This role of the qualitative researcher brought about great responsibilities. During this process, I was an observer-participant, which provided the opportunity to collect data based on teachers' perceptions with the opportunity to record the sessions and observe the teachers in their setting (see Burkholder et al., 2020). During the interviewing process, the researcher was able to interview the teachers to determine their perspective of the best methods to increase reading comprehension. Through this research study, I sought to advocate for SwE struggling with reading comprehension with a neutral stance during the interview process and through contributing to the literature base. Rubin and Rubin (2012, p. 17) suggested that a researcher take a "neutral role" so as not to impact the opinions of the participants being interviewed.

My relationship with the fifth-grade teachers who were interviewed did not affect my ability to provide an unbiased analysis. However, I did interview a few teachers I did not know prior to the interview. Additionally, I needed to be flexible with whatever issues would arise before, during, and after the interview or in any portion of the interview process. Flexibility to meet the needs and/or time constraints with the teachers helped to provide a positive interaction.

The ethical issues that could arise during the collection process were accomplished by maintaining confidentiality of the participants and the data collection process. An interviewer, according to Saldaña (2021), must be respectful of participants and ethical with the data collection process. An interviewer maintains confidentiality of participants' identities. Additionally, an interviewer maintains a non-bias stance during the data collection process. Therefore, a researcher ensures the research questions are fair and open-ended to create dialogue to develop data that are unbiased.

The role of the qualitative researcher is to associate the concepts within the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The analysis of the literature review and the participants' interview responses answer the research questions. The data collected from the interviews are coded to determine common themes. Additionally, this data collected are reported accurately in the analysis to ensure the integrity of the research process. The goal of this research was to help improve the reading comprehension of SwE by contributing to the literature. Harrison Berg et al. (2020) asserted that teachers who are passionate are engaged in making sustainable changes for their students.

Methodology

As a qualitative researcher, I explored fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE in a local school district in Georgia. This qualitative research approach assisted in limiting influence during the research process and data collection process (Kaman, 2018). Data were collected to determine fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE. Based on Rumrill Jr. et al. (2020), the role of a qualitative researcher is to learn from the perspectives of the participants as they share their experiences and points of view on the topic. The process began with obtaining baseline data through an intensive literature review, data collection, and analysis of teachers' perspectives of the foundational skills students are lacking and reading strategies teachers are using to address this issue. The literature review was conducted to gain knowledge of the effective reading strategies referenced in the literature.

The qualitative research included data collection, data analysis, and reporting the results. According to Rumrill Jr. et al. (2020), in a qualitative case study, a researcher will utilize numerous participants to collect data to provide comprehensive illustration of the circumstances affecting students' reading comprehension. The data collection process included fifth-grade teacher interviews. The interview questions sought to gather teachers' perspectives of the foundational reading skills students are lacking and the reading strategies they are using to increase reading comprehension among their students. I took notes during the interviews along with audio recordings of the conversations for accuracy. The data collected in the qualitative research were analyzed to determine the

reading foundational skills students are lacking and the reading strategies teachers are using to address this issue. The results were interpreted and analyzed, and I provide a review of the findings.

Participant Selection

The participants selected for this research study were fifth-grade teachers of SWE in a local school district in Georgia. These teachers were able to provide firsthand accounts of the struggles their students are having with reading comprehension from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants had to determine the reading foundational skills students are lacking. Furthermore, these teachers had to provide remediation to increase students' reading comprehension skills. These interviews were semistructured through an interview protocol developed using the framework and the literature review to answer the research questions. As referenced by Rubin and Rubin (2020), each participant was asked the same interview questions with the addition of probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives.

The number of participants selected were eight fifth-grade teachers who teach reading because this grade is usually compartmentalized. Data saturation, according to Yob and Brewer (n.d.), provides a researcher opportunities to see common themes and patterns from the interview questions. The final interviews provide confirmation of the themes and patterns. Data saturation occurs when there is enough data to sufficiently answer the research questions. This is determined by recurring themes in the data collection process. Mason (2010) suggested that the saturation point in a basic qualitative study is determined when the data no longer provide any additional information to the

research study. For this basic qualitative study, I interviewed eight participants and reached data saturation when I saw the recurring themes and patterns to answer the research questions.

Sampling Strategy

Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research because participants have lived experiences and knowledge of a specific phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), participants in a qualitative research study are selected because they have detailed information on the phenomenon to answer the research questions. Rubin and Rubin (2012) expressed that a researcher will gain valuable information from the specialized population selected to be participants. The sampling strategy a researcher uses is crucial to gain “valid and meaningful data” (Burkholder et al., 2020, p. 267). Therefore, the purposeful sampling strategy provides a researcher the opportunity to thoroughly analyze the phenomenon of the research study (Burkholder et al., 2020).

A purposeful sampling strategy was used to invite participants referred from administration and/or faculty suggestions. The potential participants were contacted via email and/or mail with an invitation to participate in the research study. According to Yob and Brewer (n.d.), interviewees are selected to participate on account of having valuable information that will benefit a research study. As Patton (2015) stated, analytically focused sampling helps to support researchers and allows them to interpret patterns and themes. The purposeful sampling strategy in this basic qualitative research focused on fifth-grade teachers who have valuable information pertaining to the reading

foundational skills their students are lacking and the methods they are using to address this issue; therefore, through the interviews there was an opportunity to identify themes and patterns through examining the data.

Instrumentation

Ravitch and Carl (2021) stated that the research instrument is the tool the qualitative researcher uses to collect the data. The type of instrumentation that was used for data collection was the semistructured interview protocol, audio recordings, and notes of the participants' interviews. The semistructured interview protocol can be reviewed in Appendix A. The interview protocol developed by focusing on the framework following a blended learning approach and the constructivism approach. The literature review and the research questions guided in the development of the semistructured interview protocol.

After interviewing the participants, a transcript was developed from the audio recordings and notes. The transcripts' content was transferred to a word document to incorporate continuous line numbering to locate the participant's responses. Once the transcript was finalized for all participants' responses, the verbiage was transferred to an Excel document to code the responses through open coding. The data collection tool assisted me in analyzing the semistructured interviewee's responses to determine the recurring themes and patterns. This data collection tool was appropriate for this research study to answer the research questions. This semistructured interview protocol was an appropriate method when the researcher needs the participants to answer the interview questions in "vivid detail" to answer the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 31).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment

The recruitment process involved the purposeful sampling strategy of fifth-grade teachers of SwE to interview from a possible 100 fifth-grade teachers available. The teachers were selected based on criteria they have specific information crucial to answer the research questions. Upon approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the local school district in Georgia, the fifth-grade teachers were contacted to inquire if they are willing to participate in this research study. The number of participants was eight fifth-grade teachers. The teachers were contacted via county email and/or county mail with an invitation to participate in the research study and the offer of an incentive of a \$20 gift card. After the teachers responded to the invitation, they were informed of the purpose of the research, the session will be audio recorded, their identity will be completely confidential, and their participation is completely voluntary. Also, the researcher and the participants determined the best time to meet for the interview via Zoom meeting.

Participation

The participants were asked to sign an informed consent form to participate in this research study. This consent form informed the participants of the purpose of the study. The consent form advised the participants of the benefits of their participation for them as teachers and their students. The time commitment needed from the participants was approximately thirty minutes. Additionally, the consent form explained their identity will be confidential. This form explained how the results of the of the data will be used in the

research process. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021, p. 211), the informed consent form is a method of notifying the participants of the meetings purpose and procedures in a “respectful, accessible, and transparent” process.

Burkholder et al. (2020) suggested using member checking to have interviewees provide feedback on the findings and to check it for accuracy. These interviewee members reviewed the findings and checked it for quality and accuracy. Additionally, the qualitative researcher conducted a peer review of your research findings prior to submission to confirm the quality of the statements (Mills & Birks, 2014). Furthermore, the interviewees ensured the quality of my inferences from the interview data. This member checking was crucial to protect the integrity of the research process.

Data Collection

The data collection instruments in the qualitative data involved semistructured individual interviews of the fifth-grade teachers. These semistructured individual interviews allowed me to investigate the teachers’ perspectives to answer the research questions. The data collection method of using semistructured individual interviews was to gain an understanding of the perspectives of the participants that were selected (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The data collection process involved audio recordings of the interviews and taking notes during the participants’ interviews. The semistructured individual interviews were through a Zoom meeting to accommodate time constraints of the participants in the research study. The Zoom meeting was audio recorded through the recording feature on the platform. The occurrence of these interviews was a one-time visit with them that was for approximately 30 minutes for each participant.

The interviews were audio recorded for accuracy of the dictation to the word document transcript. Rubin and Rubin (2020) indicated the benefit of developing a transcript from the video recordings of the interview is the ability to accurately report the participants' responses and the researcher becomes more familiar with their responses as well. The participants responses were transferred to a word document to incorporate continuous line numbering to locate the participants' responses effortlessly. Once the transcript was finalized for all participants' responses, the responses were transferred to an Excel document to code their responses through open coding method. The open coding involved multiple attempts to determine the data that was prominent to answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Data Analysis Plan

During the research process, qualitative data analysis is a method of carefully analyzing the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). During this phase of the research, the interviewer concentrated on the participants responses and description of their experiences. The researcher made the connections of the common themes and patterns that developed from the data, literature review, and theories. The data collected was interpreted and a report of the findings was discussed. Ravitch and Carl (2021, p. 239) stated the researcher reports the data because "the data does not speak for themselves." According to Rumrill. Jr. (2020), the qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to develop an understanding of the magnitude of data, discovering the data to incorporate in the analysis, and examining the data to establish the findings of the research study.

The codes, categories, and themes emerged through the thematic analysis of the data collected. Furthermore, the codes, categories, and themes were associated with each other. The differences between codes, categories, and themes depended on the concentration of the purpose in analyzing the data. Codes are words or phrases derived from the qualitative data collected from the participants' responses. The goal of coding is to develop a meaning through analyzing the data (Urquhart, 2013). Categories is the arrangement of the codes with similar classifications. In the analysis of large amounts of data are grouped and the distinguishing attributes develop (Lepper, 2000). The themes were developed from the categories to formulate the meaning from the data collected. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), the themes materialize while developing meaning from the participant's responses.

For coding, the process was initiated with transcribing the verbiage from the interviews into a word document. This word document incorporated continuous line numbering to locate the participants' responses more easily. These responses were transferred to an Excel document to code their responses through open coding. The open coding involved multiple attempts to determine the data that are prominent to answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The Excel document assisted me in analyzing the participants' responses to determine the recurring themes and patterns during the open coding process. The participants' responses were read to determine a word or phrases that appropriately represented each of the responses to the interview questions through an open coding process.

The process involved moving inductively from coded units to larger representations of the categories and themes that emerged from the data collection process. The codes were words or phrases extracted from the responses of the participants. The codes will be categorized according to similar classifications of responses to the questions. The potential responses from the participants hoped to provide a deeper understanding of the reading foundational skills the students are lacking and the strategies the teachers are currently using to address the decline in reading comprehension since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through analyzing the data, these words or phrases extracted from the responses of the participants were sorted according to their similarities of codes. Therefore, the codes were categorized according to similar classifications of responses to the interview questions in the open coding process. The categories transpired to provide a detailed thematic analysis to answer the research questions. The overall theme of the codes and categories was discussed after the conclusions of the interviews. According to Saldaña (2021), the open coding process assists the researcher in reflecting on the data to develop an understanding of the common themes emerging. The thematic analysis pursued to answer the reading comprehension skills the SwE are lacking and gain an understanding of the methods the fifth-grade teachers are doing to address the decline in reading comprehension ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, quality, trustworthiness, and credibility are crucial components in the research process. Quality, trustworthiness, and credibility in

qualitative research begins with ensuring the problem statement, purpose statement, research question, research design, and conceptual framework are in complete alignment. To ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, the research must focus on the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of their research focus (Shenton, 2004). Taking notes and recording the interviews can ensure the quality, trustworthiness, and credibility of the research process to accurately report the participants' experiences. This ensured the findings reported are of good quality, trustworthy, and credible. Quality, trustworthiness, and credibility will ensure the validity of qualitative research. As claimed by Ravitch and Carl (2021), the findings in qualitative research are accurately declared by the research of the participants' experiences.

The trustworthiness of the findings through semistructured individual interviews and the literature review established the credibility, transferability, dependability strategies, and confirmability of this qualitative research study. The creditability of the interview data answered the research questions through accurately reporting the data. The transferability of this research strives to contextualize the basis for the decline in reading comprehension and how the teachers are addressing this issue through purposeful sampling of participants and literature on the same theme. The dependability from the participant interviews and the literature review provided validity through the qualitative data analysis to establish the common themes emerging. The confirmability of the themes could be replicated in the future as the research process has been described in detail.

Ethical Procedures

The ethical issues which could arise during the data collection process could be maintaining confidentiality of the participants. According to Saldaña (2021), the interviewer must be ethical and respectful of the participants. In addition, the interviewer has an obligation to be ethical in the data collection process (Saldaña, 2021). The interviewer must maintain confidentiality of the participant's identity. Additionally, the data collection process of the interviewer must maintain a non-bias status. The unique ethical challenges in qualitative research are protecting privacy, minimizing harm, and respecting the shared experience of others. Protecting the privacy of the participants is crucial in maintaining confidentiality to ensure the representation of the data in the findings is impartial. As mentioned by Heggen and Guillemin (2012), protecting the participants identity is the obligation of the researcher to act in accordance with the participants' rights.

Pseudonyms names should be used and identifying information should be removed to maintain confidentiality (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). To minimize harm in the qualitative research process, the expectations of the researcher were communicated prior to the interviews. The data collected from the responses of the participants was confidential to minimize any potential harm to the participants. To reduce this potential harm of participants, the researcher informed the participants prior to the meeting and at the beginning of the meeting the expectations and purpose of the meeting. The researcher has ethical principles to adhere to during the research process, such as respecting others and maintaining research integrity (Heggen & Guillemin, 2012).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE in a local school district in Georgia. In addition, the methods the teachers are currently using to close this achievement gap were examined to identify any gaps in practices and opportunities for improvement. In this chapter, the research design and rationale were discussed comprehensively. In addition, the role of the researcher was explored. The methodology of the research was meticulously in describing the participant selection process, the instrumentation, and the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Furthermore, the methodology included the data analysis plan. Ultimately, the trustworthiness and ethical procedures were detailed to ensure the research process and the participants were treated respectfully and honestly.

In Chapter 4, a detailed synopsis of the results will be provided from the data collection. The results of the topics were included in the setting, data collection, data analysis, and results. The evidence of trustworthiness was investigated. In evidence of trustworthiness, the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in the thematic analysis of the data will be discussed.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE in a local school district in Georgia. In addition, I examined what teachers are currently doing to close this achievement gap to identify any gaps in practices and opportunities for improvement. The nature of the research study was focused on qualitative data to determine the reading strategies teachers are using to increase reading comprehension among SwE. I collected data using semistructured interviews to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes when teaching reading to SwE?

RQ2: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their challenges when teaching reading to SwE?

RQ3: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their suggestions when teaching reading to SwE?

This chapter includes a description of the data collection setting, the demographics and characteristics of the study participants, the data collection process, and a synopsis of the data analysis with the results of the main themes from the analysis. This chapter concludes with the procedures taken in the study to provide evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

The setting for the study involved eight fifth-grade teachers who taught reading to SwE in a local school district in Georgia. The fifth-grade teachers were able to provide quality information about the struggles their students have been having with reading comprehension because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These teachers provide instruction and remediation for students who are lacking the reading foundational skills needed to be successful in fifth-grade reading comprehension requirements. Therefore, the study participants included eight teachers who teach fifth-grade reading to SwE. The interviews were conducted via Zoom at different school locations, and each interview was audio recorded. The interviews were conducted for approximately 30 minutes each.

Data Collection

Once I received approval from the Walden University IRB and the local school district, the data collection process began. Once the local school district approved my research, I was approved to conduct research within 11 elementary schools. I searched the district website for those particular schools. Then, I explored each school's website for the fifth-grade teachers who would be suitable for my research parameters. I emailed 65 teachers to explore their willingness to participate. Once the teachers emailed me their willingness to participate, they were sent an informed consent form to review with the opportunity to ask questions about the research study. The participants were asked to sign and return the informed consent form.

Once the informed consent form was received, an interview date and time was scheduled based on their availability. I utilized snowball sampling to obtain additional

participants from the interviewees to obtain the number of participants needed. The interviews were semistructured conducted using an interview protocol (see Appendix A). Each interview was conducted over a Zoom meeting to provide convenience for the participants. The recordings of the Zoom meetings of each participant were saved in audio format only.

The interviews transpired over 7 weeks, and I used the interview protocol (Appendix A). The protocol was expanded with an emphasis on the conceptual framework and the literature review to answer the research questions. The participants were asked the same interview questions with the addition of probing questions to gain a better understanding of their perspectives on their students' reading comprehension (see Rubin & Rubin, 2020). The participants' interviews were audio recorded utilizing the Zoom audio recording feature. The semistructured interview format permitted me to ask 15 open-ended questions in the protocol and probing questions to gain additional information of participants' answers.

Each interview's audio recording was transcribed into a Microsoft Office Word document. I would listen to a few seconds of recording and transcribe exactly what I heard for accuracy. Once the participants' responses were transferred to a Word document, I incorporated continuous line numbering to locate participants' responses effortlessly. After the transcript was finalized for each participant with the continuous line numbering document, I asked the participants to check the transcript for accuracy and/or make any changes or clarifications as needed. Burkholder et al. (2020) indicated that qualitative research involves the participants verifying the data collected but, also,

provides additional feedback if the transcript was not transcribed accurately. Following confirmation of the accuracy of the transcripts from the participants. Each participant confirmed the validity of the transcript through email.

Data Analysis

Coding Preparation

Following the approval from each participant of their transcripts, the transcripts were saved in a rich text format. Then, participants' responses in the transcript with continuous line numbers were uploaded into a Microsoft Excel worksheet. The eight participants were kept in a separate worksheet tab in the Excel workbook. The interview protocol questions were distinguished in black ink. The participants' responses were colored in blue, green, orange, or purple depending on their school. This created a transparent visual between the questions being asked and the participants' responses. The top of each Excel spreadsheet had columns for open coding. The themes and codes were developed from each interview worksheet. Next to each participant's responses was a column with the line number to identify the specific area on the transcript. The 15 open codes were developed from raw data, which aligns with the codes from the framework and literature review.

First Cycle Codes: Open

The first cycle coding developed through using the attribute codes from the research questions. Each of the participant's responses had attribute codes applied in the first cycle of coding. The first cycle coding was relative to the successes, challenges, and suggestions of the fifth-grade teachers who taught reading to SWE. These attribute codes

provide a clear understanding of the circumstances the fifth-grade reading teachers are facing based on their experiences teaching SwE. This first round of coding began with an open coding process. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), open coding involves multiple attempts to determine the data that are prominent to answer the research questions. In the first cycle coding, it took several days to complete reading the participants' responses and coding each depending on the successes, challenges, and suggestions of the fifth-grade reading teachers, which was based on the research questions. Certain codes were prevalent (see Table 1).

Table 1

Examples of First Cycle Open Codes

Raw data	Open coding
"I think they have been taught a lot of strategies like trying to sound out words like individual sounds, but they have learned how to read individual sounds, but they have not learned how to blend them together."	Challenges
"We are learning more so now the science of reading. I don't know if this has happened because of the pandemic or things like that."	Suggestion
"I do believe the pandemic impacted the students' ability to build a foundation in reading."	Challenges
"These students are significantly below basically missed I would say last part of kindergarten, first grade as well."	Challenges
"So, currently in the classroom, I am using hand-to-mind vocabulary program. Each lesson has three multisyllabic words I think this is on a fifth-grade level book."	Suggestion
"The reading comprehension skills I feel that most of my students are lacking are word recognition, and difficulty understanding words and ideas. (Deficits in Vocabulary)"	Challenges
"So, we are working on syllabication of those, we work on learning meaning of prefixes and suffixes."	Suggestion
"Those who are monitored are better able to use syllables to decode words."	Successes
"So, I really take time and be thoughtful and engaging in the lessons that I plan."	Suggestion
"I would then work with that student individually or in a group with the same deficits."	Suggestion

Second Cycle Codes: Open

After the completion of the first cycle of open coding, I began developing codes for the second cycle of coding. This second cycle of open coding helped develop themes based on the categories from the first cycle of open coding. These themes were strictly focused on the participants' transcripts instead of the framework and literature review. The thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected from the participants' responses produced common themes that were associated to develop meaning through analyzing these data. Through analyzing the participants' responses, the recurring themes and patterns were developing that were similar to the common themes and patterns in the literature review. The following themes that developed from the second cycle of open coding are shown in Table 2: (a) Theme 1, the use of prior knowledge and experiences while reading text; (b) Theme 2, the students' challenges with phonics and the suggestions the teachers provided to improve phonics of SwE; (c) Theme 3, the students' challenges with vocabulary and the suggestions the teachers provided to improve vocabulary of SwE; (d) Theme 4, the successes of students who have received supports, the challenges the teachers have had to provide support to their SwE, and the suggestions to provide support; (e) Theme 5, the successes, challenges, and suggestions of parents in supporting their children; (f) Theme 6, the successes, challenges, and suggestions of reading; (g) Theme 7, the suggestions for teaching strategies; (h) Theme 8, the successes, challenges, and suggestions of technology integration; and (i) Theme 9, the successes, challenges, and suggestions of decoding while reading text.

Table 2*Examples of Second Cycle Open Codes*

Raw data	Open coding 1	Open coding 2
“Parent involvement is low when it comes to academic events.”	Challenges	Parent
“You feel bad they are going to middle school and still reading on a first-grade level.”	Challenges	Reading
“Depending on what gaps they may have a gap with phonics or the 6 syllable types focusing on whatever that might be.”	Suggestion	Phonics
“Throughout these books, I am asking who, what, when, where, why. But, then, also, trying to throw in inferential questions to ask them.”	Suggestion	Reading
“When I am introducing a new skill, there is a program called Flocabulary that I really like to use.”	Suggestion	Technology
“As I said before, my experience was different, and I would say I was heavily involved with parents and parents were very involved during the pandemic.”	Successes	Parent

Third Cycle Codes: Open

After the completion of the second cycle of open coding, I began developing codes for the third cycle of coding. This third cycle of open coding helped develop themes based on the categories being developed from the first and second cycle of open coding. These themes were strictly focused on the participants’ transcripts and based on each category. The thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected from the participants’ responses produced common themes that were associated to develop meaning through analyzing these data. Through analyzing the participants’ responses, the recurring themes and patterns were developing that were similar to the common themes and patterns in the literature review. The following themes that developed from the third

cycle of open coding are shown in Table 3: (a) Theme 1, the use of a graphic organizer to support the SwE reading comprehension; (b) Theme 2, the challenges with the students' lack of motivation and engagement; (c) Theme 3, the students' challenges to summarize text; (d) Theme 4, suggestions for small group instruction; (e) Theme 5, suggestions for modeling proper reading techniques; (f) Theme 6, suggestions to chunking the text; and (g) Theme 7, use of Flocabulary to prompt vocabulary acquisition.

Table 3

Examples of Third Cycle Open Codes

Raw data	Open coding 1	Open coding 2	Open coding 3
“When I am introducing a new skill, there is a program called Flocabulary that I like really like to use.”	Suggestions	Technology	Flocabulary
“Assuming they may know but they don't know a lot of exposure and explaining to try to build up vocabulary and background knowledge.”	Challenges	Reading	Vocabulary/ prior knowledge
“Graphic organizers are probably my biggest teaching tool.”	Suggestions	Strategies	Graphic organizer
“I do believe the pandemic impacted the students' ability to build a foundation in reading.”	Challenges	Reading	Foundation
“Chunking the text and different questions will be asked as we go from paragraph to paragraph.”	Suggestions	Strategies	Chunking

Each participant had a separate worksheet tab in the Excel workbook to keep their responses separate. After the first and second cycle coding was completed, I combined all the participants into a new Excel workbook. The similar categories and classifications of the participants' responses were sorted to their similar codes. The categories and

classifications provided a detailed thematic analysis to answer the research questions. Comparing the eight fifth-grade reading teachers' responses regarding their experiences while teaching SwE provided additional enlightenments on other themes not in the literature review. The codes developed from the literature review were the difficulty with reading instruction during the pandemic and virtual learning, the importance of mastering reading to improve reading comprehension, providing reading strategy instruction, and suggested reading strategies to improve reading comprehension. The codes that developed from the categories in the literature review were the interaction and engagement of the students during virtual learning, the parents during virtual learning, the complexity of the reading process, the reading instruction during learning, the process for students to become proficient readers during the virtual learning era, the importance of providing literacy instruction, the deficiencies in reading, suggestions for reading success, developing the students' prior knowledge and experiences, providing an effective foundation for reading success, the engagement with text and developing meaning from the text, supporting students with reading strategy instruction, providing teachers with professional development on reading strategy instruction for their students, the literature suggested modeling proper reading techniques, the role of metacognition in the reading process, technology integration suggestions, providing word studies/vocabulary instruction, and teaching students phonics and phonemic awareness.

Results

The findings in this study and analyzing the themes informed by a systematic open coding process. The research instrument is the tool the qualitative researcher uses to

collect the data to strengthen the final analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The type of instrumentation that was used through the data collection process was the semistructured interview protocol (Appendix A) to answer the research questions. The research questions investigated in this study were:

RQ1: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes when teaching reading to SwE?

RQ2: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their challenges when teaching reading to SwE?

RQ3: What are fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their suggestions when teaching reading to SwE?

A comprehensive analysis of the interview data was conducted focusing on the framework and literature review of using the open coding method. The analysis resulted in three essential categories based on the research questions and fifteen open thematic codes which relate to the same thematic codes in the literature review.

The fifth-grade reading teachers expressed more challenges than successes when teaching reading to SwE ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. In Figure 3, it shows the perceptions of the fifth-grade reading teachers ensuing the pandemic through comparing their challenges versus successes. The challenges mentioned in the participants' responses exceeded the successes by approximately 500%. Ensuing the pandemic, the teachers have had many challenges trying to meet the needs of fifth-grade students based on their reading comprehension skills. Figures 3 displays the teachers have experienced

many challenges when teaching reading to their SwE which was prevalent in the data analysis.

RQ 1: What Are the Fifth-Grade Teachers' Perceptions on Their Successes When Teaching Reading to SwE?

Though the pandemic created many challenges for teachers and students, the fifth-grade reading teachers did report some successes ensuing the pandemic. The successes discussed was the additional support implemented to increase fifth-grade students' reading comprehension skills. The data analysis demonstrated the following successes with these sub-themes: parents during the pandemic and presently, supporting students' reading comprehension, reading comprehension of students, reading strategy instruction, and technology integration. The participants shared valuable information about each of these sub-themes to answer the research question about their successes of teaching reading to SwE.

Parents During the Pandemic and Presently

During the pandemic, two teachers reported not having many issues with students not showing up to their virtual classes. One of the teachers stated she was in constant communication using remind.app with her parents; therefore, her virtual classroom attendance had a good turnout, according to Teacher 5. Another teacher reported she was heavily involved with communicating more with parents during the pandemic, so her experience was different as well. This teacher stated her parents were more involved because they had to be during the virtual learning era. These three teachers taught in another state during the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual instruction. For the teachers

who taught in the local school district during the pandemic and virtual learning, they expressed more parent involvement presently, such as social events planned by the schools.

Supporting Students' Reading Comprehension

The successes reported for supporting the students reading comprehension skills demonstrated that students had improved from their fourth-grade year to the fifth-grade year. The teacher stated that her “students can learn but not at a typical rate.” The teachers are in co-taught classrooms where they are meeting the needs of their students with where they are academically. These fifth-grade teachers are providing support for their students using various resources provided by the local school district, such as Core Connections and iReady. The schools are providing additional support, through the after-school tutoring program, to assist students with improving their reading comprehension skills.

Reading Comprehension and Reading Strategy Instruction

The students perform better in isolation, according to Teacher 6, due to the students listening to “my teacher says do this; my teacher said do that.” The teachers provide reading instruction in small groups to focus on skills each student needs to be successful with reading comprehension. If they are still struggling, the teachers provide individualized remediation and/or instruction to provide them with reading skills they need to improve reading comprehension. As one teacher stated, she repeats “the skill until they can use it independently.” Additionally, teachers express those students who are monitored closely can use the strategies to practice with syllables and decoding

words. Finally, another teacher states exceptional readers are capable of using and applying the strategies to reading so they learn to do it with automaticity based on Teacher 1.

Technology Integration

The integration of technology has helped to improve reading comprehension of students ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic in the local school district. Each student in the local school district has been provided with a laptop for them to enhance their education and provide learning opportunities. The students have access to a program called Read180. All teachers have reported progress of their students who have been using Read180 through improving their reading comprehension. The additional list of technology the students are able to “use in the classroom to help improve their reading comprehension is BrainPop, ReadWorks, Imagine Learning, iReady.”

RQ 2: What Are the Fifth-Grade Teachers’ Perceptions on Their Challenges When Teaching Reading to SwE?

The fifth-grade reading teachers have experienced more challenges than successes when teaching reading to SwE ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuing the pandemic, the teachers have had many challenges trying to meet the needs of their fifth-grade students’ reading comprehension skills. The discussion with the fifth-grade teachers provided valuable insights of the challenges they have been facing while working with students to improve their reading comprehension skills. The seven themes unfolded from the data analysis that relates to the following themes: challenges with reading, lack of student motivation or engagement, challenges to summarize text, challenges with

students' prior knowledge and experiences, vocabulary challenges, phonics and phonemic awareness challenges, supporting reading comprehension challenges, and parent challenges. The valuable information shared by the participants about each of these themes answered the research question about their challenges of teaching reading to SwE.

Challenges With Reading

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers felt like education took the back burner. Therefore, the students' experiences and prior knowledge were not developed as it would have been if they were in the school receiving education. Based on Teacher 5's account, the pandemic cost the students to be extremely behind when they came back into the classroom. Many of the teachers described their students as being two or more years behind in reading. Teacher 7 stated she has "worked with students who were not on grade level, but not to the amount she is experiencing now." Presently, most of the fifth-grade students are considered beginning or developing learners in reading.

The students, during the pandemic, "were not provided with the proper services to help them with their weaknesses in reading foundational skills or comprehension." The problem with reading foundational skills might have already been there, but the pandemic only "exacerbated" the issues, according to Teacher 7. The teachers do believe that the pandemic had impacted the students' ability to build a good foundation in reading. These fifth-grade students missed reading instruction during the latter part of kindergarten and first grade. The students returned to face-to-face instruction in the second grade. By this time, the students were significantly impacted in their reading foundational skills.

The students' interests and feelings greatly influence their attitudes toward reading, presently. Sometimes, the students do not want to talk to show what they have learned from the text. The teachers try to keep their students engaged, so they do not fall asleep. Teacher 1 reported that it as if "it feels like she is tap dancing up here to keep their attention." Most teachers recounted their struggles to keep their students engaged during instruction.

Most fifth-grade students have IEP goals addressing the students in answering direct recall questions, because this is a weakness of theirs. Their students "struggle with applying previously learned concepts to new concepts, such as answering direct recall questions." Many fifth-grade students have difficulty with working memory to remember what they read or what they were asked. Another teacher disclosed her students experience difficulties with answering direct recall questions if they are asked days after the instruction, according to Teacher 3. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the teachers believed their students were not being taught different questioning strategies to help them with that skill. Furthermore, if the students chose not to use the strategy, they were less successful when answering direct recall questions, based on Teacher 6.

Another factor affecting some of the students' reading comprehension skills is the language barrier. Some of the fifth-grade students are "learning to speak and read English." Additionally, if the students are newer to the country, their English proficiency is little to none. A fifth-grade teacher expressed that "several of her ESOL (English as a Second Language) students are below grade level in reading." The heavy population of ESOL students makes it challenging for many teachers to meet their academic needs.

Teacher 4 expressed “you feel bad, these students are going to middle school, and they are still reading on a first-grade level.” During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were not able to collect data to see if their students needed additional support through special education services. The teachers claim the pandemic caused a disservice for these students who would have received services earlier on in their educational journey. For these fifth-grade students, the “Tier process did not begin until third-grade or fourth-grade.” The teachers described they have a big struggle to catch up on their SwE educational needs in reading comprehension.

Lack of Student Motivation or Engagement

The students were not motivated to continue with learning to read during the pandemic shutdown, because it was a new, uncertain situation for all. Since the pandemic, students tend to be less self-motivated to want to learn per Teacher 2. Teacher 6 indicated that it is hard to “motivate students to want to read and to read different genres.” According to Teacher 1, her students will keep reading the same book repeatedly. The teachers try to motivate their students to read different books/genres, but it is a struggle.

Challenges to Summarize Text

According to teachers, their students struggle with summarizing text. The fifth-grade students encounter difficulties when it comes to finding the main idea and details within the text. One of the teachers indicated that her students have a “hard time thinking beyond the surface level of the text.” Their students struggle with explaining how the details in the story are supported with specific evidence in the text. The fifth-grade

students are not able to synthesize with evidence to explain or support the topic, according to Teacher 4.

Challenges With the Students' Prior Knowledge and Experiences

The teachers expressed many students are lacking prior knowledge, whether it be from exposure on a certain topic or experiences. “Students are lacking exposure to many things since the pandemic,” according to Teacher 8. She shared a story of when she was a child and listening “mesmerized” to her teacher read a story. This she expressed students can apply their listening comprehension to their reading, which was lacking during the pandemic. The students were not able to socialize, which plays a significant role in comprehension, Teacher 6 expressed. During the pandemic, the experiences students were lacking was having friendships and relationships with people where they could have had conversations with each other, which carries over into reading comprehension. An example Teacher 1 shared was if you “read a book about two friends, you would need to understand how that works.” Prior knowledge and experiences apply to understanding inferential applications to what you are reading and making judgements depending on what it is about, according to Teacher 1.

Vocabulary Challenges

The fifth-grade teachers reported many of their students struggle with vocabulary acquisition. A teacher expressed, “since we have returned from the pandemic, students are definitely showing a greater weakness in reading comprehension—primarily as a result of deficits in vocabulary.” The teacher described their students’ vocabulary acquisition as “very, very poor” and “significant weakness” of their SwE, per Teacher 5.

The SwE was described as beginning or developing learners when it comes to their vocabulary acquisition. Another teacher stated, “their students should be able to read text and understand it at this level in their education.”

The SwE have difficulty with understanding words and concepts, according to the fifth-grade teachers. According to one of the teachers in this study, her students are “missing the big picture and not attending to precision” when they are reading. The SwE struggle with unknown vocabulary, especially when the book does not have pictures for them to determine the meaning of the unfamiliar word. Typically, fifth-grade texts do not have many pictures, per Teacher 3. Another feels the students have a disconnect when it comes to putting all the pieces together to know and apply the skills. Background knowledge plays a significant role in vocabulary acquisition, according to Teacher 8.

Many fifth-grade SwE have IEP goals for Pre-Primer (K) and Primer (1st) Dolch sight word lists. Additionally, it is exceedingly difficult for SwE to figure out unfamiliar vocabulary words if they do not know how to segment into word parts. Teacher 2 expressed her students struggle with multisyllabic words. Many students are lacking the skill to look at a word in text and segment it by syllables, as claimed by Teacher 5. Vocabulary acquisition involves many steps which fifth-grade students are not able to decipher the unfamiliar words through the syllabication steps.

Phonics and Phonemic Awareness Challenges

Presently, the fifth-grade students were the students who were in first and second grade, during the pandemic and virtual learning. Many students during the period of virtual learning were not signing on to receive an education and those who did sign on

still struggled with the virtual instruction. As noted by Teacher 3, the “in person instruction does make a real big difference” in the education of students. A teacher mentions that “second-grade is a crucial year for phonics instruction and phonemic awareness,” according to Teacher 5 The students in fifth grade are lacking a basic phonemic awareness and being able to sound out words, with some not even knowing letter sounds. The teachers state, “this is really holding them back to being able to master reading words correctly.” Additionally, students must decode words quickly and fluently before they are able to comprehend what they are reading.

Supporting Reading Comprehension Challenges

The students are on different levels of reading and have different academic needs to read successfully. Supporting each SwE and focusing on each of their needs is almost unmanageable, as claimed by Teacher 4. She stated, you have twenty-two students in your classroom, and more than half have IEP’s. The teachers described providing support to their SwE as a struggle. These teachers expressed that there is not enough time in the school day to meet all the academic needs of their students.

Parent Challenges

The teachers believed that the parents were “very lost” during the pandemic and did not know how to support their children’s education. The families were trying to survive and make sure they had enough food, according to Teacher 7. Teacher 4 described that everyone was isolated, which made it a challenging time for everyone. The involvement of the parents was minimal, especially when we were first placed into quarantine at the end of the 2019–2020 school year. A teacher expressed that the “parents

wanted to be more involved in their children's education, but it was a frustration for them.”

The teachers, in this study, described that all the families were struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time and the following school year with virtual learning, many parents had to work and left their child at home alone. The child did not have anyone at home to make sure they were signing on for their virtual instruction. The teacher reported, she “contacted the parents often to let them know if their child was not signing on to their virtual instruction and/or completing their assignments.” Teacher 5 indicated that the “students still need to learn” and it has made it challenging time to communicate with parents on how their child was doing when they were significantly behind academically.

Teacher 3 revealed that the parent involvement during the pandemic was incredibly low. She guessed at about 30% of the parents were actively involved in their children's education during pandemic. For the parent-teacher conferences, during this time, they had about 20%–25% of the parents attend. Another teacher said parent involvement is always a concern, then and now. Most of the interaction with parents was done via telephone or Zoom meeting. Afterwards, communication with parents was more difficult since they had to use the district's software for communication with the parents. The majority of parents did not check this software often to see if they had a message or not. Additionally, there are language barriers between the parents and teachers, which made communication difficult, based on several teachers. Overall, parents want to help their child, but they are unsure how to help them.

RQ 3: What Are the Fifth-Grade Teachers' Perceptions on Their Suggestions When Teaching Reading to SwE?

The fifth-grade reading teachers have experienced many challenges while teaching reading to SwE ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers have provided many suggestions in helping to improve the reading comprehension of students. These suggestions are to assist other teachers with valuable information while working with their students to improve their reading comprehension skills and/or to build those crucial reading foundational skills. The data analysis demonstrated the following suggestions with these subthemes: suggestions for reading, suggestions for small groups, students' prior knowledge and experiences, suggested reading strategies, suggestions for vocabulary, phonics and phonemic awareness, modeling proper reading techniques, supporting reading comprehension, suggestions for technology integration, and suggestions for supporting parents. The valuable information shared about each of these sub-themes by the participants to answer the research question about their suggestions of teaching reading to SwE. Table 3 has a list of other suggested strategies by the fifth-grade teachers.

Suggestions for Reading

For the SwE who struggle with reading comprehension, the teacher can provide the students with texts on their reading level. This should be on their independent level. The teacher can check for their understanding to make sure they know what they are reading prior to answering questions about the text, based on Teacher 3. Additionally, the teacher can encourage their students to utilize those strategies they already have in their

tool kit, as claimed by Teacher 7. If the students continue to struggle, the teacher can provide one-to-one instruction to help them progress with their reading comprehension skills.

Suggestions for Small Group

The fifth-grade teachers explained that their SwE work in small groups to practice the reading skills they need to be successful with reading comprehension. In these small groups, the teachers re-teach the reading skills their SwE have not mastered yet. The students receive differentiated practice in these small groups based on their individual needs. The small groups are based on abilities and needs, such as reading or vocabulary instruction, stated Teacher 4. Within small groups, the students can work cooperatively and learn from each other, according to Teacher 1.

Students' Prior Knowledge and Experiences

The fifth-grade students must “connect the text to what they are reading and how it applies to their life to gain better understanding.” This helps the students to build reading comprehension skills. These connections with the text and their life assist in building prior knowledge and introduce the SwE to new vocabulary. The students can share their experiences relating to a topic they are reading in the text. According to Teacher 5, this discussion of the text amongst the students helps to develop their prior knowledge and learn from others' personal experiences.

Suggested Reading Strategies

The teachers offered many of the reading strategies they use to improve reading comprehension of their SwE. Teacher 5 tells her students “I give you the tools” to read

text or chapter books. The teachers provide text on the students reading level to practice the strategies they have provided them. Teacher 3 reminds her students “we are not strong at every single skill I provide you.” However, she says they practice those strategies often. The students are more successful with identifying unfamiliar words when they implement the strategies taught in the classroom.

Per many teachers, they suggested using a graphic organizer to improve reading comprehension. One teacher says, she uses the graphic organizers for reading and writing. Teacher 4 explained, she uses a graphic organizer to help her students identify who are the characters, where the story takes place, what is the problem, and what is the solution. The graphic organizer reminds students of what they read and what were the important parts in the text. The teachers explained the importance of using a graphic organizer to improve reading comprehension. According to Teacher 8, the graphic organizer takes the “pressure off of the students” because they know what to expect when they use it often.

Another reading strategy teachers use frequently is referring back to the text and rereading. The students will remember what they read if they reread the text. Referring back and rereading the text will help the students respond to questions about the text. When answering questions, the students will be able to refer back to the text and find the specific details. Most SwE have short-term working memory; therefore, re-reading and referring to the text is critical for them to comprehend, based on Teacher 7. The students are “going to read the passage and it will be gone, so they must refer back to the text over and over again,” according to Teacher 1.

The next strategy suggested by the fifth-grade teachers was to chunk the text. The teachers teach their students to chunk the text into smaller, manageable sections. These teachers will use chunking with various text, such as informational. As the students and teacher are chunking the text, the teacher will be asking questions about the text to check for their students' understanding. Additionally, the students are annotating while they are chunking the text. The teacher is progress monitoring and provides immediate feedback while their students are working.

During mini lessons, the teachers stated, they use visuals and/or videos to make their lessons engaging. The videos help the students to see and hear the information before they begin reading the text. Teacher 7 explained that she strengthened her instruction to introduce the theme with a video. These videos help to increase the engagement of her students. Additionally, it assists in improving their understanding of a topic. The visuals help to improve their students' information retention, also. Table 4 has other strategies mentioned by the teachers.

Table 4*Other Strategies*

Other strategies mentioned by teachers:	
Annotate	Taking notes while students read
Unwrap	Provides students with step-by-step process to answer selected response questions. Helps them to identify and label text evidence to support their answer.
Closed reading	The text is re-read to gain understanding.
Summarize	What was this paragraph about?
Context clues	Clues or information within the sentence to determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word.
Anchor charts	A visual learning tool to teach a topic or skill.
Paideia seminar	Desks are moved into a circle format. Students will have a discussion on the reading lessons.

Suggestions for Vocabulary

Teacher 2 stated, “comprehension begins with learning vocabulary.” This teacher communicated that teaching vocabulary is her go-to strategy. Teacher 4 suggested conferencing with each student to discuss “1) how can we improve our vocabulary knowledge and 2) how can we grow as readers.” The fifth-grade teachers believe that teaching vocabulary and sight words are important to assist the students in improving their reading comprehension skills. Additionally, they suggested practicing vocabulary and sight words frequently.

For an unknown vocabulary word, the teachers proposed for their students to use context clues to decipher the word and its meaning. In addition, the fifth-grade teachers believe teaching students the meaning of suffixes and prefixes is important in improving reading comprehension. Teacher 1 said that she teaches her students to highlight or circle the unfamiliar words, then to look for context clues in the sentence. Based on Teacher 5,

she instructs her students on different word parts and what they mean. Furthermore, the teachers provide lessons on how to determine the meaning of the words based on the word parts and context clues.

“Pre-teach the vocabulary” at the beginning of the lessons, based on Teacher 8. Some teachers use flashcards to teach and re-teach vocabulary. Those teachers would continually update their flashcard decks depending on the students’ vocabulary needs. Other teachers use Flocabulary, which is an online educational program. They will have weekly vocabulary tests based on those words.

Since vocabulary acquisition is important to reading comprehension, the teachers express the need for their students to “practice, practice, practice,” based on Teacher 1 and Teacher 7. The fifth-grade teachers suggest instructing students on syllabication and meaning of prefixes and suffixes. A teacher says she uses “hand to mind vocabulary program.” She suggested that students keep a notebook for recording vocabulary words, their meanings, and to write the word into a sentence. Also, the teachers reported to give the students a word bank or have a word wall for the SwE to use when they need it.

Phonics and Phonemic Awareness

The teachers explained that their fifth-grade students should be able to read and understand words. If not, they will need to know strategies on how to decode words. Teacher 7 expressed the “students who are not there phonetically, then, that is going to be an issue with their reading comprehension.” Depending on the gaps the students may have with phonics and decoding, they will need to be given strategies to work on those skills, based on Teacher 6. Comprehension, according to Teacher 1, begins with

accurately identifying words, which requires decoding skills. Some of the teachers use flashcards to teach or review letter sounds, vowel teams, various spelling patterns, or silent e. In addition, teachers use various apps to support phonics instruction in their classrooms.

Modeling Proper Reading Techniques

Some of the teachers use the workshop model of instruction. With this model, the teacher provides mini lessons where they focus on a particular reading standard, according to Teacher 6. They use the guidelines in this workshop model to provide instruction. The teachers will model the task, then the students will work on guided practice tasks. During the workshop model, the teacher is “sharing the expectation, using mentor text to model the use and application of the key concepts,” based on Teacher 2.

Supporting Reading Comprehension

Many of the students receive support for their reading comprehension. Some of the students are pulled out for small group support, while others receive support in the classroom. A special education teacher will pull the students for small group support one to two times a day for specialized reading instruction. The skills the students work on in these small groups depend on their academic needs. Teacher 4 described the support she provides to her SwE in small group is reading foundational skills or determining the who, what, when, where, and why in a text.

Suggestions for Technology Integration

Technology use in the classroom can “help improve reading comprehension skill” of SwE, according to Teacher 3. The students can benefit from the read to

accommodations within the technological programs. Teacher 8 explained that her students' reading comprehension has improved with the "read to feature." There are many online resources that can be provided to SwE, which are approved and/or provided by the school district. The school district has purchased several online resources for students to use to help improve their reading comprehension skills. The following will be discussed in more detail: iReady, Lexia, Flocabulary, and Imagine Learning. Table 5 will have a list of less-mentioned technological software programs.

Some of the teachers use iReady Reading program. These teachers believe iReady assists to improve their SwE reading comprehension skills. This program presents the students with a reading diagnostic assessment at the beginning. After the students have completed the assessment, there are lessons tailored to the students' individual reading needs, which the students will complete two lessons a week. Teacher 4 explained that she can "monitor my students' usage and provide one-to-one instruction," if they are not progressing with the iReady program. iReady program has interactive games, quizzes, and videos that are engaging and interesting for students. Teacher 1 stated, "iReady is a great tool to support students reading and it provides them lessons that are on their level." Additionally, she explains, it helps them progress in an "upward fashion."

Lexia is another software program some of the teachers mentioned. Teacher 5 says, "I see the benefit" of students using the program. Lexia provides individualized plans for students based on where they are in reading and/or comprehension, stated by Teacher 7. This program has interactive games to engage the students with lessons. Lexia will flag the teacher, such as these "six students need lessons on pronouns," according to

Teacher 5. In addition, the teacher can print lessons from the Lexia program to use as a resource for their small group instruction.

A few of the teachers use Flocabulary to help build the students' vocabulary. This software program has several components to help build the students' vocabulary knowledge. It has catchy songs, rap videos, and teachable moments, called *In A Minute*. Flocabulary will break down the skill and give examples of vocabulary words. Teacher 7 believes that Flocabulary is a great tool to introduce concepts, because "you want to pique the interests of your students."

Another program mentioned by some of the teachers is Imagine Learning. This software program is tailored specifically for students in the ESOL program. It is a program that provides support to facilitate and enhance the students' English language learning, according to Teacher 4. Imagine Learning is used to help improve the students' reading comprehension. The students receive lessons tailored for their individual needs through the Imagine Learning software. The ESOL teacher will keep track of the data for their students in the program.

Table 5

Other Technology

Other technology mentioned by teachers:	
Read180	Reading program purchased by the district
BrainPop	Videos to introduce topics
Getepic.com	Books, some have read-to options
Scholastics	Current articles, plays, poems, and lessons for teachers
Quizlet	Virtual flashcards

Suggestions for Supporting Parents

Teachers are “always brainstorming ideas and ways to increase parental involvement,” based on Teacher 3. Parents want to do what they need to do for their child. Therefore, Teacher 8 thinks “it takes meeting with the parents and showing them what they can do to help their child.” Teacher 6 says, she keeps “heavy dialogue” with her parents before, during the pandemic, and presently. Most parents seem to be more involved after meeting with them. Teacher 4 stated, she meets with her parents at the beginning of the school year and after an IEP meeting.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

During this qualitative research, I understood that quality, trustworthiness, and credibility are crucial components in the research process. Quality, trustworthiness, and credibility in qualitative research begins with ensuring the problem statement, purpose statement, research question, research design, and conceptual framework are in complete alignment. To ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, the researcher must focus on the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of their research focus (Shenton, 2004). The trustworthiness of the findings through semistructured individual interviews and the literature review established the credibility, transferability, dependability strategies, and confirmability of this qualitative research study. Therefore, the evidence of trustworthiness was explored in this research study by focusing on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

Credibility

The credibility of a study measures how believable it sounds. Peer debriefing, member checks and data collection created triangulation to establish credibility (Burkholder et al, 2020). Taking notes and recording the interviews ensured the quality, trustworthiness, and credibility of the research process to accurately report the participants' experiences. This ensured the findings were reported of good quality, trustworthy, and credible. Quality, trustworthiness, and credibility ensured the validity of qualitative research. As claimed by Ravitch and Carl (2021), the findings in qualitative research are accurately declared by the research of the participants' experiences. The creditability of the interview data will answer the research questions through accurately reporting the data. The participants reviewed the transcribed transcript for accuracy and meaning. I explored research on the successes, challenges, and suggestions of fifth-grade reading teachers. The factors above increase the credibility of this study's findings.

Transferability

Transferability is the question of whether the findings of a study, related to the sample size and population can be applied in other studies. All selected participants had taught fifth-grade reading in the local school district to reading instruction to SwE. Future researchers may analyze the details of this study to understand the experiences of the fifth-grade teacher ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. The transferability of this research strived to contextualize the basis for the decline in reading comprehension and how the teachers are addressing this issue through purposeful sampling of participants and literature on the same theme.

Dependability

Dependability is another issue of trustworthiness, which requires researchers to document the research and data process. I recorded the process of data collection to add dependability. Pseudonyms were given to protect the confidentiality of the participants. After the interviews, I transcribed the interview notes and quoted what the participants stated within the interview. I requested that the participants check the transcripts of their interviews for clarity and accuracy.

Confirmability

The objective of confirmability is examining the data during the process of analysis. I documented my thoughts during the interview, transcribed notes, and supported them with evidence. To address reflexivity, I frequently reflected and made notes in a journal about the research process. The confirmability of the themes could be replicated in the future as the research process has been described in detail.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explain in detail the data collection process, data analysis process, and the major thematic data results of the study. To begin, I evaluated the purpose of this study, which was to explore fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE in a local school district in Georgia. The study setting was reviewed and discussed the demographics of the participants as a group. The participants were not listed individually in the demographics to ensure confidentiality. I explained the data collections process in finding participants, conducting semistructured interviews, and

transcribing the interviews into transcripts. The organization of the data analysis was explained, and then the process of multiple rounds of coding were also detailed. I presented the data analysis findings with a detailed description of the thematic findings. The study's four trustworthiness characteristics were discussed: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The three main themes of the study, generated from the analysis of the collected data, focused on perceptions of fifth-grade teachers on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE in a local school district in Georgia. Each thematic area had approximately ten subthemes of the successes, challenges, and suggestions of the fifth-grade teachers ensuing the pandemic. In Chapter 5, a detailed discussion of the findings will be provided corresponding to the framework and literature review, along with new inductive findings from the analysis that were not in the prior literature review. The chapter will also include limitations of the study, recommendations for future studies, and a discussion of the implications for positive social change, implications for model framework development, and recommendations for practice for teaching reading to fifth-grade SwE based on the data analysis.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE in a local school district in Georgia. In addition, I examined what teachers are currently doing to close this achievement gap to identify any gaps in practices and opportunities for improvement. The nature of the research study focused on qualitative data to determine the reading strategies teachers are using to increase reading comprehension among SwE. This study provides a contribution to filling in the gap in special education focusing on reading comprehension with SwE.

The eight participants described the factors in their interview on three main themes of the study, generated from the analysis of the collected data, focused on perceptions of fifth-grade teachers on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching reading to SwE in a local school district in Georgia. Each thematic area had subthemes related to the findings in the framework and literature review with additional information discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, the limitations of the study will be discussed along with the implications for positive social change and for theory, and recommendations that may help school leaders to make informed decisions to improve students' reading comprehension skills.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings from the data analysis from the interviews of fifth-grade reading teachers demonstrated the perceived factors that impact their successes, challenges, and

suggestions to teach reading to SwE after the pandemic. The finding confirms the challenges and suggestions teachers and students had in relation to the pandemic compared to the literature review. The teachers interviewed and the literature review agreed regarding the challenges teachers encountered with interaction and engagement during virtual learning. Additionally, supporting students in developing their reading comprehension during and after the pandemic was challenging based on information in the literature review and through the interviews with teacher participants.

The teacher participants and the literature review provide suggestions similar in improving reading comprehension of SwE. The findings compare the teachers' responses and the literature review suggestions for teachers to model proper reading techniques and integration of technology to support reading comprehension. In addition was the importance of word studies/vocabulary instruction and phonics/phonemic awareness instruction to advance SwE reading comprehension skills. These factors influence the three themes: fifth-grade teachers' successes, challenges, and suggestions ensuing the pandemic. The subthemes of each theme will be discussed further.

RQ1: What Are the Fifth-Grade Teachers' Perceptions on Their Successes When Teaching Reading to SwE?

The fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their success when teaching reading to SwE were surprising. The data suggest there were reports of successes of some of the teachers ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. These successes were for those teachers who taught outside of the school district or out of state. The other successes reported were the addition of support implemented to increase reading comprehension of fifth-grade

students. The following subthemes will be discussed further to analyze what the data suggests: the successes of parents supporting their children during the pandemic and presently, the successes of the students who received support with reading comprehension, providing reading strategy instruction, and technology integration to improve reading comprehension.

Successes of Parents Supporting Their Children During the Pandemic and Presently

The analysis of the data identified that communication is a key factor in the successes of teachers who taught out of district for students attending virtual lessons during the pandemic. Therefore, heavy communication was helpful for these teachers. From their experiences, parents were more involved during the pandemic because, as a teacher said, “They had to be.” Communication was a key factor for these teachers during the pandemic; however, they used other platforms to communicate with parents versus using the required school district platform. For the local district, teachers reported more parent involvement when there were school events they could attend.

Supporting Students’ Reading Comprehension

Through the data analysis, the data suggests that students did improve in their reading comprehension comparing their previous school year to their present school year utilizing the supports they received. The teachers in the classrooms provided support to meet their students’ academic needs in reading. The supports included various resources that contributed to the successes of fifth-grade teachers when teaching reading to SWE. These resources were provided by the teachers and/or the local school district. These

supports greatly impacted the improvement of reading comprehension among fifth-grade SwE.

Reading Comprehension and Reading Strategy Instruction

The successes of reading comprehension and reading strategy instruction can be attributed to teachers explicitly stating using this strategy and demonstrating how to use it. As a teacher stated, the students “perform better in isolation.” The teachers provided reading strategy instruction, which helped to improve their reading comprehension by focusing on the skills they needed. Another factor that contributed to successes was the teachers and students practicing the skills/strategy until they could use it independently. Additionally, students must be monitored closely for the teachers to know how the students use the strategies and if they are using them appropriately.

Technology Integration

The data suggest that the use of technology in the classroom has helped improve the reading comprehension of fifth-grade SwE ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. All the students in the local school district have been provided a laptop for them to use in the classroom and at home. Through the Read180 program, the students have improved their reading comprehension skills. All the teachers described that their students increased their reading comprehension utilizing Read180. BrainPop, ReadWorks, Imagine Learning, and iReady were other software reported by teachers as improving their students’ reading comprehension skills.

RQ2: What Are the Fifth-Grade Teachers' Perceptions on Their Challenges When Teaching Reading to SwE?

The fifth-grade teachers' perceptions on their challenges when teaching reading to SwE have been many ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers expressed that they have struggled to meet their students' reading comprehension needs. The struggles teachers and students have faced in improving their reading skills have created many hardships. The challenges fifth-grade teachers have endured provided an opportunity for them to provide essential information pertaining to this research study. The following subthemes developed: challenges with reading, lack of students' motivation or engagement, challenges to summarize text, challenges with the students' prior knowledge and experiences, vocabulary challenges, phonics and phonemic awareness challenges, supporting reading comprehension challenges, and parent challenges.

Challenges With Reading

The data indicate that students' education was not the priority during the COVID-19 pandemic due to other factors taking precedence, such as health and food. According to Estoque (2022), the face-to-face model of instruction is more effective when teaching students. The students were not able to communicate with the teacher and peers at the onset of the pandemic. During virtual learning, communication was the teacher communicating the lesson to the students. There was no interaction among peers. The interactions between teacher-student, student-teacher, and peer-to-peer helps to broaden the students' educational experiences. The lack of education during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown and virtual learning caused students to be extremely behind in their

reading comprehension skills. Some of the fifth-grade students are beginning or developing readers.

According to the data, the fifth-grade students did not have the opportunity to build a strong foundation in reading during the pandemic. Colvin et al. (2022) stated that the self-learning modules of the pandemic made it difficult to provide special education services for students who needed remediation. Presently, these fifth-grade students missed in-person kindergarten through first-grade reading instruction. This significantly impacted their reading foundational skills. The students proceeded to second grade for face-to-face instruction unprepared and already behind in their education. Stephen and McCormick-Pritchard (2021) expressed that teachers were not prepared to meet the academic needs of students during the pandemic shutdown and virtual learning.

Many other factors affected the students in mastering their reading comprehension skills. Depending on students' interests and feelings, this could affect their willingness and ability to concentrate while reading, which could influence their ability to answer questions about a text. Ramzy and Bence (2022) indicated that teachers must "attend to each students' resources, beliefs, values, and habits of mind" (p. 14) as they teach their literacy instruction. Other factors that affected some of the students' reading comprehension was the language barrier. Some of these students were/are speaking little to no English.

The evidence from the data indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a great disservice to all students and their education. Many of the fifth-grade students are reading at a first-grade level. These students missed crucial reading foundational skills due to the

COVID-19 pandemic and virtual learning (Estoque, 2022). According to Johnson (2023), the instruction of these literacy skills is crucial in progressing students through the reading levels. Teachers have had a challenging time meeting the reading and educational needs of SwE during this time.

Lack of Student Motivation or Engagement

The students' motivation and engagement with learning and reading reduced greatly ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. The fifth-grade students were less motivated to learn. Additionally, they did not want to read or read a variety of genres of books/texts. Based on Heiman (2021), the students' reading comprehension declined due to the lack of student involvement with the text. The motivation and engagement of the students ensuing the pandemic has played an ingredient in the decline of reading comprehension of fifth-grade students.

Challenges to Summarize Text

The fifth-grade students struggled to summarize text. They encountered difficulties locating the important information in the text. As Grunke (2019) described, the students must engage with the text, so they can develop meaning from what they read. The students struggled to think beyond the text as well. Santoro et al. (2016) stated that the students must increase their comprehension abilities to be able to construct meaning from the text.

Challenges With the Students' Prior Knowledge and Experiences

The COVID-19 pandemic created many challenges for fifth-grade students in developing their prior knowledge which develops through experiences in the educational

setting. The prior knowledge and experiences were limited due to the lack of exposure to many things as stated by one teacher. The learning environment is one of the factors in developing the complex reading process (Bentahar & Alalou, 2022). During the pandemic, the students' learning environment consisted of a computer screen. The students were not able to develop friendships with their peers and have those conversations with them. These experiences that naturally develop in the face-to-face model relate to text as the students read. They apply their prior knowledge and experiences to develop meaning from what they are reading. According to Rose (2019), SwE demonstrate limited prior knowledge and experiences that dramatically affect their ability to relate to the text.

Vocabulary Challenges

The vocabulary acquisition was a challenge for these fifth-grade students, ensuing the pandemic as well. The students have deficits in vocabulary which greatly affects their reading comprehension. As the SwE read text, they struggle with an unfamiliar word and are not able to locate the context clues to determine the meaning of the word. According to Estoque (2022), students need to be proficient with vocabulary acquisition to advance through reading levels. Presently, the fifth-grade SwE are working on Pre-Primer (K) and Primer (1st) Dolch sight words.

Phonics and Phonemic Awareness Challenges

The success a student has with reading depends on a well-built reading foundation, based on Cox-Magno et al. (2018). The fifth-grade SwE are those who were in kindergarten and first-grade during the pandemic and virtual learning. These students

missed crucial reading foundational instruction during this time. Presently, the fifth-grade students are lacking the basic phonemic awareness and being able to sound out words.

Some of the fifth-grade students are working on learning their letter sounds. According to Grunke (2019), it is essential for students to master reading foundational skills for them to be successful later in life. A teacher stated that the students must decode words quickly and fluently before they are able to comprehend what they are reading. Many of the fifth-grade students do not have a good foundation in reading to be successful in reading comprehension.

Supporting Reading Comprehension Challenges

The mastery in reading skills can affect the students' abilities to perform "everyday tasks, have workplace success, communicate with their doctor, read a menu, or understand directions" (Nugen, 2019, p. 14). Therefore, the teachers supporting their students reading comprehension development is critical. However, the fifth-grade teachers struggle to support and meet the needs of all their SwE. It is described as "unmanageable" by some of the teachers. One teacher stated there is "not enough time" in the school day to meet all the academic needs of their students including reading.

Parent Challenges

During the pandemic, the students received asynchronous instruction where they had to complete their own reading assignments independently, sometimes the parents provided assistance with the assignments and some did not, according to Alves and Romig (2021). Based on the teachers, the parents were "very lost" during the pandemic and did not know how to support their children's reading assignments. The involvement

of the parents in their child's education was minimal due to many factors, such as working. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents had to work and left their child/children home alone. The parents were not there to make sure their child/children were signing on for the virtual lessons nor there to ensure they were completing the assignments. If their children were completing their assignments, the parents were not there to verify the assignments were completed correctly.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, parent involvement was extremely low. The expectation was for the students to receive reading instruction from their parents through self-learning modules (Estoque, 2022). If the parents were not there to assist their child/children, they did not complete these self-learning modules, or they would not complete them correctly. For those parents who were present in the home to assist with assignments, many of these parents did not know how to help based on one of the teachers. This became a "big frustration" for them per one teacher.

RQ3: What Are the Fifth-Grade Teachers' Perceptions on Their Suggestions When Teaching Reading to SwE?

The suggestions of the fifth-grade teachers could provide methods to help improve SwE reading comprehension skills. This valuable information provided by the fifth-grade teachers is strategies to help their students build those crucial reading foundational skills to increase their reading comprehension. Based on Toole (2023), the intricate process of reading involves using multiple reading strategies to comprehend what they are reading. These suggestions will be beneficial for teachers and administrators to help their SwE enhance their reading comprehension skills. The

following sub-themes of the suggestions from the fifth-grade teachers have developed: suggestions for reading, suggestions for small groups, students' prior knowledge and experiences, suggested reading strategies, suggestions for vocabulary, phonics and phonemic awareness, modeling proper reading techniques, supporting reading comprehension, suggestions for technology integration, and suggestions for supporting parents.

Suggestions for Reading

The suggestions for improving reading comprehension of fifth-grade students involve providing the students with multiple strategies. A teacher recommendation to provide the SwE with text on their independent reading level. Rose (2019) agreed that teachers need to provide their students with text on their independent reading level and progressively extend their reading level. Additionally, the teachers can encourage their students to use those strategies they have in their tool kit. For the students who continue to struggle, the teachers can provide one-to-one instruction to assist their SwE to progress their reading comprehension skills as described by one teacher.

Suggestions for Small Group

The fifth-grade teachers advised to work in small groups to help their SwE to practice the skills to assist them in advancing their reading comprehension. Teachers can re-teach the reading skills that SwE have not mastered and the strategies to help these students progress in their reading skills. According to Martinez-Lincoln et al. (2021), the instruction of evidence-based reading strategies may not benefit all students; however, the process involves finding the specific strategy that will work for each student. The

small groups can be based on abilities and needs to teach them strategies to enhance reading, phonics, or vocabulary. Furthermore, the students can learn from each other in these small groups as one teacher expressed.

Students' Prior Knowledge and Experiences

Students access their prior knowledge as they read and comprehend text. This helps the students build their reading comprehension skills. The fifth-grade students must connect the text to what they are reading and how it applies to their life for them to truly understand the text. Nath (2018, p. 196) declared reading comprehension involves a “conscious awareness” while the students access their prior knowledge during reading text. Additionally, the students can share their experiences which can help develop SwE prior knowledge where they are learning from others.

Suggested Reading Strategies

The fifth-grade teachers suggested many reading strategies to help SwE with their reading comprehension. Reading strategy instruction is crucial in assisting students with expanding their reading comprehension skills. Graphic organizers are a strategy that assists the students in identifying the important information in the text as they read. Another reading strategy is to refer back to the text, so they can appropriately answer questions based on the text. Chunking the text helps the students itemize the text into smaller, manageable sections. Additionally, the teachers can use visuals/videos to increase the engagement of students which will assist to increase the reading comprehension of SwE. Other mentioned strategies by the fifth-grade teachers to help improve reading comprehension was annotating the text, unwrapping the text, closed

reading, summarizing, teaching context clues, using anchor charts, and implementing a Paideia Seminar. Refer to Table 3 on p. 89-90 for descriptions of each of these.

Suggestions for Vocabulary

Vocabulary and sight word instruction are important to assist the SwE in improving their reading comprehension skills. Jiang and Logan (2019) expressed that vocabulary instruction is significant for students to learn, so they can increase their reading comprehension. According to Avsar Tuncay and Dedeoglu (2019), the process of reading incorporates the identification of words accurately. A teacher stated that teaching vocabulary is her go-to strategy. Another teacher indicated that teachers should conference with each of their students to discuss how they can improve their vocabulary knowledge and how they can grow as readers.

Grunke (2019) revealed the significance of vocabulary instruction in developing the SwE word knowledge and advancing their reading comprehension. The suggestions to teach vocabulary involves teaching context clues, meaning of suffixes and prefixes, pre-teach vocabulary, and syllabication. Teachers can teach students to locate context clues to decipher the words and their meaning. The fifth-grade teachers believe teaching students the meaning of suffixes and prefixes is important in improving their reading comprehension. These teachers recommended pre-teaching vocabulary and instructing syllabication to itemize the words into parts. These suggestions could help SwE to progress their vocabulary acquisition, which will help to improve their reading comprehension.

Phonics and Phonemic Awareness

A teacher communicated that “students who are not there phonetically, then, that is going to be an issue with their reading comprehension.” According to Sanden et al. (2022), most teachers think phonics instruction is a crucial skill to teach to expand the students’ ability to read text. Therefore, students struggling to decode words take away from their “cognitive resources” that could have been allocated to reading comprehension (Rehfeld, 2021, p. 1256). If the students have gaps with phonics and decoding words, the teachers will need to identify those gaps. Afterwards, teachers need to provide their SWE the strategies on the skills they are lacking. Ehri (2020, p. 548) stated that phonics and phonemic awareness instruction has been proven to assist students in “reading words from memory;” which will improve reading comprehension.

Modeling Proper Reading Techniques

Teachers can model the reading tasks; then, the student can work on guided practice tasks. Modeling the reading tasks encompasses the cognitive processes while reading, such as questioning the meaning of the text or difficult word (Estoque, 2022). Based on one teacher, the workshop model involves the teacher “sharing the expectation, using mentor text to model the use, and application of the key concepts.” Alves and Romig (2021) explained that the teachers can model summarizing the text as they collaborate with the students. Modeling the proper reading techniques can help students improve in their reading.

Supporting Reading Comprehension

The SwE benefit when they receive support to assist them to improve their reading comprehension skills. Smith (2019) indicated that teachers of students who struggle with reading need to allocate crucial time searching for reading strategies that would support their students with their reading needs. A teacher can pull students for small group instruction or for individualized instruction, so they receive specialized reading support. The skills the students work on depend on their academic needs. Wanzek et al. (2020) described the reading strategies the teacher implements must keep the students' weaknesses in mind as they plan their lessons and to provide the supports the students need.

Suggestions for Technology Integration

In accordance with Sponaule (2023), the utilization of technology in the classroom has improved the students' reading proficiency. Stetter (2018) agreed that technology is an effective method in assisting students with reading comprehension. A teacher concurs that technology use in the classroom can "help improve reading comprehension" of SwE. Another teacher communicated that students can benefit from the read to accommodations. The teachers provided some suggestions of the technology they use in their classrooms.

iReady is used by many as they believe it can assist SwE to advance their reading comprehension skills. Lexia provides individualized plans for students based on their weaknesses and abilities in reading. Flocabulary is a software program that helps build the students' vocabulary knowledge. Imagine Learning is tailored specifically for

students in the ESOL program. The following is a list of other mentioned technology the fifth-grade teachers use in their classrooms/schools: Read180, BrainPop, getepic.com, Scholastics, and Quizlet.

Suggestions for Supporting Parents

Parents want what is best for their child's education. A teacher indicated that teachers need to keep "heavy dialogue" with parents. Another teacher says that teachers need to meet with the parents and show them how they can help with their child's education. Estoque (2022) agrees that teachers need to collaborate with parents to effectively provide reading support to their children. Finally, parents will be more involved with their child's education after meeting with them and showing them how to help their child.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations that were beyond my control were the participants, limited information on the topic, time constraints, and the researchers' biases. Once approved by the school district, the willingness and disposition of finding of participants to participate in the research. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the information on the topic was limited in finding the literature to conduct thorough research. The time to conduct the research of the current fifth-grade teachers of these students greatly impacted during the crucial foundational reading skills is during this current school year before they move on to the next grade level. These limitations were minimized to the best possible to obtain the most accurate qualitative data.

Additionally, the limitations to trustworthiness that arose from the execution of the study are as follows: First, the limitation of finding the number of participants to collect the appropriate data to conduct a thorough data analysis was challenging. Second, the time to conduct the research before the progressed to next grade could have affected the data analysis by not being able to repeat the same research. Third, the biases of the researcher possibly could have influenced the data analysis. Fourth, the limitations of this research to be transferred to a large sample size could affect the outcome of the data analysis. However, these limitations were addressed to control the validity of the trustworthiness of this research study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Due to the results of my findings, I recommend additional studies to be conducted on a different grade level, such as sixth grade. Additionally, I would recommend having more participants to develop a more in-depth research study. Furthermore, I would suggest repeating this study in a different area of the local school district to see if the impact from COVID-19 pandemic was as challenging for those of upper socio-economic status. Finally, I would propose additional research in the upper socio-economic status in the local school district if parents were more involved during the pandemic. Furthermore, some of the teachers reported that mathematics was impacted more ensuing the pandemic. Further investigations into how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted mathematical skills of fifth-grade students.

Implications

Positive Social Change

This research study on the successes, challenges, and suggestions of the fifth-grade teachers while teaching SwE ensuing the pandemic is important. This study has implications for social change by providing a focus on the decline in reading comprehension of SwE ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. Colvin et al. (2022) stated that students who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual learning are at a higher risk of learning disorders if their academic needs are not met. Administrators and teachers can utilize this research study to promote the education of their SwE by providing them with the suggestions provided in this research from the fifth-grade teachers who teach SwE. Additionally, school districts could use this research to implement change to improve the reading comprehension of their students through reviewing the successes, challenges, and suggestions of the fifth-grade teachers who have the lived experiences ensuing the pandemic while teaching reading to SwE.

The results of this study are crucial for school districts, administrators, and teachers who are the decision makers in creating change for their SwE. Sanders et al. (2019) expressed the essentialness of mastering reading comprehension skills for students to succeed. Latson (2019) stated that teachers struggle to find methods to aid their students with reading comprehension. Therefore, the findings of this research could provide the stakeholders methods to help improve the reading comprehension of SwE. Furthermore, the improvement in reading comprehension is a collective effort of all stakeholders for the success of our students.

The fifth-grade teachers in this study provided suggestions of supports and strategies to advance the reading comprehension skills of SwE and it can make an impact on the students' academic performance. The decline in reading comprehension will negatively impact SwE's future education and career choices which will negatively impact society. Literacy instruction is a "delicate dance" the teachers engage in as they implement reflection and adjust their instruction to address the academic needs of their students (Ramzy & Bence, 2022, p. 18). Therefore, this research study promotes the tools the teachers need for the delicate dance of reading instruction/remediation to enhance the reading comprehension skills of their SwE. Finally, the findings of this research will provide a meaningful contribution to the current literature for all stakeholders to utilize as they make important decisions to improve the reading comprehension of their students.

Empirical Implications

This research study documents the experiences of fifth-grade teachers ensuing the pandemic based on their successes, challenges, and suggestions when teaching SwE ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggested that the students' reading comprehension declined drastically ensuing the pandemic. Based on the NAEP (n.d.), the reading proficiency scores declined approximately 2% from 2019 to 2022. Additionally, the NAEP (n.d.) indicated the average reading score of the students was approximately 10% below the proficient level in 2022. Therefore, the fifth-grade teachers had many challenges in the improvement of their SwE reading comprehension skills following the pandemic. The pandemic shutdown and virtual learning caused the fifth-grade students to

be extremely behind in their reading. These students are described as beginning or developing learners.

The fifth-grade students struggle with the reading skills foundational skills that are crucial in the development of their reading comprehension. If they have not mastered the reading foundational skills, they will continue to struggle with reading comprehension in future grades. It is essential for students to master the reading foundational skills, so they are successful later in life (Grunke, 2019). According to Nugen (2019, p. 14), the mastery in reading foundational skills can affect the students' ability to perform "everyday tasks, have workplace success, communicate with doctors, read a menu, or understand directions." The fifth-grade students should be reading informational text to learn concepts; however, they are still learning the foundational reading skills.

This research study should be considered when addressing the gap in special education when focusing on the reading comprehension skills of SwE. Grimm et al. (2018) stated that teaching reading strategies could reduce the difficulties the students have with reading comprehension. The focus of this study was to make an original contribution to the field of special education practice through investigating the reading strategies the fifth-grade teachers are using to increase their SwE reading comprehension levels. Currently, fifth-grade students are struggling with the reading foundational skills which are affecting their reading comprehension based on the experiences shared by the teachers. This research focused on the experiences of fifth-grade teachers and the literature review to support the professional practice to provide educators with the

strategies these teachers are currently using to improve their SwE reading comprehension skills.

The success a student has with reading depends on a well-built reading foundation (Cox-Magno et al., 2018). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the fifth-grade teachers had to provide remediation for their students who were still reading at a kindergarten or first-grade reading level. They observed the SwE challenges as they struggled to read fifth-grade text. These participants shared their experiences as they applied various strategies to improve the reading comprehension levels of their students. Therefore, mastering reading comprehension is crucial for the success of SwE.

The findings based on participant interviews suggested many methods to increase reading comprehension of SwE. The experiences of the fifth-grade teachers helped me understand the successes, challenges, and suggestions while working to improve the reading comprehension of their students. The successes of the teachers were based on “heavy communication” with parents and improving reading comprehension through the implementation of strategies and technology. The challenges were many for teachers and students ensuing the pandemic which impacted the decline in reading comprehension. The fifth-grade teachers shared their perceptions of their suggestions to improve reading comprehension of SwE.

The findings of this research determined that the successes with parents involved “heavy communication” to have them assist their child with their education during the pandemic. Following the pandemic, the students received more support and remediation to help them improve their reading comprehension skills. The teachers reported that the

support and remediation through reading strategy instruction presented the fifth-grade students with little success in the improvement of their reading skills from one grade level to the next. The students benefitted from the use of technology in the classroom that focused on the reading skills the SwE needed.

The results of this study highlighted the challenges the fifth-grade teachers and students experienced ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. The students, during the pandemic, were not provided with the remediation they needed to address the reading deficits they had. The pandemic created passive learners who were not engaged with their own learning process which affected the development of their prior knowledge and experiences. The computer screen was the students' learning environment which limited the natural development of their prior knowledge and experiences. The SwE were not able to summarize the text due to low comprehension. These students have deficits in vocabulary acquisition and phonics/phonemic awareness which has impacted their ability to comprehend text. Additionally, the teachers stated they struggled to meet all the academic needs of their students. Parents were not able to help their child because they did not know how to help. These factors contributed to the decline in reading comprehension of SwE ensuing the pandemic.

Key findings of this study, based on the perceptions of the fifth-grade teachers, provided suggestions to improve reading comprehension of SwE. Reading comprehension involves a "conscious awareness" for the students to access their prior knowledge during reading, based on Nath (2018, p. 196). The fifth-grade teachers and the literature review suggested that students must practice vocabulary, sight words,

phonics/phonemic awareness, and syllabication frequently to advance their ability to comprehend text. Additionally, the fifth-grade students can read on their independent level to help boost their confidence with reading. Teachers can provide the SwE reading strategies during small group or one-to-one instruction to assist them to improve their reading comprehension skills.

The instruction of reading strategies can assist SwE in the progression of their reading comprehension skills. The teachers provided many strategies to help with this progression in reading, such as using a graphic organizer, referring back to the text, chunking, and using visual/videos. Additionally, the students benefit when the teachers model the proper reading techniques and provide support to advance their reading comprehension. The reading strategies the teacher implements must keep the students' weaknesses in mind as they plan their lessons and provide the supports the students need (Wanzek et al., 2020). The teachers can implement various software in their plans to develop their SwE reading comprehension, such as Read180, iReady, Flocabulary, and more.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results of this study, the literature review, and additional research, there are five recommendations for practice that could be implemented to address the problem of low reading comprehension of fifth-grade SwE in a local school district in Georgia. These five recommendations have specifically been developed to help close the gap in practice and ultimately improve the reading comprehension levels of the students at the research setting, but other school leaders and teachers could consider these

recommendations. The five specific recommendations are (a) developing the students' prior knowledge, (b) provide instruction in vocabulary/sight words, (c) provide instruction in phonics/phonemic awareness, (d) teach students many reading strategies, and (e) modeling the proper reading techniques. Each of these recommendations will be reviewed in this section and supported by the results and/or current research based on any identified needs and gaps discovered during this study.

Recommendation One

The teachers suggested the development of the students' prior knowledge is crucial for improving the reading comprehension of fifth-grade students. The development of the students' prior knowledge helps them to make connections with the text as they are reading. The researchers suggested that the process of understanding text involves activating prior knowledge while combining it with new knowledge (Cox-Magno et al., 2018). Additionally, this activation of prior knowledge aids in the understanding of the information that is important for comprehension. This is supported by current research by Nath (2018, p. 196) who stated that it is the "conscious awareness" involved in reading comprehension as students access their prior knowledge during reading process.

Recommendation Two

A change that could be implemented more frequently is to provide instruction in vocabulary and sight words. This is supported by Gao (2021, p. 442) who stated the significance of vocabulary instruction since word recognition is crucial for "language expression and language applications." Jiang and Logan (2019) suggested that

implementing vocabulary instruction can increase the students' reading comprehension. This was also supported by the data analysis for this study as suggested by the theme of suggestions for vocabulary. The teachers suggested in this study that we need to provide instruction in vocabulary to help improve the reading comprehension of SwE and the research supports this as well.

Recommendation Three

Another immediate change that must be implemented for fifth-grade students is to provide instruction in phonics/phonemic awareness. The instruction of phonics/phonemic awareness is usually implemented in the lower grades. However, the data analysis of fifth-grade teachers has recommended instructing the students of these crucial reading foundational skills to the students in the upper grades to improve their reading comprehension levels. Researchers agree with the instruction of phonics/phonemic awareness as these skills are critical for reading progression and academic success (Paige et al., 2023). Therefore, my recommendation is to provide instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness for those students who are struggling to read fluently and tailor the instruction for their individual needs.

Recommendation Four

Researchers suggest teaching reading strategies to improve the reading comprehension of students (Vaughn et al., 2018). This was supported by the teachers in the data analysis as the various reading strategies they use to improve their students' reading comprehension. In the research, it is recommended to develop a reading profile which includes the strengths and weaknesses of the students, and this would aid the

teacher in the development of reading strategies that will address the weaknesses in reading (Capin et al., 2021). Smith (2019) suggested implementing reading strategies into the instructional plans to help progress the students' reading comprehension. The recommendation I would suggest is to find the reading strategies that work for each individual student to help improve their reading comprehension.

Recommendation Five

Through the data analysis, the teachers suggested modeling the proper reading techniques to help increase the students' reading comprehension. Researchers suggest that teachers need to model the proper techniques in the reading process and the application of reading strategies to develop proficient readers in their classrooms (Ramzy & Bence, 2022). Therefore, it is recommended to model the proper reading techniques and reading strategies to help students improve their reading comprehension. This is supported by the research by Grunke (2019) as they suggested to model the reading strategy application for effective reading instruction.

For my suggestion, a theme that was not developed through the data analysis for recommendation is that the teachers provide instruction in metacognition. Metacognition is a crucial skill for students to learn so they understand their learning process. The researcher suggests that metacognition is the process of a person understanding their thinking process and their ability to engage in their learning process. Furthermore, Pratt et al. (2022) suggested that metacognition involves the students' reasoning and their awareness of executing the reading strategies while they are reading text. My

recommendation is to provide instruction in metacognition so students understand their thinking process which can help in the improvement of their reading comprehension.

Even though a theme was not developed for this recommendation, it is my research-based suggestion that the school leaders and teachers also implement methods to support parents. This is supported by current research conducted by Estoque (2022) who recommend that teachers need to collaborate with parents to effectively provide reading support to their children. The recommendation for school leaders and teachers is to develop a seminar for parents to attend to teach them how to support their children with their education. This could also increase parent involvement and raise awareness about the need to help their children get caught up with their reading comprehension skills.

Conclusion

The fifth-grade students lost crucial instruction of the foundational reading skills during the COVID-19 pandemic. This loss of instruction has impacted the SwE reading comprehension. Piasta et al. (2020) stated that students who have not learned the foundational reading skills will continue to struggle with reading comprehension. This has proven to be a true statement for these fifth-grade students. The reading process is complex as there are many ingredients involved to be proficient in reading. It is essential for students to be proficient in reading, so they are successful in their academics and into adulthood (Hammerschmidt-Snidarich et al., 2019).

The findings from this study revealed that the fifth-grade teachers experienced successes and challenges when teaching reading to SwE ensuing the COVID-19 pandemic. These teachers provided suggestions for other teachers and administrators to

help improve the reading comprehension of SwE. The successes for some of the teachers surprised me; however, heavy communication seemed to be the key of the successes with the parents. Additionally, the fifth-grade students were successful with the additional support provided ensuing the pandemic from one year to the next. The challenges of the fifth-grade teachers and students were expected. They all have had many struggles to overcome that affected the students' low reading comprehension. Finally, the teachers provided many suggestions of the strategies they use to increase the reading comprehension level of their SwE.

There were several findings that were noteworthy. First, the students were successful when they were provided additional support, such as reading strategies and the integration of technology. In addition, there were many challenges that impacted the reading comprehension of SwE ensuing the pandemic, for instance lack of students' motivation, vocabulary acquisition, and phonics/phonemic awareness challenges. Lastly, the suggestions the fifth-grade teachers provided from their experiences has helped to improve the reading comprehension of their SwE, namely the suggestions of reading strategies they use, methods for teaching vocabulary, and the incorporation of technology in the classroom. These reported findings from this study can have an impact on the reading education of SwE through providing a better understanding of the perceptions of the fifth-grade teachers as they worked with their SwE ensuing the pandemic.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

- I. Introductions
- II. Review the Consent Form
- III. Participant Questions
 - a. Interview Questions
 - i. Describe the reading comprehension skills that you feel that students with exceptionalities are lacking since we returned from the pandemic? (research question and lit review)
 1. How would you describe your students with exceptionalities ability to answer direct recall questions?
 2. How would you describe your students with exceptionalities ability to identify unfamiliar vocabulary words?
 3. Is there anything else you would like to add about the students' lack of reading comprehension skills since we have returned from the pandemic?
 - ii. Describe what you are doing to address the low reading comprehension achievement of your students with exceptionalities since we returned from the pandemic? (research question and lit review)

1. Describe a typical block of instructional time dedicated to improving your students with exceptionalities reading comprehension skills?
 - a. What would it look like if I came in to observe you teaching reading comprehension skills?
 - b. What are the students doing and what are you doing?
 2. How would you describe your most go to teaching strategies or even theories on learning to improve the reading comprehension skills of your students with exceptionalities?
 3. If you notice that a student or students with exceptionalities are struggling with reading comprehension, describe how you would improve their reading comprehension skills?
 4. Is there anything else you would like to add about how you specifically address the low reading achievement of students with disabilities?
- iii. If the participant mentions technology: (lit review)
1. Can you describe the technology that is used and how it is used by you and your students to improve reading comprehension skills?

2. Do you integrate technology to help improve reading comprehension skills of students with exceptionalities in the classroom?

a. If so, can you describe how it is used by you and your students to improve reading comprehension skills?

iv. If the participant mentions parents: (lit review)

1. Describe the involvement of the parents during the pandemic?

IV. Conclusion of the Interview

- a. Procedures for Exiting the Study
- b. Thank you for your participation
- c. Participant Questions