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Teachers' Experiences with Researched-Based Programs and Strategies to Help Struggling Readers in Grades 6–8

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2025

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MA, Kaplan University, 2014

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

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Reading Literacy & Assessment

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Abstract

The problem in this qualitative study was that adolescent students in Grades 6–8 in a rural district in the southeastern United States were struggling with reading and had inadequate reading comprehension achievement. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how teachers implemented researched-based practices of reading intervention programs and the strategies they deemed beneficial to use while aiding struggling students. Marzano's nine instructional strategies were used to frame the study. The 12 participants were reading teachers, interventionists, and specialists. Data were collected via semistructured interviews and were analyzed using thematic analysis with open and axial coding. The findings revealed that teachers recognized the need for research-based instruction and used effective strategies such as scaffolding, small group instruction, and differentiation. Teachers noted the value of assessment of student progress as well as regular conferencing with students to foster student growth in reading achievement. Teachers articulated a need for accessible literacy coaches to provide them with more support. Results of this study may be used to provide educators with valuable information about effective strategies and practices to use in assisting struggling readers in Grades 6–8. This may lead to positive social change in the form of improved reading comprehension which prepares students for mastering each grade level, and for pursuing higher education or careers of their choice.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my father, Robert Carlos, and my grandmother, Henrietta Dixon. Their unwavering belief in me and their invaluable lessons have shaped the person I am today. My grandmother taught me to dream big, to never settle for less, and to always pursue my aspirations with determination. My father instilled in me the courage to face challenges head-on and reminded me that anything worthwhile requires hard work and resilience. Though they are no longer with us, their influence continues to guide and inspire me every day.

I also dedicate this work to my children, Orviana, Kevell, and Kevien, and my granddaughter, Anari. Their unconditional love, support, and patience throughout this journey have been my greatest source of strength. I am forever grateful for the joy they bring to my life and for the inspiration they provide.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Kevin Sutton, my children's father and my best friend. Kevin always reminded me that the sky is the limit and encouraged me to pursue my dreams fearlessly. His words of wisdom and belief in me will forever resonate in my heart.

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I would like to thank Dr. Morton and Dr. Billie Andersson as well as the additional Walden faculty, who have helped me to reach this milestone in my academic career. I also want to give sincere thanks to the educators who dedicated their time and shared their reading intervention experiences. I could not have done it without you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Teachers' experiences involving the best way to provide reading interventions for struggling adolescent readers vary. Teachers and administrators are often looking for research-based intervention strategies and practices (Nguyen et al., 2021). Marzano's (2020) nine instructional strategies frame this study. Experimental and control research have been conducted by active educators to assess the efficiency of teaching methods in their classrooms (Marzano, 2020). When teachers improve their use of classroom strategies and behaviors according to the Marzano teacher evaluation model, student achievement typically rose by 16 percentile points (Learning Sciences International, 2020). Experienced teachers can enhance their teaching when using Marzano's instructional strategies (Learning Sciences International, 2020). Marzano's model is unique because it has undergone rigorous testing through action research studies that were conducted in real classroom settings (Learning Sciences International, 2020). Extensive research sets Marzano's instructional strategies apart from other evaluation models.

As administrators and teachers are incorporating technology in their daily teaching and learning, many schools in the United States have adopted computer-based reading intervention programs to provide additional support to students identified as struggling readers beyond teacher-delivered strategies (Bippert, 2019). Although computer-based programs are beneficial and engaging, there is a lack of evidence to show how they have assisted in terms of improved reading achievement with struggling adolescent readers as well. Bippert (2019) concluded teacher perceptions of intervention programs varied significantly from perceptions of students and administrators as they

related to student reading achievement. As a result, Bippert suggested that more research is recommended to determine how successful reading intervention programs may be for struggling adolescent readers. This study was conducted because it may provide educators with valuable information that will be useful in selecting intervention programs and strategies to use with struggling sixth to eighth-grade readers.

The lack of reading intervention practices and strategies geared towards struggling sixth through eighth-grade readers in rural settings was the area of interest for this basic qualitative study. This study may have a positive influence on social change because it can contribute to limited literature regarding teacher experiences of appropriate reading intervention practices and strategies for struggling sixth to eight grade readers. I aimed to provide educators with valuable insights to guide the selection of effective reading strategies and intervention programs, while also highlighting teacher experiences that contribute to the reading success of struggling sixth- to eighth-grade students.

In Chapter 1, I provide background information on reading interventions as they related to struggling sixth through eighth grade readers. The problem statement is stated, a concise purpose of the study is provided, and research questions are stated. Also included in Chapter 1 is the conceptual framework. I describe the phenomenon being investigated. Definitions of terms are included to provide clarity on multiple-meaning words that will be used in this study. Chapter 1 includes assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations. The significance of the study and a summary of main points conclude Chapter 1.

Background

For decades, there have been problems with literacy in the United States (Benner et al., 2022). Reading is a practice that is used daily in schools, yet some students continue to struggle with reading even in their adolescent years. Students who lack fundamental reading and writing skills are faced with obstacles when it comes to securing future jobs and achieving economic success (Benner et al., 2022). Reading is a complex act that requires many skills; however, it can sometimes be difficult to pinpoint the exact areas of struggle. Experts from various fields like developmental psychology, cognitive science, education, and linguistics have been studying reading comprehension for decades (Duke, 2021). Reading is considered a fundamental and therefore necessary skill for students to acquire academic success. Each student who struggles to read requires their needs to be met on an individual basis.

According to the department of education for the study sites state, most struggling readers have difficulty with fluency, reading comprehension, and reading stamina, or the ability to read for sustained periods in the upper elementary grades. However, indicators of struggling readers can fluctuate and are based on interactions between individual students and the text and the purpose of reading the text (Duke, 2021). In addition to comprehension, the reading struggle arises when students are not able to interpret what is being read because of syntax, phonemic awareness, and schema (Learned, 2018). Furthermore, the process of deciphering a word involves a series of operations that are aimed at extracting contextual meaning from text (Yılmaz & Melekoğlu, 2023). Comprehension is complex, and a clear understanding of its processes is needed to efficiently address the comprehension difficulties of struggling readers. Reading

comprehension is encountered across all subject areas (Yilmaz & Melekoglu, 2023). Reading intervention programs are needed because specific learning disorder (SLD) is the most common special education category with a 5% rate among all students enrolled in the United States (Yilmaz & Melekoglu, 2023). Reading comprehension is a skill that students need to be successful in the classroom.

Educators often struggle with determining beneficial ways to accelerate the progress of sixth to eighth grade struggling readers. Progress in strengthening adolescent literacy depends on schools selecting appropriate programs and implementing these programs consistently and effectively. There are promising reading interventions that have been created to improve the reading comprehension of adolescents; however, when these programs and practices are implemented by classroom teachers, effects are often insignificant. Gallagher (2023) suggested this is due to a lack of relationships between teachers and reading coaches. A positive teacher-reading coach relationship can be beneficial. Acquiring knowledge through coaching can enhance teachers' classroom management skills and strategies for effectively instructing within specific content areas (Kappell, 2023). Reading coaches play a crucial role in facilitating learning, whether through personalized one-on-one sessions with teachers using individual learning plans or conducting focused workshops and professional development sessions for selected educators or staff (Kappell, 2023). Teachers should be trained properly and seek assistance from reading coaches as needed. If there is a strong relationship between reading coaches and teachers, it could have a positive impact on student achievement (Gallagher, 2023). Teachers can benefit from this additional support because they are challenged with meeting the various needs of struggling sixth to eighth-grade readers.

Reading is a skill that is necessary for students to be successful in the classroom and become functional adults in society. Readers in Grades 6-8 are struggling with reading comprehension which is due to many challenges in the reading process from decoding to developing an understanding for reading. Early comprehension teaching should focus on reading words and making connections, phonetic-graphological understanding, semantic knowledge, cognitive adaptability, as well as morphological awareness and reading speed (Duke, 2021). Although fluency is vital, reading comprehension does not come automatically. Teaching text features helps improve comprehension, as the processes involved change based on the purpose and content of the reading. Strategy instruction boosts understanding, and expanding vocabulary and knowledge further enhances comprehension, encouraging deeper engagement with texts. (Duke, 2021). Additionally, many sixth through eighth graders struggling with reading difficulties experience gaps in terms of decoding and fluency which negatively affect the ability to comprehend. Research exists on the effectiveness of early intervention for struggling readers, however there is a lack of accessible information about what defines successful intervention strategies for adolescents who continue to face struggles in building essential reading skills during middle and high school (Lovett et al., 2021). Good reading intervention strategies have been developed; however, during sixth through eighth grades, struggling readers may also need to address motivation to read and ways to stimulate engagement to assist with reading and comprehending more challenging text.

A lack of knowledge of intervention practices that teachers think are beneficial for the academic growth of struggling adolescent readers and the implementation of these practices is the gap in practice for this study. Minimal research was available that

specifically focused on struggling readers in middle school. Between 2005 and 2015, there was a shift in literacy initiatives, which places emphasis on addressing the requirements of students from Pre-K to Grade 3 (Sedita, 2021). Determining teacher experiences regarding best reading intervention practices for students in sixth through eighth grades can be beneficial for students and educators.

To assist in the success of struggling readers, teachers need access to the best reading intervention practices. Currently, there is a lack of literature that addresses teacher experiences of the best reading interventions for struggling Grades 6–8 readers. This study was needed because the 2022 College and Career Ready Reading Assessment shows that over 50% of adolescent readers in the local district were performing under grade level expectations (South Carolina Department of Education, 2023). By investigating teacher experiences of beneficial intervention programs and strategies, research data emerged that could potentially assist educators in employing the best reading intervention programs and reading intervention strategies for struggling adolescent readers.

Problem Statement

The problem I sought to address in this study was the inadequate reading comprehension strategies and intervention practices geared toward struggling readers in grades sixth-eighth. At times I refer to sixth-eighth grade students using the terms adolescent or middle school because some research studies use these terms when referring to Grades 6 through 8. Based on data collected from the State Department of Education (2023), reading achievement in the United States among adolescent students is significantly low. Based on the 2022 College & Career Ready Reading Assessment,

57.3% of sixth graders, 61.3% of seventh graders, and 72.8% of eighth graders are performing below grade-level expectations (State Department of Education, 2023). Reading intervention programs that promote student growth are needed (State Department of Education, 2020). Reports show many school districts in the United States have adolescent students that are struggling in reading. This remains an issue because according to nationwide statistics, over 1.3 million fourth grade students lack the ability to read at a basic level (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2020). In addition, based on data collected by The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2022, only 27% of eighth-grade students performed at or above the NAEP proficient level on the reading assessment. This is evidence that many adolescents continue to struggle with reading comprehension at the middle school level. Content area middle school teachers have expressed frustration with the poor reading abilities of their students (Deshler, 2023). The requirements for science, social studies, and English Language Arts at the middle school level rely on the ability of students to read and comprehend grade-level appropriate content (Deshler, 2023). Although struggling readers may have been taught comprehension strategies earlier in their schooling career, they often continue to struggle with reading across content areas, which is a daily task for middle school students. Students who lack reading comprehension skills often struggle in other core subject areas.

Table 1 includes the state testing scores for sixth grade reading students in the local district for the past 3 years. These scores are often used to provide information to teachers, parents, and other educational stakeholders about student strengths and

weaknesses. Identifying a student's areas of struggle gives teachers a clear starting point to support their success in the classroom.

Table 1

Local District 6th Grade College & Career Ready Reading Achievement Percentages, 2021–2023

Year of Assessment	Number of Students Tested	Did Not Meet Expectations (%)	Met Expectations (%)	Exceeded Expectations (%)
2021	145	66.9	22.1	11.0
2022	185	57.3	28.6	14.1
2023	162	54.4	20.4	25.3

Note. Data retrieved from the State Department of Education 6th Grade Reading Ready Assessment.

Table 1 shows that students not reaching grade level proficiency ranged from 54.4% to 66.9%. There are fluctuations in performance: however, the data above points to the need for ongoing efforts to improve student outcomes, especially in meeting grade level expectations. The increase in meeting and exceeding expectations in 2022 suggests potential positive developments that could be further explored for future improvements. Based on the state reading plan, focus needs to be placed on low performance in reading and writing and the literacy achievement gaps among demographic groups (State

Department of Education, 2023). The local district would like to see an increase in the average number of students who meet grade level expectations (State Department of Education, 2023). My goal with this study was to address the needs of Grades 6–8 readers struggling with reading comprehension.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how teachers implemented researched-based practices of reading intervention programs and the strategies they deemed beneficial to use while aiding struggling Grades6–8 readers. Although teachers receive professional development related to improving reading achievement, the strategies and programs used vary and students were not making sufficient progress, as Table 1 indicates. It was important to find out what educators have found to be most helpful. This information can be shared to support initiatives aimed at addressing the issue of adolescent struggling readers in educational settings.

In this basic qualitative study, I focused specifically on Grades 6–8 struggling readers living in rural areas. The intent of this study was to explore teachers' experiences with researched-based programs and strategies for struggling sixth-eighth grade readers.

Research Questions

The following research questions for this basic qualitative study are aligned with the problem and purpose of the study. These research questions guide the research and keep the study focused on teacher experiences of credible reading intervention programs and strategies that will support struggling readers.

RQ1: How are teachers implementing research-based strategies and programs to support struggling Grades6–8 readers in rural settings?

RQ2: What strategies and programs do teachers perceive as most beneficial for struggling readers in Grades 6–8?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Marzano's response to intervention (RTI) which focuses on the nine research-based instructional strategies that can be used for any content area. In this study, the focus was reading comprehension strategies that can be used for struggling Grades 6–8 readers. Research-based strategies have been tested and have promising results. These types of instructional strategies, when used consistently, can make a difference in the academic achievement of students (Marzano, 2003). Marzano has identified nine key teaching strategies that significantly impact student achievement. (Marzano et al., 2001). These strategies are discussed in detail in the literature review section.

This qualitative study was grounded in the work of Marzano. Marzano's RTI framework is based on research-based instructional strategies to improve student academic achievement. It is a systematic approach that can identify and address student needs through tiered interventions. This model integrates data-driven decision-making and ensures that all students achieve academic success (Marzano & Pickering, 2001). Marzano's RTI uses nine instructional strategies that serve as the foundation of this framework. Each strategy is research-based and designed to improve student learning. To illustrate, identifying similarities and differences encourages students to classify, compare, and create analogies or metaphors, which enhances comprehension by making connections between concepts (Marzano et al., 2000). Summarizing and note taking teaches students to summarize key ideas and organize notes to improve understanding

and memorization. Reinforcing effort and providing recognition fosters motivation by highlighting student effort and celebrating achievements. Homework and practice reinforces learning through additional assignments and fosters practice outside of the classroom. Nonlinguistic representations include visuals, models, and graphic organizers that help students understand and remember key concepts. Cooperative learning promotes collaboration. Through collaboration, students build both an understanding of concepts as well as social skills. Setting objectives and providing feedback assists students by providing clarity and understanding of tasks, which in turn improves student achievement. Generating and testing hypotheses helps to develop critical thinking skills. Students participate in predicting, experimenting, and problem solving, which also promotes student growth. Finally, cues, questions, and advance organizers help to activate prior knowledge and help to prepare students for learning new content through guiding questions and structured tools (Marzano et al., 2000). These strategies work collectively to address the varied academic needs of all students. Marzano's framework is relevant to struggling readers in Grades 6th–8th because the interventions are tailored to individual student needs. Each of Marzano's strategies are aligned with RTI principles and offer differentiated support, fosters engagement, and uses evidence-based methods to improve reading outcomes. Marzano's RTI framework focuses on identifying student needs, providing targeted interventions, and monitoring progress. Additionally, this framework aligns with the goals of this study because it explores how teachers implement research based strategies and programs to support struggling readers in Grades 6–8. A more thorough explanation is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

Using a basic qualitative approach, I investigated teachers' experiences of implementing beneficial reading intervention programs and strategies for struggling Grades 6–8 readers. Various interpretations exist for qualitative research. Broadly speaking, these approaches are used to explore scientific and practical concerns within societies, employing naturalistic and interpretative methodologies across diverse subjects (Taherdost, 2022). Qualitative research methods incorporate a range of empirical materials, including life experiences, and narratives that reflect the daily routines and challenges individuals encounter (Taherdost, 2022). The emphasis of a qualitative study involves studying the meanings and motivations underlying these experiences, and aspects that defy quantification (Taherdost, 2022). In a basic qualitative study, only one data source is used. I inquired into and interpreted participants' experiences in relationship to the research problems using open-ended, semistructured interviews. The decision to use interviews as my main source of data to address my research questions was because qualitative data is typically obtained from sources such as interviews, focus groups, observations of real-life settings such as the classroom, and existing documents such as previously collected assessment data (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). In addition, the qualitative approach is often used when gathering information about an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). A basic qualitative approach could be used to address problems in the field and to inquire into a person's experiences. I conducted interviews in this basic qualitative study to investigate teachers' experiences.

As I addressed the phenomenon investigated, literature about research-based reading programs and strategies for struggling adolescent readers informed my interview questions. Data collected from interviews were carefully recorded and coded. The coded documents were read many times to make sure all emerging ideas were noted. The codes were organized and transcribed to develop themes (Saldana, 2021). These themes provide information about teacher experiences of reading interventions and reading strategies. Participants included 12 Grade 6–8 teachers, reading interventionists, instructional facilitators, and reading tutors. The twelve participants engaged in semistructured interviews conducted via Google Meets. The Google Meets format allowed for flexibility in scheduling and facilitated in-depth discussions while ensuring consistency across interviews. The results of such inquiries were efficiently applied and synthesized to determine teacher experiences of reading intervention programs administered in rural counties for adolescent struggling readers.

Interviews were conducted via Google Meets due to COVID 19 situations. I recorded and transcribed the interviews then analyzed each using open coding of emerging ideas. By using these methods to collect data I was able to provide valuable information about teacher experiences of beneficial practices for implementing reading interventions. These practices specifically focused on struggling readers in sixth-eighth grade classrooms located in a local rural community.

Definitions

The purpose of the definitions section is to provide clear and precise meanings for terms used throughout the dissertation. Some words have multiple meanings so to ensure a common understanding among readers, I have provided definitions for clarity.

Failure Free Reading: A reading program designed to improve vocabulary, fluency, word recognition, and reading comprehension for Kindergarten through Grade 12 students who score in the bottom 15% on standardized tests and have not responded to conventional reading intervention (What Works Clearing House, 2007). The Failure Free Reading program is used in the local setting. The Failure Free reading intervention program combines computer assisted activities and workbook assignments.

Response to Intervention (RTI): The RTI approach is designed to determine if students require special services. RTI began to take shape in the late 1970s as a reaction to the practice of determining eligibility for special education services by showing the discrepancy between IQ and achievement scores for a student (Vontz & Goodson, 2020). RTI is used in the local setting.

Socioeconomic status (SES): An economic measurement based on income levels, parent education, and social status within a given community (Ayres, 2011).

Assumptions

It is important to understand the assumptions made when conducting a research study. The assumptions held by a researcher influence how they seek answers to the research questions and provide the foundation for evaluating a study. (Moroi, 2021). This is important to understand the assumptions made when conducting a research study. This study is based on teacher experiences of reading intervention programs and reading strategies. The main assumption in this study was that teachers have used the programs and strategies in question and that they have responded truthfully throughout the interview. I assumed that the participating teachers have an invested interest in student achievement and are familiar with the setting and challenges of the students. I assumed

educators gave their honest and true experiences because they understand change is needed. These assumptions are essential to my study as they provide the data necessary to drive social change.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was teacher experiences of researched based practices of reading intervention programs and reading comprehension strategies. These experiences are important for understanding how to aid struggling Grades 6–8 adolescent readers in a rural setting. This focus was chosen due to the abundance of reading intervention programs and strategies being implemented within the southeastern state in the United States. It was important to understand which strategies and programs were most beneficial when teaching struggling Grades 6–8 readers. Teachers in Grades 6–8, reading interventionists, reading tutors, as well as instructional facilitators who serve struggling readers through the implementation of the intervention programs being researched in rural districts, were interviewed. This research has transferability because information on the best perceived reading intervention programs and strategies may be used in English language arts instruction, reading classes, as well as in content-based classes such as science or social studies to improve reading.

Reading coaches were excluded from the interview process because the study focuses on teacher experiences. Furthermore, reading coaches work closer with the teachers in lieu of the students. Student data is readily accessible, so educators and stakeholders in the local district are aware of the reading struggles and understand that this is a problem.

Limitations

The conclusion of the study was determined by the experiences of teachers in rural districts. The sample of 12 reading instructors selected for the research conducted is limited to a rural district; containing several schools that serve students in Grades 6–8. I chose to select participants from each location to enhance the diversity of the sample and to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of which reading strategies are the most beneficial when working with struggling readers in Grades 6–8. Although the research was conducted in a rural district, the results of the data collected may be transferable to other settings. Even though participants were limited to employment in rural settings, the outcome of this study may be transferable to similar settings and assist teachers searching for information that could lead to increased reading comprehension achievement amongst struggling adolescent readers in rural communities. By providing careful description and thorough data, teachers may find similarities and thus improve their own practices.

As an educator of adolescent students, I needed to maintain professionalism throughout the interview process to mitigate possible biases. I was specifically careful to confirm my own biases. I was vigilant in not letting my preconceived beliefs or experiences influence data collection.

Significance

Teacher experiences of remediation for struggling Grades 6–8 readers may provide valuable insight into strategies that can support students' literary needs at the upper elementary and middle school level. This basic qualitative study may provide educators of struggling adolescent readers in Grades 6–8 with information about teacher

experiences of beneficial reading intervention strategies and programs. Educators, students, and other stakeholders can benefit from this research resulting in positive change for rural school districts, as well as comparable settings that share similar academic hardships. As states begin to develop new evaluation systems where student learning targets are based on measures of proficiency and/or growth, educators are faced with the challenge of showing consistent academic growth (State Department of Education, 2020). Being knowledgeable of teacher experiences of beneficial intervention practices for struggling readers will help to bring about social change by informing improved reading instruction and improvement of adolescent reading achievement in rural areas. Participants in this qualitative study included eight Grade 6–8 English Language Arts teachers, one reading tutor, two instructional facilitators and one reading specialists in selected rural districts.

Summary

Reading intervention can be used to improve student achievement. In Chapter 1 of this qualitative study, I discussed the purpose of the study, which was to investigate teacher perspectives of researched-based practices of reading intervention programs and strategies that are used to aid struggling adolescent readers. Interviews were conducted via Google Meets and was the main source of data collection used to address the research problem also identified in Chapter 1. The data was collected, analyzed, and placed into themes.

In Chapter 1 of this study, I provided background information and explained the purpose of the study. Next, I identified research questions and discussed the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework included research-based instructional strategies

and reading intervention programs that were found to be beneficial for struggling readers. Concise definitions of key concepts and terms with multiple meanings were addressed in Chapter 1 to provide clarity. Finally, assumptions, scopes and delimitations, limitations as well as the significance of the study were expressed. In Chapter 2, I provide a literature review that includes a synopsis of the current literature and explains how it is relevant to the exploration of teacher perceptions of research-based programs and strategies for struggling adolescent readers.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The problem I sought to address in this basic qualitative study was the inadequate reading comprehension strategies and intervention practices geared toward struggling readers in Grades 6–8 The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how teachers implement researched-based practices of reading intervention programs and the strategies they deem beneficial to use when aiding Grades 6–8 struggling readers. Adolescents who face reading challenges might exhibit difficulties in fundamental abilities like word recognition, in more complex skills such as comprehending text, or they could encounter struggles in both areas (Donegan & Wanzek, 2021) supported the need for this study. Based on data collected by The National Literacy Institute (2023) 40% of students were unable to read at a basic proficiency level nationwide. In 2022, approximately 37% of 8th grade students in the southeastern state performed below basic on national reading assessments (NAEP, 2024). Help was needed to assist with the reading demands for struggling readers in grades 6th-8th. Continuous reading challenges among students who faced reading difficulties in primary school may contribute to the emergence of new reading difficulties in upper grades resulting in a significant population of struggling adolescent readers (Donegan & Wanzek, 2021). Struggling adolescent readers are challenged by the reading requirements placed before them. For example, they are required to increasingly read longer, more difficult words, and comprehend expository text that they might have had limited exposure to during their earlier academic years (Donegan & Wanzek, 2021). Students who enter middle school as struggling readers may continue to have trouble in the classroom unless the issue of struggling readers is addressed. Much research is available that provides valuable information on

teaching struggling readers in the primary grades, but literature related to teaching struggling readers throughout their adolescent years is limited. A study was conducted to review 33 reading intervention research studies geared towards upper elementary students from 1998-2022; however, researchers found minimal research investigating the impacts of implemented reading interventions (Donegan & Wanzek, 2021). This further supported the need to determine teacher perceptions of best reading intervention strategies and programs to address struggling adolescent readers. For many adolescents in the focus district, the issue of struggling in reading is combined with the issue of poverty. Children raised in poverty are more likely to experience emotional and social stressors, and cognitive lags which impact memory and emotion (McKenzie, 2019). It is important for educators to be aware of the role that poverty plays when addressing struggling adolescent readers, this way educators can implement research based strategies and interventions with the hopes of decreasing the number of low achieving reading students in the local district.

Chapter 2 includes the literature review for this study, the literature search strategy, the conceptual framework, literature review related to key variables and concepts, as well as a summary and conclusions.

Literature Search Strategy

During the process of researching literature for this study, I used several online databases. Through the Walden Library, I used Thoreau Multi-Database Search, SAGE Journals Online, Academic Search Complete, and Taylor and Francis Online. The primary search terms used were *response to intervention (RTI), reading interventions,* and *struggling readers*. In addition, I searched for literature using related phrases such as

struggling adolescent readers, reading intervention in middle school, struggling readers and poverty, challenges and barriers for adolescent struggling readers, teacher perspectives on reading intervention, Marzano's multiple intelligences, and *teaching in rural areas*. I also searched for literature using the terms *Read 180, Iready Failure Free Reading,* and *Exact Path*. A multitude of databases and key terms and phrases were used to collect literature for this study.

During the process of collecting related research, peer-reviewed journals, books, and research articles from the previously mentioned notable educational sources were used. I limited my research to articles written between 2019 and 2024. However, there were instances when I reviewed older literature to garner a better understanding of topics such as schema theory and the zone of proximal development. Although these articles and books were not published within the suggested 5-year time frame, they were closely related to the nature of my study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is Marzano's RTI. Marzano's (2003) RTI consists of a variety of research-based instructional strategies. Marzano's RTI framework has been widely used in educational research where there is a focus on improving literacy. Marzano's RTI framework is based on educational theories that emphasize differentiated instruction, targeted interventions, and evidence-based practices. Marzano (2010) highlighted the importance of tiered support to provide all students with instruction tailored to their individual needs. This framework is based on Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development and emphasizes scaffolding to support

student growth (Marzano, 2010). It also incorporates formative assessment and regular progress monitoring to help guide teaching.

Many studies have emphasized the importance of teacher training, implementation of strategies, and the use of formative assessments to achieve positive student outcomes. Key definitions and statements from this framework include RTI, Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3. RTI can be defined as a systematic approach to identifying and addressing student needs through tiered instruction and progress monitoring (Marzano, 2010). In Tier 1, students are provided high-quality, research-based classroom instruction. In Tier 2 small groups are used to target students who need additional support. In Tier 3, intensive interventions are provided to students with significant reading challenges (Marzano, 2003). These key statements and definitions are inherent to Marzano's RTI framework.

Using Marzano's RTI framework may ensure that all students are receiving the support they need. This concept applies to current research. For example, RQ1, of this study examines how teachers implement research-based strategies and programs, aligning with Marzano's (2003) three-tiered RTI model. Tier 1 focuses on core classroom instruction, using strategies that meet the needs of most students. Tier 2 focuses on delivering targeted support to students who need extra assistance, typically through small group instruction. Tier 3 offers personalized interventions designed for students facing significant literacy difficulties. By analyzing teacher practices through interviews, this study explores how these strategies align with the structured approach of RTI, particularly within the unique setting of Grades 6–8. For RQ2, the study investigates teachers' perceptions of the most beneficial strategies and programs, reflecting the practical

effectiveness of interventions across RTI tiers. This aligns with Marzano's (2003) emphasis on evidence-based decision-making and the importance of teachers identifying strategies that improve reading outcomes. In my data analysis, I examined patterns in teacher responses to understand how their practices and perceptions correspond to RTI principles. Thematic analysis connected instructional strategies, progress monitoring, and student outcomes, offering insight into how RTI is applied in Grades 6–8 classrooms.

The current study benefits from Marzano's framework as it provides ways to examine how teachers implement and perceive reading interventions for struggling readers in Grades 6–8 in rural settings. The three-tiered model offers a clear structure for analyzing how strategies are to be used. Marzano's (2003) RTI framework monitors progress and aligns with the study's goal of understanding what teachers perceive as effective. This framework ensures that my research findings were supported by evidence that addressed the individual needs of struggling readers in Grades 6–8.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

This section includes an in-depth review of the current literature drawn from academic sources on the topic of teacher perceptions of researched-based reading intervention strategies and programs used to assist struggling adolescent readers. The related literature is organized into emerging topics that are consistent with the study's problem, the purpose, and the scope. Topics presented include aspects of reading, reading in adolescent courses, research-based reading strategies, schema theory, professional development related to reading, RTI, computer-assisted reading programs, environmental stressors, reading achievement in situations of poverty, and rural school characteristics.

The selection of concepts for the literature review in my dissertation was grounded in a systematic process. This approach ensured that the review reflected current research but also identified the most pertinent and impactful themes relevant to the study. To develop a thorough understanding of the research topic, I read and analyzed an exhaustive number of scholarly sources. Each study was carefully reviewed to extract key details related to its research questions, purpose, methods, participants, findings, and results. These details were systematically organized into a chart for comparison and synthesis across studies. Using the chart, I analyzed the data to identify common themes and differences within the research. Themes emerged based on recurring patterns in the findings, such as the types of interventions employed, their perceived effectiveness, the challenges teachers face in implementing them, and the role of professional development. Differences were also noted, particularly in terms of contextual factors such as school settings, student demographics, and instructional approaches.

Aspects of Reading

There are several aspects of the reading process. Some of the aspects are phonics, comprehension and reasoning, vocabulary, and fluency (Clemens et al., 2020). Students use various aspects of reading when interacting with text features and attempt to meet the demands of the reading situation (Clemens et al., 2020). Depending on the situation, these aspects of reading enable students to improve their reading ability, acquire knowledge, or read for pleasure (Clemens et al., 2020). Reading skills that encompass the fundamental aspects for comprehending, interpreting, and analyzing text are needed to assist struggling Grades 6–8 readers (Ruan, 2023). These proficiencies encompass aspects such as reading fluency, decoding, comprehension, and lexical memory (Ruan, 2023). These

aspects of reading, often taught as skills, all contribute to student mastery of the reading process.

Phonics

Phonics is an important skill when learning to read. With phonics instruction, teachers teach letter-sound relationships; matching sounds with letters is a valuable skill for beginning readers to help them identify familiar words and add new words to their schema (Sprague, 2019). Bowers (2020) concluded that initial reading instruction should emphasize systematic phonics and not be based on meaning-based reading approaches such as whole-language instruction. Based on his study, Bowers stressed that understanding phonics is key in learning to read. According to recent research by Henry (2020), systematic multisensory phonics interventions yield positive results for struggling readers. Following an 8-week intervention period, students demonstrated improved accuracy in word reading and increased reassurance in their reading skills (Henry, 2020). Although the action research study was conducted using fifth and sixth grade student participants the benefits of providing phonics instruction to struggling readers at varying grade levels were visible.

Systematic phonics instruction can be beneficial for struggling 6th-8th grade readers. Phonics and fluency instruction are commonly perceived as skills primarily applicable to elementary education, with the misconception that they are not relevant for middle school students (Dilgard & Hodges, 2022). This misconception overlooks the potential benefits of phonics instruction for older students and suggests that phonics be presented as a literacy center (Dilgard & Hodges, 2022). Using literacy centers has been found to be an effective approach to addressing the gap in middle school reading

education (Dilgard & Hodges, 2022). At the middle school level, phonics could be practiced in literacy centers or in small groups. Phonics instruction has been proven to be more effective than programs that do not directly instruct phonics, in addition, phonics instruction can help to improve reading difficulties among struggling readers (Henry, 2020). This proves that phonics instruction is necessary for assisting struggling readers. The Science of Reading Comprehension stated that instruction in phonics and word recognition is essential for building reading comprehension skills (Duke et al., 2024). Effective phonics teaching at the middle school level should not only be systematic, but also captivating and appealing to students. Systematic phonics instruction that is engaging can improve reading comprehension.

Comprehension

One of the purposes of reading is to gain information from the text. Reading is one way in which students in the middle and secondary grades are expected to acquire new knowledge (Clemens et al., 2020). It is assumed that adolescent students can read when entering the classroom. Students are expected to use the reading comprehension skills learned in elementary school to learn and process new information in content area classes in middle school. Therefore, adolescent students who have not yet mastered the reading process are at a disadvantage.

Reading comprehension can be complex for many students. Reading comprehension involves understanding what is read, and interpreting the mental imagery presented in the text, which relies on the interactions between conceptual and procedural knowledge while reading (Sun et al., 2021). Understanding the components of reading comprehension is important for a variety of reasons. To illustrate further, trends from the

NAEP (2024) indicated that a significant number of middle schoolers lack reading comprehension skills that are sufficient for preparing to eventually enter college and various careers. Additionally, a significant number of middle school students exhibit reading skills below the expected grade level, and recent observational studies indicate that middle school educators often employ a restricted range of reading comprehension strategies in their teaching of content subjects (Stevens et al., 2022). In the experimental pilot study, researchers aimed to increase reading comprehension outcomes for middle schoolers by providing schoolwide professional development (Stevens et al., 2022). Students in the schools that participated in the reading comprehension improvement professional development outperformed students whose teachers did not participate in the experimental study (Stevens et al., 2022). This study showed that more reading professional development is needed for middle school-level teachers. The lack of reading proficiency among students in the United States has been resistant to change as students advance across grade levels (NAEP, 2024). This can present a dilemma as it relates to academic proficiency. Change is needed in the way struggling adolescent readers receive reading intervention instruction.

Various levels of reading proficiency exist. The extent of reading encompasses not only the depth of pertinent knowledge readers can attain but also involves understanding the words and sentences within a text, grasping the logical structure, and ultimately comprehending the core ideas (Zhang et al., 2021). Each stage of reading comprehension corresponds to distinct dimensions of a text's content; therefore, diverse strategies should be employed to enhance reading skills at different levels, and recommendations for reading materials should consider the various dimensions of content (Zhang et al., 2021).

Merely assessing the reading material, itself is insufficient for evaluating the overall effectiveness of reading activities.

Several factors can contribute to the lack of reading comprehension among struggling readers. In a case study format, researchers found that students reported weak reading habits in the sense that they do not read for pleasure because of an unavailability of reading materials, beliefs of having better things to do than reading, difficulty of reading materials provided by the English department, beliefs that improving reading is not as important as improving other language skills, and a lack of family reading habits (Eppard et al., 2020). In addition, Eppard et al. (2020) indicated multiple factors contributed to a lack of reading comprehension among struggling readers. The factors they reported were: "(a) decoding words, (b) reading text with appropriate speed and accuracy (fluency); (c) understanding the meanings of words; (d) relating content to prior knowledge; (e) applying comprehension strategies; and (f) monitoring understanding" (Eppard et al., 2020, p. 720). Addressing these factors could assist with improving reading comprehension.

There can be a variety of ways to assist struggling readers with reading comprehension skills. Sanders et al. (2021) collected data on the use of the TRAP method during reading intervention. The results of their research revealed that all student participants showed improvements in identifying the main idea and recalling details when TRAP was implemented (Sanders et al., 2021). It is also important to note that this method was taught in a small group setting. Working with students on reading strategies in a small group setting could be beneficial to struggling readers as well. Reading comprehension is a necessary skill for students to access other content areas.

Many free or inexpensive technology programs and devices exist to assist struggling readers with comprehension. In recent years, advancements have made reading and writing support tools available on tablets and smartphones, further enhancing accessibility beyond what computers offered in the past. A recent study explored how assistive technology affects students with significant reading disabilities. The research included 149 participants, with one group completing 24 sessions focused on assistive technology training, while the other group was provided with traditional treatment methods (Svensson et al., 2021). Participants in the study used apps designed to assist in improving decoding and writing skills, such as through text-to-speech technology (TTS) and speech recognition (speech-to-text or STT). These are highly acceptable options for individuals with reading challenges. Applications provide a substitute for conventional reading and writing approaches, especially advantageous for students with significant disabilities related to reading and writing (Svensson et al., 2021). Integrating technology into the classroom can benefit struggling readers in a variety of ways.

Vocabulary

Struggling adolescent readers are faced with a variety of text sources that contain difficult vocabulary and complex syntax (Swanson et al., 2017). It is recommended that students are exposed to new vocabulary in a variety of ways. One way is to provide students with a variety of texts at varying levels and genres (Swanson et al., 2017). Students in upper elementary and middle school grades need to succeed in content area learning; Students read to acquire knowledge from text during the adolescent school years, unlike in the primary grades when emphasis is placed on how to read (Fogarty et al., 2017). However, many students do not master the basics of how to read and become

struggling readers at the middle school level. “Reading instruction in middle grades and beyond often receives minimal emphasis” (Fogarty et al., 2017, p. 326). This may be due in part to the idea that at the adolescent stage students are reading to learn instead of learning to read.

A research study analyzing 9th-12th grade struggling readers with or at risk for having a learning disability was conducted by Zimmerman and Reed (2020). They saw a pattern with students struggling with comprehending text, especially informational texts (Zimmerman & Reed, 2020). In their research they observed a special needs teacher and her general ed co-teacher. Through their observations and data collected from student work samples, quizzes, and writing samples they determined that text structure instruction in which students learn to identify and analyze organizational patterns in texts may improve the reading comprehension of students with or at risk for LD (Zimmerman & Reed, 2020). Teaching students how to identify and apply informational text features such as captions, graphs, and diagrams could help to improve vocabulary understanding in adolescent readers. By viewing images related to the vocabulary words students could have a better understanding of unfamiliar words. Students can learn additional information by viewing images that are related to the vocabulary by using text features.

Children possess varying learning styles. It is widely accepted in academic circles that people learn more effectively when engaging multiple senses, particularly in the context of enhancing language acquisition (Ziadet, 2021). Sometimes struggling readers may have trouble remembering words. The study employed a quasi-experimental design, incorporating control and experimental groups with a total of 39 participants. Data collection included two phases: pre-tests and post-tests (Ziadet, 2021). VAKT is a

multisensory teaching method. (VAKT) is a mnemonic device for visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile learning strategy. It engages the visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile sensations to improve learning (Ziadet, 2021). The strategies presented have been demonstrated with hundreds of teachers as well as in clinical settings while working with struggling readers. The VAKT strategy has been proven to promote growth for developing readers as well as for students with dyslexia. Using the VAKT strategy can assist with vocabulary acquisition, and the hands-on “tactile” approach is an effective way to keep students engaged throughout the learning process.

In addition to the VAKT strategy, Quizlet is an online program that allows free vocabulary practice. The Quizlet Application is recognized as a digital flashcard tool and is accessible on both computers and smartphones (Setiwan & Wiedarti, 2020). Setiawan and Wiedarti (2020) investigated the use of the Quizlet app as a means of vocabulary acquisition. The study emphasizes the importance of enhancing students' motivation in learning English vocabulary who often struggle with memorization. It proposes using the Quizlet Application to achieve this goal. Employing an experimental and control group design, the research study included 65 high school students who were separated into experimental and control groups. Observation checklists were utilized to gauge students' motivation during vocabulary learning sessions, with data analyzed using the Wilcoxon test. The findings suggest that the Quizlet Application effectively boosts students' motivation, as evidenced by increased enthusiasm, sustained interest, and independent task completion (Setiawan & Wiedarti, 2020). Quizlet consists of study sets of terms and definitions that you can create yourself or use study sets created by others. In addition to the virtual flashcards or typing answers to written or audio prompts, students can compete

live as they race to answer vocabulary-related questions. Students also have the option to compete in a group format where students must work cooperatively to determine the correct meaning of vocabulary words. Recent studies and empirical literature reviews have indicated a rising fascination with gamified approaches to learning English, for their positive effects on the student learning (Waluyo & Bucol, 2021). Quizlet is a free online tool that may benefit vocabulary acquisition.

Fluency

Over the years the term fluency has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. These include the rapid reading of site words, reading words correctly, the speed at which one can read text, and reading with expression (Paige, 2020). Based on Paige (2020), fluent reading is now conceptualized by reading scholars as a construct composed of three facets, or indicators: 1) the rate of one's reading, 2) the accuracy at which words are pronounced, and 3) the prosody (meaning expression) in one's voice that brings a text to life. Paige (2020) gathered data on 1,064 6th and 7th grade students attending 73 schools. Student participants were measured on phonics and grade-level reading fluency. Results from the study indicated that students achieving proficiency in fluency on the reading assessment administered had a 70% chance of scoring proficient or better on the state reading assessment (Paige, 2020). Those who scored less-than-proficient on the composite had a 20% chance of achieving proficiency on the state reading assessment. Paige presented findings that show foundational reading skills such as print concepts and phonics are critical to attaining state reading proficiency. Struggling readers often lack the foundational skills such as fluency and habits of connecting with background knowledge needed to become successful readers.

Many adolescent students do not receive instruction related to foundational reading skills that are a part of the reading process, because these are skills teachers may assume were learned in primary grades. Middle school teachers view themselves as experts in the content area they teach, and math or science teachers are often unable or unwilling to provide reading instruction within their content areas, citing that English language arts teachers or reading specialists should fulfill that role (Thomas et al., 2022). There is a need for research-based intervention strategies and programs geared towards the middle school. The fact that adolescent students with reading difficulties continue to struggle in reading fluency further supports the need to improve reading instruction with adolescent readers. When addressing reading fluency, it is important to consider the various components of reading to better understand which reading interventions are needed and what works best.

Research has suggested that children who do not have the ability to read fluently in the early years of schooling are more likely to have trouble comprehending texts introduced in later grades. Lang conducted a randomized experiment on the impacts of reading intervention when using the technology program Fluency Tutor. Fluency Tutor allows students to repeatedly read grade-level passages (Lange, 2019). Students can hear themselves read, assess their own reading, and view teacher feedback from previous readings (Lange, 2019). Lange's focused on third graders, most of whom were behind a grade-level in reading and are a part of racial and ethnic minority groups living in a low income setting (Lange, 2019). This program may also benefit struggling adolescents in rural areas.

One of the reading intervention strategies that has been proven to help struggling readers is repeated reading (Lange, 2019). Repeated reading is one of the features of Fluency Tutor, a technology tool (Lange, 2019). The Fluency Tutor incorporates intervention techniques that have evidence of effectiveness and offers a way to provide continuous feedback to learners (Lange, 2019) by providing a score after each practice session. Incorporating technology tools into the educational environment has been shown to improve academic outcomes for students living in urban, rural, and low-SES (Lange, 2019). Due to currently being in a pandemic, many students are using technology daily to access their learning materials. Improving fluency through technology enhanced programs can be one way to assist struggling readers.

A recent study investigated the efficacy of using the Fluency Development Lesson. Thirty primary ages students participated in this study which took place over a five-week period (Zimmerman et al., 2019). Student participants practiced 40-min Mini reading lessons daily (Zimmerman et al., 2019). During each of the fluency lessons, participants practiced and developed their reading skills through repeated readings and word work such as cite word practice (Zimmerman et al., 2019). Assessments given tested comprehension, reading fluency, word recognition accuracy, reading speed, and prosody (Zimmerman et al., 2019). In addition, a control group of student participants also took the pre- and post-intervention tests (Zimmerman et al., 2019) The conclusion of this study shows that students who participated in the Fluency Development Lesson showed significant gains on all measures (Zimmerman et al., 2019). Based on the research that has been conducted, it is safe to say that phonetic practice may benefit struggling readers.

Reader's Theater is another strategy that can be beneficial to improving fluency. Reader's theater is an instructional activity that engages students in rehearsing and performing scripts; however, the performance doesn't require the use of props, costumes, acting, or memorizing (Young et al., 2019). Reader's theatre involves reading, speaking, and listening. This can be an engaging strategy because it allows students the opportunity to "act" out their reading, making it memorable and enjoyable instead of reading text the traditional way. In an 18-week quasi-experimental study using 76 second students and 13 teachers, researchers examined the effects of readers theater instructional protocols that expanded on the traditional reader's theatre approach by adding various reading comprehension and vocabulary activities (Young et al., 2019). Compelling evidence was provided that proves consistent implementation of readers theater with a focus on reading comprehension and vocabulary, can improve students' decoding skills as well as vocabular (Young et al., 2019). Participating in readers theater can potentially improve reading achievement.

Schema Theory

Schema theory asserts that knowledge is categorized and stored in groups; these groups are known as schemata (Alawdi, 2023). According to schema theory, learners grasp new texts or ideas by activating a schema that represents the concepts within the content. This information is stored in "slots," each holding associated knowledge and experiences (Smith, 2021). Every component of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world (Paul, 2017). Schema theory is related to this research because it provides information that may indicate a possible problem associated with struggling readers.

The knowledge stored in these information slots guides the interpretations, inferences, expectations, and attention of the learners as ideas are comprehended (Smith, 2021). Although Bartlett was the first person to explore schema in the process of reading, educational psychologist Anderson was instrumental in bringing schema theory to the attention of the educational community (Kan et al., 2020). He studied schema theory and presented information that is beneficial to assisting students who struggle with reading. Bartlett characterized schema as the network of past experiences in the mind. Since Bartlett introduced his proposal, the schema construct has assumed a central role in numerous cognitive domains, encompassing development, learning, memory, and decision-making (Kan et al., 2020). This study aimed to test a model that explores how prior knowledge impacts learning engagement through cognitive load and help-seeking strategies. A recent study sought to understand how activating schema influenced learning engagement. It involved 356 students from two middle schools, the analysis utilizing structural equation modeling found a positive association between activating prior knowledge and learning engagement (Dong et al., 2020). Schema theory can account for the effects of activating prior knowledge and how it could potentially influence the attainment of new knowledge which will improve reading comprehension amongst adolescents.

There are a variety of ways that teachers can assist struggling adolescent readers with the concept of schema in mind. Scaffolding learning and activating prior knowledge or schema can supply students with the opportunity to comprehend more than they would have been able to comprehend without activating their schema (Anderson, 1984).

However, students who live in rural areas may have less access to authentic learning opportunities or situations they may read about, which means fewer opportunities to add new information to their schema (Smith, 2021). This is often the case because rural communities often have fewer businesses and entertainment possibilities.

The National Education Association stated that many rural school districts are underfunded and lack a steady revenue stream (Rural Communities, n.d.). There are fewer jobs available in rural areas and therefore emphasis is placed on cultural and infrastructure factors (Klarner & Knabe, 2019). The authors suggest that cultural factors including low aspirations and a lack of access to positive role models may limit rural students. In addition, adolescents in rural communities are often influenced by their peers who may discourage the importance of academics yet encourage criminal activity (Klarner & Knabe, 2019). Structural factors that impact learning opportunities in rural communities include the lack of well-paying jobs and the transportation needed to get jobs (Klarner & Knabe, 2019). When jobs are not available many families find it difficult to meet their basic needs, which can impede child development (Ge & Wang, 2019). This lack of revenue results in fewer professional development opportunities and lower salaries and benefits for educators. (Rural Communities, n.d.). Not to mention, without proper funding, it is a possibility that students will not be able to participate in field experiments or have access to technology and other desirable resources that higher SES schools may have. Authentic learning opportunities can play an important part in educating the whole child. Having access to authentic learning experiences can help to improve schemata.

In addition to field experiences, students can partake in the THIEVES strategy.

THIEVES is a schema strategy that includes seven steps. Each step should be completed prior to reading the entire text (Khataee, 2019). The seven steps to the THIEVES strategy are listed below.

1. Title: What information do I have about this topic? What is the relationship between this topic and the chapter? What point of view does the title present? What is the text message?

2. Headings: What is the paragraph beneath this heading about? What information does this heading tell me? How can I change this heading into a question to be answered in the text? What can I understand from this heading?

3. Introduction: What information does the first paragraph provide about the whole chapter? Does the first paragraph introduce the chapter well? What does this introduction provide me about what I will read? Do I have any knowledge about this topic?

4. Every first sentence in a paragraph: What does the whole chapter provide according to the first sentence in each paragraph?

5. Visuals and vocabulary: Are there any photographs, drawings, maps, charts, or graphs in the chapter? What can I understand from the visuals in the chapter? Is there a complete list of key vocabulary and definitions of the chapter? Are the important words of the chapter in boldface type throughout the chapter? Do I know the meanings of the words in boldface?

6. End-of-chapter questions: What do the questions want? What information do I need to answer the questions? What information can I learn from the questions? I

should keep in mind the questions at the end of the chapter, so I can find where the information is located.

7. Summary: What do I learn and remember about the topics of the summary?

The THIEVES strategy was used in a study teaching reading to 63 struggling middle school students (Khataee, 2019). Results of the study show that THIEVES helped to activate the learner's prior knowledge (Khataee, 2019). This strategy can assist students at the adolescent level.

Even with reading interventions in place, many adolescent students continue to struggle with reading. Theorists and researchers such as Bartlett (1932), Smith (2021), and Anderson (1984) identified schema theory as an important component of reading. As an important aspect of the reading process, schema theory informs this study because it provides insight to a plausible reason why the percentage of struggling readers in the local district is higher than that of those in suburban areas.

Schema theory is important to the discussion of Marzano's conceptual framework. Schema strategy can be helpful in supporting student progress (Cho & Ma, 2020). In 1932 the concept of schema was developed by British psychologist Sir Frederic Bartlett. It was further developed in 1981 by Brewer and Treyens (Smith, 2019). Schema can be defined as acquired knowledge or as background knowledge as it relates to language comprehension (Cho & Ma, 2020). Schema theory highlights the importance of activating prior knowledge. Schema theory claims that comprehension is the result of the relationship between a learner's prior knowledge and a text in which new information is related or connected to the previous information that is stored in long-term memory. It is believed that when students can tap into their prior knowledge, their ability to

comprehend text increases drastically and that comprehension will improve as students begin to make connections with the text. To make connections, students need to be provided with opportunities to gain knowledge from experiences that will add to their schema.

Professional Development in Reading Instruction

High quality professional development is one way to support struggling readers. Educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders suggest that for students to be successful they must be able to read, analyze what they read, and then form arguments based on their reading (Robinson & Smith, 2020). For effective reading practices to occur, educators need continuous support. Teachers' knowledge and practices help shape the learning outcomes and academic achievements of students (Basma & Savage, 2023). One way to improve teaching practices is through professional development. Policymakers and educators worldwide invest in resources that enhance teachers' understanding of pedagogy-related reading and refine their practices, aiming to improve students' academic outcomes (Basma & Savage, 2023). At the school level, reading coaches are available to assist teachers with implementing reading practices that will promote growth. Professional development supports teacher growth and enhances student performance (Grierson et al., 2022). Current literature describes that learning expectations established by the state and national standards drive professional development. Organizations such as the International Reading Association (IRA) have demonstrated that by improving teacher knowledge of literacy strategies and practices, students show growth; however, workshops and professional learning communities (PLC’s) are usually not enough to improve the literacy instruction of teachers. Further information needs to be provided that

will allow teachers the opportunity to differentiate reading instruction in a manner that will be most effective when teaching struggling adolescent readers.

The opportunity for teachers to grow professionally is often provided by the local school district. The recommendations presented by previous researchers have led many schools and districts to hire literacy coaches, purchase intervention programs, and employ individualized professional development. Classroom teachers are often provided with literacy coaches to assist with providing quality reading instruction. Coaching should be personalized and ongoing. It should include cycles of reflection where teachers identify their goals (Grierson et al., 2022). Reading coaches should work alongside teachers in their classrooms. Reading Coaches should work with the teacher by demonstrating best practices, planning together, and teaching lessons that are aligned with the teacher's established goals. These practices could collectively bring about positive changes in teachers' practices and students' reading performance. Teachers should reach out to the literacy coach for assistance because a teacher’s literacy instruction is best supported when there is an increase in knowledge of reading.

Based on constructivist theory, professional development should be grounded in teachers’ previous knowledge (Smith & Robinson, 2020). In addition, constructivists believe that teachers should be engaged in both the understanding and implementation of the literacy strategies and intervention programs presented during professional development opportunities (Smith & Robinson, 2020). Smith and Robinson believe that if teachers understand the benefits of implementing specific strategies and programs, students will show improvements in reading. When teachers participate in professional

development opportunities, they can improve as educators and positively affect student learning.

Current literature suggests that intervention at the middle school level is different from reading intervention at the elementary level. Teachers at the elementary level teach students how to read and access print. Elementary teachers are traditionally trained to teach all subject areas, but middle school teachers are generally certified to teach one or two subjects (Smith & Robinson, 2020). Content area teachers at the middle school level often believe that English language arts teachers or reading specialists should fulfill the role of educating struggling readers. Content area teachers tend to focus on the delivery of their specific content. Not having instructional support with reading problems presents a challenge for students who continue to struggle with reading at the middle school level as they may not have mastered aspects of learning to read, such as phonemic awareness and fluency which are usually taught in earlier elementary levels. These ideas should inform professional development; however, more information is needed to determine how this will take place in a middle school setting.

The lack of instructional support is also evident in professional learning communities (PLC's), another model used by districts to provide professional development (Smith & Robinson, 2020). Based on the literature reviewed, professional development has been identified as one way to assist educators with teaching struggling readers. Still, many teachers in the local district have expressed that they are not satisfied with the professional development opportunities offered (Personal Communication, August, 2019). Similarly, Thomas et al. (2020) reported that teachers were very vocal about their need for quality professional development. The dissatisfaction with the lack of

choice, access to materials, and overall quality of professional development was expressed (Thomas et al., 2020). Additionally, teachers have expressed concern about the lack of training provided to assist with the delivery of intervention instruction as well as the process of identifying struggling readers (Thomas et al., 2020). Teachers expressed in Thomas et al. (2020) interviews that they perceived a lack of training and lack of choice concerning the standard protocol assigned. They also reported that the data collected through use of programs available were sometimes difficult to analyze and did not make sense to many of them, so they did not perceive the data collected as useful in decision-making (Thomas et al., 2020). Teacher participants in the Thomas study felt that they were being asked to implement programs without being properly trained or being allowed the opportunity to provide input as to whether the programs or strategies presented would work best for the group of students, they were providing reading instruction.

Teachers sometimes need guidance when selecting and applying evidence-based reading interventions. Lillge (2019) conducted a study with the purpose of determining why English teachers struggled to apply their learning and on understanding the complex relationship between professional development facilitators and teachers. Results indicated that funding, time, and space threatened professional development which would normally allow teachers and PD facilitators to develop good relationships (Liu, 2019). Professional development is often needed for teachers to improve their instruction. Strengthening the relationship between educators, reading coaches, and PD facilitators could help to improve student reading outcomes.

Response to Intervention

Although professional development is commonly used throughout school districts, teachers are often left feeling they have been inadequately trained when it comes to identifying struggling adolescent readers as well as assisting struggling adolescent readers. One commonly used way to identify struggling readers is by using the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach (Marzano, 2020). RTI is an approach that provides support for all students. This support includes students who struggle with learning and other disabilities. The RTI model gained traction when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was established in 2004. IDEA allowed school districts to implement RTI to identify students who needed special services. Research shows that despite the RTI approach being extensively adopted as the leading way to determine students with special needs, there is a lack of research available regarding its implementation in middle school.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a commonly utilized framework for supporting students' academic success, but its effectiveness can vary significantly across different educational levels. In the local elementary setting, RTI is used as an early identification of struggling students as well as to better understand the specific needs of students (Thomas et al., 2020). However, at the middle school level RTI isn't as efficient. Current research cites scheduling conflicts, availability, and access to technology and monitoring tools, reading difficulties, and an emphasis on testing as barriers to the RTI process as the middle school level. The research group investigated teacher perceptions to RTI implementation in a middle school setting and found that adolescent reading teachers do not feel prepared or confident in teaching reading and integrating it into their content areas (Thomas et. al., 2020) A lack of training and time constraints can also be reasons

why implementing RTI in middle schools was difficult. Teachers also indicated districts provided manuals and other helpful information on the RTI process, but enough information was not offered to assist new teachers with the response to the intervention process. Based on the literature reviewed on the implementation of RTI at the middle school level, it can be determined that more training is needed so that teachers will be able to accurately identify student needs. RTI may be a research-based process teacher in this study find helpful or are interested in trying.

Researchers emphasize the importance of additional studies addressing aspects concerning the application of RTI. The case study, Response to Intervention as a Structuring Benchmark for Organizing Services for Students at Risk and With Learning Difficulties in Reading: A Multiple Case Study in Three Elementary Schools aims to present the findings from a multi-case study exploring the roles of teachers and remedial teachers in the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) in reading across three elementary schools (Boily et al., 2023). The focus of the study is specifically on the organization of services, examining various evaluation and intervention procedures that are associated with RTI (Boily et al., 2023). The results reveal that RTI evaluation and intervention procedures are perceived as essential benchmarks, structuring the organization and planning of services throughout the school year for students at risk or those already experiencing reading difficulties. Using the response to intervention strategy is one way to assist struggling readers.

Computer Assisted Intervention Programs

Based on literature reviewed, the use of technology to provide reading intervention instructions has increased over the years. School systems and school boards

frequently invest in literacy programs with anticipation of positive outcomes. This has been practiced repeatedly in the education world with mixed results (Lewis et al., 2021). During the process of locating and analyzing research for this study, several computer assisted reading intervention programs were identified. The reading intervention programs that were used most frequently and received notoriety for producing the maximum amount of student growth were the STAR program, Read 180, Failure Free Reading, and Exact Path. These programs are designed to keep students engaged while providing an opportunity to improve reading skills and/or monitor student growth.

The content that a teacher deliver is based on standards. One of the major focuses established by Common Core Standards is to increase student engagement with reading complex texts. Although this is an important goal to have in place, it is obvious that this goal will be difficult to attain for struggling readers. The number of struggling readers at the middle school level and the concerns of low reading scores are so sobering that states and school districts have provided funding for reading intervention programs that are intended to raise standardized scores (Lewis et al., 2021). A significant amount of computer assisted programs are purchased yearly at the local setting. Understanding which programs teachers perceive as the most beneficial may help cut costs and provide a more focused approach to the way teachers in the local district teach reading intervention.

Due to Covid 19 many schools are operating through a virtual model. This means that instruction is being presented virtually. Bippert (2019) studied perceptions of technology, curriculum, and reading strategies in a middle school intervention program. Information was provided that clarified the way teachers perceive the use of technology when teaching intervention (Bippert, 2019). The researcher in this study analyzed the

impact of computer-assisted reading intervention programs and the perceptions. Bippert concluded that there were significant contradictions among students, teachers, and administrators as to how they perceived tools related to reading comprehension strategies, technology, and instructional curriculum (Bippert, 2019). For example, researchers have found that teachers often supplement computer assisted reading intervention programs to provide support for students' individual needs, however relying on technology-based reading intervention programs alone will not support the diverse needs of struggling adolescent readers (Bippert, 2019). Educators are attempting to develop ways to improve struggling readers' achievement; however, schools continue to rely on interventions that fail to address the needs of adolescent struggling readers (Bippert, 2019). Programs being implemented are often scripted and skill-based with an emphasis on isolated skills, fluency, and word recognition (Bippert, 2019). These types of interventions often lack opportunities for students to reflect and personally engage with texts which are needed for adolescent readers (Bippert, 2019). Adolescent struggling readers need intervention programs and strategies that involve not only decoding and comprehension skills, but also social engagement and interactions connected with texts (Bippert, 2019). This information will be valuable when discussing teacher perceptions of intervention programs because intervention programs used in the district are either paper-based, technology-enhanced, or a combination of both.

Several studies related to computer-assisted intervention programs indicated ways to help improve adolescent reading. In a mixed-methods study conducted by Booth, focus was placed on an in-school reading program designed to determine the effectiveness of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Throughout Booth's research study various practices

associated with differentiated instruction that exemplify the influence of sociocultural influences on learning. These practices include cooperative learning, problem-based, and project-based learning, as well as small group instruction (Booth, 2019). Participants in this study included 7th and 8th-grade struggling adolescent readers. Students in 7th and 8th grade were given a pre-test; after the pre-test students participated in a focused reading program. A post-test was given, and the data were analyzed for significant differences. The results revealed there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-posttest scores after taking part in the focused reading program (Booth, 2019). This literature is beneficial to my study because it proves that when the right programs are used students show improvements in reading.

Environmental Stressors: Poverty

While conducting research for this basic qualitative study, I reviewed several research studies related to poverty and the effects it can have on student achievement. A correlation has been reported between educational outcomes and child poverty; Johnson (2019) researched the education of students living with poverty. The correlation between poverty, human development, trauma, pedagogical implications, and bullying has damaging implications in adulthood (Johnson, 2019). Johnson analyzed the impact of bullying, traumatic experiences, and how living in poverty can have an adverse effect on human development that expands beyond the educational gap between minorities and white students (Johnson, 2019). For example, Johnson found evidence to substantiate that poverty causes chronic stress, which deteriorates human functioning in every faculty of the body, especially memory, brain development, and emotional regulation. Children in poverty face unusual stressors that children living in middle-class often do not experience

because upper SES students live in a contextual environment perceived as safe and nurturing. Stressors that students may face include negative or absent parent(s), parents with multiple sexual partners, substance abuse, violence in the home and/or community, both verbal and physical abuse, unsanitary surroundings, and a lack of finances and resources (Johnson, 2019).

Poverty can affect struggling adolescent readers in a variety of ways. Based on research, poverty can impact brain development. Cortisol is a stress hormone. This hormone is needed in instances of fight and flight responses. Cortisol can propel into high gear when the body senses stress or is faced with threat (Johnson, 2019). High levels of the hormone can affect the amygdala. The amygdala plays a key role in regulating emotions, has been linked to an increased risk of coronary heart disease, hypertension, and elevated cholesterol levels (Johnson, 2019). Struggling literacy learners that face poverty often exhibit low academic achievement and limited engagement in literacy activities, leading to a widening gap between them and proficient students as they progress through schooling. While literacy research and interventions commonly focus on primary education, the 2019 Supporting Struggling Secondary Literacy Learners project examined teacher perceptions of barriers faced by struggling literacy learners in secondary English classrooms. Identified barriers that impacted learning included: literacy skill disparities, English language proficiency, absenteeism, home environment factors, student attitudes and engagement, school and systemic issues, as well as learning difficulties and disabilities (Merga, 2020). The home setting and parent involvement or lack of can have a significant impact on a child's education.

Educational inequalities begin to surface as early as the preschool years, but can continue to impact middle and high school learning for struggling readers. The educational success that adolescents experience is very important. Varying levels of achievement can present a challenge for teachers in mainstream classes as they strive to tailor learning experiences to accommodate the diverse skills and abilities of their students (Merga, 2020). Education affects the lives of young people and attaining a formal education can contribute to their future. Understanding poverty and its effects on educational achievement may lead to finding interventions that can support positive outcomes as it relates to teaching struggling adolescent readers in low income, rural areas.

Poverty continues to be a crisis in the United States. The effect of poverty is especially significant among school-aged children and their families. “Poverty has a profound and lasting impact on students and their overall school achievement” (Curry & Tomczak, 2023, p. 71). Research suggests that students living in poverty face significant challenges in terms of academic performance compared to their peers. Poverty-stricken students have unique needs and when these needs are not met it impacts learning. Many K-12 educators lack a comprehensive understanding of the challenges associated with poverty, which affects their ability to address the educational needs of students from impoverished backgrounds and cultivate supportive teacher-student relationships (Curry & Tomczak, 2023). In addition to support from teachers, parents living in poverty should show interest in their child’s education and set educational expectations to break generational curses and close the achievement gap (Johnson, 2019). Parents and teachers must work together to assist poverty-stricken struggling readers. It is important to note

that although studies show the impact of poverty can be detrimental, not all impoverished adolescents struggle with reading.

Rural Schools Characteristics

The focused district for this basic qualitative study is in a rural area. Recent studies show that people living in remote and/or rural areas lack mobility, centralization services, and economic infrastructure (Klarner & Knabe, 2019). According to the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS), the southeastern state where this study was conducted has a rural poverty rate of 20.4% (ruralhealthinfo.org, 2023). This information is relevant when looking at the characteristics of a rural environment and determining its impact on struggling readers.

Students in rural areas are faced with many disadvantages. For example, there's the issue of mobility. Poverty in rural areas is intensified because students and parents lack needed transportation (Klarner & Knabe, 2019). For example, if a student misses the bus a parent may not have the transportation to take them to school. Missing school means that students are missing valuable instruction. In addition, parents may lack employment because they do not have transportation to or from work. Mobility issues not only affect school and employment, but they can impact student access to needed healthcare services (Klarner & Knabe, 2019). Klarner and Knabe (2019), respondents interpreted living in a rural community as negative. Participants reported not being a part of clubs and organizations within the community, and they also reported that public institutions failed them by leaving them to face daily challenges alone. There is a lack of social and cultural opportunities for people of poverty living in rural areas. "Poverty and

a lack of opportunities to do something valuable makes it difficult to maintain relationships”

(Klarner & Knabe, 2019, p. 460). When students have access to community centers such as recreational departments, libraries, and parks, students can come together and build relationships.

Children from poor families may be less able to conform to existing group norms. Their deviated consumption patterns result in difficulty in performing appropriate tasks in a peer group because adolescents tend to judge others based on their personal properties (Ge & Wang, 2019). Consequently, children in poor families have difficulties building and maintaining positive peer relationships, and they become more vulnerable to being socially excluded and victimized. In addition, economic pressure influences adolescents' feelings and behavior, making them feel inadequacy and anxiety when interacting with peers, which may lead to social withdrawal behavior, and in turn, bring pressure for peer relationships (Ge & Wang, 2019, p. 210). Peer relationships as well as parent-child relationships were identified by Ge and Wang as the two major domains in exploring children’s development throughout their adolescent years (Ge & Wang, 2019). Being able to build and maintain relationships are important to human development, however individuals living in poverty tend to avoid social interactions (Klarner & Knabe, 2019), this type of behavior can affect how students interact with one another in school and other settings. The behavior of students who experience issues with social interactions or building relationships could hurt the way they behave in the classroom.

Teaching in rural communities has been a popular topic over the years. In recent years, reform has been accelerated to improve education in rural areas; however, the

number of rural teachers has decreased substantially (Li et al., 2020). Opportunity structures that would allow individuals living in poverty to build or expand relationships are lost when businesses or public services move further, and shops and restaurants close. “If qualified people with good ideas and prospects leave the region because they see better opportunities elsewhere, they are no longer able to serve as bridging ties and providers of opportunities in the networks of those who remain behind” (Klarner & Knabe, 2019, p. 467). Ge and Wang (2019) studied child poverty in rural areas. They found that the progression in health, nutrition, education, and other aspects in poverty stricken areas is substantially lower than the national average.

Children living in rural areas sometimes face challenges that can hinder academic achievement. Children living in rural areas “fall into multidimensional poverty because of not only inadequate nutrition, educational opportunities, and public services but also low level of parents' education” (Ge & Wang, 2019, p. 209). These factors can stifle the full development of children in rural areas compared with those living in more affluent areas (Ge & Wang, 2019). One key to improving education in rural areas begins with hiring qualified teachers. For this reason, the local district has been providing a yearly bonus to qualified teachers working in the district. It is the hope of the Superintendent and Board Members that the teacher attrition rate will decrease, and teachers will remain in the district. This continuity of instruction may help more students in the area achieve a higher level in reading.

The archival data used for this basic qualitative study was retrieved from the State Department of Education website. The rural districts face academic challenges associated with the underperformance of adolescent readers (South Carolina Department of

Education, 2023). This is quite possibly a concern in numerous districts. To address this concern, many states have implemented legislation associated with improving reading achievement (Donegan & Wanzek, 2021). Including the data from the *South Carolina Ready* scores for Grade 6 reading students in one rural district for the past 3 years was necessary because it highlights the reading deficits in a rural district and provides insight into the problem I seek to address in this study.

The concepts selected for the literature review reflect a clear understanding of the topic. This rationale demonstrates the systematic process behind the review and highlights its value in advancing discussions about reading interventions for struggling middle school readers. Additionally, the literature review provides a foundation for addressing the research questions guiding this study. The literature review informs how teachers are implementing research-based strategies and programs to support struggling adolescent readers in rural settings and identifies the strategies and programs that teachers perceive as most beneficial for improving reading ability.

Summary and Conclusions

There were several major themes found throughout the literature reviewed. Themes include aspects of reading such as comprehension, fluency, sound/symbol association, schema theory, professional development, Response to Intervention (RTI), computer assisted programs, environmental stressors, and rural school characteristics. It is known that all these themes can affect struggling adolescent readers either positively or negatively. For example, when teachers receive adequate professional development, they may be able to effectively identify and support struggling readers with beneficial strategies and programs. What needs to be determined is what can be done to improve

reading achievement for struggling adolescent readers in the local district. The present study will help to fill the gap in literature available for teacher perceptions of beneficial reading strategies and programs for struggling adolescent students in low income, rural areas. The information presented in the current study will provide knowledge related to teaching struggling adolescent readers. Teachers will be able to use this information to make informed decisions on how to approach reading interventions for adolescent readers. This study has the potential to assist teachers with improving reading achievement in the local district and can provide stakeholders with needful information about which professional development opportunities will be the most desirable for teachers in the local district and for which programs they should fund.

In Chapter 3, information was presented related to the research method and design of the current study. My role as a researcher and any personal or professional relationships involving participants were revealed. The participant selection process was revealed as well as the instrumentation process. Procedures for recruitment of participants, the data analysis plan as well as internal validity and information related to transferability and dependability will be presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate teachers' experiences of implementation of research-based practices of reading intervention programs and strategies to aid struggling adolescent readers. In addition, I sought to determine teacher's experiences of which interventions they find particularly beneficial for adolescent students in rural communities. Chapter 3 provides information on the research design as well as the rationale for this study. The role of the researcher is explained, and personal and/or professional relationships I established with participants in the study are revealed. In the methodology section of Chapter 3, information on the procedures for participation selection, instrumentation, and a description of the recruiting procedure for participants and data collection will be provided. A data analysis plan is provided, and trustworthiness and ethical procedures are also described.

Research Design and Rationale

This basic qualitative study focused on the following research questions:

RQ1: How are teachers implementing research-based strategies and programs to support struggling adolescent readers in Grades 6th - 8th in rural settings?

RQ2: What strategies and programs do teachers perceive as most beneficial for improving reading ability?

These research questions guided the research and kept the study focused on teacher experiences of credible reading intervention programs and strategies that will support struggling readers.

Qualitative research focuses on human experiences and can be observed (Ravitch

& Carl, 2020). It also involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world because it studies things in its natural setting (Creswell, 2021). The qualitative design attempts to provide understanding of the phenomena in ways that are meaningful to the people it relates to (Creswell, 2021). It is also useful when studying issues related to education (Merriam, 2009). I decided to take a basic qualitative approach when conducting this study because this approach will lead me to the answers I seek as it relates to assisting struggling readers.

Qualitative studies may have a basic, generic, or traditional design. Merriam (2009) stated that the basic qualitative research design should be used by researchers who are interested in "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (p. 23). The generic design approach is often used in situations where the topic is relatively new or poorly understood (Kostere, 2021). The generic design allows an opportunity for exploratory research by allowing the researcher to explore smaller sample sizes (Kostere, 2021). The traditional basic design differs from the previously mentioned design types because most traditional qualitative designs are focused on subjective content of a given experience (Celis, 2019). The traditional design also explores the meanings, values, judgements, and beliefs associated with the experiences being studied (Celis, 2019).

Other types of qualitative research designs were considered such as ethnography, phenomenology, narrative, and case study. These designs could differ depending on the purpose of the research being conducted. Ethnographers seek to understand the beliefs and behaviors of members of a specific group (Creswell & Baez, 2020). Ethnography

research studies take place in a natural setting. Ethnographers are interested in what group members say and do in observations. They engage in the daily activities of the individuals or groups they are studying and document their observations. Ethnographers also study artifacts (Risku et al., 2022). With phenomenology research, the researcher seeks to understand the world based on how others view it and explores the experiences of people as well as the meaning they attribute to certain experiences (Williams, 2021). Ethnography was not chosen for this study because I chose to conduct one interview per participant and no observations. Additionally, phenomenology research can require extended involvement with the participants in multiple interviews. A phenomenological design was not applicable to this study because I conducted one interview with each participant, and phenomenology requires special phenomenological analysis. I used basic qualitative analysis. Narrative research was not a good fit for this study because narrative research has a different goal from my proposed study. Narrative research focuses on personal experiences and seeks to understand the ways people create meaning in their personal lives (Gilstein, 2020). Data for a narrative study can come in the form of letters, journals, conversations and interviews, photographs, and other artifacts (Gilstein, 2020). These items are then analyzed and used by researchers to determine life experiences (Gilstein, 2020). I did not study the participants' lives but instead focused on teachers' experiences of reading strategies and programs.

Case studies can be a form of qualitative research, but it would not have been a good design for this study. Although case study methodology is often used in social sciences such as psychology, medicine, law, political science, and education, it has its disadvantages (Range, 2019). Depending on what researchers choose to include in their

case studies, as well as the subjectivity of the case study approach, it can result in issues of biases (Range, 2019). When taking a case study approach, observations and interviews can still be conducted; however, it may require more time because approval is needed before collecting data in the forms of observations, which may be a challenge when minors or vulnerable populations are involved. After considering the various types of qualitative studies, I determined that a basic qualitative approach would be the best choice for this study since I only used interviews as my data source.

Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher in this study was to serve as an interviewer. I am currently employed as an English Language Arts teacher in a rural district. The district selected has schools identified as Title 1 schools and are in rural areas. In addition to being the 6th grade English Language Arts teacher at one of the elementary schools, I am also a state evaluator. I work closely with struggling readers and use research-based strategies and intervention programs daily to support struggling adolescent readers. I have no power to determine which programs are purchased for use by the district. Using Iready is the main computer-assisted intervention program used by the district and is not optional, but it is administered online, and all students can take part in the program. I can, however, select the additional programs and/or strategies that I deem beneficial for my struggling readers.

Researcher biases and power relationships were properly managed. I understood that biases could be formed due to my experience as an English Language Arts teacher in a local district. I was committed to not allowing my personal experiences to interfere with fully examining and understanding the experiences of the participants. To set my biases aside, I recorded my thoughts in a research journal. A research journal has many benefits

and can serve as a record of the research process. It was useful because it provides the researcher with a tool for tracking the research process (Miller, 2019). A research journal can also show the research process from the initial phase of research to the final paper allowing documentation of each step in researching and data collection (Miller, 2019). I recorded my ongoing thoughts and noted my biases, noting how they may differ from the interviewees.

Each of the participants was employed in the same district as I; however, I have had no previous interactions with teachers outside of the elementary school where I am employed unless we encountered each other briefly during a professional development opportunity. I am familiar with some of the participants in the school setting where I am employed; however, the familiarity is only from interacting during school events. I do not have, and have never had, supervisory responsibility for any of the participants, and teachers were not informed of other participants in the study. I recruited teachers from the local district for my qualitative research study by requesting their participation via email. All participants were asked to participate with the understanding that there was no incentive provided for participation.

Methodology

I employed a basic qualitative approach to examine teachers' experiences on effective reading intervention programs and strategies for supporting struggling readers. Qualitative research requires the involvement of human experience that can be observed. Researchers then seek to explain observed behaviors (Crabtree & Miller, 2023). It also involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world because it studies things in their natural setting. The qualitative design attempts to provide understanding of the

phenomena in ways that are meaningful to the people it relates to. It is also useful when studying issues related to education (Creswell & Baez, 2020). I decided to take a basic qualitative approach when conducting this study because this approach led me to the answers I was seeking as it relates to assisting struggling readers.

The study took place in a southeastern part of the United States. Each of the schools participating in the study has been identified as a Title 1 school. It is important to note that in some districts where the study is conducted, sixth grade students are housed within elementary schools. There are middle schools in the southeastern state which serve only seventh and eighth grade students.

Participant Selection

Reading tutors, reading interventionists, instructional facilitators, and Grades 6–8 reading instructors were the source of data collection. In this section, I discuss the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection for the participants. I would also like to note that no participants were recruited, and no data was collected until proper permission was received from Walden University and the superintendent of the local school district.

I used purposeful sampling when selecting participants. Purposeful sampling is a technique which is commonly used in qualitative research (Thomas, 2022). Purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting participants who are knowledgeable or have experience with the phenomenon being researched. Purposeful sampling serves as an effective method in research because it allows the researcher to reduce the pool of potential participants (Thomas, 2022) efficiently and swiftly. I selected participants as a source for data collection because I sought to investigate teacher experiences of

researched-based practices of reading intervention programs and strategies to aid struggling adolescent readers, and what interventions they found particularly beneficial for the students.

Once permission was granted from the administration of selected schools and Walden University, I emailed a letter of invitation to recruit teachers, reading tutors, and reading specialists. I accessed the email addresses of teachers and support staff by using the local district's website to search for individual school web pages. No outside resources were needed to access possible participants for this study. To encourage teachers and support staff, I provided a brief statement regarding the purpose of the study in the letter of invitation. I also informed participants that a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience was required to participate in the study.

I planned to invite 25 participants for this basic qualitative study. These 25 individuals were selected based on the knowledge that they serve adolescent readers in rural districts. Possible participants were language arts teachers, reading tutors, reading specialists, and reading interventionists who serve adolescent readers in rural districts. I selected this number because Creswell (2021) stated a qualitative study should have between five and 25 participants and because I wanted to focus on the reading intervention needs of Grade 6-8 language arts students. The 25 invited participants all served Grade 6-8 language arts students in a rural setting. The invited participants were licensed educators and served in middle or elementary schools in South Carolina. It was my hope that of the 25 invited participants, at least 50% would accept the offer to participate. In the district where the research took place, the elementary schools consist of

K-6th graders whereas the middle school provides instruction to seventh and eighth grade students.

The goal was to recruit a minimum of 12-15 participants. Ultimately, 12 participants were selected for this qualitative study. I recruited teachers, reading tutors, instructional facilitators, and reading interventionists to gain insight into their experiences with reading interventions designed for Grades 6–8 struggling readers. If I did not receive a response following my initial recruiting email, I sent a follow-up email and continued to send additional invitations to teachers in the district where I conducted the study until I secured the required number of participants.

As participants accepted or declined their invitations, I thanked them for their time. Participants who met the criteria outlined in the invitation letter received a follow up email notifying them of their acceptance to participate. I sent the acceptance email, attached an informed consent form, and requested that participants return a signed copy. Participants had the option to sign the informed consent form electronically or print, sign, and return, providing flexibility in how they submitted their consent. Five participants submitted a hard copy of the consent form while eight participants submitted a signed electronic form. I chose this procedure because due to the pandemic I wanted to minimize contact as much as possible. I suggested that participants keep a copy of the informed consent and informed them that I would keep a copy as well. After receiving their consent, interviews were scheduled. When the schedule was set for the interviews, I sent another email with a link to Google Meet and included the necessary attachments. In the informed consent form, I articulated the purpose of the study, data collection steps and procedures, risks, and benefits of participating in the study, explained that the interview

would be recorded, and that I would share a copy of the transcribed interview as well as the results from the study via email at an applicable time. All this information was provided in the interview protocol document. I also reassured participants that the interview questions were reviewed by experts in the field and that their privacy would be maintained. In addition, I provided the superintendent and all participants with contact information for myself and the representative who will serve as an additional point of contact if questions or concerns arise about the study.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument used for this was an interview protocol document that included interview questions (Appendix A). I developed interview questions based on research problems and related literature. I conducted interviews recorded via Google Meets. To address content validity, I asked three fellow teachers who were not in the participant pool to read my interview questions and provide feedback on whether the questions were clear and would reveal important information for the study. I considered the feedback given by the interview questions reviewers and made changes to questions as needed. This helped to add trustworthiness to my study.

Zoom and Google Meets are two of the leading apps that have been used since the Covid-19 pandemic for meetings. They provide videotelephony and online chat services (Lorenz et al., 2020). They are run through a cloud-based peer-to-peer software platform and are used for several purposes such as teleconferencing, telecommuting, distance education, and social relations (Lorenz et al., 2020). Zoom and Google Meetings can be synced with a calendar system that allows the participant to be reminded of the upcoming interview. Zoom and Google Meets deliver streamlined enterprise-grade video

conferencing from desktop computers as well as mobile devices (Gartner, 2020). In addition, features such as background noise suppression allowed for clear audio recordings during the interview (Gartner, 2020). By using Zoom or Google Meets as sources for interviews, research participants and I could maintain social distancing while collecting data.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Before selecting participants, I received approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once IRB granted approval, I emailed the local district superintendent. In the email I provided an overview of the purpose of the study and asked if it was possible for the research to be conducted in their school district. Once I received written permission from the superintendent, I began to recruit participants. I determined which teachers, reading tutors, instructional facilitators, and reading coaches and interventionists to contact by viewing their job titles on district staff directories and confirming that they serve Grade 6th-8th students. After identifying possible participants, schools within rural districts were identified as sites for participation in the study. In addition to receiving permission from the superintendent, I informed the principals at each site of the basic qualitative study being conducted.

Due to local concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were held virtually. Virtual interviews took place via Google Meets. These interviews were conducted in the location of the participant's choice. Prior to each interview participants were provided with a consent form to ensure that each participant understood their rights and responsibilities. Participants were provided with the opportunity to decline participation or agree to participate. Participants were told that I would audio record the

interview, but they had the option to turn off the camera if desired. Qualitative data collection methods can vary to include participant observation, documentary analysis, narrative analysis, and in-depth qualitative research interviews (Harper et al., 2020). For this basic qualitative study, I conducted in-depth, semistructured, open-ended interviews, 25-60 minutes long. It was my goal to only conduct one interview, so follow ups were not required. I requested that participants find a quiet spot free of interruptions or distractions. I also reminded participants that I would be alone during the interview to protect their privacy. Once participants were established, they were each assigned a number to mask their individual identity. Throughout the research, participants were referred to using the numeric code assigned and stored on my personal computer instead of by name. This was done to protect the privacy of all research participants.

Data Analysis Plan

For this study I employed a thematic analysis approach. This approach was used to connect the data collected to my research questions. This method, as described by Roberts et al. (2019), is ideal for analyzing non-numerical data by identifying recurring themes and patterns. For RQ1, I analyzed the data to uncover how teachers implemented research-based strategies and programs to support struggling adolescent readers in Grades 6–8 in a rural setting. For RQ2, I examined the data to determine which strategies and programs teachers perceived as most beneficial for improving reading ability. By utilizing thematic analysis, I was able to systematically identify and categorize emerging themes from the participants' responses, ensuring a thorough and meaningful interpretation of the data in alignment with the research questions. After each interview was transcribed using

the Google Meets transcribe feature, I began using Braun's (2019) six phase process to analyze data and determine which themes are identified. Braun's six phases are:

Phase 1 reread transcripts until you are familiar with the information presented.

Phase 2 determine codes by documenting how and when patterns occur.

Phase 3 generate themes.

Phase 4 review themes to determine if they support the data.

Phase 5 define each theme.

Phase 6 write the final report (Braun et al., 2019).

Once themes were identified I began to facilitate interpretation of the material. The thematic analysis approach is a good way to analyze qualitative data. It enables researchers to examine diverse themes and trends within the information while offering flexibility in addressing different dimensions of the research topic.

The type of coding procedure I used was open coding. Coding is how I found common themes, additionally it was part of the thematic analysis process (Braun & Clark, 2022). While using open coding concepts began to emerge from the data. I later grouped these concepts into conceptual categories. Coding involves examining, reflecting on, and arranging gathered observations. Both deductive and inductive research methods utilize coding (Locke et al., 2020). Open coding was used to build a descriptive framework of the data collected and was my initial form of coding.

In addition to open coding, I used axial coding. Axial coding is essential for exploring the connections between concepts and categories that were established during the open coding phase (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). Axial coding was used as the second form of coding in my data analysis plan. This process was used to look at the

relationships among the open codes. Axial coding was selected because it is one way to construct relatedness of the data. After using axial codes, I began generating themes. I set up a grid that lists the coded words or phrases in a vertical list, then write the numbers for the participants across the top. I can then enter a check next to each code for each participant. This procedure gives a visual representation of different codes and frequencies used.

The themes I developed from open coding and axial coding are presented in my research on teacher experiences with researched-based programs and strategies for struggling readers in Grades 6–8 in Table 4. By using interviews, I was able to have rich discussions that allowed me to understand the perceptions of the participants. Asking open ended questions as well as probing questions, allowed participants to share their experiences with using researched-based reading strategies and implementing technology enhanced reading intervention programs to assist struggling adolescent readers. In addition, all data was included in the analysis, and I also would like to note that there were not any discrepant ideas among the participants.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research relies on interpretive data, which could lead to the findings being subject to scrutiny and questioning. Trustworthiness should be established by the researcher throughout the research process. Establishing trustworthiness is crucial in qualitative research to ensure that findings are credible, reliable, and applicable. Trustworthiness encompasses several key criteria, such as credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Researchers build trustworthiness by employing strategies like triangulation of data sources, member checking, and reflexive journaling

(Ahmed, 2024). As a researcher, I ensured that my interview questions were applicable by receiving feedback from experts in the field. I provided evidence of my findings to ensure the reliability and validity of the research. I accomplished this by having my interviews recorded and transcribed using the Google Meets record and transcription features. This helped with trustworthiness because recordings provide a detailed transcription that could be reviewed by peers or other stakeholders, increasing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Ahmed, 2024). When selecting participants, I ensured that they were reliable and knowledgeable of the research topic by having them respond to background questions regarding their teaching experience prior to providing participants with the informed consent form. By recording and transcribing data, I upheld the integrity of my findings, enabling a transparent analysis that enhances the study's validity.

Reliability and validity can also be important components for collecting qualitative data. Reliability refers to truthfulness and validity refers to the accuracy of the research findings (Ahmed & Ishtiaq, 2021). Reliability makes it possible to show consistent support for one’s analysis of the data collected from research participants (Ahmed & Ishtiaq, 2021). The validity component is related to the appropriateness of data collected. It relates to how accurately the data represents the actual results among both the participants of a study and comparable individuals who are not partaking in the study (Ahmed & Ishtiaq, 2021). To ensure reliability, I employed a consistent coding procedure during the thematic analysis process. I reviewed the data multiple times and identified codes that were applied across all participants’ responses. An audit trail was used to document each step of the analysis process. To show validity, I conducted member checking by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants to confirm

that the themes identified accurately represented their experiences and perceptions. Using member checking, I was able to ensure reliability and validity. Both are essential in qualitative research when producing credible and meaningful findings.

Building on this foundation, I used the data collected from interviews to apply interrater reliability (IRR) and validity measures. These methods, as emphasized by Cole (2023), are critical for reinforcing the rigor and credibility of qualitative studies, transforming raw data into trustworthy conclusions. Using interrater reliability methods, I had three experts independently review the coding of my interview data, allowing for a consistency check between coders and minimizing interpretive bias. This approach aligns to improve transparency in qualitative analysis, as it ensures that the coding process is reliable and that findings accurately reflect the phenomena being studied. Incorporating interrater reliability enhanced confidence in my data analysis coding and strengthened the validity of my research findings.

To enhance credibility in my research, I used member checking, a widely recognized technique in qualitative research. After transcribing each interview word for word, I shared the transcript with the respective participants. This allowed them to review the data, ensure its accuracy, and suggest any necessary changes to better reflect their perspectives (Motulsky, 2021). Once I analyzed the transcripts, I summarized the findings and emailed the summary to participants. This gave them an opportunity to see how their input was being represented and provide feedback. Any additional insights or clarifications were incorporated into the final discussion. This process not only validates the data but also fosters a sense of collaboration by allowing participants to reflect on how their ideas are portrayed in the study. Additionally, I maintained a researcher journal

throughout the study. This journal served as a reflective tool, helping me document thoughts, observations, and any evolving interpretations, which further supported the transparency and trustworthiness of the research process.

For transferability, I selected to use thick description. Detailed descriptions of qualitative findings are essential for improving the transferability of qualitative research (Younas et al., 2023). Thick description enhances transferability by providing sufficient contextual information for readers to assess the applicability of the research to their own situations. By including details about the setting, participants, and the processes observed, researchers enable others to draw parallels between the study's context and their own (Younas et al., 2023). The study focused on struggling adolescent readers in a rural community; but by presenting information using thick description, it may be transferable to other age groups and similar educational settings. By using thick descriptions, researchers and teachers in similar settings may be able to find something that is applicable to them.

To establish trustworthiness in qualitative research, dependability and confirmability are critical components, often addressed using an audit trail. Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the research process over time. It involves ensuring that the methods used are logical, traceable, and clearly documented, enabling others to comprehend and possibly reproduce the study under comparable conditions. Dependability is demonstrated by detailing the research design, implementation, and any changes made during the study (Ahmed, 2024). Confirmability highlights the objectivity of the research findings, ensuring they are rooted in the participants' experiences rather than shaped by the researcher's personal biases or tendencies. It requires a clear trail of

evidence showing how data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted, allowing others to confirm the findings' accuracy (Adler, 2022). An audit trail ties these concepts together by systematically documenting all stages of the research process, including the theoretical framework, data collection methods, analytical procedures, and decision-making processes. To ensure transparency and organization, I maintained an audit trail. This included detailed documentation of the steps taken during thematic analysis. I kept notes as I refined the codes identified, recorded patterns, and themes. The audit trail captured the process of organizing data into tables, analyzing participant responses, and identifying recurring themes. Documenting these steps in detail provided a clear record of the data analysis process. By maintaining detailed records, the researcher provides transparency and allows for external evaluation of the study's credibility (Carcary, 2020). This approach also supports both dependability and confirmability by demonstrating that the research is free from undue bias. Using an audit trail, I ensured that all significant elements of the research process were comprehensively recorded, reinforcing the reliability and trustworthiness of my findings.

The data analysis process also involved documenting the evolution of my thoughts throughout the research project. I provided a detailed account of how data was collected and described the interview process. My analysis also includes examples of the coding process, and I specified if any codes were grouped together for thematic insights. Maintaining a research journal ensures transparency and captures reflective thoughts. By employing an audit trail and research journal I was able to document each stage of the research process. These efforts enabled me to establish both dependability and confirmability, reinforcing the study's credibility and trustworthiness.

Ethical Procedures

Walden University's Research Ethics Planning Sheet was used to ensure I manage any possible ethical concerns. By understanding the 40 ethical standards being used by the Institutional Review Board, I made certain that I eliminated any foreseeable issues or challenges beforehand. After successfully completing my proposal and oral proposal defense, I began the process of obtaining IRB approval. The first step involved completing an online form outlining the details of my study, including its title, purpose, and target participants. In the second phase, I was required to submit supporting materials for review, such as the consent form, permission to conduct the study, and participant invitation letters. Once I had completed both phases and met all requirements, I was granted IRB approval #01-03-24-0750961 to proceed with conducting my research study. Protecting the rights and interests of each human participant was a priority.

As mentioned previously, the informed consent form utilized included the purpose of the study and participants' rights. Participants were reminded they could leave the study at any time, and their responses would be guarded to honor confidentiality. To protect the rights of participants and to ensure data remains confidential, I did not include names, nor did I include the names of their respective settings or any information that will allow identification of a participant. Instead, each participant was assigned a number, and each setting was assigned a letter. All interview recordings and transcripts were saved on a password-protected PC to maintain the protection of data. Interviews were conducted via Google Meets eliminating the risk of participants contracting Covid-19. Additionally, introductions from initial contact and other forms of communication such as email and phone calls were taken prior to interviews to build rapport with participants.

These procedures allowed participants to feel as if they are in a non-threatening environment. All printed documents were stored in a locked file cabinet where only I had access. All data will be stored for 5 years after the research is published. At this time, if data does not need to be reanalyzed, printed documents will be shredded and recording, transcripts, and other electronic documents will be deleted from the PC. If a change needs to be made in the study, I will contact IRB and get approval for the changes.

Summary

In Chapter 3, the research purpose and an in-depth look into the research methods were presented. This was followed by the research design and rationale for the proposed study. The role of the researcher was defined, and any personal or professional relationships were revealed. An explanation of the research methodology and procedures for participant collection was provided. Additionally, the methodology section is where I provided information related to interviews. Interviews were the data collection instrument used for determining teachers' perceptions of researched-based programs and strategies for struggling adolescent readers. In addition to providing information on the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, I shared my data analysis plan. In the trustworthiness section, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability were addressed. The last section of Chapter 3, Ethical Procedures, is where I addressed the ethical treatment of human participants and described the treatment of data. Chapter 4 includes the results and discussion of the basic qualitative research I conducted.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate teachers' experiences in the implementation of research-based practices in reading intervention

programs and strategies to aid struggling adolescent readers. In addition, I explored teachers' experiences and which interventions they find particularly beneficial for adolescent students. In his basic qualitative study, I focused on the following research questions: How are teachers implementing research-based strategies and programs to support struggling adolescent readers in Grades 6–8 in rural settings? What strategies and programs do teachers perceive as most beneficial for improving reading ability? In this chapter, I present the findings from the study and provide an overview of the research process. Chapter 4 includes a detailed discussion of the setting, participant demographics, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Furthermore, I outline the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings and their implications.

Setting

This basic qualitative study was conducted using the Google Meet online conferencing platform. Participants were given the flexibility to select their preferred date and time for the interview, and each interview was completed in one session. Participants conducted their interviews either from their school or home settings. Many expressed that their busy schedules made after-school hours and weekends more convenient for participating.

This basic qualitative study involved 12 participants from South Carolina, including English Language Arts teachers in Grades 6–8, instructional facilitators, reading coaches, and a reading interventionist. These participants were selected to provide a variety of perspectives on reading instruction and intervention practices at the middle school level. The participants included a diverse group of 12 individuals: two

White females, one White male, one biracial female, one Filipino female, and seven African American females. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants from both the local district and neighboring district, ensuring a range of perspectives. Participants' teaching experience varied widely, from 3 to 39 years, with many holdings specialized educational endorsements such as Read to Succeed, Gifted and Talented, and LETRS certifications.

The first 12 individuals to meet the qualifications and complete the consent forms were selected for the study, and interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times. Before beginning each interview, I ensured that participants fully understood the study's purpose and had the opportunity to ask any questions. The interviews were conducted with minimal interruptions. One participant briefly lost connection due to a computer issue but quickly rejoined, and another interview experienced a minor interruption from an announcement. Despite these small challenges, all interviews were completed successfully and provided valuable insights for the study. Further details can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Experience and Educational Endorsements

Participant Code	Years of Experience	Educational Endorsements
Participant 1	15	3
Participant 2	18	2
Participant 3	13	2
Participant 4	7	3
Participant 5	5	1
Participant 6	34	3
Participant 7	3	0
Participant 8	8	2
Participant 9	11	2
Participant 10	18	1
Participant 11	39	5
Participant 12	7	0

Note. Participants' years of experience and number of endorsements.

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the IRB and the appropriate school district personnel, I began emailing potential participants. Using staff directories available on each school's website, I identified eligible participants and sent invitation emails to introduce the study and outline the participation process. The data collection for this study was conducted using Google Meet, with interviews taking place between October 30, 2024, and November 23, 2024. Each of the 12 participants was assigned a unique

code, and the interviews varied in duration, ranging from approximately 18 to 56 minutes. All interviews were completed in a single session as expected, with participants selecting their preferred dates and times.

I collected data using semistructured interviews, which were recorded via Google Meet. Although my original plan outlined in Chapter 3 included Zoom as a potential platform, all participants opted for Google Meet. The platform's transcription feature was used to generate written records of interviews. To ensure accuracy, I shared the transcripts with participants, allowing them to review and verify their responses. I organized the verified responses into a table format, which helped me identify codes and themes within the data. Throughout the research process, I compiled my notes, reflections, and analytical ideas in a reflexive journal to document my thought process and enhance the study's transparency.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected from 12 participants through semistructured interviews, I followed an open coding process. First, I recorded and transcribed each interview to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data. I then organized the transcribed responses into a table format. This allowed for a clear overview of the participants' input. Using the table I created using an Excel spread sheet, I inputted the transcribed responses; I carefully reviewed the responses and identified recurring themes and patterns based on the participants' responses. From these patterns, I developed descriptive codes that captured the participants' viewpoints. This facilitated a detailed analysis of the data collected.

I analyzed the experiences shared by the research participants to identify both similarities and differences in their views on implementing reading interventions for struggling readers in Grades 6–8. Initially, I organized the data into two separate tables, each aligned with a specific research question. Themes that emerged from RQ1 were program implementation, data-driven decisions, differentiation, teacher training, student engagement and buy in, and a focus on foundational skills. Codes that emerged from RQ2 were program effectiveness, literacy components, student engagement, differentiation, teacher and technology integration. During the second phase of coding, I examined both tables collectively to identify overlapping patterns. For example, student engagement and buy in, and differentiation. To ensure accuracy and depth of analysis, I cross referenced the codes with the interview transcripts and entries from my reflexive journal, uncovering key themes. The key themes identified for RQ1 included the effectiveness of current programs, the need for consistency, strategies for building confidence in struggling readers, and the importance of teacher-student conferencing and feedback. For RQ2, the key themes focused on alignment with best practices, challenges in implementation, parental involvement, and program recommendations. No discrepant cases emerged during the study.

Results

Data analysis revealed a detailed understanding of the emerging codes and key themes related to teacher experiences with researched based programs to help struggling readers in Grades 6–8. Based on data collected in response to RQ1 findings indicate that teachers in the focus setting implement research-based strategies and programs to support struggling 6th-8th grade readers through structured interventions like I-Ready, data driven

decision-making based on assessments such as DIBELS and MasteryConnect, and the use of pre- and posttests to track progress. They also prioritize student engagement and motivation by incorporating strategies like games and incentives to encourage participation and buy in. Findings for RQ2 indicate based on teacher experiences the most beneficial strategies and programs were those that were personalized and technology driven, such as I-Ready, Read 180. UFly was also noted as a beneficial program and includes a technology component. Teachers also valued initiatives like PBIS Celebrations, personalized learning paths, and small group or one-on-one instruction. Additionally, teachers highlighted the importance of differentiation, focused instruction in areas like phonics, comprehension, and vocabulary, and engaging parents through newsletters and workshops. Real-world connections and technology integrations were also considered key elements for enhancing student learning.

Teachers frequently referenced structured programs such as I-Ready, UFly, MasteryConnect, and Read 180 for their ability to provide tailored interventions and resources. These programs were combined with teacher-led instruction, student practice, and technology-assisted learning to address specific skill gaps. The progress monitoring features and assessments in these programs ensured alignment with students' needs and allowed for targeted interventions. Participant 6 noted, "Read 180 aligns with standards, reinforces classroom learning, and provides individual growth opportunities." Across these programs, foundational literacy components such as phonics, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and phonemic awareness were consistently emphasized, with many lessons incorporating decodable texts to bridge the gap between instruction and independent practice.

Student engagement was mentioned frequently, with teachers highlighting gamification, personalization, and the use of incentives to motivate students. Examples included PBIS celebrations, in-class rewards, class challenges, and individualized learning paths, which teachers noted significantly increased participation and ownership. As Participant 4 shared, "Students thrive when they see tangible results, like through progress-monitoring tools, and engage in personalized learning paths." Participant 5 shared, “They love competitiveness, so we’ve included passing lessons into our PBIS celebrations. One quarter we had a volleyball game, so they really liked that.” Differentiation also emerged as a recurring strategy, with teachers using small group instruction, one-on-one sessions, and diagnostic data to deliver targeted support. Creative approaches, such as interest-based groupings, further enhanced student engagement and outcomes. Participant 8 observed, "Small groups and modeling allow students to practice skills in a low-pressure environment, which yields the greatest growth." Technology integration was both a strength and a challenge. Teachers relied on tools like Mastery Connect and UFly slides to enrich lessons and monitor progress. While effective, it was noted that technology was occasionally overused, leading to student disengagement. Participant 2 stated, “We don't want instruction to be 100% technology. It can help us; we were told that 25% of our class time should be spent on technology.” The balance of teacher-led instruction and technology was critical to ensuring technology’s effectiveness in supporting literacy growth.

Key themes provided additional insights into the broader patterns within the data. The alignment of programs with Marzano’s best practices, gradual release, scaffolding, and foundational literacy skills like phonics and phonemic awareness, was a major

strength. However, challenges in implementation persisted, particularly with limited planning time and the stigmatization of older students who needed foundational support. Teachers also reported mixed levels of parental involvement, with many parents unaware of how to support their child's literacy development. To address this, workshops, newsletters, and take-home activities were employed to bridge the gap, although their effectiveness varied. The need for consistency in program implementation was another recurring theme. Teachers advocated for district-wide alignment in intervention frameworks and access to literacy coaches to ensure equitable and effective practices. They also called for the integration of engaging, culturally relevant texts to maintain student interest and build real-world connections. Quotes supported these themes, includes Participant 6, "Read 180 aligns with standards, reinforces classroom learning, and provides individual growth opportunities" and Participant 8, "Small groups and modeling allow students to practice skills in a low-pressure environment, which yields the greatest growth.” In summary, the overlapping codes program effectiveness, literacy components, student engagement, differentiation, and teacher integration highlight the complexity of successful reading interventions. The key themes focused on aligning programs with best practices, addressing implementation challenges, improving support for struggling readers, and enhancing the effectiveness of teacher-student feedback. These findings offer valuable insights into the tools and strategies needed to effectively support struggling readers in Grades 6–8.

Table 3

Key Themes Identified

Theme	Key Insights from Participant Responses	Participant Code	Examples from Collected Data
Alignment with best practices	Participants emphasized research-based strategies like scaffolding, small group instruction, and differentiation.	Participant 1	"Our interventions are based on best practices... we base all of our interventions on what we know is good for readers."
Challenges in implementing reading intervention	Time constraints, lack of fidelity in using programs, and limited training were highlighted as major barriers.	Participant 3	"Time... there's very little time when trying to teach other subjects."
Effectiveness of current programs	Programs like i-Ready were mentioned as useful but often required a better understanding of using available resources and consistent application.	Participant 1	"i-Ready... seems to be valuable, but we're still learning how to use it effectively."
Data-driven decision making	Participants used tools like Mastery Connect, I-Ready, Ufly, DIBELS, and teacher-created assessments to track student progress and guide instruction.	Participant 2	"We use Mastery Connect... it lets us know where students are and helps organize groups."
Small groups	Small group instruction was frequently cited as an	Participant 4	"For intervention, I use leveled reading groups. I break them up into

effective intervention method for struggling readers.	groups and provide different text choices based on the student's interests, such as sports or video games, and their Lexile levels."

Note. Themes were identified through qualitative analysis of interview transcripts and participant reflections.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness in my qualitative research, I adhered to the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as outlined by Ahmed (2024). Credibility was achieved through triangulation, utilizing data from interview transcripts, reflexive journaling, and participant feedback to ensure an accurate representation of findings. Transferability was supported by providing rich descriptions enabling others to apply the findings to their contexts. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a transparent and consistent audit trail of the research process, including coding and analysis. Finally, confirmability was established using reflexive journaling. This was used to mitigate researcher bias and ensure the findings were grounded in the participants' experiences.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I provided a detailed overview of the study's results, and evidence supporting its trustworthiness. The chapter begins with a description of the setting in which the research was conducted. I also introduced the participants, including years of experience, and adding insight into their perspectives within the research. The data collection process was outlined, including the location and methods used to gather rich

and meaningful data. I then explained the data analysis process, detailing how specific codes and themes were developed from the data. This process involved open coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis, leading to the emergence of 11 key themes. These themes are presented in the chart above to highlight the findings visually. The results section delves into these themes, supported by direct evidence from the data to illustrate their significance. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I employed rigorous procedures such as triangulation, member checking, and maintaining an audit trail, which are discussed in detail. These steps reinforce the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the findings. By presenting a comprehensive analysis and adhering to standards set by Walden University, Chapter 4 establishes a clear link between the research questions, the data collected, and the meaningful themes that emerged. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings, discusses the limitations of the study, and offers recommendations for future research. Additionally, it explores the implications of the study for social change, focusing on how the findings can inform and improve reading practices.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate teachers' implementation of research-based reading intervention programs and their experience of using effective strategies for supporting struggling sixth through eighth-grade readers in a rural setting. Despite training and professional development efforts, student progress remained insufficient. Understanding which strategies educators find most effective can help inform initiatives aimed at improving reading outcomes for struggling adolescent readers in Grades 6–8.

The RQ1 findings presented both strengths and challenges of reading interventions and reading strategies. Key findings for RQ1 revealed that teachers found IReady to be valuable for collecting skill-specific data, and UFly was effective for its flexibility and phonics practices. As it relates to the effectiveness of current programs, inconsistencies with implementation and limited use hindered program effectiveness. While professional development opportunities like LETRS training and peer collaboration were appreciated, gaps remained in RTI and MTSS training. Teachers expressed a need for more structured literacy support and follow-up training. Diagnostic tools like MAP, MasteryConnect, and Dibels helped target interventions, but participants expressed that excessive testing led to student fatigue. Misalignment between assessment formats and instruction created challenges. Teachers expressed small group instruction, leveled texts, and culturally relevant materials to enhance student engagement. Teachers also used gamification, such as March Madness competitions and various rewards, to motivate students and reinforce skills. Setting goals and using incentives, such as competitions and tangible rewards, encouraged student participation. However, some

students felt embarrassed about receiving interventions, and sometimes rushed through diagnostics which led to inaccurate placements. Although teachers identified effective strategies for assisting struggling readers in Grades 6–8, the inconsistency in program use, training, and assessment alignment needs to be addressed.

The findings for RQ2 revealed best practices aligned with reading intervention programs and identified the challenges teachers faced in implementing reading interventions, engaging parental involvement, and accessing resources. These findings show that the current reading interventions used in the district are aligned with best practices such as scaffolding, gradual release, and phonics instruction. The challenges arise with implementation, limited planning time, and the stigma associated with reinforcing foundational skills with students in Grades 6–8. As it relates to parental involvement, efforts like workshops and take-home activities were beneficial. Teachers recommended district-wide consistency in intervention frameworks, increased access to literacy coaches, and access to engaging real-world texts that would support student interest. Some of the strategies that were perceived as effective strategies included small group instruction, repeated readings, and personalized progress monitoring. However, teachers noted that improvements in training, planning time, and parental engagement were needed.

Interpretation of the Findings

The information provided in my literature review confirms the key findings. Li et al. (2020) provided information about the importance of quality instruction and the challenges presented by teacher attrition. The fact that rural schools offer financial incentives to retain teachers directly aligns with the research on how teacher stability

impacts student learning outcomes. Cho and Ma (2021) conducted a research study that compared reading strategies and schema building. They showed reading comprehension improved when the strategies were utilized. This aligns with the best practices and strategies used by the participants. My review of the literature provided insight into topics such as phonics, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and schema theory. These aspects confirm that participants are using best practices. Basma and Savage (2023) showed for effective reading practices to occur; educator support should be ongoing. The key findings confirm that teachers' experience with professional development, PLC's and training was beneficial, and more training was requested. Grierson et al. (2022) study included cycles of reflections where teachers identified their goals. The findings from the study determined that teachers desired the reading coaches to model best practices and to work alongside them in the classroom to assist with lesson planning. This also confirms key findings because participants noted a need for more direct contact with the reading coach. Participants utilize a computer-assisted program daily as their main intervention tool. Based on the literature review the use of computer-assisted programs have increased over the years, this confirms teacher experiences. The characteristics of rural schools and poverty are aligned. Things such as limited access to resources and high teacher turnover contribute to the struggles that rural community students face. For example, if a student misses the school bus, they may not have transportation and will therefore miss school. Klarna and Knabe (2019) discussed the inability to access quality healthcare and employment. The state test data confirms that students in rural community's face disadvantages that go beyond economic hardship. There is a strong correlation between my literature review and research findings.

Marzano's RTI was aligned with the key findings of the research study. Summarizing, note taking, compare and contrast, homework, practice, cooperative learning, and providing feedback were identified as best practice by participants. These key findings are aligned with Marzano's RTI.

Limitations of the Study

When collecting qualitative data, researchers may experience limitations. I encountered empirical limitations in recruiting participants, particularly due to the study taking place in a rural district with a limited pool of potential participants. However, I was able to recruit 12 participants from various schools in the district for interviews. Although the sample size was relatively small and geographically restricted, the diverse range of participants helped mitigate some of these limitations. It is important to note that these limitations did not affect the trustworthiness of the study, but they may limit the broader applicability of the findings.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for further research were revealed in the study. Teachers suggested strategies that would enhance students' reading abilities in Grades 6–8; they recommended consistency with program use, more professional development with program use, and using data to guide instruction. Consistent program use ensures that students receive continuous and reliable support, while professional development helps teachers feel more confident and capable in delivering instruction. Using data to guide instruction allows for a more personalized approach, targeting individual student needs, and improving overall effectiveness. More engaging and culturally relevant texts were also recommended, as they can increase student motivation and make learning more

relatable, ultimately fostering better comprehension and a deeper connection with the material. Other recommendations included collecting data from multiple districts, such as urban and suburban districts, or conducting numerous rural studies and comparing the data. These suggestions would provide a broader, more diverse understanding of how various contexts impact reading interventions. Such data would allow for the identification of patterns and best practices that are effective across different educational settings. These recommendations are supported by the literature review, which highlights the importance of professional development, diverse texts, and a data-driven approach to improving student outcomes.

Implications

The key findings of this study have the potential to promote positive social change by providing educators with insight and best practices for supporting struggling readers in Grades 6–8. By understanding the challenges these students face and using evidence-based strategies, teachers can better address the diverse needs of their students, potentially improving literacy outcomes. This study can serve as a valuable resource for educators looking to improve student achievement, particularly in Grades 6–8. Additionally, the findings can offer guidance on the design of future professional development and training programs, helping teachers build the necessary skills and confidence to implement effective reading interventions. This study has the potential to create lasting improvements in student outcomes, contributing to a more equitable educational experience for all learners.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore teacher experiences of researched based programs and strategies to help struggling readers in Grades 6–8. I addressed the number of intervention programs available and sought to understand which programs and research-based strategies were most effective through the teacher's lens. The key findings highlighted both the strengths and challenges of current interventions. These findings emphasized the need for consistency in implementation and improved training opportunities. By examining teacher experiences, I was able to contribute insights that can be used to enhance reading instruction and improve reading achievement. The implications of this research reach beyond the classroom, fostering positive social change by equipping teachers with proven strategies supported by literature, to close achievement gaps, and improve literacy outcomes for struggling readers. Making sure all students have access to high-quality, research-driven interventions is a move toward achieving educational equity. in rural districts where resources may be limited.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Date:

Time of Interview:

Interviewee:

Background Questions:

1. How many years of teaching experience do you have? How many of these years were with adolescent readers?
2. (Instructional Coaches, Tutors, Reading Specialists) How long have you served in your current capacity? How many years of experience did you have before entering into your current position?
3. Do you have any educational endorsements? (Read to Succeed, Gifted & Talented etc.)
4. How would you define a struggling reader?
5. What do you believe are the roles and responsibilities of a reading teacher?
6. What do you believe are the roles and responsibilities of a reading student?

Research Questions:

RQ1: How are teachers implementing research-based strategies and programs to support struggling 6th-8th grade readers in the focus setting?

1. How do your current reading intervention strategies align with high-quality instructional practices?
2. How do you ensure that your reading intervention strategies are effectively implemented in your classroom?

3. Which reading intervention programs or RTI techniques have you found most effective for middle school students?
4. How do these interventions address the specific needs of struggling readers?
5. How adequately trained do you feel in implementing the RTI reading intervention strategies and programs provided in your setting?
6. What aspects of your training have been most or least helpful?
7. What is your evaluation of the current reading intervention programs being offered in terms of their effectiveness and alignment with best practices for supporting struggling readers?
8. How are these strategies helping to grow struggling adolescent readers?
9. How do you differentiate reading interventions to address the diverse learning needs and varying reading levels of students in your classroom?
10. How do you measure the effectiveness of your reading intervention strategies?
11. How would you include a student in setting goals for themselves to increase their reading Lexile (To ensure that they can have input in their individual learning plan)?

RQ2: What strategies and programs do teachers perceive as most beneficial?

1. How do the intervention programs you find most beneficial align with widely recognized principles of effective interventions for struggling adolescent readers?
2. What specific features of these programs contribute to their effectiveness?
3. Which literacy components are integrated into the intervention programs you use?

4. How do these components align with best practices for addressing the specific needs of struggling readers?
5. Which reading intervention strategies have you found to result in the greatest student growth?
6. How do these strategies align with proven frameworks for maximizing effectiveness in struggling readers?
7. What are the main challenges you face in implementing reading interventions for struggling adolescent readers?
8. What strategies within established intervention frameworks can help minimize these challenges?
9. How does technology support or enhance your reading intervention strategies?
10. In what ways does it align with structured intervention models to improve student outcomes?
11. What challenges do you encounter in fostering parental involvement in reading interventions?
12. What strategies from intervention models could help overcome these challenges?
13. Please provide examples of how reading interventions have significantly improved a student's reading ability, and what factors contributed to these successes?

14. What changes or improvements would you propose for your school's reading intervention approach to better align with research-backed frameworks and enhance overall effectiveness?

Appendix B: Interview Question Guide

Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions and Maslow's Response to Intervention

Interview Question	Research Question or Framework
1. How do you currently implement reading intervention strategies in your classroom?	RQ1: How are teachers implementing research-based strategies and programs to support struggling 6th-8th grade readers in the focus setting?
2. What specific reading intervention programs or techniques have you found most effective for middle school students?	RQ1
3. Do you feel properly trained in implementing the strategies and programs offered in your setting? Elaborate	RQ1
4. What type of professional development or training have you received related to reading intervention?	RQ1
5. What additional training or resources do you feel would help you improve your reading intervention practices?	RQ1
6. What are your overall perceptions of the current reading intervention programs being offered?	RQ1
7. How are these strategies helping to grow struggling adolescent readers?	RQ1

8. How do you address diverse learning needs and reading levels in your classroom?	RQ1

9. How do you assess students' reading levels and progress in your intervention programs?	RQ1
10. What tools or assessments do you find most useful for monitoring the progress of students in reading intervention?	RQ1
11. How do you measure the effectiveness of your reading intervention strategies?	RQ1
12. How would you motivate a student to "buy into" taking part in reading intervention if they are resistant to it?	RQ1
13. Think about the intervention programs that you perceive as the most beneficial. What makes this program a good resource for providing reading intervention to adolescent struggling readers?	RQ2: What strategies and programs do teachers perceive as most beneficial?
14. Which literacy components are included in the program? How do you perceive these components will assist struggling readers?	RQ2
15. According to your perception, which reading intervention strategies have you used that resulted in maximum student growth?	RQ2

16. What do you perceive as the biggest challenge when providing reading intervention instruction to struggling adolescent readers? What can be done to reduce these challenges?	RQ2
17. What role does technology play in your reading intervention strategies?	RQ2
18. How do you involve parents in supporting reading intervention efforts at home?	RQ2
19. What challenges do you face in getting parents to engage with their child's reading intervention?	RQ2
20. Can you share any success stories or examples where reading intervention has significantly improved a student's reading ability?	RQ2
21. What changes or improvements would you like to see in your school's approach to reading intervention?	RQ2
22. How do you envision the future of reading intervention in middle school settings?	RQ2