

2016

Teacher Perspectives on Increasing Fourth-Grade Reading Behaviors

Theresa Evans Hunter
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Theresa Hunter

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

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by

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MA, Walden University, 2007

BA, Washington State University, 1998

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

April 2016

Abstract

Elementary students in the United States are expected to read proficiently in order to be successful on high-stakes assessments. Researchers have found that many elementary students lack the motivation to become frequent readers. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the reading motivational techniques used at a local district to encourage elementary students to become frequent readers. Framed by Skinner's operant conditioning theory and the focus on motivators and their effects on learning outcomes, the research questions explored teachers' perceptions of the motivators that increase student reading in the elementary grades. Data for the study were collected through individual interviews with a sample of 6 teachers who volunteered from the district's elementary schools. Open coding of the transcribed interview data and thematic analysis revealed 5 overarching themes: difficulties and challenges, preexisting perceptions, perceived effectiveness of used incentives/motivators, applicability to other grade levels, and factors critical to support reading development. The findings revealed certain recommended strategies such as free choice reading, increased parental involvement, and grade enhancement that may support intrinsic motivation compared to external motivation, which may be better supported through more immediate rewards. This study has the potential to promote social change by providing educators and other stakeholders at the local site with research findings on effective techniques to motivate elementary students to read more frequently.

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Acknowledgments

First, I would like to give honor to God. He has given me strength and perseverance to keep going even when I did not feel like continuing the fight. A special thanks to my committee, Dr. Maryann Wangemann, chair, Dr. Amar Almasude, second committee member, Dr. Michelle Brown, URR Coordinator, and Dr. Sara Rofosky Marcus, URR, for their guidance and feedback.

I would also like to thank my family, Edward, Mary, Roshunda, and Marsha, for encouraging me to finish, but most of all believing and praying for the best in every aspect of my life.

Finally, I would like to specially thank Alex and Chris-Michelle. God knew what he was doing when he placed you two in my life. Alex you were sent to spark a fire inside of me and Chris-Michelle you were sent to keep me encouraged. Thank you.

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Section 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

In 2014, U.S. elementary students were expected to be transformed into articulate, refined students who are mentally prepared and ready to enter college or a career by the time they complete high school. These students are expected to read rigorous texts to be globally competitive in educational achievement (Common Core State Standards [CCSS] Initiative, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2009), the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 included mandates that, by 2014, all students would be proficient in reading, math, and language arts. The Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors Association, and other experts from high-performing countries and states came together and compiled common standards to serve as a foundation to assist teachers in encouraging their students to reach their potential growth (CCSS Initiative, 2010).

The CCSS Officers' main purpose is to make decisions regarding educational issues, as well as to express the views of the organization to professional organizations, federal agencies, and the public. As set forth by the CCSS Initiative (2010), the CCSS are designed to specifically align with the goal of students operating globally in the economy and society. This goal will be ensured by implementing rigorous study, requiring higher-order thinking, having students read more nonfiction texts, and adhering to thorough writing processes across the curriculum. With the new standards, students will also be able to better understand and explain their own learning.

In the local area where the current study took place, all fourth-grade students were expected to consistently read at least 25 books or book equivalents (1,000,000 words) each year (Georgia Department of Education, 2006). However, with all of the mandated time requirements for teaching each subject, special times designated to read, programs such as Sustained Silent Reading or Drop Everything and Read are obsolete. Approximately for the past ten years, the percentage of students reading independently has declined; there remains only a small percentage of students who demonstrate the motivation to meet the state's current standard (CCSS Initiative, 2010) of reading 25 books or more.

According to the research district's Academic Achievement Plan for 2013 and the research site's action plan (2011–2012), 20% of the students were not meeting the requirements to achieve proficiency on the reading/English language arts Common Core standards. Stakeholders believe the current number of students who are unable to comprehend literature affects the outcomes of the district. Each school is mandated by the district to create action plans to raise the number of students meeting standards. However, motivating students at the local level to read was not addressed in the achievement plan or on the intended research site's action plan. Klaudia (2009) stated that assisting educators and other stakeholders with understanding students' reading habits, reading motivations, and reading attitude will assist them with increasing their reading achievement and engagement. Student engagement (rigorous learning) and student achievement will continuously be a factor in education as the demands for meeting these standards continues to increase.

Students must know how to functionally read complex informational text independently (CCSS Initiative, 2010) to meet or exceed reading and English language arts standards. In addition, students need to be literate to function in a globally competitive society, in which vocabulary and comprehension are needed to operate successfully (Davidson, 2010). To meet these demands, students must increase the number of books they read to improve their vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, and fluency level (Loh, 2009; Spear-Swerling, Brucker, & Alfano, 2010). Padak and Potenza-Radis (2010) stated that students can make academic progress when they are engaged in reading frequently, especially when it is done independently. Leppanen, Aunola, and Nurmi (2005) found that the amount of reading completed in and out of school is also correlated to the child's reading skills and reading habits. Other researchers have stated that reading motivation is correlated to academic success and the amount of reading (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, Tonks, & Perencevich, 2006).

The complicated component that educators continue to face is trying to motivate learners to read in and outside of school to increase their reading achievement (Lau, 2009; Sturtevant & Kim, 2010). Based on early reading achievement and exposure, motivating students to read can be arduous. It is laborious for experts in schools to motivate students to continuously read (Brozo & Flynt, 2008; Harlaar, Dale, & Plomin, 2007; Marinak & Gambrell, 2010). Motivation and other elements, such as comprehension and fluency, are impediments to student achievement and cause bewilderment to many who want to influence students to want to read (Marinak, 2007; Mucherah & Yoder, 2008; Pitcher et al., 2007).

The expectations for students to be thought-provoking learners across the curriculum are prevalent in the United States, and it is important to assist students in meeting the standards that will be expected to succeed, especially in reading (Wiggins & McTighe, 2008). Reading is the foundation to all subjects; therefore, helping students become strong, thought-provoking, motivated readers can help to reshape education (Wiggins & McTighe, 2008). A brief, well-articulated summary of the local problem that substantiates the study with references to more detailed discussion is given in Section 2.

Problem Statement

Reading comprehension remains an essential skill that should continue to be emphasized during early education. In previous eras of modern education, reading comprehension was typically promoted through mandatory minimum reading requirements, such as a specific number of books that students were required to read during the academic year (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2012). However, the increased predominance of alternate teaching strategies and the amount of time that students of all ages now spend using computers for social and recreational purposes have made such approaches more difficult to rely on and more or less impractical in the contemporary educational setting (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2012). That is mainly because recreational computer use undermines students' motivation to read books during their free time (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2012). For the 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 academic school years, records indicated that the average percentage of books read in the classroom dropped from 51.6% to 43.6% respectively (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2012). That is a reduction of 8.0% on average per classroom.

The consequences of reduced motivation for independent reading include reduced academic performance and reduced lifelong reading comprehension skills. According to Mol and Bus (2011), this lack of motivation to read independently among students is an obstacle to future professional success. For that reason, assessments have been altered on a national and state level to support expectations that students will meet the minimum standards of reading skills at various levels (CCSS Initiatives, 2014).

Elementary school teachers need reliable techniques that will motivate their students to read more (CCSS Initiatives, 2014). In the local area where this research took place, a computerized reading program called AR was being used to track student reading patterns and related behavior. This approach requires students to read AR books and to exhibit their understanding of what they read, with a goal of 25 books read by each student annually. More specifically, the AR program tests students' zone of proximal development level based on autonomous choice of grade-level library books. Short comprehension quizzes on the books are recorded by the AR program and students receive rewards for high academic performance (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2012). However, even with the AR program, many students still fail to meet the required reading levels. This approach might be more useful if motivation can be improved. For instance, although not many students receive the 25 Book Award, students who do meet this goal demonstrate an 85% or higher average in reading (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2012).

At the time of this study, the research site was implementing the Common Core Standards, making it imperative to ensure better reading habits at an early stage. According to researchers in the field, students need "stamina, concentration, and skills

otherwise they will read less and revert to other media sources” (CCSS Initiative, 2014, p. 4). A gap in the literature exists in identifying effective strategies for increasing students’ motivation to read. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine what methods might be useful and effective for increasing the motivation of students to do more independent reading. The results serve to assist teachers and other educators in identifying the most productive approaches that can be implemented in schools to increase student motivation to read more.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how to increase the number of books students read by focusing on effective techniques that motivate students to become frequent readers. The results of this study provide educators with effective techniques to assist students with increasing their motivational level for reading. This study was designed to boost the number of books students read to increase student comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary skills yearly.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this qualitative case study was to understand which motivators inspire students to increase the number of books read. I conducted a case study research design, which is a procedure to investigate an activity or event with in-depth research of a particular group or individuals (Creswell, 2009). I conducted the case study to understand the experiences of the individual teachers (Creswell, 2013) through the description given during the interview. According to Merriam (2009), interviewing is a component that is needed during qualitative research, especially when the behavior is nonobservatory (i.e.,

feelings or actions). Interviewing was necessary in this study because the teachers were observing the reading behaviors of the students during the allotted amount of time of the study and were reporting back to the researcher. The perspectives of the participants were based on the use of the prescribed motivator chosen for their particular class. This study captured the experiences of the participants and allowed the observations to be analyzed for both unique and common experiences. More details on the research design are found in Section 3.

The research took place in a metropolitan area located outside of a major city. The student population of the district was diverse but was predominately of African American descent. The schools are considered economically disadvantaged. Because the schools are classified disadvantaged, the schools are Title 1 schools, a designation granted by the federal government to schools that have at least 35% of the population that come from low-economic families (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). The low-economic status of families is based on their qualifications for the number of students receiving free or price-reduced lunches.

After permission was granted for research in the district, the participants were preselected from four selected schools. I attempted to select 12 teachers who initially received a recruitment letter to request their participation. Of the 12 teachers, I aimed to select six to participate in the study. If one of the six finalist teachers was unable to participate after being selected, then a teacher from the previously selected volunteers, if available, would have been substituted to participate.

The selected participants in this study were fourth-grade teachers who had access to the AR program, work at either of the selected sites, and volunteered to participate in the study. The participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in this study. The participants were also selected based on their ability to discuss which prescribed motivator was used in their classroom and their experiences during the research. The participants were invited through an email and a recruitment letter that was delivered to the school. The letter and email discussed the study's purpose and intentions of the data collected, and it provided a contact number. When the participants agreed to participate, a meeting was scheduled to distribute consent forms and to answer questions about the research. I collected consent forms at the time of the meeting, unless the potential participant wanted additional time to review the consent; however, I requested that consent forms be returned within 1 week if the teacher was interested in participating in the study.

I am a fourth-grade teacher but did not participate in the study. I do not work for the selected school sites; however I do work for the selected school district. I recruited, met with the teachers, distributed the prescribed motivators, interviewed each participant, and checked for accuracy from each participant. I had a goal to have the participants describe their experiences of using motivators for the purpose of assisting other educators with creating lifelong readers.

Data Collection

I collected the data from three sources: audiotaping, field notes, and references to the computerized program, AR. Audiotaping was used to document the interviews for

later reference. I used field notes to document the observations of the interviewees' environment, feelings, and thoughts during the interview. I took field notes during the interviews so I could transcribe the participants' behavior, setting, and conversation (Creswell, 2013). The participants took notes of their observations of the fluctuation of the number of books the students were reading as a result of the type of motivation.

I informed the participants on the same day of the interview that they should bring artifacts that display their success. The participants knew the artifact could be a computerized print out from the AR program; however, only the averages and the number of books would be revealed. The AR program data are a computerized report that allows the teacher to monitor and differentiate reading instruction for each student (Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2012). Hatch (2002) suggested having the participants discuss how the particular artifact was used to enhance the experience that is being explained during the interview.

The six chosen teachers interviewed with open-ended questions. I conducted face-to-face interviews in the participants' classrooms. Creswell (2003) stated that interviews should occur in the participants' natural setting. After receipt of the approval from the institutional review board to conduct the study, I obtained approval from the school district where the interviews were to be conducted. I also obtained consent from the participants and elementary school principal before the research began. The 45- to 60-minute interviews took place within a 6-week period. The collected interviews were audio recorded with relevant documentation, such as AR program data. Although the

participants were able to use their AR program data, only their averages and the number of books read within the time frame I used during the interview.

Data Analysis

I transcribed the interviews verbatim and reviewed the field notes thoroughly to supplement the interviews. Once I transcribed, I looked for codes from the data. I scripted the interview to find common themes of consistency, which included (a) the type of reinforcements used, (b) the observed students' reaction, and (c) whether or not the reinforcement increased the amount of books read. I determined whether the data coincided with the artifacts the participants submitted along with their written observations. I used codes that used were based on the motivators, and which motivator increased the number of books read. I looked at common themes, created codes and inserted into the electronic data software, Nvivo 10 qualitative analysis software. I analyze the data through an open-coding method that allowed observation of the common patterns in the data. Open coding involves asking questions, finding commonalities within and among the data sources, and making comparisons (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Research Question

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What motivators impact student reading based on the teachers' perception?
2. How do teachers perceive the implementation of motivators?
3. How do teachers perceive motivators to influence students reading behavior?

Theoretical Base

The theoretical framework for this study was the operant conditioning theory. Operant conditioning is a behaviorism theory that is supported by various theorists. However, this research is based on the theory presented by Skinner (1974). Skinner, the originator of operant conditioning, suggested that behavior can be changed based on reinforcements or punishments. Human behavior is operant on a daily basis. The type of behavior a human displays produces a particular outcome based on experiences. Keller and Schoenfeld (1950) stated, "Individuals act upon their environment to satisfy their basic needs" (p. 49). Humans learn how to behave based on their experiences and their environment (Chazan-Cohen et al., 2009; Karlsdottir & Gardarsdotti, 2010).

Skinner (1974) suggested that the frequency, or how often the reinforcement or punishment occurs, will strengthen the desired behavior. The amount of reinforcement or punishment may determine the learning success (Broadbent, 1961). Hilgard (1948) argued that punishment is a form of reinforcement; however, it is not permanent. Punishment weakens the behavior, but does not eliminate the undesired behavior (Hilgard, 1948). The desired behavior is increased when positive reinforcement is present (Keller & Schoenfeld, 1950). The conditioning theory was chosen for this study to base the idea that a particular behavior can be changed through rewards. This theory informed this study and supported outcomes that reinforce reading to twenty-first century students and support the development of frequent readers who will be ready to operate in a common core structured environment.

Furthermore, students are capable of increasing their reading frequency and reading academic scores if they are conditioned to read more often (Turner, 2010), perhaps on a daily basis. Students are a product of their environment. Therefore, if they are conditioned to read frequently, reading will continue to reoccur in their futuristic lives.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to provide clarity in their use within this study:

Accelerated Reader program: A computerized information system that provides students and teachers with immediate diagnostic feedback on student reading practices through short quizzes (Nunnery, Ross, & McDonald, 2006).

Adequate yearly progress: An annual measurement of student achievement on statewide assessments (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

Frequency: The number of occurrences (Keller & Schoenfeld, 1950).

Motivation: The interest that drives individuals and their actions (Pinard, 1959).

Operant conditioning: A process in which a person is operating in a new environment effectively through positive or negative reinforcement (Skinner, 1974).

Reinforcement: According to Skinner (1974), reinforcements are consequences of the intended behavior and are either positive or negative.

Reward: Compensation or incentive received (Gilberth, 1921).

Assumptions

The first assumption in this study was that the type of motivators chosen would change the reading attitudes and behaviors of the students. The chosen motivators were

small candies, highlighters, and homework passes. It was assumed that the students would desire the chosen motivators and read more books to achieve what was being offered. The second assumption in this study was that the chosen professionals would answer the questions honestly and to the best of their ability. A consent form was signed to authenticate the participant integrity to the study and the participants' answers should have been based on their experiences. The third assumption in this study was that six weeks was enough time to capture the participants' experiences fully. The chosen time frame allowed the participating teachers to observe their students for three weeks and then implement the strategy for three additional weeks, while observing the reading behaviors based on the amount of books read. .

Limitations

This study was limited by the availability of voluntary participants. A limitation to the study was teacher attitude, which could represent a threat to the study. Corkett, Hatt, and Benevides (2011) noted that teachers have a major influence on students' reading and writing. Although teachers may volunteer to participate in the study, there could be some hidden negative attitude about motivating students to read.

Delimitations

One of the delimitations in this study was the restriction to fourth-grade teachers. The study is not applicable to other grade levels at the elementary level. There is a need to increase the amount of books on other levels, but the scope of this study was limited to one grade level. Another delimitation in this study was that only four elementary schools were used throughout the research. There are many schools in the researched district that

are in need of increasing student reading. The study included participants from four schools that are similar demographically.

A threat to this study was the time restraint of the study. Therefore, the amount of time allotted for this research was also a delimitation. The time line of the study was six weeks. This amount of time may not have been conducive to working around the participants' schedules and the schools' academic schedules in a timely manner. A long-term study could determine how the techniques affected the students in terms of motivation and whether or not the students developed reading habits that perpetuate to the next year.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to create a positive social change in schools to equip teachers with strategies that will assist their students in becoming college career ready. This study could also be significant to other grade levels. This study could change the way students are motivated. Educators can begin implementing reading programs that are geared towards reinforcing students to frequently read and raise the level of academic achievements. Most importantly, the study can be an addition to future research with respect to the usage of effective reinforcement strategies and how students measure up in a common core society. When improving students' reading skills and advancing them on to the next level becomes a focal point, knowing how to motivate students will be a valuable piece of information.

Summary and Transition

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) mandates included that all students must be proficient in reading by 2014; however, the stakes for success have moved to a higher order. The new CCSS took full effect by the time 2014 started a new school year. It will ensure that all students are working towards being college prepared or career ready. Currently, many fourth-grade students at the elementary level are struggling to become proficient readers. In fact, according to the National Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011), not enough growth is being made in subjects across the curriculum.

These students who are struggling readers need the additional time at home to practice in order to move to another level, but these students refuse to practice or remain disinterested in practice. Teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers need assistance with reinforcing techniques to get students to understand that they must read in order to be successful. This study was designed to give teachers techniques to increase the desire to read and the amount of books read.

In Section 2, the literature review is focused on the implication of what researchers' say about children and their attitudes when it comes to reading in and out of school. Section 2 also provides an explanation of the various types of motivational practices, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcers that are implied to be successful in getting students to read.

In Section 3, the methodology offers a description of the process that took place for this study to be conducted. The most appropriate strategy used was the efficacious

strategy of inquiry that addressed the relationship between the attitude of fourth graders toward reading and their motivational choices.

In Section 4, the data collected in the qualitative research was reviewed to provide insights into the research problem. The participants' experiences and the researcher's field notes provided insight to the strategies that are effective when it comes to reinforcing how to motivate students to read. The students' reading benchmark assessments were analyzed and the students' amount of growth was noted. The records from the Accelerated Reader program were used to indicate that the strategies are effective. This leads to Section 5 with the conclusion. The conclusion summarizes the findings and conclusions of the study. Recommendations and future research are also provided.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review consists of information on the decline of reading attitudes among older students. There are benefits for motivating students to read a substantial number of books regularly using various motivators. The strategies that I used to search the literature came from numerous research databases that were related to the study. Research terms included *reading motivation*, *reading attitudes*, *motivation and literacy*, and *intrinsic and extrinsic motivation*. The purpose of the study was to compare the effectiveness of motivators and the effects they have on fourth-grade literacy.

I included research studies on reading motivation to represent the methodologies that I used. Judge (2011) conducted a qualitative case study that focused on Japanese students' perceptions on what motivated them to read as much as they read. The sample consisted of nine of 11 remaining participants. The students were evaluated on the number of pages read. Students were allowed to read different types of genres and exchange the books for new ones when they were ready. I arrived at the conclusion avid readers are internally driven and also possess an external drive.

De Naeghel et al (2014) conducted a mixed-method designed, case study that focused on identifying strategies among teachers that promoted autonomous reading motivation. The study included 1270 fifth-grade students and their 67 teachers. The strategies used were operative at the classroom level all the way to the school level. Strategies included offering choices, creating a reading atmosphere, hosting a book club, providing time for independent reading, and establishing schoolwide interest. The

findings of this study recognize that creating a school culture that fosters support in reading for students and teachers is critical when it comes to motivating students to read.

The current qualitative case study I conducted focused on teacher perception of student motivation as it relate to increasing the number of books read.

In this review, before presenting information on student motivation, the discussion centers on reading attitudes of students. Then, student motivation is discussed along with the benefits of motivating students to read. Finally, positive and negative reinforcers (both intrinsic and extrinsic) are highlighted, as well as the relationship between these motivators and academic achievement. The section ends with a summary and a transition to Section 3.

Reading Attitudes

According to Roberts and Wilson (2007), reading among both youth and adults is declining in the United States. Students are not taking the time to read, which can affect them academically (Logan & Johnston, 2009; Martinez, Aricak, & Jewell, 2008). Lack of student success at the beginning of education correlates with negative reading attitudes, which impacts the amount of books students read and their reading skills (Martinez et al., 2008; Williams & Hall, 2010). However, Roberts and Wilson stated that sometimes poor reading attitudes do not necessarily affect students academically. Pitcher et al. (2007) described these students as capable of reading; however, they are lacking the interest level in the materials. Researchers are reporting that the illiterate students are not interested in the issued text and would rather participate in other activities besides

reading. Brinda (2008) stated that reading needs to be “meaningful, attainable, and enjoyable” to reach the illiterate students (p. 496).

Students are influenced by factors in their environment, such as parents, teachers, and peers, which can lead to their attitudes toward reading (Becker, McElvany, & Korenbruck, 2010; Geske & Ozola, 2008; Roberts & Wilson, 2007). Williams and Hall (2010) conducted a study to gain an understanding of how students felt, if their attitudes were better, and if they were willing to read when their teachers had positive attitudes toward reading. The study findings also showed that students understood that having a positive attitude was important to pass the high-stakes assessments and that a positive attitude is necessary in order to be successful in their daily lives.

The Sturtevant and Kim (2010) study documented that the decreased amount of time allotted for students to read as they get older contributes to the lack of reading that students engage in during school hours. Nelson and DeBacker (2008) conducted a study on peer climate, best friend relationships, and the effects the relationships have on academic motivation. Nelson and DeBacker reported social environment and peer climate have a major impact on academic motivation, more than best friend relationships. Students worry more about how others perceive them. Chiu and Chow (2010) said this type of social influence is where students acquire their beliefs, affecting their motivation and achievement.

Conlon, Zimmer-Gembeck, Creed, and Tucker (2006) reported that a student’s self-perception toward reading impacts reading achievement. A positive self-perception toward reading correlates with the child’s willingness to participate in reading. Student

self-perception is the key to having a positive attitude toward reading. Park (2009) used the term *self-concept* to describe the way one feels towards a particular task. Students must acknowledge they are good readers in order to execute the mission of engaging in the task. Poor readers will be reluctant to read if they perceive themselves as poor readers.

What causes students to view reading books that do not relate to school as attractive and the books assigned by the school personnel as uninteresting? Pitcher et al. (2007) reported in their study that students viewed in-school reading negatively and did not view themselves as readers; however, they spent time writing in journals, texting, e-mailing, reading magazines, poetry, and comics. Therefore, the authors concluded that the way students view themselves contributes to the way they perform in school. Positive self-concept is needed to have higher achievement in reading; positive reading attitudes support development of the self-concept as an intricate part of reading improvement and achievement (Logan & Johnston, 2009; Morgan & Fuchs, 2007; Roberts & Wilson, 2007). Thus, students must have a positive reading attitude to have a positive self-concept to be motivated to read (Clayton, Blumberg, & Auid, 2010).

Motivation

Student motivation plays a major role in the world of education. Teachers have stressed the need for motivation and know the benefits it brings inside and outside of the classroom (Sturtevant & Kim, 2010; Ulper, 2011). Heckhausen and Heckhausen (2008) defined *motivation* as the “pursuit of a particular goal and [that which] forms a

meaningful unit of behavior” (p. 1). Based on this definition, students need to have a goal in order to aim towards becoming motivated.

Ulper (2011) reported that students are not motivated to read because they do not receive choices when it comes to selecting books. Guthrie et al. (2007) concurred with Ulper’s findings, but found students preferred significant people in their lives to select books for them as a way of giving up ownership. Students need a reason to read or incentives to aim towards because reading motives correlate to reading achievement. Students are positively affected when they perceive their teachers care about them and want to motivate them to succeed. Teachers can have a significant role in motivating students. Morgan and Fuchs (2007) found that there is a bidirectional link between reading skills and reading motivation. Morgan and Fuchs believed that students who are unmotivated have experienced repeated failure when it comes to reading and, ultimately, become reluctant readers.

Prior researchers have studied and reported on ways to motivate reluctant readers to become avid readers. Padak and Potenza-Radis (2010) suggested students should be provided with ample independent reading time to allow students to optimize reading skills. Differentiating instruction is another way to motivate students to become engaged readers (Servilio, 2009). Servilio stated that differentiated instruction can be used to motivate students to read and to improve the type of grades students receive in reading. When the individual needs of students are met, they will be more likely to have positive reading attitudes (Servilio, 2009). Differential instruction can work well with all students. Pitcher et al. (2007) recommended engaging students in stimulating activities.

There are multiple literacies that students appreciate that are used outside of the classroom, but should be implemented inside of the classroom and qualify as substantial reading materials (Pitcher et al., 2007; Sturtevant & Kim, 2010). Pitcher et al. (2007) described multiple literacies as activities such as “popular culture music, the internet, magazines,” and other technology resources (p. 395). Situated experiences are also noted to increase the motivational level of students and to spark students’ attention; however, they may not be adequate to sustain long-term motivation for reading (Guthrie et al., 2006).

Benefits of Motivating Students

When students are motivated, they are able to have successful learning (Clayton et al., 2010). Motivation is the primary reason for literacy development (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010). Students have the ability to excel and to have high achievement in school when they are motivated (Guthrie, Wigfield et al., 2006). Loh (2009) explained that, as students continue to read independently, their vocabulary level increases, language skills improve, and reading comprehension skills are elevated.

Padak and Potenza-Radis (2010) explained the benefit of motivating students can occur when a substantial number of books are read. This is the only way progress can be made in reading. Williams and Hall (2010) described in-depth the potential benefits of motivating students to read, explaining that motivating students can assist students to read, enhance learning, and provide benefits to students in their life endeavors. Students need to be literate to operate in society successfully.

Reinforcers

Ma (2009) wrote that there are four types of motivators: “positive reinforcement (giving positive reinforcer), punishment (giving negative reinforcer), punishment (withdrawing positive reinforcer), and negative reinforcement (withdrawing negative reinforce)” (p. 398). However, in this study, the focus was on only various positive reinforcement (giving positive reinforcers). The effects of using various positive reinforcers was examined to determine the effect they have on academic growth. According to Ali, Iqbal, Shahzad, Qadeer, and Khan (2011), positive and negative reinforcers have an unequivocal correlation to student motivation and academic achievement. Ali et al. recommended, “Teachers always use positive reinforcement in the form of extrinsic and intrinsic reinforcers” (p. 962).

Mendres and Borrero (2010) stated that if the reinforcer is constant, the subject will comply with the warranted behavior. Kodak, Lerman, Volkert, and Trosclair (2007) encouraged parents and teachers to use positive reinforcers, especially on children who have a hard time complying with the appropriate behavior. However, it should be a positive reinforcer that is preferred by the child.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is defined as being self-fulfilled or perceiving satisfaction from within, without being coerced by another person or object (i.e., not affected by extrinsic reinforcers) (Brophy, 2010; Lei, 2010). Intrinsically, students are more inclined to read without being told to read and tend to read books that are more challenging for them (Park, 2009). Logan, Medford, and Hughes (2010) reported that intrinsic motivation

works best with low-ability readers. These students are more inclined to be dedicated to using reading strategies of decoding vocabulary they have been taught and persevering through the text even when it becomes difficult. Students who are intrinsically motivated are cognitively engaged (Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, & Guthrie, 2009). These students possess a strong desire to go beyond the text through self-generated questioning, to use background knowledge, and to comprehend the text.

The negative connotation about using intrinsic motivation alters as students get older and their intrinsic value declines due to their interest level (Corpus, McClintic-Gilbert, & Hayenga, 2009; Lee, McInerney, Liem, & Ortega, 2010). Results of the study by Corpus et al. (2009) indicated that older students tend to not spend their time being as inquisitive as younger students. Older students would rather select the easy task than the more challenging ones (Corpus et al., 2009).

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation is defined as receiving external forces from outside oneself that support the desire to complete a task or work (Afzai, Ali, Khan, & Hamid, 2010). Afzai et al. (2010) described extrinsic motivation in terms of receiving money, gifts, grades, threats, punishments, approval, or even competition. There has been controversy about students receiving extrinsic reinforcements. Park (2009) argued that extrinsic motivation can, in some cases, undermine intrinsically motivated students and deter them from developing a true appreciation of the activity. More specifically, Park discovered that extrinsic motivation has a positive effect on reading performance, especially if the

student has a medium level of intrinsic motivation; however, extrinsic motivation can be unfavorable if the student's intrinsic motivational level is low.

Becker et al. (2010) reported that extrinsic motivation is detrimental to reading literacy in the long run. Extrinsic motivation is a temporary fix for students because these students participate for the moment to please or receive tangibles and they do not practice to further develop their reading skills (Becker et al., 2010). This type of behavior inhibits these readers from becoming proficient readers. Therefore, Becker et al. concluded a negative correlation between extrinsic motivation and frequency of reading (or amount of reading). Accordingly, Becker et al. contended that the only way to increase students' motivational level when it comes to reading literacy is to assist students so they can make progress and become competent readers through intrinsic motivation.

Highlighting the importance of continuous reading and ways to achieve student motivation to continue to read, Padak and Potenza-Radis (2010) stated that, without a massive amount of books being read, progression cannot possibly happen. In contrast to Becker et al. (2010), Margolis and McCabe (2006) believed extrinsic motivation works. Teachers have to temporarily give students what they want before getting the students where they want them to go academically (i.e., to get them to read continuously).

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation Relationship to Academic Achievement

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators have demonstrated positive and negative results when it comes to motivating students academically (Brophy, 2010; Corpus et al., 2009). Brophy (2010) stated that if the motivation is purely extrinsic, students will not value the activity, but will look forward to the reward itself; whereas, if the motivation is

strictly intrinsic, only the students who valued the activity originally will enjoy the activity. Corpus et al. (2009) stated intrinsic motivation will fade with the more education students receive because personal and academic goals change.

However, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are beneficial when it comes to assisting students in their academic achievement (Afzai et al., 2010). Afzai et al. (2010) reported evidence that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation raised student academic performance 23% and 34%, respectively. The authors concluded that the achievement of students who are motivated extrinsically will decline over time because they rely on rewards or approval to gain the required success. However, the intrinsically motivated students will continue to be successful because they are interested in what made them successful (Afzai et al., 2010). According to the Corpus et al. (2009) study, extrinsic motivation was a negative factor when it related to grades and standardized test scores. However, intrinsic motivation proved positive when it related to grade point averages, grades, and standardized test scores. Taboada et al. (2009) concluded that the benefit of intrinsic motivation is that students have a desire to comprehend and, because these students tend to implement taught reading strategies, reading comprehension tends to increase.

Conclusion

Motivation leads to growth in reading comprehension (Guthrie et al., 2007) and the volume of reading; however, the question for this study is which type of motivation will bring academic benefits for the students. The goal of this study is to get students to enjoy reading and become so interested in it that they want to become lifelong readers.

The literature review included the many benefits of motivating students intrinsically and extrinsically; however, the interest of the teachers and administrators has the most influence on how students grow academically. Teachers have to know what motivational strategies work best for their students, whether it is extrinsic, intrinsic, or both. However, teachers must remember that what works for one school or classroom may not work for the next and, many times, not even with the next student.

Section 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the effects of using motivators to increase the number of books read at the fourth-grade level. This case study research was intended to assist teachers by informing them of effective techniques that can assist their students. In this chapter, I explain the chosen research design, research questions, setting, sample, instruments, data collection, data analysis, participant confidentiality, as well as the dissemination and findings of the research.

Research Design

I used a case study design in this research. Creswell (2003) and Merriam (1998) described a case study research as the process of examining an activity or event in a thorough manner to gain knowledge. This design allowed capture of the essence of the participants' strategies that supported their students to be successful readers. According to Creswell, the design also allowed the participants to remain in their comfortable environment, which, in turn, allowed rapport and credibility to be built with the participants" (p. 181). A case study was chosen for this research to strengthen the existing goals of the mandated Common Core State Standards. This design allowed I examined successful techniques that will lead students into meeting the standards. The case study design is often used when the researcher wants to incorporate quantitative data collection in a predominantly qualitative design (Creswell, 2009). Case study research incorporates multiple forms of data from different sources (Yin, 2009). In this study, I maintained a primary focus on the qualitative results but included the quantitative portion using

descriptive stats related to books read by the students as additional data to support the case study. Last, the research took place in a closed system (the school) during a specified time frame, which is a distinction made for a case study research (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Merriam (2013) described phenomenological research as the discovery of the phenomenon based on the experiences or the interpretation of the participants. Creswell (2003) described a phenomenological research as the process of examining an activity or event in a thorough manner to gain knowledge. A phenomenological research design was not ideal for this research because this particular research did not focus directly on the students' lived experiences but rather on the teachers' observations of the students' growth and development (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Therefore, the students who were experiencing the various types of strategies were not revealed in this research.

I also did not choose an ethnographic research design. Ethnography uses interviews, artifacts, and observation; however, it focuses on examining cultural or societal beliefs or values (Creswell, 2009). The research design for this study was focused on attempting to comprehend the phenomenon from the perspectives of fourth-grade teachers (VanderStoep & Johnson, 2009). I did not chose the ethnographic study design because this research did not focus on understanding the culture aspects of fourth graders but, rather, was focused on which type of motivators were used, as reported by the teachers, how the motivator allowed the participants to obtain success, and how it can assist teachers in improving the amount of books read within the classroom. Therefore, I did not use an ethnographic research design for this study.

Narrative research is another qualitative research design that was not used in this research. This research design informs readers of the lives of one or more participants, who are involved in the research through a story structure (Creswell, 2003; VanderStoep & Johnson, 2009). The current research does not discuss the actual lifestyle of the participants in story form, but the participants do describe what makes their students successful when it comes to reading more frequently.

Grounded theory is also a research design that was not used in this research. Merriam (2013) described grounded theory as a means to generate hypotheses based on the data collected to determine the existing problem. The grounded theory research design was eliminated in this study because the problem is clear. The students are not reading the number of books needed to read. Therefore, grounded theory was not used in this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions served to guide this study:

1. What motivators impact student reading based on the teachers' perceptions?
2. How do teachers perceive the implementation of motivators?
3. How do teachers perceive motivators to influence students reading behavior?

Setting and Participants

This study took place in a suburban metropolitan area located 12 miles from a major city. The school district of interest included 62 schools from grades kindergarten through Grade 12. There are 36 elementary schools, 14 middle schools, nine high schools, and three special schools. All schools located in the district are Title 1

schoolwide programs. The schools qualify as Title 1 due to having over half of the school's population designated as low-income families (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.). The criterion for selecting this school district included that it is a Title 1 district and that it is the district in which I currently work, although the specific school in which I work was not included in this study.

Permission from the district's review board was obtained before recruiting the participants from four chosen schools. These four schools were chosen because they provided accessibility to the researcher (within the district in which the researcher worked), and used the AR program. The recruitment of participants for the study was based on a pre-selected criterion. Creswell (2009) described this type of sampling as *purposeful selected sampling* (p. 178). The researcher selected participants, settings, events, and individuals meticulously to assess information for the intended purpose of the research (Creswell, 2009).

The criteria for the chosen participants within the schools included that they were fourth grade teachers at one of the selected schools and that they had access to the computerized program, AR. The fourth-grade teacher population was selected for this study due to the decline in reading among older elementary school students noted in the literature, suggesting that as students get older, their intrinsic value declines due to their interest level (Corpus et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010). Corpus et al. indicated that the older students tend to not spend their time being as inquisitive as the younger students. This trend is described as the *Fourth Grade Slump* (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990; Tyre & Springer, 2007). The Fourth Grade Slump refers to fourth graders who come from low-

socioeconomic backgrounds and decline in reading attitude, motivation, and interest (Chall et al., 1990; Donaldson, 2010). This study was intended to reveal strategies for raising the motivation levels of fourth grade students.

Twelve teachers from the selected schools (all available full time fourth grade teachers at the selected schools) received a recruitment letter. From the 12 teachers, it was hoped that six fourth-grade teachers would volunteer and be selected to actually participate in the study. The sample size of six was sought acknowledging the limitations of the staff availability and desire to voluntarily participate in the study. If one of the selected teachers decided to decline participation in the study, the list would be revisited and one of the remaining teachers, if enough volunteers were obtained, would be asked to participate. These participants were interviewed to share their observations of their intended prescribed motivators among their fourth grade students. Dworkin (2012) stated that vast amounts of research have used sample sizes between 5 - 50 participants to provide an adequate sample for an in-depth qualitative research study. Given the expected availability of the teaching staff and the expectation that all teachers would not be interested in volunteering for the study, the sample obtained of six participating teachers were utilized to give their in-depth opinions and views on motivating fourth graders based on their observations and perspectives.

The following steps were taken to obtain permission to conduct my research. First, permission was granted by Walden's IRB to begin the research. I then contacted the district research review board concurrently for permission due to the district's processes of research application, which occurs twice a year. After both boards had made a decision

to approve my research, I took both letters to the participating teachers' school principals to discuss the research topic, data collection, and to obtain permission. After obtaining permission from the individual principals to conduct research on their campus, I placed a recruitment letter in the school mailboxes of all of the fourth grade teachers to request their participation in the study. As the researcher, I scheduled to meet with the teachers chosen to participate in the study.

Protection of Human Participation

Permission obtained allowed the research to begin with the faculty members who were involved at the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the district's review board, Division of Accountability and Assessment Department, and the elementary school principals of the selected schools. The National Institution of Health certificate had been completed, which informs individuals of the human rights.

The participants each signed a consent form to signify their willingness to participate in this study during the preliminary meeting. The form was issued at the same preliminary meeting to explain the study procedures, the non-risk factors, the fact there would be no compensation for participating, and confidentiality. The form also informed the participants that termination was permitted at any time during and after the study. The ability to refuse answering any of the study questions was also addressed on the form to ensure all participants felt comfortable and protected.

For confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to protect the names of the schools, the participating teachers, and the school district. After completion of the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher for use in the analysis. The teachers

were presented with the transcribed copy of their interview to check for accuracy with the opportunity to correct any misrepresentation or wording. The interview audio data, transcribed documents, and field notes, were stored on a flash drive, secured with password protection, and kept in a locked device. All data will be destroyed after five years.

Researcher's Role

I have 18 years of teaching experience: five years in another state and 13 years at my current school. As a fourth-grade teacher, I have served as a grade-level chair, a teacher support specialist, student support team chair, and as a member of the Better Seeking Team, (BST), to assist with improving the school. In addition, I have trained teachers within my current school with implementing the new Common Core Curriculum and have served as Master teacher to student teachers for five years.

I have 12 years of experience with using the Accelerated Reader program and implementing strategies to increase the amount of reading in the classroom. My classroom has won the Accelerated Reader Program banner that is awarded to the classroom with the highest number of books read and/or the highest percentage in the fourth grade for the past eight years. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), "The energy that comes from a researcher's high level of personal interest (called bias in traditional research) is infectious and quite useful for gaining access" (p. 114).

As the researcher, I established a relationship with all the participants by visiting all sites and issuing the participants a consent form as an introduction. Another visitation was made to notify the individual teacher participant which particular strategy would be

implemented in the classroom. The next visitation was conducted through the interviews to collect the information for the study. Later, a visitation was made to allow the participants to read and member-check the information gathered.

Bias was introduced in the study through the researcher's personal experiences of motivating students to read. I believe all students are capable of growing through consistent practice. This bias was eliminated through crosschecking interview data and AR data from the four researched schools. I would like to validate my personal experience of getting students to read through the data. Researcher bias was, therefore, minimized through triangulation and member checking and was discussed in the Validation section. At the time of the study, I did not currently serve on a leadership role in any school and did not teach at the selected schools; therefore there was no conflict of interest involved in this study.

Instruments

The Accelerated Reader program is a computerized reading program that was utilized in this study. Both schools have purchased rights to utilize the program within the schools. The computerized program tracks and records the number of books students read. The program was used in this research to track the number of books students read as a class and only the volunteering teacher viewed the data to see if changes were being made during the indicated allotted time frame. The participants' interview records and other documentations were secured in a locked location accessible only by me to ensure that the data collected during the study were protected.

Procedures

The school district and schools in this study maintain reading data and collect data through an Accelerated Reading program developed by Renaissance Learning, Inc. The data from the reading program assisted the participants in validating their observations of the students reading behaviors. These data were not used directly in this study, as the participant pool included only the fourth grade teachers, not the students. The following research procedures were used to begin research. Because students' individual data were not involved in the study, parental and student consent was not required. Permission was gained from the Walden University IRB, the school district's research committee, and the individual school administrators and participants (consent to participate, Appendix A).

The participants were instructed to observe the increase or decrease in the number of books students read during the first 3-week period without motivation. After the initial 3-week period, the participants decided on how to motivate the students for the next 3-week period, using personal experience and prior data-driven suggestions for motivating strategies. The participants met with the researcher to share the observations of the data after using the indicated motivator. The participants' responses to the interview questions were confidential. The participants' identities were held confidential by using pseudonyms throughout the study. The participants were interviewed on site in their regular work environment at the school in which they work to provide a comfortable setting. The participants' answers to the interview questions were audio recorded during the interviews, wherein they expressed their methods of motivating students to increase the number of books read.

Data Collection

Data were collected for this study once approval had been granted from the faculty members of Walden University, the administrators of the building, the Division of Accountability and Assessment committee, and the Institutional Review Board. The research was conducted over a 6-week period of time during the school year to ensure all teacher participants had enough time to observe the potential growth in the number of books read and whether the motivator implemented had an effect on the growth (or lack of growth). This time line was an established time during the school year where school breaks were not scheduled and at a time of year when the participants had an established routine. The first 3-week period of the study allowed the participants to observe and establish a reference point as to the motivation level of the students without being teacher motivated. On the last day of week 3, each teacher implemented a chosen strategy during the last 3-week period of the study.

The goal was for each student to read at least one chapter book (worth 1.0 point) or two picture books (totaling 1.0 point) weekly. Students that read at least one chapter book or two picture books weekly received a reward each week. During the last 3 weeks, Teachers 1 and 2 motivated the students with tangible rewards including small candies, tangible items, tokens, and student acknowledgement. Teachers 3 and 4 motivated the students with a book of their choice. Teachers 5 and 6 motivated the students with either a book of the student's choice, or a tangible reward, and every child that met these goals received student acknowledgement. The participants were interviewed to disclose the

observations of the number of books read during the first 3-week period compared to the data from the last 3-week period.

The interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes, which consisted of the recorded conversation with field notes taken by the researcher during the interview, an interview protocol, and observation of the teacher documentation of the student successes. The interviews were very valuable in this research. Students were not used in this research; therefore, interviewing the teachers provided teacher observational data on the student population. Maxwell (2012) stated that interviews are a gateway into people's actions and events; especially for unobtainable events. The interviews were recorded on an audio recorder and saved to a flash drive. The field notes were recorded on a note pad, transcribed to a Word document, and saved on the same flash drive as the interviews.

Creswell (2009) recommended that audio and notes be taken during the interview to ensure reliability of the data. The recorded interviews, with field notes, were collected at the time of the interviews and held confidential in a locked box inside a closet within the researcher's home. The only person with access to the locked box was the researcher. Creswell (2009) suggested research be kept for a reasonable period of time (5 to 10 years) to guard against the data being compromised by other researchers. After five years, I will destroy all materials to safeguard the research.

Analysis

This study was an exploratory study designed to explore the data to reveal patterns in the data. The data were analyzed through a coding method during week 8 after the data had been collected, encompassing the categorization of relevant statements by

theme by the researcher. Maxwell (2013) described coding as the process of sorting the most important information into categories that are relevant to one another. Codes were established to discover any patterns or similarities in the data or if there was a huge discrepancy in the data. Discrepancy found in the data was reexamined carefully for accuracy and reported according to the findings. The researcher reiterated to the participants that the data would be kept confidential, supporting accuracy of the participants reporting and discussion and a potential reduction in discrepant data. Secondly, the participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used throughout the study to maintain their confidentiality by disguising their identities.

The electronic software program that was used to organize the interviews, field notes, and the teacher observations was a program called Nvivo 10 qualitative analysis software. Nvivo is an electronic program that imports, categorizes, sorts, and communicates findings from the data. This program provides informative visuals such as code by descriptor graphs, bubbles plots, and many other tables to expose patterns in the data.

Trustworthiness

The validity of the study was maintained through member checking and triangulation. Triangulation compares many sources to establish the validity of a study (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Creswell, 2003). The tools that were used to crosscheck the data were the data from the Accelerated Reader reading program (checked by the teachers against their observational data), the interviews, and the field notes that documented the participants' observations. Triangulation of the data took place during

week 9, at which time the data were crosschecked with the interviews and Accelerated Reader data, as noted previously. Member checking established validity through the confirmation of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The participants verified if the researcher had displayed the data accurately. These methods cleared any discrepancy cases, allowing all relevant data to be reported without discrepancy. The participants were asked to attend a follow up meeting during week 10 to individually view the researcher's transcript and to confirm the validity of the researcher's findings.

Dissemination of Findings

A copy of the completed study was made available to the administrators of the elementary schools and the committee of the Division of Accountability and Assessment for the school district. I used this study's results to assist teachers in a Professional Development course that disseminated the study findings and demonstrated effective techniques to teachers. Teachers and other inquiring adults had access to the study based on request.

Summary

In this section, the methodology used in this study was described as having the intent to increase the number of books students read through successful techniques. The intended materials to collect the data were discussed. The protection of the participants and maintaining validity and confidentiality was also discussed. A detailed description of the analysis of the data was explained in Section 4. Section 5 concludes the study by providing a discussion of the interpretation of findings, implications for social change, and recommendations for further study.

Section 4: Data Analysis and Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how to increase the number of books students read by focusing on effective techniques that motivate students to become frequent readers. The results of this study provide educators information on techniques to assist students with increasing their motivational levels for reading. This study was designed to explore teacher perceptions of the impact of different applied motivational techniques on both the number of books students read, and the noted increases (if any) in student literacy and comprehension. The nature of this qualitative case study was to understand which motivators inspire students to become frequent readers. To meet the goals of the study, the study was designed to address three research questions from the perspectives of the teacher participants. These questions included (a) what motivators are perceived by teachers to impact student independent reading; (b) how does the use of motivators promote independent reading; and (c) how do motivators influence students' reading behavior?

Demographics

For this study, a total of six fourth-grade teachers participated in one-on-one interviews to better understand their perceptions of the impact of motivators for increasing reading literacy. In addition, each teacher collected classroom data in the form of the overall number of books read by the students in the class. All the teacher participants who volunteered for the study were fourth grade teachers; two taught English/language arts and reading, one taught reading/writing/language arts and social studies, one taught math, and one taught social studies and science. All fourth grade

teachers were eligible for inclusion in the study, as reading literacy is integral to all subjects and content matter. The sample was limited by the voluntary nature of the study.

Table 1 illustrates the demographic characteristics of the teacher participants. All the participants had been in their current position for one to three years, with varying amounts of overall teaching experience. The data represents the responses of the participants during the interviews. Not all teachers offered all types of information and some teachers offered more than one response to questions, depending on the question.

Table 1

Participant Demographics and Experience

Response	# participants to mention this response
Current position	
Grade 4 English, language arts, reading	2
Grade 4 math	1
Grade 4 social studies and science	1
Grade 4 language arts and social studies	1
Grade 4 teacher; reading writing, language arts and social studies	1
Experience at current position	
3 years in position	4
First year/ 1 year	2
Overall teaching experience	
3 years	3
8 or more years	2
Experience teaching reading	
Also taught reading in primary grades, K–3	3
Not much experience teaching reading	1
Experience in small group reading instruction	1
Experience in reading interventions, corrective reading strategies, and reading fluencies	1

Data Collection

The two sources of data for this study were semi-structured interviews and teacher observation data sheets. The data sheets included teacher observations related to the number of students enrolled in the class; the motivator implemented for the study; the number of books read by the students in the class prior to implementation of the motivator; the number of books read by the students after implementation of the motivator; the number of students who did not read (pre-implementation); and the number of students who did not read (post-implementation). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for use in the analysis. Nvivo 10 qualitative analysis software was used in the analysis of the interview data. The Nvivo software provided an organized workspace in which to conduct the coding and analysis of the interview data, allowing the ability to log, track, sort, categorize, and retrieve coded data easily and efficiently for analysis.

Interview Data Analysis

The six teachers in the sample participated in this qualitative case study incorporating individual, face-to-face interviews using a series of semi-structured interview questions to support the interview discussion. The case study design allowed for an in-depth look at a few cases, in this case six teacher participants, with an emphasis on exploration and description (Creswell, 2009). All fourth grade teachers were recruited for participation; however, the study was limited to voluntary participation of teachers at the case study schools. This case study was completed through a process of coding and analysis of the transcribed interviews with each participant (Creswell, 2007),

incorporating a systematic identification and categorization of the participant responses to reveal common and relevant themes from the data (Merriam, 1998). During this review, relevant data were selected purposefully in a process of data reduction (Shkedi, 2005) for further inclusion in the analysis.

The case study analysis followed the procedure recommended by Merriam (1998), in which the researcher initially grouped codes according to content through axial coding, a process of relating codes to each other via a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning (Merriam, 1998). The process continued with a comparison of each coded occurrence with occurrences in other participant responses. This constant comparative process was used to develop thematic categories and reveal themes within these categories (Merriam, 1998) related to the research questions of the study.

The revealed themes were then further categorized, revealing the different perceived elements central to the phenomenon through evidence of common elements and themes within the group, allowing for interpretation and conclusions to be drawn for the participants as a group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). NVivo software was used during the analysis to provide an organized workspace in which I was able to code and reveal patterns in the data to support the development of categories and themes related to the topic of interest. The Nvivo workspace allowed for the efficient classification, sorting, arranging, and tracking of coded data, noting the frequency and location of occurrences of types of responses both within and across participant interviews.

The thematic categories and themes revealed from the analysis are discussed in the following sections. The discussion includes detailed textual data from the interviews

along with tables illustrating response frequencies to demonstrate both the variety of responses and the commonality of responses among the participant group. This presentation was used to support an in depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of participants as a whole.

Previous Experiences Teaching Reading and Perceptions of Successful Motivators

The first thematic category developed during the analysis of the coded data represented codes related to the teachers' previous experiences and challenges teaching reading and their preexisting perceptions of successful motivators for students, given these past experiences. This thematic category was divided into two thematic sub-categories of past experiences and challenges teaching reading, and preexisting perceptions of most effective motivators.

Past experiences and challenges. For this thematic category, several themes were evident from the participant discussions related to the specific experiences and challenges of teaching reading, which included (a) difficulty in identifying student reading preferences and finding appropriate books, (b) student reluctance and intimidation related to chapter books, and (c) the need for incentives to support reading for most students. Table 2 illustrates the different responses offered by the participants and the associated frequency among the sample of six teacher participants.

Table 2

Past Experiences and Challenges Teaching Reading

Response	# participants to mention this response
Difficult to identify student preferences and to find books students are interested in	2
Students reluctant/resistant to reading chapter books	1
Students intimidated by chapter books	1
With more experience reading in AR, is less reluctance and more enjoyment	1
Need for incentives for most kids	1

Two participants discussed difficulties identifying student preferences and/or finding books the students were interested in reading to support their motivation to read. Teacher 3 explained this as a frustration, stating, “Teaching reading can be frustrating because a lot of the books that I found kids are not interested in reading, so if they are not interested, it makes it harder for them to be motivated to read.” Teacher 4 also noted that these fourth grade students are only just “discovering what type of authors they like” and that teachers tend to focus on the learning content and reading strategies.

Another difficulty, perhaps related to the difficulty in finding appropriate and interesting books for the students, is that the students were reported to be reluctant to reading chapter books at the fourth grade and fifth grade levels. Teacher 1 stated:

My experience thus far is that fourth graders at the beginning of the year tend to be very reluctant to read chapter books in fourth grade and really up in fifth grade as well. We ideally like them to be reading books of longer lengths. In third grade they read a lot of picture books, but in fourth grade/fifth grade we like them to be

reading chapter books. So at the beginning of the year they are very reluctant and sometimes a little resistant. ... I think they might be intimidated by chapter books. However, Teacher 1 also noted that this reluctance can be lessened with continued reading. Teacher 1 stated, "I come to see that they read them and finish them and test on them with their Accelerated Reader Program that the resistance and reluctance isn't quite as seen because they realize they like it."

Because of these challenges, Teacher 5 discussed the importance of giving the students incentives to support motivation to read and eventually, the development of enjoyment in reading. Teacher 5 explained:

Giving the kids incentives to read because they will not be motivated to read on their own unless they truly enjoy reading. A small percentage of kids in my experience really like to read independently because they are interested in reading. The other ones find it a chore or a duty they have to do for school and so I have to motivate them to want to read for the purpose of other than a grade.

Pre-existing perceptions of most effective motivators. In addition, several themes were revealed in terms of the teachers' perceptions of the most effective motivators for supporting reading among their students. Some participants noted more than one theme, but the most effective motivators reported by the teacher participants based on prior experience included (a) general incentives, rewards, or point systems built up over time; (b) instant gratification rewards, such as candy, stickers, or extra computer time; and (c) free choice of the kind of books to read (reading freely). Other responses

included goal setting and feedback (reward) within a short time period, and getting the parents involved.

Table 3

Perceptions of Effective Motivators

Response	# participants to mention this response
Providing incentives, rewards, or point systems that build over time	3
Instant gratification rewards; candy, stickers, computer time	2
Free choice of kind of books to read; read freely	2
Goal setting and feedback reward within short time period	1
Getting parents involved	1

From the teachers' past experiences, the most effective motivators to increased reading among the students included the use of incentives, rewards, or point systems. Participants felt that instant gratification rewards and working toward a short term goal work best. For example, Teacher 1 described both of these types of motivators, stating, "Any type of instant gratification reward works well for the students. Working towards completing a goal and receiving feedback (in the form of a tangible reward) within a short time period has shown to be effective."

Different motivators are likely more or less appropriate according to the age level. Teacher 2 described how using instant motivators were effective in the lower grades, whereas extra points would not tend to motivate younger students. Teacher 2 explained:

In the past, I have taught in the lower grades, and I have found that candy, stickers, extra computer time, etc. were motivators. I didn't feel that extra points would motivate the younger students, so I never used that as an option. Now with

my fourth graders, candy does seem to work sometimes. I have also allowed students to eat lunch with me as a motivator.

Parental involvement was also seen as critical, especially in providing incentive for students to read, as noted by Teacher 3, who also highlighted the importance of free reading choice given to students. Teacher 3 explained:

I like to provide incentives for students to read and I like to try to get the parents involved in the reading process and allow the kids to be free to choose the kind of books they would like to read.

The importance of free choice was also stressed by Teacher 4, who explained:

I think in order for children to really want to learn how to read you have to teach them to learn to read and that means just exploring what type of genre they like. They are discovering what type of authors they like and a lot times we don't do that. We go straight to this is what I need you to learn because this is what strategy they say I'm supposed to be teaching you. The biggest motivator is just letting them read and they're reading freely and they're getting use to what they like to read.

Perceived Results Obtained by Implemented Motivator

The teacher participants discussed the motivator(s) they implemented for the 6-week observation period for this study and their perceptions of how the motivator they chose affected the reading motivation and practice of the students in their classrooms. The different incentives or motivators chosen by the teachers and used over the six-week observation period included (a) a motivator that was tied to the student's grade, such that

extra credit points were earned to contribute to a higher reading grade or classroom grade (two participants); (b) a pizza reward (one participant); (c) a motivator of earning a free professional basketball game ticket for every 150 minutes of reading (one participant); (d) a motivator of free computer time or a sweet treat/candy (one participant); and (e) a combination of motivators that included a book club, which earned the ability to watch the related movie to the book that was read, that was then switched to pizza rewards, which was finally switched to the use of candy, all during the study time period (one participant). Teacher two, who implemented extra credit points toward the students' grades, also noted that when verbal praise was added for students reading on their own or for taking Accelerated Reader Program tests, the students seemed to demonstrate a boost of motivation.

Teacher participants offered their perceptions of the success of the implemented motivator, as well as observed behavioral changes associated with the use of the reading motivator, and the adaptability of the use of the motivator selected to other, particularly older grade levels. These coded thematic sub-categories, which are related to the primary thematic category of perceived results related to implemented motivator, are discussed individually.

Perceived success of the motivator implemented. The first thematic sub-category, under the results of the motivator, revealed the teachers' perceptions of the success of the use of this motivator at supporting reading goals for the students. The teacher participants generally believed the motivators were successful at supporting a positive growth in the literacy development of the students. Specifically, participants

commonly reported positive growth in terms of increased number of books read, and students wanting to read and seeking out reading materials more often. Only one participant described the motivator implemented as not successful, which was felt to be due to this participant's lack of consistency during the study period, switching rewards from the book club participation, to pizza rewards, to candy rewards. Table 4 offers the full variety of responses in terms of why the participants felt the use of the motivator was successful.

Table 4

Perceived Success of Motivator Implemented for Study

Response	# participants to mention this response
Felt was successful	5
Positive growth: increased number of books read, wanting to read; seeking out reading materials	3
Tied into overall reading grade not just AR points	1
Students motivating each other	1
Improved book selection	1
Reading logs were filled in more, however, lacked verification	1
Felt was not successful	1
Switched from book club to pizza to candy; should have been consistent with the club, would have demonstrated more success	1

The teacher participants generally expressed that the motivators used were felt to be successful in their classrooms and with their students. Teacher 6 described how the motivator increased the number of books read and the number of books the students checked out from the library, noting, "It encouraged positive growth in the sense of it increased the number of books that they would read and check out. ... Yes, the

motivators contributed to its success.” Similarly, Teacher 2 described the success of the implementation of the selected motivator, as students who were not reading were felt to want to read more. This was felt to be supported by the motivator, but also by peers, with students motivating each other. Teacher 2 explained:

I think it was successful because, like I said, I saw more of the students who weren't reading wanting to read more. I think some of the other students kind of played a part in that too, in motivating them as well because they tend to motivate each other too. It wasn't just me it was, I think, it was a collective thing. You know. We were all motivating each other... students motivating each other and also me motivating the students. Even just wanting those extra 10 points because just stressing the fact how much 10 points can help on a classroom assignment and I tell them all the time, it can make a difference between an A and a B and B and a C and so forth. So I think that was a good thing for them.

Teacher 3 described a similar experience in students demonstrating very little reading and motivation to read in the beginning, which was felt to be increased when the pizza motivator was implemented. Teacher 3 stated:

The students were reading very little when we began and they definitely were not taking any tests until I started implementing the pizza. What I saw was at first the students were choosing easy books to read, but then later as it went on they were choosing more interesting and longer books so they were generally getting interested in reading period.

One teacher did not feel the implementation was successful. Teacher 4 felt that the perceived lack of success may have been due to the inconsistency of motivator used. Teacher 4 started with the book club, switched to pizza rewards, and then switched to candy/sweet treat rewards. This teacher explained:

No [I did not feel the implementation was successful] and the reason I say that is because I was not consistent with the same motivator, like with the book club. I think if I would have stuck with it the whole time. I would have had the participation level, but going from one to the next is where I think I messed up.

Noted positive behavioral changes of students during study period. The teacher participants were asked during the interviews to describe any observed behavioral changes from the first three weeks to the last three weeks of the study time frame. Themes from this sub-category highlighted the common observations that students seemed to be more interested in reading and enjoying reading, that they read more books, and that they were more aggressively reading and completing books, using free time for reading and AR when possible.

Table 5

Observed Behavioral Changes Resulting from Implementation of Motivator

Response	# participants to mention this response
Generally getting interested in reading; enjoying reading	2
Read more books	2
More aggressively reading and completing books, using free time for reading and AR	2
Student comprehension was noted to be higher when motivator present	1
Moved from reading very little to choosing easy books to read to choosing longer, more interesting books	1

Improvement in lower group	1
No changes noted	1
Were motivated to fill out the reading logs, but actual reading was not verified	1

One common response theme in this sub-category of observed behavior changes was teacher perceptions of increased student interest in reading and enjoyment of reading. Teacher participant 2 offered an in depth explanation of experiences with the students and their increased enthusiasm.

I can tell like with my homeroom when they come in the morning the first thing they want to do is go take an AR test or go to the library when the first thing they have to do is their morning work. At first when they would come in it was just, whatever. I noticed more of them wanting to read more even with some of my students who weren't reading at all, at all. ... For instance at the end of the day, during dismissal time, that is a quiet time, a time for them to AR read. Also, in the few minutes in transition between classes during that time they want to play on the computer. They want to get up and socialize with each other and then I noticed in the last three weeks it was more so an interest or motivation to want to take advantage of that AR time. ... I noticed they took advantage of that time at the end of the day or in between, transitioning between classes even during lunch. They'll take their book with them to lunch. (Teacher 2)

For Teacher 6, this increased enthusiasm and interest in reading was evident in the increased use of library materials. Teacher 6 explained how the student reading moved from casual reading to more aggressively reading:

They were also a bit more involved with checking out books in the library. We have a scheduled date which is Monday, but there were several students who wanted to trade in their books early, like maybe a couple of days early. If they checked out on Monday, rather than wait to the following Monday, they would want to go to the library on maybe on Thursday or Friday perhaps and maybe read over the weekend and come back and still trade on Monday. ... They were excited and aggressive to want to read and check out books when the motivator was present. They read casually without the motivator. Those two words casual versus aggressive, they were more casual type to the reading. They were pretty good with checking out books on their own, but again with having a motivator present that put more of an aggressive edge to their activity.

Teacher 1 noted a significant improvement in the number of students who read, compared to the number who did not read, also noting an increased comprehension with the use of the motivator. Teacher 1 described:

There was a significant difference in the number of students that did read or did not read so I would definitely note that as a behavioral change. I saw that when the motivator was present that students' comprehension tended to be a little higher.

Behavior changes were noted by Teacher 3 as a progression, moving from students who were not demonstrating much reading and who chose easy to read books to becoming students who demonstrated interest in reading, choosing longer books and taking the tests. Teacher 3 described:

What I saw was at first the students were choosing easy books to read, but then later as it went on, they were choosing more interesting and longer books so they were generally getting interested in reading period. ... The students were reading very little when we began and they definitely were not taking any tests until I started implementing the pizza.

Teacher 4 described the success of the book club, in particular, in instilling positive behavior changes among the students, increasing the number of books read, because they very much wanted to be a part of the club.

Well, in the beginning it increased their reading. It increased how many books they were reading in a week, which I kind of knew it would. I required they put it on a reading log just to make sure. A lot of them were turning in a reading log. I don't know if they wanted to read as much as to watch the movie and to get in that club or if it was self-motivation, like I want to do this. I don't believe it was so much as self-motivation then I want to be in her club, I want to be part of that group.

Overall, Teacher 6 seemed to sum up the observed behaviors of the students, stating, "It was positive. It encouraged positive growth in the sense of it increased the number of books that they would read and check out [from the library]."

Perceived applicability of motivating strategy to other grade levels. The final thematic sub-category formed from the data was the perceived applicability of the motivator for use in other grade levels. In general, the participants felt the motivator strategy used was applicable to other grade levels; however, all six responses were

slightly different. Table 6 illustrates the full variety of the participant responses, demonstrating general agreement in the applicability to other grade levels, despite the different response types.

Table 6

Perceived Applicability of Incentive to Other Grade Levels or Environments

Response	# participants to mention this response
Applicable with older students	1
Incentives work to motivate most people to do what want them to do	1
Teachers will like the book club and students enjoy it	1
Applicable as an incentive, but need to include AR testing to verify comprehension	1
Would be accepted because need to seek student input in what would be acceptable motivator	1

Overall, the participants felt the motivators were applicable to other grade levels, with a focus on older grade levels, rather than younger. For example, Teacher 2, who implemented an extra credit reward as a reading motivator, explained:

Yes, well, with the older students. I think so. I think that would be a good motivator for the older students. Another thing I wanted to say I noticed with the older ones they have that drive to want to make the A team or the honors achievers making all As or As and Bs. It's kind of like a completion with them. So with the older ones getting those extra points that go towards their grade was a good motivator as opposed to maybe a piece of candy or something that would work with the younger kids.

Teacher 4 described the powerful positive motivator of the book club and the perception that other teachers and students would truly enjoy it.

I actually think other teachers will like it. You know I already, as an educator, you see them giving treats if they do reading logs, you see them giving stickers, but as far as book clubs I think they would actually enjoy it if they tried it. (Teacher 4)

Teacher 5 also described the perceived positive effects of the motivator used, the Fast Break basketball ticket program, and the applicability of this program to other grades. This participant stated, “With the Fast Break program everybody in school was participating in it and everybody was receiving those basketball reading logs back” (Teacher 5). Finally, Teacher 6 also confirmed the acceptance of the motivator across grade levels, stating, “I think it would be perceived and accepted positively particularly with getting student input in regarding what they would be more willing to except as a motivator to get them to increase their reading” (Teacher 6).

Incentives Perceived to be Critical to Reading Success

The third thematic category developed from the data reflected the participant perceptions of incentives that are felt to be critical to reading success, taking into consideration both their prior experience teaching reading and the experience of this 6-week observational study. Three common themes were highlighted in the data, which included (a) free choice reading (involving both helping students to find books they are interested in and to choose appropriate independent reading), (b) incentives contributing to reading grade, and (c) parental involvement. Other responses lacking commonality among the sample included consistent monitoring of reading material, book clubs,

incentives specific to student wants, and starting with small incentives with an increasing value of incentives to continue to motivate the students to read.

Table 7

Incentives Critical to Successfully Encouraging Reading and Independent Reading

Response	# participants to mention this response
Free choice reading: finding books they are interested in and teaching students to choose appropriate independent reading	3
Incentives contributing to reading grade	2
Parental involvement	2
Constant and consistent monitoring of material being read is needed	1
Book club to instill sense of a special group	1
Start with small incentives and increase value of incentive to continue to motivate to read	1
Using incentives specific to what the students want	1

Teacher responses revealed many critical aspects to supporting reading from a teacher's perspective. Three participants agreed that free choice reading is critical to successfully encouraging reading, particularly independent reading, among the students. Teacher 1 noted the importance of monitoring of the material read by students, providing high quality literature, and specifically to increase independent reading, supporting student choice in independent reading material.

From a teacher's perspective, constant and consistent monitoring of material being read is needed. High quality literature is vital. To ensure increased independent reading, the teacher must play a part by teaching the students how to choose books independently, and most importantly how to choose books that are ones that their reading skills can grow and develop from reading. (Teacher 1)

According to Teacher 2, free choice of reading materials supports the desire to read, the student's love of reading, by finding what they are interested in reading.

Well, I think with those that love reading it's just going to be there, they're going to do it anyway, but with some of the other ones who don't like it as much, one of the things I try to get them to do is find something they are interested in reading. Then two some of them you have to give them some kind of incentive to really push them to make them want to read because they just won't do it some of them. They just won't do it.

The need for student incentive was similarly asserted by Teacher 3, who felt that children need to be interested in their reading and that the school curriculum needs to offer interesting reading for the students. Teacher 3 contended, "The child needs to read books that interest them. They need to be interested in what they're reading. I hope the curriculum provides more interesting stories for children to read."

Another factor commonly cited by the teacher participants as critical to motivating student reading was tying the motivator to student grades. This was detailed by Teachers 1 and 5 as follows:

From the time period trialed, offering incentives in the form of contributing towards their overall reading grade proved effective and I believe should play a part in encouraging reading. Fourth grade students do care and value their grades, especially if they play a part in any type of extracurricular activities. (Teacher 1)

Overall, there is only a small percentage of students that are already self-motivated. They are not really reading, they are just going home and filling out

their reading log. There really aren't a lot of students that are really reading. Most students just write something down, but the ones that are really reading, they come in at the end of each week requesting for a new reading log. The grade is the only motivator for most of these students and that's only the ones whose parents are really giving them support asking about their grade. If they are not getting support, where somebody really cares about their grade, then they are not going to care. (Teacher 5)

The final common factor expressed by the teacher participants as critical to supporting reading achievement and the impact of specified motivators was parental involvement. Participant 5 described the impact of a parent, particularly the negative impact of the parents not being present and lack of support.

In my opinion, the real motivator is parent support. If they don't have parent support then what's the motivation in it. If they come home with an A or an F and in my household it's the same value so if an A and I'm going to get the same response as an F then what's going to motivate me. So then really the motivating factor would probably be the teacher and if your teacher really cares about what you are doing and they tell you what you are going to get, and encourage them. (Teacher 5)

This need for parental support was supported by Teacher 3, who discussed the importance of direct reading interactions between parents and children, and parental involvement in the child's selection of books.

I think the main thing is to get the parents involved. The parents need to be more involved in their children's reading either by having the child read to them or read to each other, or they both go to the library to select the book. The parent needs to be more involved in the process and the child needs to read books that interest them. They need to be interested in what they're reading. I hope the curriculum provides more interesting stories for children to read. (Teacher 3)

Interview Finding Conclusions

Conclusions of the interview analysis are drawn from the results obtained from the thematic categories and themes revealed in the data analysis. The following overarching themes were revealed through the analysis in review and comparisons among the thematic categories and themes revealed therein.

Theme 1: Difficulties and challenges in identifying student reading preferences and helping students to find material they are interested in reading, as well as challenges associated with student reluctance to read more challenging material, such as chapter books.

Theme 2: Teacher preexisting perceptions of increased student motivation tied to the use of incentives, rewards, and point systems that offer instant gratification or goal setting rewards over a short period of time, as well as the motivational effect of free choice of books to read.

Theme 3: General perceived effectiveness of motivators used in terms of positive behavioral changes and student growth in number of books read, interest in reading, and

more aggressively reading and completing books as evident in using free time for reading tasks and seeking out own reading materials.

Theme 4: Incentives and motivators used were felt to be applicable to other grade levels, particularly older grade levels.

Theme 5: Factors felt to be critical incentives to support reading development among the fourth grade students included free choice reading to support independent reading, incentives that support reading grade (extra credit offered), and parental involvement in reading and assisting in book selections.

Teacher Observation Sheet Data Analysis

The teacher participants reported observational data in the form of student enrollment (pre-implementation of the motivator and post-implementation), the total number of books read by students in the classroom (pre-implementation and post-implementation), and the number of students who did not participate (i.e., did not read), both pre- and post-implementation. Table 8 illustrates these data, highlighting the change in number of books read and students who did not read according to teacher and motivator used.

From the table, observational data support the effectiveness of the use of extra credit points for the class work grade (Teacher 2 with 13 more books read overall), the use of the Pizza Hut reward (Teacher 3 with 12 more books read), and the use of free computer time and candy (Teacher 6 with five more books read). However, the extra credit grade motivation used by Teacher 2 also demonstrated an increase in the number of students who did not read, whereas the Pizza Hut reward (Teacher 3) and the use of free

computer time and candy (Teacher 6) showed a decrease in the number of students who did not read as well as increases in the number of books read.

Table 8

Teacher Observation Data

Motivator Used	Student Enrollment Pre/Post	#books read (Pre)	# books read (Post)	Change in # books read	(Pre) # of students who did not read	(Post) # of students who did not read	Change in # of students who did not read
Extra Credit	31/32	28	19	-9	3	13	+10
Extra Credit	32/32	13	26	+13	6	19	+13
Pizza Hut	29/29	3	15	+12	26	14	-12
Book Club/ Pizza/ candy	21/21	21	13	-8	0	8	+8
Fast Break Basketball Tickets	26-24	5	5	0	0	0	0
Free Computer time and candy	28/28	19	24	+5	9	4	-5

Results and Conclusions

Combining the findings of the interview data analysis and the teacher observation data, the findings are presented as the conclusions of the analysis according to the research questions of the study. The research questions and results are presented as follows:

Research Question 1

The first research question asked: What motivators are perceived by teachers to impact student independent reading? Teachers demonstrated preexisting perceptions of increased student motivation to read through the use of incentives that offer instant gratification, such as candy, computer time, or point systems that offer rewards over a short period of time, as well as free choice in reading content (Theme 2). Although all the teachers felt their individual motivators were effective at positively impacting student reading, the one teacher who expressed a lack of success over the entire research process felt the key to the successful impact of the motivator was consistency.

Having participated in this study and having past experience teaching reading, the teacher participants described key motivators to supporting reading development as free choice reading, incentives tied to the students' grades (extra credit), and parental involvement in reading development (Theme 5). These motivators are particularly critical when compared to teachers' expressed challenges in teaching reading, which highlight difficulties identifying student reading preferences and helping students to independently find reading material that is appropriate and interesting to them, as well as student reluctance to read chapter books (Theme 1). The motivators of free choice reading, extra credit toward grades, and parental involvement may directly affect these challenges to support student reading growth.

Research Question 2 and Research Question 3

The second and third research questions asked: According to teacher perceptions, how does the use of motivators promote independent reading and how do motivators

influence students' reading behavior? The findings of this study support a general perceived effectiveness of the motivators used in this study (extra credit points, pizza rewards, book club, candy, computer time). This effectiveness was evident in teacher perceptions of increased number of books read, increased student interest in reading, and perceived increased aggressiveness in reading among the students in terms of use of free time for reading and seeking out more reading materials (Theme 3). However, observational data only confirmed an increased number of books read among the motivators of extra credit toward student grade, pizza rewards, and computer time and candy rewards. Teachers felt the incentives and motivators were applicable to other grade levels, particularly higher grade levels. Specifically, the extra credit toward grades and computer time, and reading club were felt to be applicable to older students, whereas the more immediate gratification rewards, such as candy, were also felt to be applicable to the younger levels.

Summary

This chapter detailed the findings of the qualitative analysis of teacher interview data as well as teacher observational data in terms of number of books read and number of students participating in the reading. Qualitative findings supported five overarching themes that described the perceptions and experiences of the teachers as a group. The teacher perceptions of the success of the motivators were compared to teacher observational data to support the use of extra credit, pizza rewards, computer time, and candy motivators among fourth grade students. Chapter five will discuss the findings

specific to the research questions of the study and in relation to the previous literature on the topic.

Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how to increase the number of books students read by focusing on effective techniques that motivate students to become frequent readers. The findings of this study were expected to provide information to educators with regard to specific techniques to increase student motivation for reading. To accomplish this goal, a qualitative case study was conducted using a sample of six fourth grade participants, who participated in one-on-one interviews to better understand their perceptions of the impact of specific motivators for increasing for reading literacy. In addition to the interview data, classroom data in the form of number of books read by the students were also collected. The data obtained for the study were analyzed within a case study approach following an open-coding method that allowed for identification of common patterns in the data (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Recommendations for Action

It is my recommendation for educators to know their students' needs before implementing a technique to increase the amount of books read by their students. It is observed that the teachers did not take the initiative to familiarize themselves with the interest level of the students. Perhaps issuing an interest survey and getting a consensus as to what motivates their students will work.

Recommendations for Future Study

Motivating students will always be a topic in education. One recommendation that can be considered for further exploration is at the school level. Motivating students to read needs to stretch beyond the classroom. Future studies should explore how can a

schoolwide incentive program geared towards reading affect the amount of books students read.

Another recommendation is to provide future research on schools and the amount of time allotted to allow students to independently read during the day. The review of literature shows and one of the participant mentions that the interest level of students have to be built and fostered by every person involved in the child's life.

Finally, parents need to be held accountable for their child's success. I recommend future researchers explore the impact of parents getting involved with motivating their child to read. There needs to be more research on the involvement of parents and the long term affects over a period of time. The study should also explore parent involvement to the connections of intrinsic motivation.

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of the research along with an interpretation of the findings and a discussion of the relationship of these findings to previous literature. The limitations of the study and implications for social change and recommendations for action are also discussed, highlighting the significance of the study. These recommendations to teachers and other educational leaders may support development of new practices aimed at improving the outcomes for students struggling with literacy and the motivation to read. Finally, recommendations for future research are discussed in relation to the findings of this study.

Summary of Findings

Given the mandates of No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation, all students must be proficient in reading by 2014; however, many fourth-grade students at the elementary

level continue to struggle to become proficient readers, indicating that not enough progress is being made (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011). Despite the need for additional reading practice, these struggling readers lack the motivation to practice or remain disinterested. This study was designed to explore a variety of techniques that serve as motivators to support student reading, increasing the motivation to read, and ultimately, the number of books read by the students.

Interviews with six fourth grade classroom teachers along with classroom observational data indicating the number of books read by students according to the motivators applied provided the data to address the research questions of the study. Within a case study design using an open coding analysis process, interview findings revealed five common themes expressed by the teacher participants. These included (a) difficulties and challenges in identifying student reading preferences and helping students to find material they are interested in reading, as well as challenges associated with student reluctance to read more challenging material, such as chapter books (theme 1); (b) teacher preexisting perceptions of increased student motivation tied to the use of incentives, rewards, and point systems that offer instant gratification or goal setting rewards over a short period of time, as well as the motivational effect of free choice of books to read (theme 2); (c) general perceived effectiveness of motivators used in terms of positive behavioral changes and student growth in number of books read, interest in reading, and more aggressively reading and completing books as evident in using free time for reading tasks and seeking out own reading materials (theme 3); (d) incentives and motivators used were felt to be applicable to other grade levels, particularly older

grade levels (theme 4); and (e) factors felt to be critical incentives to support reading development among the fourth grade students included free choice reading to support independent reading, incentives that support reading grade (extra credit offered), and parental involvement in reading and assisting in book selections (theme 5).

Teacher observational data were reported in the total number of books read by students in the classroom based on the motivator applied (pre-implementation and post-implementation). Results indicated effectiveness of the use of extra credit points for the class work grade, the use of the Pizza Hut reward, and the use of free computer time and candy to support greater number of books read by students in the classroom. However, it was noted that the motivators of the Pizza Hut reward and the use of free computer time and candy also showed a decrease in the number of students who did not read as well as increases in the number of books read, while the extra credit grade motivation demonstrated an increase in the number of students who did not read, despite the greater number of books read by the class overall. In the next section, these results are interpreted and discussed further in relation to the specific research questions of the study and in relation to previous literature findings from Section 2.

Interpretation of the Findings

In America, both students and adults are demonstrating a decline in reading as a leisure activity (Roberts & Wilson, 2007). In particular, students are not taking the time to read, which has a negative impact on their academic achievement (Logan & Johnston, 2009; Martinez et al., 2008). However, given proper motivation to read, students are able to demonstrate successful learning and achievement (Clayton et al., 2010). Prior research

has contended that motivation is the primary reason for literacy development (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010), building to high academic achievement (Guthrie, Wigfield et al., 2006). This increased achievement can be gained through reading because as students continue to read independently, their vocabulary level increases, language skills improve, and reading comprehension skills are elevated (Loh, 2009).

Research Question 1: What Motivators are Perceived by Teachers to Impact Student Independent Reading?

In relation to the first research question, the results addressed the motivators that were perceived by the teacher participants to impact student independent reading. Preexisting perceptions were noted among the teacher participants related to effective increased student motivation to read through the use of incentives that offer instant gratification, such as candy, computer time, or point systems that offer rewards over a short period of time, as well as free choice in reading content (theme 2). Although all the teachers felt their individual motivators were effective at positively impacting independent student reading, one teacher did express the importance of consistency in the effectiveness of the motivator. This teacher's opinion aligned with the findings of Mendres and Borrero (2010), who stressed the importance of a reinforcer being constant, to support compliance of the student with the desired behavior.

Having participated in this study and having past experience teaching reading, the teacher participants described key motivators to supporting reading development as free choice reading, incentives tied to the students' grades (extra credit), and parental involvement in reading development (theme 5). These factors of free choice reading,

grade incentives, and parental involvement support student motivation, which has been defined as the pursuit of a goal that supports meaningful behavior (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2008). The teacher participants even directly noted the importance of goal setting as an effective motivator. Therefore, students need goals to support their personal motivation to read and these specific motivators seem to support personal goals to serve as incentives, such as being able to read a popular or favorite book, earning high academic marks, or gaining parental approval and praise.

The finding related to free choice reading aligned with the results offered by Ulper (2011) and Guthrie et al. (2007), who concluded that students are not motivated to read because they do not receive choices when it comes to selecting their books. Guthrie et al. also found students preferred significant people in their lives to select books for them to read, perhaps touching on the importance of parental (or other significant figure, or teacher) involvement, as seen in the findings of this study, rather than as a means of giving up ownership, as Guthrie et al. suggested. Students are positively affected when they perceive their teachers or other significant caregivers care about them and seek to motivate them to succeed.

However, free choice reading presents certain challenges, especially for young readers who are struggling. Difficulties in identifying student reading preferences and helping the students to independently find appropriate reading materials of interest were noted by the teacher participants in this study. In addition, students who are struggling to read often avoid or are reluctant to read more challenging books, such as chapter books (theme 1). This type of reluctance may stem from repetitive failures (Morgan & Fuchs,

2007). Parental (or other significant adult) involvement may help to relieve the stress associated with repetitive failure by supporting more positive results in a caring environment in which the student will not be judged by peers or teachers. Despite the potential challenges to offering free choice reading, this motivator can support greater interest on the part of the student, which also supports internal motivations and self-concept development of the student in terms of likes and dislikes and perceptions of personal abilities.

When involved, parents should not underestimate the importance of multiple literacies that students may be more attracted to outside of the classroom. These multiple literary sources qualify as substantial reading materials (Pitcher et al., 2007; Sturtevant & Kim, 2010) and may include popular music lyrics, internet and other technological reading sources, and magazines (Pitcher et al., 2007). These types of reading materials offer opportunities for students to engage in reading content that they are more interested in learning, supporting internal motivation of the student to read. When intrinsically motivated, defined as being self-fulfilled or perceiving satisfaction from within and without external influence (Brophy, 2010; Lei, 2010), students are more inclined to read independently and without being told to read and tend to read books that are more challenging for them (Park, 2009). Intrinsic motivation certainly is the goal, but sometimes to get there, teachers and parents must provide external motivators to support the development of a self-concept that will support greater intrinsic motivation in the individual student.

Previous research has highlighted the bidirectional relationships between students' self-concepts in reading, positive attitude toward reading, motivation to read, and reading achievement (Clayton et al., 2010; Conlon et al., 2006; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Morgan & Fuchs, 2007; Park, 2009; Roberts & Wilson, 2007). A student's self-perception toward reading correlates with the child's willingness to participate in reading, and is a critical factor to having a positive attitude toward reading, impacting reading achievement (Conlon et al., 2006; Park, 2009). Poor readers will continue to demonstrate reluctance to reading if they perceive themselves to be poor readers. At the same time, positive reading attitudes support development of a positive self-concept, which supports student motivation to read and ultimately reading improvement and achievement (Clayton et al., 2010; Logan & Johnston, 2009; Morgan & Fuchs, 2007; Roberts & Wilson, 2007). Thus, efforts to enhance student self-concept and positive attitude toward reading will likely support motivation to read and reading achievement. From the results of this study, it seems that parental involvement and free choice reading to support more frequent success in reading and interest in reading may serve to impact student self-concept and motivation to read.

For students who continue to demonstrate reluctance to read, extrinsic motivators may be effective in supporting reading activity. Indeed for this study, teacher perceptions supported the effectiveness of extrinsic motivators such as rewards of candy, pizza, computer time, and point systems. In particular, incentives tied to academic (grade) credit were felt to be effective in offsetting the challenges struggling readers experience to

support literacy growth. However, there is some debate over the efficacy of external motivation in the long term.

Research Question 2 and Research Question 3: How Does the Use of Motivators Promote Independent Reading and How Do Motivators Influence Students' Reading Behavior?

Margolis and McCabe (2006) believed extrinsic motivation works, suggesting that teachers must give students what they want in the short term in order to get the students where they want them to go academically in the long term (i.e., be continuous and independent readers). In contrast, Becker et al. (2010) concluded that extrinsic motivation is detrimental to reading literacy in the long term, representing only a temporary fix for students who end up participating for the moment to receive the reward, but not motivated to practice to further develop their reading skills and actually inhibiting the students from becoming proficient readers (Becker et al., 2010). Thus, Becker et al. contended that the only way to increase students' motivation to read is to help students become competent readers through intrinsic motivation. This was supported by Afzai et al. (2010), who concluded that the achievement of students who are motivated extrinsically will decline over time because they rely on rewards or approval to gain the required success; however, more intrinsically motivated students will continue to be successful because they are interested in what made them successful.

In addressing the second and third research questions, teacher perceptions in this study supported effectiveness of the motivators, specifically extra credit points, pizza rewards, book club, candy, and computer time (theme 2), through increasing the number

of books read, increasing student interest and perceived aggressiveness in reading among the students (i.e., use of free time for reading and seeking out more reading materials: theme 3). Although all motivational strategies were perceived by participants to be effective, observational data only confirmed an increased number of books read among the motivators of extra credit toward student grade, pizza rewards, and computer time and candy rewards. These motivators represented more immediate rewards, which supports the conclusions of Becker et al. (2010), suggesting that the motivator serves as a temporary motivation to participate and to receive the immediate reward. However, the study did not examine whether the rewards supported a continued motivation to read beyond the reward, which Becker et al. contended that extrinsic rewards would not support.

It was noted that the extra credit grade motivation used by Teacher 2 also demonstrated an increase in the number of students who did not read (i.e., lack of participation). Of the perceived effective motivators used in this study (extra credit, pizza rewards, computer time and candy), the extra credit grades represented a more long term reward or goal compared to the other more immediate rewards. Although this finding may support greater participation among students in immediate rewards, it also suggests the efficacy of more long term rewards, although perhaps this effectiveness is more evident in more intrinsically motivated students. Additional research would be needed to determine if this is the case.

In addition, the teacher participants in this study felt the incentives and motivators were applicable to other grade levels, particularly higher grade levels. The extra credit

toward grades and computer time, and reading club were felt to be applicable to older students, whereas the more immediate gratification rewards, such as candy, were felt to be applicable to the younger levels. However, prior research has supported the opposite, that older students' intrinsic value declines, tending not to be as inquisitive as younger students and tending to select the easier task over the more challenging one (Corpus et al., 2009). In addition, intrinsic motivation has been considered to be more effective with low-ability readers, as one would find in younger students, who may be more dedicated to using reading strategies and persevering through text despite difficulties (Logan et al., 2010), and remaining cognitively engaged with a dedication to moving beyond the text through their inherent inquisitiveness to comprehend the text (Taboada et al., 2009). This may be explained by the nature of the immediate rewards offered in this study, such as pizza rewards, or candy rewards, which may be more applicable to the wants of younger students, whereas extra credit toward grades, computer time rewards, and book club participation may simply be more attractive to older students.

In addition, social influences change as students get older. Social climate, affected by peer reactions and the impact of relationships on academic motivation can influence motivation to read at different grade levels (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008). In addition, students receive progressively less time during the school day to read as they get older (Sturtevant & Kim, 2010). Social environment can have a significant influence on student motivation and achievement as students acquire their beliefs and goals from these social influences (Chiu & Chow, 2010). Parental influence can also have a counter effect to peer influences, again supporting the importance of parental involvement.

Limitations

This study was limited to a focus on a variety of positive motivation strategies (giving positive reinforcers) used by teachers to support literacy development among fourth grade students. The scope of the study did not include an examination of the other three types of motivators: punishment by giving a negative reinforce, punishment by withdrawing or withholding a positive reinforce, or negative reinforcement of giving a negative reinforce (Ma, 2009). Although both positive and negative reinforcers have been correlated to student motivation and achievement (Ali et al., 2011), Ali et al. (2011) recommended the use of positive reinforcement in the form of extrinsic and intrinsic reinforcers. For this study, the focus was on extrinsic positive reinforcers.

In addition, the study was delimited as a qualitative study using a sample of fourth grade teachers taken from a population from four elementary schools from a single school district. The study was dependent on the voluntary participation, and due to the voluntary nature of the study, recruitment of participants may have supported participants with strong views related to motivating student reading, teacher attitudes toward students struggling with reading, and hidden negative attitudes with regard to motivating students to read. Lastly, the study time frame was limited to a period of six weeks, which may have affected the results.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the preceding limitations, several recommendations can be made for areas in need of future research. The scope of this study did not include an examination of whether the rewards supported a continued motivation to ready beyond the reward,

which Becker et al. did not suggest. That being said, additional research is recommended to examine the impact of rewards used to motivate reading and whether these strategies are effective in promoting long term changes in reading behaviors of students supporting continued motivation to read beyond the reward.

In this study, the extra credit grade motivation also demonstrated an increase in the number of students who did not read (i.e., lack of participation), despite the motivational strategy. The researcher offered that, as a motivator, grade enhancement represents a more long term reward or goal, which may be more effective among more intrinsically motivated students compared to more extrinsically motivated students, as the grade is a reflection of personal self-concept as well. Additional research is suggested to explore the types of students who participate and are motivated by the opportunity to earn academic credit toward supporting a higher grade and which types of students are not motivated by this type of reward compared to more immediate types of rewards.

Given the restricted timeframe for this study of six weeks, additional research is suggested as a means of determining on a longer term basis how the specific techniques used affect students in terms of their motivation to read and whether that motivation continued to the long term to support reading habits that continue throughout the years. More specifically, perhaps, to examine if increased literacy habits were maintained through to the following year.

Implications

The significance of the study is to create a positive social change in schools to equip teachers with strategies that will assist their students in becoming continuous

readers, which will ultimately support student academic achievement and college readiness. Although as a qualitative inquiry, this study is not necessarily generalizable to other grade levels, the study does shed light on the problem and results may be applicable to other grade levels. The teachers in this study suggested the results and specific strategies may work for older versus younger student populations.

From the findings of this study, the effectiveness of extrinsic motivators such as pizza rewards, candy, or computer time are supported. Participants noted that these types of extrinsic motivators may be more successful among younger students due to the immediacy of the rewards. However, prior research has suggested that more intrinsically based rewards may be more effective for younger students. The results of this study support that the efficacy of rewards to different grade levels may be more based on the preferences and interests of the age group, as the immediate rewards offered in this study, such as pizza rewards, or candy rewards, were felt to be more applicable to the wants of younger students, whereas extra credit toward grades, computer time rewards, and book club participation may simply be more attractive to older students.. If this is true, those interested in motivating student reading should utilize appropriate motivators based on age and grade level.

Despite the potential challenges to offering free choice reading, such as difficulties in finding material that is both interesting and challenging for the student, this motivator can support greater interest on the part of the student, which may also support internal motivations and self-concept development of the student in terms of likes and dislikes and perceptions of personal abilities. Given the importance of the student self-

concept as a reader, strategies to support self-concept growth and positive attitude toward reading are critical to employ if wanting to motivate students to demonstrate lifelong reading behaviors. More intrinsic types of motivational strategies mentioned in this study, such as free choice reading and grade enhancement, were also noted by teacher participants to be effective, and possibly offer a more long term motivation and behavior change compared to the other, more extrinsic type motivational strategies.

In addition, parental (or other significant adult) involvement may help to relieve or eliminate the stress associated with repetitive failure by supporting more positive results in a more positive and less judgemental environment. Parental (or other significant adult) influence was also seen as critical to successfully increasing reading in the home setting; however, the associated challenges mentioned by participants of finding appropriate reading materials remain. When involved, parents should not underestimate the importance of multiple literacies that students may be more attracted to outside of the classroom. These multiple literary sources qualify as substantial reading materials (Pitcher et al., 2007; Sturtevant & Kim, 2010) and may include popular music lyrics, internet and other technological reading sources, and magazines (Pitcher et al., 2007). These types of reading materials offer opportunities for students to engage in reading content that they are more interested in learning, supporting internal motivation of the student to read.

With greater intrinsic motivation (Brophy, 2010; Lei, 2010), students are more inclined to read independently, without being told to read, and tend to read books that are more challenging for them (Park, 2009). Although intrinsic motivation seems to be the

goal, supporting independent reading and enjoyment, sometimes extrinsic motivators are necessary to support the development of a self-concept that will in turn support greater intrinsic motivation in the individual student who has continued to struggle with reading achievement and may view themselves and reading less positively.

The findings of this study support changes in the way students are motivated to read. The strategies used in this study were perceived as effective in reinforcing independent reading and demonstrated increases in overall number of books read by class. Educators can begin implementing these types of strategies into their current reading programs to support improved literacy development and raise the level of academic achievement. Understanding how to effectively motivate students to read independently is valuable information when attempting to improve student reading skills and advance these skills to the next level. Students who read more, read independently, and read aggressively will demonstrate greater achievement, supporting increases down the road in terms of meeting the standards and NCLB regulations, improved student achievement outcomes, and increased graduation rates. All of these potential consequences support positive social change in creating a more highly educated and less socially dependent society.

Conclusion

Using a case study design, this study maintained a focus on the perceptions of fourth grade teachers related to motivational strategies to support independent reading and literacy development in their students. The purpose of this study was to explore how to increase the number of books students read by focusing on effective techniques that

motivate students to become frequent readers. To achieve these goals, semi-structured one-on-one interviews and classroom observations (in terms of number of books read) were used to explore the perceptions and experiences of these teachers with regard to the impact and efficacy of different motivational strategies for increasing reading literacy. An expected outcome of the study was to provide information to educators regarding specific techniques to increase student motivation to read.

The data analysis revealed several themes that served to address the research questions of the study. These themes supported (a) difficulties and challenges in identifying student reading preferences and helping students to find material they are interested in reading, as well as challenges associated with student reluctance to read more challenging material, such as chapter books; (b) teacher preexisting perceptions of increased student motivation tied to the use of incentives, rewards, and point systems that offer instant gratification or goal setting rewards over a short period of time, as well as the motivational effect of free choice of books to read; (c) a general perceived effectiveness of motivators used in terms of positive behavioral changes and student growth in number of books read, interest in reading, and more aggressively reading and completing books as evident in using free time for reading tasks and seeking out own reading materials; (d) incentives and motivators that were felt to be applicable to other grade levels, particularly older grade levels; and (e) perceived critical incentives supporting reading development among the fourth grade students of free choice reading to support independent reading, incentives that support reading grade (extra credit offered), and parental involvement in reading and assisting in book selections.

The discussion noted differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and the applicability to addressing the needs of students at different grade levels, and the sustainability of the motivational aspects. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators have been shown to be beneficial in terms of motivating students to achieve (Afzai et al., 2010; Brophy, 2010; Corpus et al., 2009). Certain strategies such as free choice reading, increased parental involvement, and grade enhancement may be more likely to support intrinsic motivation compared to external motivation, which may be better supported through more immediate rewards such as candy, pizza, or computer time rewards. The applicability of these different types of rewards may be determined by student preferences. To support lifelong learners and readers, it would seem the ultimate goal is to achieve intrinsic motivation within each student, as reading should be “meaningful, attainable, and enjoyable” to not only reach the illiterate students (Brinda, 2008, p. 496), but continue to develop their self-concept as a reader and their positive attitude toward reading.

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Appendix A:

Interview Protocol

Title: An Exploratory Study of Motivators for Increasing Fourth-Grade Reading Behaviors

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Opening: Thank you for volunteering your time to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to explore effective motivators that motivate students to read frequently. The study will assist other teachers to increase the amount of books read within the classroom. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes. I will be recording as well as taking notes of the interview. If you do not feel comfortable answering any question you may skip it. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

1. What is your position/title?
2. How long have you held this position?
3. What duties and responsibilities does your position entail?
4. What is your experience with teaching reading?
5. Prior to this study, what is your current strategy for motivating your students to read? Provide key processes that have proven to be effective?
6. Describe your process for motivating students to read during this study.
7. What difference in level growth did you experience when there was no motivator present versus a motivator being present?

8. Based on the strategies you have used to motivate reading, what enhancements or incentives are needed to encourage reading?
9. What were the behavioral changes noted in the first 3 weeks versus the last 3 weeks with motivators present?
10. How did the motivators affect the students' vocabulary, fluency level, or comprehension level?
11. Was your chosen method successful: Yes - what were the contributing factors for its success No: why not and what would you have done differently?
12. How do you think your chosen method would be perceived in other classrooms?

Closing: Thank you for your time and cooperation. Your views and opinions are important to me as a researcher. I will be contacting you with the transcription of your interview. Please review it carefully to make sure it reflects your views and opinions accurately. If it does not, please let me know so I can correct it.