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Teacher Self-Efficacy Levels in Providing Reading Instruction to Students in Kindergarten Through Second Grades

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TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY LEVELS IN PROVIDING READING INSTRUCTION
TO STUDENTS IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH SECOND GRADES

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Rebekka Powers under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Abstract

TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY LEVELS IN PROVIDING READING INSTRUCTION TO STUDENTS IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH SECOND GRADES. Powers, Rebekka, 2022: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy levels of kindergarten through second-grade teachers in their ability to provide reading instruction to students with a focus on the five foundational areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, the study sought to make recommendations as to how the district of study can enhance teacher efficacy in delivering reading instruction, as well as assist the district in providing instructional resources and teacher professional development that increase teacher efficacy levels in reading instructional practices. A mixed method approach was used to conduct this study. Data were collected through the use of the Teacher Self-Efficacy in Reading Instruction Survey and focus group interviews. K-2 teachers within the district's summer program were participants. Survey results were analyzed through the use of frequency of response tables. Participant responses from the interviews were coded and themed in order to gain a more thorough understanding of efficacy levels within the five foundational areas of reading. The analysis of collected data shows a strong correlation between professional development and access to effective practices through resources as contributors to the level of efficacy teachers exhibit when teaching reading. Based on the findings, the district should consolidate professional development into a consistent reading instructional program. In addition, the district should provide effective instructional resources to K-2 teachers in all five foundational areas of reading.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) changed the field of education by thrusting it into a new age of accountability. The reasoning behind the new legislation was "to change the culture of America's schools by closing the achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on what works" (Aud et al., 2012, p. 328). With this new legislation came reform initiatives within schools that quickly swept across our nation. In response to NCLB, states developed data-driven accountability models.

Due to the changes in accountability measures, new curriculums were designed, assessments were written in alignment with the new standards, and "progress monitoring" and "data-driven instruction" became standard school-wide terms. The idea of data-driven instruction is centered on the premise that once a teacher has analyzed student data, they then have a better understanding of an individual student's or group of students' needs. The teacher can then tailor or customize their instruction to address the specific areas of student weakness. This practice is heavily supported by NCLB (Melucci, 2013).

With the changes in accountability models came high stakes assessments that monitored student proficiency in reading and math in Grades 3-8. Student proficiency on these assessments and their growth from 1 year to the next became the new measurement of success for our nation. States found themselves being held responsible for reporting student performance to internal and external stakeholders through an annual school report card. School report cards are shared with the public using data to reflect the student performance at each school using multiple performance indicators.

Statement of the Problem

Fast forward a little less than a decade, and education in the United States would see change once again when, in 2009, the Common Core Standards were launched through a state-led effort. Forty-one states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories voluntarily adopted these standards. According to the Common Core Standards Initiative site, the reasoning for these standards was due to the stalled performance of the country as a whole:

> For years, the academic progress of our nation's students has been stagnant, and we have lost ground to our international peers. Particularly in subjects such as math, college remediation rates have been high. One root cause has been an uneven patchwork of academic standards that vary from state to state and disagree on what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, About Common Core Standards Section, para.2)

To ensure that no student was left behind, states felt that providing a set of common standards in reading and math that the nation would adopt would allow for gaps in learning to be removed when a student moved from one state to the next. Furthermore, students would receive a more equitable learning experience by learning the same standards as their peers across the nation.

In 2010, the state of North Carolina fully implemented the Common Core Standards to provide a curriculum with rigor in the classroom. With this implementation came revised standardized, summative assessments, called End of Grade Assessments (EOG), aligned to the new Common Core Standards during the 2013-2014 school year.

With new assessments came higher rigor and proficiency scales. The scale score cutoffs to reach proficiency in the areas of both math and reading increased significantly.

Two years after Common Core Standards were introduced to teachers across the state, the General Assembly of North Carolina passed the Read to Achieve legislation. Read to Achieve set a new expectation for reading in the state of North Carolina. This new legislation set the standard that third-grade students must be proficient in reading to be promoted to fourth grade. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) responded to the Read to Achieve legislation with universal screening programs and procedures for educators to follow to measure student progress in reading in kindergarten through third grades. To further support districts, the state has offered the Race to the Top grant that districts can apply for to receive additional funding for literacy programs and initiatives that will help students with their abilities to reach the new rigorous literacy standards and expectations.

Sweeping changes in education legislation have occurred over the past 20 years. In 2015, with a new administration, the United States educational field met another shift with the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). This act was signed into law by the Obama administration as an update to NCLB. The Every Student Succeeds Act focuses on established accountability measures but also on subgroup populations to ensure equity in learning and the closing of achievement gaps between subgroups. With the additional annual measures of progress being implemented, states, districts, and schools continue to strive for high student performance in response to the current legislation and reform efforts.

Table 1 shows the percentage of fourth-grade students reading at grade-level

proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment by

year at both the national and state levels.

Table 1

Percentage of Fourth-Grade Students Reading at Grade-Level Proficiency on the NAEP

Assessment

Assessment year	NAEP national reading proficiency Grade 4	NAEP North Carolina reading proficiency Grade 4
2002	31%	32%
2009	33%	32%
2015	36%	38%
2017	36%	39%
2019	34%	36%

In 2002, just 1 year after NCLB was signed into law, the NAEP results showed

that only 31% of our nation's fourth-grade students are reading at grade-level proficiency.

In 2009, the same year that Common Core Standards were launched at the national level,

33% of the nation's fourth graders were reading on or above grade level. In 2015, when

the Every Student Succeeds Act was signed into law, 36% of the nation's fourth graders

were reading at or above grade-level proficiency. In 2019, the most recent NAEP results,

only 34% of our nation's fourth-grade students were reading at grade-level proficiency.

This is a 2% decrease from the previous reports in 2017 and 2015 (National Center for

Education Statistics 2019).

Using state-level NAEP results, North Carolina was aligned with that of the

nation. As seen in Table 1, in 2002, North Carolina was 1% higher than the nation, with

32% of students reading at or above grade-level proficiency. Seven years later, while the

nation increased slightly, North Carolina remained the same, with 32% of its students

reading on or above grade level. In 2015, North Carolina saw a 6% increase over 6 years,

with 38% of students on or above grade level. Most recent results for the year 2019, show

the percentage drops, with 36% of our students performing at or above grade-level

proficiency, a 3-point decrease from the 2017 results, which showed that 39% of fourth

graders were on or above grade-level proficiency.

Table 2 shows the percentage of students proficient on the North Carolina reading

EOG at the state level for Grades 3 and 4 by year.

Table 2

Percentage of Third- and Fourth-Grade Students Proficient on the North Carolina

Reading EOG

Assessment year	North Carolina EOG reading proficiency Grade 3	North Carolina EOG reading proficiency Grade 4
2002	78.2%	75.7%
2009	65.5%	69.1%
2014	60.2%	55.6%
2017	57.8%	57.7%
2019	56.8%	57.3%

While the state's fourth-grade reading proficiency percentages for NAEP remain

stagnant in the upper 30% range, the state's EOG reading achievement scores for third

and fourth graders show a more significant percentage of students reading at a proficient

level. As seen in Table 2, using North Carolina EOG results, NCDPI reported in 2002

that 78.2% of third-grade students were reading at or above proficiency, while 75.7% of

fourth graders were at or above the proficient level. In 2009, the state saw a substantial

decrease in both grade levels, with 65.5% (third) and 69.1% (fourth) being on grade level.

At the end of the 2013-2014 school year, the state had new standards and assessments. In

third grade, student proficiency in reading was at 60.2%, while fourth-grade reading was

at 55.6%. It is evident that through the new changes in the assessments, students had more of a challenge in reaching the new proficiency scale scores. It also is of interest to note that before the 2013-2014 school year, North Carolina measured student performance on a four-achievement-level rating system; however, beginning with the 2013-2014 assessments, students were measured on a five-achievement-level rating system. This system changes the ranges of scale scores for each level, creating smaller ranges for proficiency levels.

In 2017, the state had 3 years of implementation of the new common core standards; however, the state still saw little growth in proficiency, with 57.8% of third graders being proficient in reading and 57.7% of fourth graders reaching proficiency. Two years later, 2019 results showed that 57.3% of fourth-grade students were reading on or above grade-level proficiency on the state-level summative assessment. In addition, 56.8% of third-grade students were reading at or above grade level on the state-level summative assessment (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Testing and Accountability, 2019). These decreases in proficiency directly oppose the intended results of both the Every Student Succeeds Act and Read to Achieve legislation written into law less than 10 years before these achievement results.

In accord with the results at both the national and state levels, the district of study has seen small incremental increases and decreases in reading proficiency for students in Grades 3 and 4 over the past 6 years, with scores remaining stagnant at around 50% to 54% proficient. Table 3 shows the percentage of students in the district of study who were proficient on the North Carolina reading EOG from 2013 to 2019 by grade and district levels.

Table 3

Percentage of Proficient Students on the North Carolina Reading EOG

Grade	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
3	39.4%	51.8%	51.9%	52.5%	51%	51.4%	51.8%
4	37.8%	50.1%	50.7%	51.3%	51.5%	54.1%	53.6%
5	34.9%	47.4%	48.4%	48.3%	51.2%	52.8%	50.6%
6	40.9%	49.3%	50.5%	51.7%	56.1%	57.6%	57.1%
7	41.8%	51.5%	47.3%	51.3%	55.7%	55.4%	55.3%
8	38.1%	50.2%	47.2%	48.7%	48.7%	51.6%	51.1%
District	38.8%	50.0%	49.3%	52.3%	52.3%	53.8%	53.3%

According to the data, 53.6% of fourth-grade students in the district of study are reading on or above grade-level proficiency according to state-level assessment data. Over the past 3 years, students have seen a 3.5% increase; however, the latest proficiency is a decrease from the previous year. Furthermore, third-grade reading proficiency scores have seen an increase in the 2015-2016 school year, with 52.5% of students proficient. However, the district has not seen an increase since it remains at the same percent proficient, with 51.8% of third-grade students reading on or above grade level, the same percentage of proficient students 6 years ago in 2013-2014.

The lack of change in proficiency in third- and fourth-grade reading scores within the district is a cause of concern. Despite the efforts of the Read to Achieve legislation and the district's response to the legislation through the use of funding to implement new reading intervention programs, professional development for teachers, and placing reading coaches at all Title I schools, the district has not seen a substantial increase in reading proficiency.

Purpose of the Study

With NCLB, data-driven instruction has been an educational reform effort at the

forefront of education (Godzak, 2018). With the revised legislation of the Every Student Succeeds Act and North Carolina's Read to Achieve law, teachers are now held to a high standard to provide a curriculum with rigor and to move students from nonproficient levels to performing on grade level by closing achievement gaps at a much faster rate. To do so, teachers must collect, analyze, and act upon student performance data fluidly within their classrooms daily.

A study by Fuchs and Fuchs (2003) identified the importance of using systematic progress monitoring by stating the following:

When teachers use systematic progress monitoring to track their students' progress in reading, mathematics, or spelling, they can better identify students in need of additional or different forms of instruction, design stronger instructional programs, and their students achieve better. (p. 1)

Furthermore, Brooke (2017) discussed the importance of K-2 monitoring by sharing the following:

Many educators focus more on intervention than prevention-spending time, chasing the effects of instructional gaps rather than addressing the root causes. For those K-2 students who struggle with grade-level expectations, the earlier identified, the better. Research shows that if schools wait until grades 3-5 to identify struggling students, the intensity of intervention required to close the gap is significant and seemingly unachievable. Prevention and early identification of skill gaps for all students are crucial. (Fielding et al., 2007; Scanlon et al., 2010; Torgesen, 2002). (p. 1)

Data are the road maps that guide educators in identifying the direction they must

go instructionally to provide instruction that intervenes for those most at risk and enriches those who have surpassed grade-level expectations. To know who needs additional interventions and what content is needed to be remediated, teachers must have a process in which to monitor students in their performance in all grade levels to monitor and address learning needs (U.S. Department of Education & Institute of Education Sciences, 2009).

To help monitor student performance in all grades, including kindergarten through second grades, Early Warning Systems have served as a way for districts, schools, and teachers to identify students at risk of performing below grade level. Several indicators, such as attendance, behaviors, and performance, are used as a source of information in identifying these at-risk students (Neild et al., 2007). Students in kindergarten through second grades are graded on a standards-based report card, much different from the numeric grading that Grades 3-8 receive each quarter. Although the grading and promotion standards are different for students in kindergarten through second grades, performance in these three grade levels does have a direct impact on the performance students have in middle and high school, including graduating within 4 years (Che et al., n.d.).

Currently, the district's Strategic Plan measures student proficiency in the subject areas of reading, math, and science for Grades 3-8 and proficiency on high school end-of-course assessments in the areas of English, biology, and math. However, graduation rates and other college and career readiness indicators are also included in the district Strategic Plan. With the performance in kindergarten through second grades having a direct correlation and impact on a student's performance as they move to middle and high

school grade levels, it is imperative that the district measures their success during these foundational years so it can adjust instruction and provide the resources needed to get them on track.

Additionally, over the past decade, the district has implemented several different reading programs in elementary schools with the type of program being adapted to changes in state standards and new research around new literacy instruction. These changes have often occurred after 1 to 2 years of implementation and were based on the whole-language approach to teaching reading. Programs and approaches implemented by the district are Balanced Literacy, Fountas and Pinnell, the Basal Approach, and Lucy Calkin's Reader's and Writer's Program. Over the past year, the district has implemented SPIRE phonics and Heggerty's Reading Curriculum for teachers in elementary grade levels as a way to provide direct reading instruction to students instead of the whole-language approach to teaching reading.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy levels of kindergarten through second-grade teachers in their ability to provide reading instruction to students with a focus on the five foundational areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, the study sought to make recommendations for how districts can enhance teacher efficacy in delivering reading instruction.

Setting

The study was completed within the 10th-largest school district in the state of North Carolina. The district serves approximately 31,000 students, ranging from prekindergarten to 12th grade. Currently, there are 55 schools, with 30 serving elementary

students, 11 serving middle school students, and 11 serving high school students. The remaining three serve special populations, including a virtual academy.

Furthermore, the district has two early college high schools. The district has two alternative schools. One serves behaviorally at-risk students, and the other serves students who are severely handicapped. In 2020-2021, the district's student population was as follows: preschool was 372; kindergarten through fifth grades was 13,172; Grades 6-8 was 7,273; Grades 9-13 (this includes the early college high schools) was 9,481. This totals 30,298 students enrolled in prekindergarten through Grade 13.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of efficacy for K-2 teachers delivering reading instruction?

2. What strategies do K-2 teachers find most effective when delivering reading instruction?

3. What strategies need additional support for teachers to reach a level of efficacy?

Significance of the Study

In analyzing the historical performance of the district, data indicate that the district as a whole is continually producing non-grade-level proficient readers by the third grade. Growing proficient readers in elementary school is key to graduating students from high school (Kirsch et al., 1993). Hernandez (2011) stated that students who are in the third grade and cannot read on grade level are more likely to not graduate from high school in 4 years; however, their peers reading on grade level upon entry into third grade will likely graduate on time. In addition to monitoring student performance and addressing learning needs, schools and districts must begin to develop a mindset that for

students to obtain reading proficiency in the third grade so they may be promoted to the fourth grade, students must first be able to reach grade-level proficiency on the foundational skills presented in kindergarten through second grades. These three prior grade levels set the beginning work for ensuring students achieve reading proficiency by providing a curriculum that teaches students the foundational skills needed in upper-grade levels.

This study was necessary due to the overwhelming need for reform in the reading instructional practices within the district to increase the percentage of students who can read on or above grade level by the beginning of their third-grade year. Data from Table 1 has shown that the reading proficiency levels among students are not improving as they progress to each grade level due to the continued plateau of reading proficiency percentages throughout the progression of Grades 3-8.

This study is significant because the results will help determine the areas of effectiveness within reading instructional practices with a focus on teacher efficacy levels in providing instruction of the five foundational reading skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Furthermore, the results were used to provide research that will assist the district as they create both short- and long-term instructional and teacher professional development plans that increase teacher efficacy levels in reading instructional practices that will improve grade-level reading readiness in kindergarten, first, and second grades. This will in turn improve the third-grade reading proficiency for the district's schools so that over time, the district will no longer be stagnant in having half of the third-grade student population reading on or above grade level at the end of the school year. This is imperative to the district because, throughout

this study, data were analyzed to determine the type of impact new or different approaches to reading instruction have had on students reading on grade level by the beginning of their third-grade year. The conclusion of this study will play a role in driving the district instructional and professional development planning, which in turn will make a dynamic impact on its students' abilities to read on grade level by their third-grade year, which can ultimately lead to high school graduates who are well-prepared citizens of their community and state.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theoretical framework of the self-efficacy theory that is derived from Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy is a person's particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can execute a plan of action in prospective situations (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, research has found that teacher efficacy, both personal and teaching, were influenced by the context of the workplace (Moore & Esselman, 1994).

Higher teacher efficacy is associated with the use of more challenging teaching techniques and teacher willingness to try innovative methods (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988; Rangel, 1997). The findings regarding the impact of teacher efficacy on student achievement have been consistent. Higher teacher efficacy enhances student mastery of both cognitive and affective goals (Guskey, 1988; Ross, 1992, 1994; Turgoose, 1996; Watson, 1991).

Teaching efficacy (a sense that children can learn and teaching as a profession can affect this outcome) was found to be strongly influenced by the historical achievement performance of students. Both reading and mathematics historical performance was

indirectly influential in teacher sense of teaching efficacy. Context was found to be an important influence on teaching efficacy as well. A positive school atmosphere (focused on instruction), the reduction of barriers to effective teaching, and classroom-based decision-making influence each contributed to teacher sense of teaching efficacy (Moore & Esselman, 1994).

Reading instruction has evolved over the past decades, and there are still debates about the best way to teach children to read (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000). In addition, a teacher's success being measured by high stakes standardized testing competes with the developmental approach to teaching reading. Teachers must be trained to assess, identify, and remedy reading difficulties from the first day of kindergarten to decrease the reading gap between those who come to school without school readiness and those who learn to read early (Allington, 2009; Stanovich, 1986).

Methodology

The mixed methods research study was quantitative and qualitative as a teacher self-efficacy survey and focus group interviews were used. Phase 1 of the study was the distribution of the teacher efficacy in reading instruction survey. The survey was distributed to K-2 reading teachers within the district who were participating in the summer school program. Phase 2 of the study was focus group interviews with K-2 teachers who agreed to participate. The goal was to have a participation rate of 30% of the K-2 teacher population.

Teachers who completed the survey were asked to identify and rate their levels of efficacy in providing reading instruction to their students, with a focus on the five foundation skills. In the focus group interviews, teachers who volunteered were allowed

to provide open-ended answers to address their efficacy levels in providing reading instruction practices that have contributed to their students' performance.

Definition of Terms

Achievement

Level of proficiency on the North Carolina EOG in the area of reading.

Assessment

Method in which a teacher evaluates, measures, and documents the reading readiness, progression, content mastery, and educational needs of students.

Benchmark Assessment

Tests administered throughout the school year to give teachers immediate, formative feedback on their students' performance (Fournier et al., 2009).

Comprehension

The ability to understand or interpret what is read. Intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader (NRP, 2000).

Diagnostic

Assessment tasks that are used to determine students' level of knowledge, skills, and understandings at the beginning of a course, grade level, unit, and lesson. They test the students on what they already know. These tests allow the instructor to adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of the students (The Center for Effective Reading Instruction, n.d.),

Effectiveness

The extent to which an activity such as a specified intervention, strategy, or program reaches the intent in which it was implemented for a certain population

(Wojtczak, 2002).

Formative Assessment

Assessments designed to monitor student progress during the learning process (Chappius & Stiggins, 2002).

Intervention

Instructional approaches and programs designed to prevent or remediate persistent academic difficulties (Tunmer, 2008).

NCLB

Federal legislation that enacts the theories of standards-based education reform. NCLB ensures that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (NCLB, 2001).

Phonemic Awareness

An understanding of how individual phonemes (consonant or vowel sounds) can be manipulated and arranged to create words.

Phonics

The connection of different sounds with different letters or different groupings of letters.

Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring involves the systematic and repeated collection and analysis of student performance data. It provides a standardized and empirical method for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions (Florida Association of School Psychologists, n.d.).

Summative Assessment

Assessments designed to determine a student's academic development after a set unit of material (Chappius & Stiggins, 2002).

Vocabulary

The range of words a student can understand and use in context.

Summary

Over the past 6 years, the district of study's reading proficiency scores have remained stagnant, with little to no growth in the percentage of proficient students. The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy levels of kindergarten through second-grade teachers in their ability to provide reading instruction to students with a focus on the five foundational areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, the study sought to make recommendations for how districts can enhance teacher efficacy in delivering reading instruction.

A mixed methods analysis was used to determine teacher levels of efficacy in providing instructional strategies and practices in their work to increase student proficiency in the five foundational reading skills. The researcher used survey and focus group interview data to determine the efficacy levels of K-2 teachers. The researcher looked for trends in the data to identify key grade levels or reading skills that could point to areas in need of additional professional development for teachers. The researcher used teacher responses to identify powerful practices and strategies that are directly correlated to student reading performance. Results were shared with district leadership to provide quantitative and qualitative data to guide short- and long-term instructional and

professional development planning.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Millions of American children get to fourth grade without learning to read proficiently, putting them on the high school dropout track. The ability to read by third grade is critical to a child's success in school, life-long earning potential, and ability to contribute to the nation's economy and security (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010).

Becoming a proficient reader is developmental and requires intervention, support, and practice. This study was designed to identify strategies and instructional methods for teachers in kindergarten through second grades that show promise in helping students reach reading proficiency in the three primary grades and maintain proficiency as they enter their third-grade year. Kindergarten through second grades are foundational grade levels and provide the gateway to success in Grades 3-12 (Richardson, 2018).

History of Reading Instruction

Reading instruction has evolved over the decades, often based on educational philosophies and political beliefs. Reading instruction found its beginnings in America during the colonial period. The primary purpose of this instruction is centered on religion due to there being very little writing written for children (Graves et al., 1998). During this time, reading instruction was straightforward, with no additional strategies (K-12 Academics, 2002). The teacher would teach students the code and let them read. However, the purpose of reading instruction changed over time, focusing on the alphabetic approach being the continued approach to teaching reading.

In the 1840s, Horace Mann provided a different, holistic approach (Graves et al., 1998). He believed that teaching the word as a whole instead of looking at the parts of the word was a better and more sustainable approach to reading instruction. With this

change, reading programs began to transform to the basal-driven approach. Through the approach, teachers were provided manuals with directions on providing reading instruction to their students. Worksheets were created, and collections of stories were available in one place (Graves et al., 1998). One of the more well-known versions of the basal approach was the *Dick and Jane* series. Another key feature of the basal approach is the inclusion of supplemental resources such as recordings, games, puppets, and posters. Providing these supplemental resources also documents the beginning of interventions being used for educational purposes (Zimmerman, 2020).

As previously stated, the evolution of reading instruction is often based on educational or political beliefs. With the rise and popularity of the basal reading approach came challenges, from advocates who believed that the whole language approach was a more practical approach to reading instruction. According to Graves et al. (1998), these advocates were concerned that reading and phonics skills were taught in isolation; therefore, students could not apply the learning knowledge in the reading context.

In 1991, Adams published *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print.* Adams's research was focused on phonics and early reading instruction. Adams's findings supported that students who receive reading instruction through approaches that use both phonics and whole language components perform at a higher level of achievement than students who receive instruction through approaches that do not use phonics and whole language together. Adams suggested that reading instruction include phonemic awareness, phonics, independent reading, authentic literature, automaticity, and reading aloud. Many of today's foundations for teaching reading are due to Adams's research.

While Adams's (1991) research gave an extensive review of her reading research, her study did not provide any ways in which the field of education could provide interventions to readers who struggle even though they are receiving the most effective approach to reading instruction. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education and National Academy of Sciences published the *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* report. The concerns behind the report were with the large numbers of children in America whose educational careers are imperiled because they do not read well enough to ensure understanding and meet the demands of an increasingly competitive economy (National Academy of Sciences, 1998); therefore, a committee was formed to research and examine the prevention of reading difficulties.

The committee concluded that no interventions could replace a well-trained teacher; however, they did recommend instructional methods that teachers of students in prekindergarten through third grade should provide (National Academy of Sciences, 1998). The recommendations of the committee to teachers of students in these young grades were to obtain meaning from print, frequent and intensive opportunities to read, exposure to regular spelling-sound relationships, determine the nature of the alphabetic writing system, and understand the structure of spoken words (National Academy of Sciences, 1998). The report also included recommendations and strategies by grade level for teachers to use when instructing at-risk students. The National Academy of Sciences (1998) shared that at-risk students will require supplementary services, ideally from a reading specialist. The specialist provides individual or small-group intensive instruction coordinated with high-quality instruction from the classroom teacher. While these children are behind, the majority do not need an entirely new set of instructional methods.

Instead, they need the application of the same principles taught to them by someone who can apply them expertly to individual children experiencing difficulty (National Academy of Sciences, 1998).

Just 2 years after the research study and recommendations were completed by the National Academy of Sciences in 1998, research on a much larger scale was conducted by the NRP. In 2000, this panel was formed in response to a Congressional charge to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NRP, 2000) to research the effectiveness of the various approaches to reading instruction within the nation.

The focus of the research was on a selected set of topics: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, teacher education, reading instruction, and computer technology and reading instruction. The NRP had subgroups assigned to a topic where they conducted extensive research based on standards. NRP's (2000) study found that effective reading programs incorporate phonemic awareness, phonics, and guided reading while integrating reading comprehension. This critical research has proven to form the elements of reading for today's generation and provides insight into building a complete reading program (NRP, 2000).

Twelve years after publishing NRP's (2000) report, Duke and Block (2012) examined if the recommendations from the report were being implemented in U.S. classrooms. Duke and Block found that improving students' word-reading skills beginning in kindergarten had received more attention and adoption; however, vocabulary and comprehension instruction remained relatively nonexistent in the primary grades. Furthermore, it was found that the skills that are easier to master were a focus of instruction. Still, the domains that prepare students for mastery in comprehension and

learning in the later grades, such as vocabulary knowledge, comprehension strategy use, and conceptual and content knowledge, were not a part of the instruction; therefore, the stagnation in fourth-grade students' comprehension achievement is thus unsurprising (Duke & Block, 2012).

Through their examination, Duke and Block (2012) identified obstacles that have prevented schools from implementing the best practices in teaching reading thoroughly.

The first obstacle is a short-term orientation toward instruction and instructional reform that focuses on the easier-to-learn reading skills at the expense of vocabulary, conceptual and content knowledge, and reading comprehension strategies. The second is a lack of expertise among many educators in effectively teaching these harder-to-master reading skills. The third is the limited time available in the school day and year to meet unprecedented expectations for children's learning. Policymakers, the education community, and parents must attend to these three challenges if they wish to see meaningful improvements in the reading skills of American children. (Duke & Block, 2012, pp. 66-67)

Furthermore, Duke and Block (2012) identified that a reading recovery plan for struggling readers that includes intensive reading instruction occurs in addition to the core instruction. The instruction should be systematic and build skills onto one another over a period of time. Students should be provided corrective feedback during this intervention and practice to support their ability to use the skill appropriately and effectively.

Elements of Effective Reading Instruction

Reading is an essential skill that students need to gain in early grades. It will be

the foundation of learning in all academic subjects throughout their education

(Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Sloat et al., 2007). Since the implementation of NCLB

(2001) and progression to the current legislation of the Every Student Succeeds Act

(2015), teachers have been required to have a focus on standards-based instruction in

reading and math based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing

measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education (Amidon, n.d.)

As defined by the NRP (2000), the foundational reading skills are phonemic

awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These five skills are often

referred to as the "pillars" or components that work together as a foundation of an

effective literacy instruction strategy. By providing instruction in a structured program

that introduces one of the components at a time, in their correct progression, teachers can

help students become successful readers who can both fluently read and understand the

English language (Waddell, 2019).

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the initial skill that all children traditionally begin

mastering when learning how to read. This skill is typically taught during a child's

preschool years as a critical foundational skill that is imperative to their ability to read at

grade level. Phonemic awareness is the awareness that the speech stream consists of a

sequence of sounds—specifically phonemes, the smallest unit of sound that makes a

difference in communication (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

Early studies of the effectiveness of teaching phonemic awareness as a

foundational skill to early literacy began in the 1960s with D.B Elkonin (1963), who took

a psychological approach and developed three stages in which children acquire how to

understand and speak the sounds of their language. Through his studies, Eloknin believed that the biggest stumbling block young children face in learning to read was learning the alphabet prior to understanding the association of a sound with the letter (Billow, 2017).

In 1973, Dorothy Seymour's study specified the methods needed to teach children how to develop an understanding of the alphabetic principle correctly. There is a specific relationship between letters and the sounds that they make. Seymour's study further supported the stumbling block that Elkonin identified through his study; that there is a need to teach concepts of learning based on sound prior to presenting the concept of the letters of the alphabet, which can be done through the visual representation of words (Billow, 2017).

Bradley and Bryant (1983) completed a 4-year longitudinal study with over 400 children, ages 4 and 5, who had not learned to read. After controlling for scores on final tests and memory abilities, data from the results suggested a significant correlation between a student's initial sound mastery scores and their ability to read and spell with mastery even 3 years later. Their findings again emphasized the significance of learning sounds in words at the phoneme level during the early stages of learning, especially in preschool.

Throughout history, studies have been completed on the significance of students learning that speech and words are a sequence of sounds. Furthermore, these studies have proven that having a foundation in this skill is an indicator of reading success for students as they progress through their early elementary years of reading. In order to create this success for students, teachers must have strong knowledge about phonemic awareness and have the ability to provide good, sound instruction to their students (WETA, 2019).

Phonics

Once students have learned the stream of sounds through phonemic awareness instruction, the next step is to learn phonics or the actual letter sounds (Alexander, 2022). As children learn to read, the most challenging part about learning how to read is understanding that the marks or letters on the page before them represent parts of their language; however, figuring out the code in which these marks or letters create that language becomes an arduous task, leading to phonics learning as an unnatural part of the reading (Treiman, 2018).

Throughout several studies on reading, the majority of the researchers will agree that phonological decoding is a critical prerequisite for the development of a skilled, fluent reader. As a student applies their learned phonological decoding skills to the unfamiliar words they come to in a text, they make a transition from being "novices" to being "experts" who will become a reader of familiar words in a manner that is quick and seamless (Castles et al., 2018).

Throughout extensive research, in reading instruction interventions, it has been proven that the most effective approach to teaching word reading, which is a foundational skill of a fluent reader, is through teaching the alphabet and phonics through explicit instruction (Castles et al., 2018). Phonics instruction teaches students how the writing system of the alphabet works (Treiman, 2018). As students begin to understand how the alphabetic system works, they will be able to decode effectively (Alexander, 2022).

Teachers who are strong in teaching phonics do so with explicit instruction by using detailed explanations and modeling for their students and providing ample practice (Strickland, 2011). Alexander (2022) shared that the best practices of phonics instruction

are word-building activities, word-changing activities, and composing on paper or the computer. By mixing explicit instruction and opportunities for students to practice independently, teachers ensure students gain a strong understanding of phonics and gain the confidence needed to continue growing in their reading.

Oral Reading Fluency

In order to be fluent readers, students must first master the foundational skills of word reading and phonological decoding (Irwin et al., 2021). By reading words efficiently and decoding unknown words through letter and sound recognition, students will become fast and accurate readers, which is the driving force behind higher levels of oral reading fluency (Metsala & David, 2017). Students who can read aloud with grade-level appropriate speed and are accurate in doing so are likely to be more successful in comprehending the text that is being read (O'Reilly et al., 2019). This can be concluded to the student's ability to preserve their cognitive abilities in applying their comprehension skills instead of spending vast amounts of their cognition on decoding the text.

With this being said, oral reading fluency is an indicator of the overall reading progress of a student and their competence as a reader. Oral reading fluency is one of the clearer indicators to monitor, as it is accessible and reliable, therefore making it an effective marker of a student's progress as they learn to read (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2003). Furthermore, oral reading fluency assessments have become one of the easier and quicker ways in which teachers can determine which students are on track toward meeting grade-level standards. This offers teachers the opportunity to quickly identify who is mastering the skills needed to become fluent, high-performing readers and which students would

need support through intervention (Reschly et al., 2009).

White et al. (2021) conducted a study using the oral reading fluency portion of the 2018 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) assessment. This assessment is given to fourth-grade students throughout the nation. NAEP looked at the scores for the oral reading fluency and the two foundational skills of word reading and phonological decoding portions for students who performed below the basic level on the assessment (Irwin et al., 2021). The study found that for the fourth-grade public school students performing below the NAEP basic level, being able to read the text quickly and accurately was a challenge for the students. Furthermore, results revealed that word reading and phonological decoding skills are underdeveloped for this group of students (White et al., 2021). Therefore, this concludes that students must have mastered the foundational skills presented through phonemic awareness and phonics instruction to become fluent readers.

Alexander (2022) shared best practices when working with students to increase their fluency skills in their research of fluent readers. First and foremost is for teachers to model fluency through their reading. This allows students to hear a fluent reader and identify how it sounds. The second is to have moments of choral reading during whole group instruction or echo reading, where a student reads aloud with a peer to provide them with practice in their fluency (Alexander, 2022). The third is to use software-based resources that allow students to read aloud for practice or to hear recordings of fluent readers to further understand what a fluent reader sounds like when reading a piece of text (Foorman et al., 2016).

Vocabulary

As a student begins to read, vocabulary instruction must be a component of receiving literacy instruction of higher quality (Foorman et al., 2016). Teachers having simple communication with students each day in conjunction with building their vocabulary instruction will make a significant impact in reducing the differences students have in their vocabulary skills when entering school, therefore allowing teachers to continue to expand students' vocabulary at higher levels (Foorman et al., 2016). By expanding vocabulary skills, teachers can develop students' abilities to be proficient at reading new words they encounter through various texts. This will, in turn, lead students to be able to use acquired vocabulary when communicating with others (Connor & Morrison, 2012).

Through the research of appropriate vocabulary instruction, Alexander (2022) identified three of the best practices used today to support students in their performance with mastering grade-level and higher vocabulary to become fluent, accurate readers. The first practice is for the teacher to model and explain vocabulary encountered through varied texts to students. This could be done by discussing the plot of the story by organizing the events during their read-aloud. As seen with phonics instruction, teachers modeling instruction to students can be one of the most powerful indicators of students having success at the task being learned (Alexander, 2022).

The second best practice is to teach academic vocabulary to students. By exposing students to academic vocabulary, teachers are allowing them the opportunity to learn various word origins and that words can have multiple meanings. When students learn academic vocabulary, they can cross-reference concepts directly to different content areas

(Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network, 2019). When reading

informational texts or content-area-specific readings, students may not be able to identify

the technical meanings of words; therefore, they cannot make those connections to the

vocabulary they are encountering and its meaning within that specific context

(Alexander, 2022).

Last, to strengthen students' vocabulary acquisition, teachers must instruct

students on how to connect the new words they are learning with words they have already

learned the meaning of (Alexander, 2022). This occurs through the teacher modeling

various contexts in which new words can be used and how they can understand the word

and its meaning through connecting their prior knowledge of similar vocabulary

(Foorman et al., 2016).

Comprehension

A student's ability to comprehend the grade-level text they have read is the goal of

producing a successful reader. This can be achieved by allowing early learners to be

introduced to strategies they can use to help them understand different types of texts and

how they are structured during reading instruction (Shanahan et al., 2010). As with the

other components of reading instruction, to begin instruction for comprehension, it is

suggested that teachers model the strategies that readers use while reading to expose

students to this type of thinking. The whole group read-aloud time within the

instructional day would be an ideal period for this type of modeling. When teachers are

modeling comprehension skills, they can also show how different types of text and clue

words help with their comprehension of what is being read. For example, when reading a

text that compares and contrasts specific topics, beliefs, or experiences, the words both

alike and different may be found within the text, therefore leading students to be able to use comprehension skills that are aligned with comparing and contrasting text (Alexander, 2022).

Modeling comprehension strategies is just the beginning of providing in-depth comprehension instruction to students (Shanahan et al., 2010). While modeling is an important part of comprehension instruction, students also need to be engaged by asking questions, answering questions, making their predictions, and explaining the motives of the characters within the story, and be able to recall specific actions taking place in the text (Shanahan et al., 2010). This type of instruction will be effective for students when teachers have a plethora of high-quality literature that spans various genres, cultures, and experiences relevant to children (Duke, 2000). This allows teachers to provide students with text aligned with their reading levels that allows them the opportunity to read and comprehend during their independent reading times.

When teachers allow for independent reading time within the instructional day, they allow students to experience how to use comprehension skills within a structured environment (Sisk et al., 2018). Furthermore, teachers must carefully choose fiction texts with clear plots and the development of characters and information texts that are accurate and structured to make comprehension easier (Shanahan et al., 2010).

Reading Instruction in the 21st Century

The International Literacy Association ([ILA], 2020) issued a What is Hot in Literacy Survey to a group of diverse educators with various levels of experience. This survey was designed to gather ratings on critical topics that make the most significant impact on literacy instruction in the 21st century. These topics were using a balanced

approach to build early literacy skills, providing equity to all students, access to diverse content, effective strategies for at-risk readers, assessment, and professional development.

Instruction that builds early literacy skills was the highest-ranked topic in the ILA (2020) report. The survey responses expressed that teaching early literacy skills through a balanced approach that includes foundational and comprehension instruction is key when providing literacy instruction to students. In addition to teaching phonemic awareness and phonics, it was found that students must be provided opportunities to have shared reading and writing activities that allow them to make comparisons through various texts that will support their comprehension. The survey also found that student achievement in response to this type of instruction is higher when instruction is provided by teachers who demonstrate strong knowledge in the early stages of reading instruction, which are phonemic awareness and phonics, but also in the later stages of fluency and comprehension (ILA, 2020).

The second highest-rated topic on the survey was how teachers are to determine effective strategies to work with at-risk readers. As society changes, teachers are challenged with finding differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students who are diverse in their technical, social, cultural, and linguistic abilities (Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018). Literacy teachers must understand the obstacles that students face and be able to provide instructional strategies that support their literacy development (ILA, 2020). Recent research has suggested a high correlation between early reading deficiencies and future reading achievement in students (Washburn et al., 2016). One of the major barriers to meeting grade-level appropriate literacy skills is the ability of students to obtain their

foundational phonological skills, which are phonemic awareness and phonics. If not

mastered early on in literacy-building, students are more likely to experience difficulty in

mastering grade-level appropriate fluency and comprehension skills (Castles et al., 2018).

It is not hard to find students with varying reading difficulties in classrooms. Some will

have strong foundational skills and can decode words yet struggle with comprehension of

the text they are reading. Others may easily decode and comprehend but have lower

levels of fluency (Castles et al., 2018). These types of diverse learning gaps among

students continue to challenge teachers to provide differentiated instruction within their

classrooms. Therefore, a teacher's knowledge and self-efficacy in meeting students' needs

through differentiated literacy instruction is vital to the success of their students

(Washburn et al., 2016).

Another hot topic in 21st century literacy instruction is equity for all learners.

Teachers must be able to provide content that is diverse and reflective of various cultures

in today's classrooms (Ng & Graham, 2017). Teachers must ensure that students' needs

are met equitably within the learning environment. A concern that has evolved recently

among literacy educators is the disconnect that occurs between literacy practices and

regular school practices (ILA, 2020). The concern is that literacy instruction must

become a culturally responsive and engaging practice for all students so that the

environment is inclusive for all learners (Ng & Graham, 2017).

Assessments have become an essential part of current 21st century instructional

practices, including literacy instruction (ILA, 2020). Diagnostic, formative, and

summative assessments are seen as critical components of 21st century literacy instruction

because of their ability to provide teachers with a way to assess the needs of students'

abilities as they progress through the stages of literacy instruction. Without this crucial information, teachers will not be able to provide the strategies needed to address the students' needs in the best manner to improve student reading achievement (Chu et al., 2017).

The topic that was ranked as needing immediate attention and improvement to increase teacher effectiveness in literacy instruction is that of professional development and teacher development programs designed specifically for teaching how to implement effective 21st century literacy instruction (ILA, 2020). Respondents specifically shared that they would like more development in incorporating digital resources when teaching literacy because literacy materials have evolved and are no longer just available in print (ILA, 2020). The current generation of students is learning how to read in ways much different from those of their predecessors, although similar skills are being learned and similar strategies are being used by teachers (Leu et al., 2017). While print-based resources are still the primary way in which teachers teach literacy, society has seen shifts in the way texts are read, which are more multisensory than in the previous century and, in turn, need to be considered in the work of contemporary literacy education (Leu et al., 2017). Therefore, literacy teachers must shift how they teach and assess these skills based on the systems in which today's students understand (Di Cesare & Roswell, 2020).

The changes in literacy instruction will reflect how current students are engaged with multimodal literacies and must begin with teaching programs in colleges and universities. These programs will have to develop teachers who can understand and create digital media and multimodal texts and have high efficacy when using these products when modeling and instructing students (Di Cesare & Roswell, 2020). In

response to this need, there have been two key initiatives, the Framework for 21st Century

Curriculum and Assessment (National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE] Executive

Committee, 2013) and the Standards for Literacy Professionals (ILA, 2020), revised to

reflect the current advances within the field of literacy. These national literacy initiatives

and frameworks can influence professional development and teacher preparation

programs that will, in turn, impact the beliefs of literacy teachers and provide them with

the knowledge to teach literacy in an effective manner (Washburn et al., 2016). However,

it is important not to disregard the amount of confidence these teachers must also hold in

their ability to teach 21st century literacy skills (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011).

Self-Efficacy

Steele (2010) identified three characteristics of effective teachers: nonverbal

communication, servant leadership, and teacher self-efficacy; however, in recent

discussions and evaluations identifying the elements of effective instruction, self-efficacy

is the most critical element of an effective educator and can be seen as the one element

that combats burnout, engages learners, and embraces innovation (Mielke, 2021).

Self-efficacy believes that one has the abilities and resources necessary to

accomplish a set goal (Mielke, 2021). Lack of self-efficacy often leads to learned

helplessness, a feeling of having no power due to repeated failings to succeed. Albert

Bandura is one of the leading voices in the research of self-efficacy. Through studies of

human behavior, Bandura (1986) developed the self-efficacy theory. The self-efficacy

theory explains a person's motivation to engage in certain behaviors.

While often associated with behaviorism, Bandura's (1977) work does not

support traditional behaviorism because his theory attributes the behavior of humans to

be more than rewards and punishment based on their environment. Bandura (1977) believed that humans could observe one another's behaviors and learn from them. These lessons can lead to the person mimicking the behavior or choosing a different behavior due to their observations (Bandura, 1977).

Additionally, Bandura (1994) added a component to behavior based on one's cognitive ability through the self-efficacy theory. Bandura (1994) believed that humans could process the observation prior to responding with the same or different behavior before responding to an observation. Therefore, a person's thoughts are manifested through their perceived self-efficacy, when one believes in their capability to organize and execute specific actions needed to provide a certain outcome (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) explained that when a person's self-efficacy is higher, their probability of persevering through different challenges to reach the desired outcome is much greater than someone with lower self-efficacy.

While Bandura is credited with the self-efficacy theory, the foundation of his work is based on Julian Rotter's (1966) social learning theory and his own social cognitive theory (Bandura 1977, 1986). Through social learning theory, Rotter suggested that the outcomes one experiences are based on what is within and beyond their control. Social cognitive theory shares that people behave a certain way due to what they believe is within their control; therefore, when they feel they have control over the situation and outcome, they will work to achieve that outcome in its entirety. They act on their internal control, believing they can impact and change the outcome; however, if they think something is outside their control, they will behave independently of what is outside their control. This means that no matter what they do or how they behave, they cannot control

or change the outcome; therefore, one's perceived motivation is based on their perceived level of control (Rotter, 1966).

Bandura (1977) took Rotter's (1966) social learning theory and expanded it to include that people learn within the realms of their social environment. While in an environment with others, one can learn various behaviors by observing others' interactions or experiences (Bandura, 1977). Whether positive or negative, the consequences often serve as a stimulus for behaviors or lack thereof. Through observation of behaviors, one can determine which behaviors result in successful outcomes; therefore, future behaviors will be exhibited due to the information gained through these observations (Bandura, 1977). While information is gained through these observations, the stimuli experienced often provide motivation. The consequences one experiences due to past behaviors will motivate an individual because one can discern what behaviors are needed to provide an intended response (Bandura, 1977).

While observation provides individuals with information that motivates and drives future behaviors, learning through modeling is an additional way in which one can understand what behaviors produce desired outcomes. Bandura (1977) argued that specific tasks, such as learning to drive a car, swimming, or talking, and allowing trial and error are not the correct way to learn behavior. For an individual learning one of these tasks and relying on the stimulus/response mechanism, trial and error may be harmful; therefore, people model the behaviors they have observed to ensure they will have a successful outcome. Furthermore, people learn behaviors before they begin to model them. However, being entirely focused on the process is a must for one to be truly productive in exhibiting successful behaviors (Bandura, 1977).

After individuals observe, learn, and demonstrate a behavior, they must regulate and maintain their responses. Bandura (1977) introduced three regulatory processes: stimulus, reinforcement, and cognitive control. During stimulus control, certain stimuli will bring certain consequences. For example, as one observes behaviors, one can also have stimuli that bring certain emotions within the individual, such as anger, frustration, happiness, fear, or anxiety. Furthermore, some stimuli serve as a signal to continue or stop one's actions. For example, a red light would signal one to stop their car by pressing the brake pedal and waiting for the light to turn green to proceed in their driving.

Reinforcement control includes internal and external reinforcements to an individual's behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Types of external reinforcements can include how a teacher may treat students' behaviors to reinforce the continuity of the behavior. Other examples would be when one is praised for their behavior through verbal or physical cues (smile, handclapping, etc.). These types of praise would provide a certain response and therefore reinforce the behavior to continue.

While many behaviors are observed, learned, and demonstrated, there are still circumstances when individuals may behave in a certain manner without any prior thought processes. While many actions can be predicted, there are still those behaviors that occur without thought. This is defined as cognitive control. However, one can learn from this experience and the consequences of the behavior by connecting the action to the outcome to address this with fluid thought processes in the future (Bandura, 1977).

With his many studies of human behavior to define the social learning theory, Bandura provided a more in-depth assessment and understanding of human behavior. Through his findings on information processing through cognitive control of one's

behavioral responses, Bandura (1986) evolved social learning theory into the social cognitive theory. Due to his change in theory, he influenced a shift in paradigms within the psychology fields of study. Leading up to Bandura's work, behavior models were input-output linear models; however, the social cognitive theory proposed a behavior model that included humans processing and creating their own biases through learning from experiences, observations, and communication (McAlister et al., 2008). Therefore, it can be concluded that one's behavior is not based solely on the observations they have made of the behavior but also on influences through personal behavior and environmental experience, including self-efficacy (McAlister et al., 2008).

Social learning theory was expanded to include self-efficacy through the new concepts of social cognitive theory. When initially introducing self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) intertwined social cognitive theory and social learning theory as a way to provide a thorough understanding of how behavior motivation and belief in one's abilities are both needed in order for one to accomplish their set goal. With this being said, other factors contribute to the outcome, which include what is within a person's control, their personal experiences, how they respond to stimuli, and the environment in which the behavior will be exhibited (Maddux & Kleiman, 2016). When presented with a task, those with low self-efficacy will often opt out of attempting the task. In contrast, those with high self-efficacy are more apt to attempt the task no matter the difficulty. The variance between these two types of attitudes toward the task is based on one's self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Bandura (1977) explained that a person will determine the behaviors needed to produce the desired outcome when presented with a task. They then determine if they have what it takes to do the task, which is determined

by their own internal belief of their ability to perform the task and get the desired outcome.

Bandura (1986, 1994) set the argument that there are four influences on one's sense of self-efficacy. Mastery experiences, social modeling, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal are the four influences. Mastery is developed when we see success in our work towards a goal. Seeing this success makes our belief in our ability and skill level stronger. It drives us to achieve similar or even more challenging future goals. Having mastery experiences provides a strong influence on building one's perceived self-efficacy. Comparing oneself to others is human nature. We can learn from their successes and identify what worked or did not by observing others. This furthers our ability to perform at higher levels or work with others to achieve high-performance levels. It further creates persistence to work toward achieving one's set outcome.

Social modeling occurs when we can integrate our observations into our behavior. When people observe others reaching outcomes through accomplishing tasks, their self-efficacy is strengthened (Bandura, 1986). This happens due to the person observing and learning the behaviors exhibited by the person performing the task and, in turn, demonstrating these same behaviors when completing similar tasks and reaching similar success.

Verbal persuasion or verbal feedback can profoundly impact one's level of self-efficacy. Results from a study conducted by Gardner-Neblett et al. (2020) found that teachers who participated in one-on-one coaching sessions in addition to receiving professional development in the language-focused curriculum had more significant growth in their self-efficacy in their ability to provide language modeling and instruction

than their peers who attended the professional development sessions only. Our self-efficacy improves when we are praised, coached, or feel supported in our efforts; however, when criticized, we may begin to doubt our self-efficacy. Therefore, what people say to us influences and persuades our efficacy views.

Lastly, our emotions can affect our self-efficacy. As individuals perform a task, they also experience emotions varying from stress, tension, excitement, anger, and happiness, all emotional states an individual can feel when performing a task. When focusing on positive feelings or recalling times of positivity in our lives, our self-efficacy will rise. On the contrary, when we reflect on negative experiences or have negative moods and reactions, our self-efficacy tends to decrease, which affects our performance.

Teacher Efficacy

Teachers carry the most vital capacity to influence and impact their school's culture based on their level of self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). When educators lack self-efficacy, they are often no longer able to educate their students effectively. Studies on self-efficacy have produced data identifying the effects on teachers and learning. Self-efficacy is the most significant indicator behind a teacher's well-being, levels of innovation, ability to engage their students in their learning, and positive student performance (Mielke, 2021); however, school improvement plans or implementation of new instructional initiatives often get lost.

High levels of teacher self-efficacy are linked to increasing persistence and patience when working with struggling students. Furthermore, teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are willing to try new approaches to teaching and learning. They invite parental involvement, and as a result, the engagement of parents is higher in their school.

Achievement reaches higher levels for students instructed by teachers with high self-efficacy. With high levels of teacher self-efficacy also comes lower levels of burnout and increased job satisfaction (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Teacher Efficacy Theory Development

The individual beliefs that a teacher embodies have been directly linked to their students' achievement. This is specifically true in the area of teacher efficacy, which is an area that has been researched and had several studies conducted to provide evidence of the impact teacher efficacy has on student achievement. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) outlined the theoretical concept of teacher efficacy through their literature review, beginning with Rotter's (1966) examination of how our beliefs affect our sense of control within a given situation. In summary, Rotter presented findings that those who have been given reinforcement in their behaviors expect that there will be future success for them. By having this belief, individuals can have a stronger sense of self-control. The argument was given that those who have this type of internal control work harder to improve the environment in which they are and feel that individual skills hold a greater value.

As a result of Rotter's (1966) work, further research on teacher efficacy was inspired (Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998). In the mid-1970s, the RAND Corporation conducted a study that measured a teacher's sense of control in their ability to promote student learning (Armor et al., 1976). As a result of that early study, teacher efficacy has been associated with such significant variables as student motivation, teachers' adoption of innovations, superintendents' ratings of teachers' competence, teachers' classroom management strategies, time spent teaching certain subjects, and teachers' referrals of students to special education (Hoy, 2000). Gibson and Dembo (1984) proposed that there

were two efficacy labels for teachers: general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy.

General teacher efficacy is the belief that a teacher can produce a given result and is further about the power of teaching to reach difficult children (Hoy, 2000). Within a classroom, there are several external factors children bring with them that can influence a teacher's belief in their ability to teach them and lead them to high performance in their mastery of the content. Among these external factors are the socioeconomic status of the home, substance abuse, tension among adults in the home, violence, and mental health needs (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). These external factors, along with many others, can influence a teacher's opinion of how they affect their ability to teach their students. Those opinions that are developed are considered general teaching efficacy; therefore, teachers who blame these external factors as the source of low student motivation and performance are experiencing low general teacher efficacy.

Personal teacher efficacy espouses that a teacher's abilities can overcome the many obstacles when teaching students (Flimban, 2019). While general teaching efficacy places blame on external factors, personal teacher efficacy identifies them as having an impact on student learning but does not place blame. Instead, teachers choose to push through these obstacles and persevere by teaching their students to be their best. They can do this because of their high confidence in their capacity to overcome these barriers that often make it difficult for students to learn (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Personal teacher efficacy places a specific emphasis on the individual teacher, unlike general teacher efficacy. The RAND Corporation (Armor et al., 1976) took their study's general teacher efficacy scores and personal teacher efficacy scores and merged them to become

teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory includes the concept of self-efficacy. This concept can be applied when studying teachers' efficacy when teaching a new curriculum or implementing a new learning approach. Their beliefs in their ability to implement a new curriculum or learning approaches impact the level of effort they put forth when implementing their reaction to times of adversity and/or stressful situations.

In 1977, Bandura defined perceived self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Nine years later, Bandura (1986) defined the difference between perceived self-efficacy and outcome expectancies. Perceived self-efficacy occurs when one has belief in their ability to perform a task with success. Outcome expectancy involves the belief that a certain outcome will happen due to the behavior given to the task. Student performance (outcomes) is strongly linked to the efficacy of a teacher and their behaviors when in a classroom (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The belief a teacher has in their ability to perform specific tasks influences the effort they put into teaching the concepts and skills to their students and setting goals for their outcomes, which is their performance on the taught concept or skills (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Research supports that if teachers do not believe they will be successful in teaching their students, they will be less motivated to put forth their best effort in the classroom. Furthermore, when obstacles present themselves through students' inability to understand or perform, they will often give up on the task despite having strategies that would assist them in teaching the students (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) took the work of Bandura a step further by

positing that a teacher's self-efficacy is also a result of the teacher analyzing the context of the specific task in addition to the belief in their competence in completing the task. Their research explained that teachers could anticipate what will be required in each situation by analyzing the task given. This allows the teacher to identify the difficulties they may need to overcome to accomplish the given task. Tschannen-Moran et al. noted that when teachers analyze a teaching task, they have to judge what resources or means will be necessary to reach the expected end. Research conducted by Ashton and Webb (1986) aligns with the findings of Tschannen-Moran et al. Ashton and Webb shared that teachers who have a higher belief that they can work with students, even during times of difficulty, will take more responsibility for their students' performance.

While teachers assess the task and what resources are needed to meet the end, they also assess if they have the necessary competence to complete the task. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) suggested that teachers judge their current ability and capacity when determining their competence; therefore, they argued that by combining the teaching task analysis and assessing their competence, one's teacher efficacy would be determined. Teaching efficacy creates the persistence and effort a teacher gives to the task. This, in turn, affects their performance in teaching the task. The performance on that given task then contributes to the further efficacy of the teacher and continues the cycle (Flimban, 2019).

Using the information from their study, and the work of Bandura's sources of efficacy information, Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) developed a construct to explain their theory of the developmental cycle of teacher efficacy (Figure).

Figure

The Cyclical Nature of Teacher Efficacy
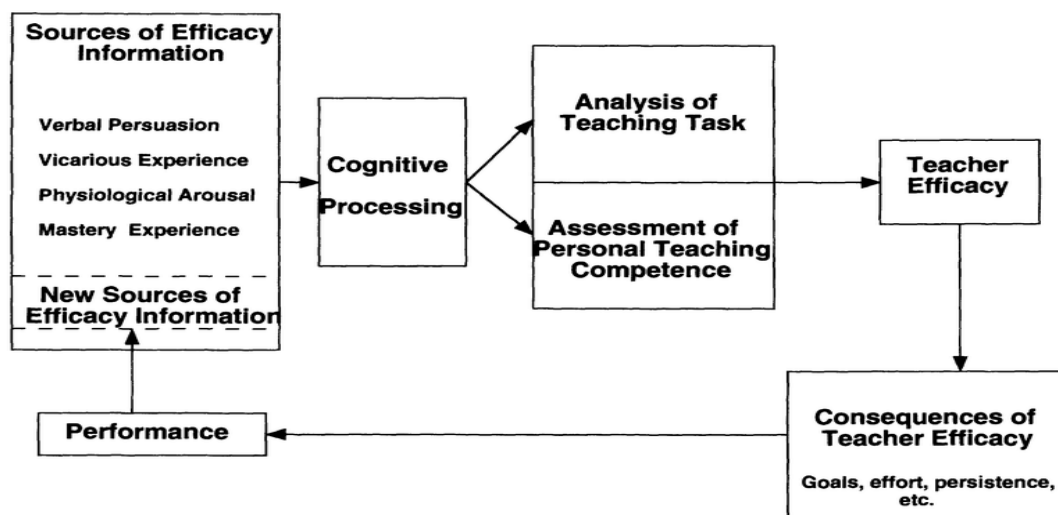
From "Teacher Efficacy: Its Meaning and Measure," by M. Tscahannen-Moran, A. W. Hoy, and W. K. Hoy, 1998, *Review and Research*, *68*(2), pp. 202-248.

As shown in the figure, the cycle begins with Bandura's sources of self-efficacy that were previously defined. These sources lead the teacher to process the information through the task analysis and assess their ability to complete the task. A teacher must also consider the task's context and analyze it. It is then that teacher efficacy is developed. Once the efficacy is developed, the consequences of the efficacy occur. These can be positive or negative. Positive consequences are reached with higher levels of efficacy. These consequences include a more significant effort put forth by the teacher, goal setting, and persistence towards achieving the goals and completing the task to reach set goals. These consequences then positively impact the teacher's performance and lead to new sources of efficacy.

Teacher Efficacy and Student Achievement

Teacher efficacy seems to be one of the attributes of teachers that directly

correlates to student achievement, according to Woolfolk-Hoy et al. (2009). There has

been an abundance of studies researching teacher effectiveness on student achievement.

In 1976, Armor et al. found a positive correlation between teacher efficacy and student

achievement. As a part of the research, student achievement in reading was linked to

several variables, including socioeconomic status, race, and teacher efficacy. Once the

research was complete, it was found that students increased their performance in reading

when teachers had a high sense of efficacy.

With helpful information proving the importance of teacher efficacy leading to

student achievement, efficacy should be acknowledged as a critical component of school

improvement. It is believed that a student's outcomes rely on the levels of efficacy of the

teachers providing the instruction (Flimban, 2019). Caprara et al. (2006) researched

teacher efficacy and its impact on student achievement and job satisfaction. Caprara et

al.'s research confirmed that high levels of efficacy within teachers significantly affect

student performance. On the contrary, teachers who exhibited low efficacy often blamed

their students for their weaknesses and set low learning expectations for students they

viewed as unable to meet the standard.

Teacher Efficacy and Implementation of Response to Intervention

A teacher's effectiveness in implementing interventions directly impacts a

student's learning outcome through the intervention (Nichols et al., 2020). As a response

to federal reform efforts, schools across the nation have implemented research-based or

evidence-based practices to address the needs of our most at-risk students. Recently,

more researchers have begun to study the relationship between teacher efficacy and the

implementation of these practices. A teacher's level of efficacy and their personal beliefs

about the successes and failures of their students help shape an understanding of how they will respond when trying new instructional approaches, working with their students who are at risk in their learning, and implementing new evidence-based interventions in response to the needs of at-risk students (Nichols et al., 2020).

A study was performed by Nichols et al. (2020) to examine how teacher efficacy impacted the implementation of a tiered system of behavioral support for students within an elementary school. As a part of the evaluation, the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale was used and divided into three subparts: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. Teachers were asked to complete the evaluation tool which included 24 questions rated using a Likert scale. While the evaluation and implementation results of the PBIS model were weak, there was a significant, positive relationship between teacher efficacy and the subpart section on instructional strategies (Nichols et al., 2020).

This positive relationship suggests that teachers' levels of teacher efficacy in their ability to implement these various strategies result in higher scores on the levels of implementation. Therefore, it can be determined that to implement a response to the intervention model successfully, teachers who have higher levels of efficacy will find more success in their implementation and, in return, will see more positive results in student performance (Nichols et al., 2020).

Impact of Effective Teachers

Research consistently has revealed that teacher quality is the single most essential resource schools possess to impact student achievement (Rice, 2013). Furthermore, the most effective teachers are five times more impactful than those least effective (Mincu,

2015). In 2003, Marzano analyzed an effective teacher's impact on student achievement. The study was conducted over 2 years using various inputs and the outcomes of students' percentiles in relation to achievement. Through his study, Marzano found that the quality of the teacher had the most significant impact on students' achievement levels regardless of attending an effective or ineffective school. In each study instance, the effective teacher raised the achievement scores, while the ineffective teacher's student saw the opposite result (Marzano, 2003).

There is an abundance of research that supports the argument that an effective, high-quality teacher positively impacts student achievement. Research to identify the attributes of a quality teacher is not as abundant, but although the amount of research is smaller, it has provided us insight into the qualities of effective teachers. Many studies, including Stronge et al.'s (2011) research, identify that effective educators possess content knowledge, compassion, classroom management, and instruction quality.

Hattie and Zierer's (2017) research provided a list of factors that influence student achievement, with the greatest attributes being teacher estimates of student achievement, teacher credibility, and teacher clarity. A study conducted by Stronge et al. (2011) compared the differences between most effective teachers and those who are least effective by reviewing the student achievement scores for each teacher's class of students. They found that teachers with higher student achievement scores are the most effective. These teachers have strong classroom management skills, which result in fewer disruptions in their classrooms. This led to better relationships between the student and teacher due to the focus on teaching and learning instead of behavior. Hattie (2003) held a similar comparison study to Stronge et al. Hattie determined that there were five

distinguishing characteristics of experts in their field. These teachers can identify essential representations of their subject, provide guided learning through interactions, monitor student learning and provide feedback, attend to affective attributes, and influence the outcomes of their students' learning (Hattie, 2003).

In 2000, Wray et al. conducted a specific study of what highly effective literacy teachers do that is different compared to teachers who were identified as not as effective. Wray et al.'s study consisted of teacher observations and interviews, leading them to identify six common characteristics among highly effective teachers. The first of the six was the opportunity to learn, which measures student engagement during their learning time. Next is classroom organization, which reviews the amount of time a teacher spends providing whole group, small group, and one-on-one instruction within a set period of time. The third characteristic is task setting. This characteristic requires teachers to prepare lessons and assignments that challenge students and lead to success. Fourth, task content measures how well matched the task is to the student's ability. Teaching skills are the fifth characteristic, which analyzes how teachers spend time instructing their students and monitoring their independent work while keeping a quick pace. The final characteristic is teacher-student interaction. This characteristic evaluates the relationship between a teacher and student, which is evident through the feedback provided throughout the progression of the lesson (Wray et al., 2000).

In addition to these characteristics, it has been noted that effective teachers go above and beyond to do what is best for their students to perform well (Ferdman, 1990). Teachers have a significant impact on their students' learning because of their influence on how concepts will be taught and what will be seen as the most important skills within

the concept (Ferdman, 1990). Palmer (2011) shared two truths about teaching that concur with the characteristics proposed by Ferdman (1990). First, what teachers teach to their students will never be fully comprehended and retained unless it relates to the inner part of the student and sparks interest due to its relevance. Second, teachers will only be able to make the first truth come to pass when they come to terms with and are confident in their inner ability as a teacher. To indeed be an effective teacher, one must have a sound knowledge of the content and have a good understanding not only of their students but of themselves (Palmer, 2011).

Teacher Efficacy and Reading Instruction

Student achievement and teacher efficacy have been shown to correlate with one another strongly; therefore, this has led researchers to explore further how teacher efficacy can be improved. When exploring the connection between teacher efficacy and reading instruction, there continues to be little existence of research and findings that provide ways in which schools can increase teacher efficacy in relation to literacy instruction (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011).

Tschannen-Moran and Johnson (2011), however, did identify through their study of teacher efficacy and reading instruction that the most significant source of efficacy that impacts literacy instruction is the ability of teachers to learn through actual experiences with their students. By participating in this mastery experience, teachers were able to see improvements in their students' performance over time, which increased their efficacy in teaching students how to read proficiently. This encouraged teachers to believe that future student reading performance would be successful due to their efforts in teaching them. Through the increase in their efficacy, teachers continued to be persistent in

working diligently with students to increase their reading performance (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011).

Poggio (2012) conducted a study that examined the relationship between certain variables for both teachers and students that impact a teacher's efficacy toward reading instruction. The study used reading achievement scores from the Kansas Reading Assessment, a standardized assessment given to students through the state-wide assessment program in response to the federally mandated Elementary and Secondary Education Act. These grade-level assessments were aligned with the reading standards that students were to master during their time in that grade level (Poggio, 2012). In addition, results of the Teacher Sense of Efficacy for Literacy Instruction (TSELI) were used to analyze the relationship between teacher efficacy and student reading achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Results of Poggio's study found that teacher efficacy had a significant relation to students' achievement on reading assessment scores. Furthermore, the study found that a teacher's efficacy towards reading instruction is a reliable predictor of student performance on their reading assessment (Poggio, 2012).

In 2013, Abernathy-Dyer et al. conducted a study that explored issues that bring change to current instructional practices and identified areas that may influence or prevent instructional reform. The study used classroom observations, interviews with teachers, and questionnaires to highlight teacher efficacy in relation to student achievement within a reading program. The team researched two different reading frameworks for first-grade students within four other schools. Two schools implemented the Reading First program, which was executed by two teachers who had little experience. These schools had lower student performance levels and received additional

instructional support due to these performance scores. In the opposite of that setting, the remaining two teachers were experienced and taught at a school with higher performance scores. Both teachers held advanced degrees and had participated in multiple professional development opportunities throughout their careers (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013).

Through observations of teaching and interviews with the teachers, it was determined that all four schools showed similarities in their teaching of learning to read, which included a focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013). There were inconsistencies due to each school's change in materials used. The two schools that used the Reading First program had abundant resources to teach reading due to increased funding. The two non-Reading First schools had to seek materials and resources to fill in the gaps. This realization during the study led the district to discuss adopting a reading program that all schools would use to provide reading instruction to students to overcome the differences in abundance or lack of materials (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013).

Testing data of the students from both schools were reviewed to determine if the efficacy of the four teachers played an important role in student achievement instead of the fact that two different frameworks were used to teach students how to read (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013). Data revealed that students in all four classrooms achieved higher levels. The research team attributed this to the passion that drives teachers to obtain the knowledge needed to identify what works well in teaching their students to read (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013).

The team acknowledged that the teachers made a significant effort to ensure students received and mastered the foundational skills needed to become successful

readers despite their external circumstances; therefore, due to the teachers' high levels of efficacy, students in all four schools experienced high reading achievement levels. (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013).

Jordan et al. (2019) conducted a study to measure the self-efficacy for teaching reading in elementary to provide insight into how teacher education programs can prepare elementary education majors to teach reading effectively. While some students who struggle with obtaining reading proficiency are often served through special education services, many do not qualify for these services. They need a general education teacher who is equipped with strategies and the level of confidence needed to help them learn how to read at grade level (Jordan et al., 2019). Jordan et al. identified that reading performance serves as a prerequisite for how students will perform academically in all subject areas and an indicator of students being able to thrive once they have graduated.

The Teacher Reading Efficacy Scale was used for teachers to rate how confident they were in their ability to teach multiple areas of reading (Jordan et al., 2019). Results showed that teachers need to be confident in teaching students how to read, especially at the beginning level of reading development and phonemic awareness. Furthermore, teachers of reading need to be confident in designing effective phonics and fluency instruction. Jordan et al. (2019) argued that in order to increase teacher confidence in their abilities to do these actions, education major programs and districts must provide quality professional development that allows teachers to learn how to build and deliver instruction around phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency that will, in turn, produce grade-level proficient readers (Jordan et al., 2019).

Students have a right to be taught by a well-prepared teacher who is confident in

their ability to provide literacy instruction that can meet each student's individual needs. (ILA, 2020; NCTE Executive Committee, 2013). Ciampa and Gallagher (2021) used a revised TSELI scale in their study of the impact teacher self-efficacy has on literacy instruction and, in turn, renamed the scale to the Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs for Literacy Instruction in the 21st Century scale. It was determined that previous versions of this efficacy scale did not take into consideration the most recent changes to literacy instruction and would not be able to get a clear understanding of the professional development needs of both preservice and in-service teachers who were now providing literacy instruction in classrooms.

The revisions to the TSELI scale reflect the changes in literacy instruction in the 21st century. They include a variety of components in which teachers were to rate their level of efficacy, including reading, vocabulary, comprehension strategies, motivation, differentiated instruction, and assessment (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021). The scale results show that the teachers had higher self-efficacy when implementing 21st century competencies in their classroom; however, their self-efficacy was lower in their ability to teach early literacy skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. When teachers are faced with teaching early literacy skills, they may tend to feel more frustrated due to their low self-efficacy in their ability to teach these skills in today's diverse classrooms. They will need support in ways in which they can provide effective literacy instruction to all students (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021).

Summary

Reading is an essential skill that students must be exposed to and gain in early grades to have as a foundation of learning as they move forward in life. Without this skill,

students will face challenges and consequences due to a lack of development in learning to read (Hulme & Snowling, 2011). Literature is conclusive that the critical foundational areas of reading instruction and development are phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

While these five areas are the foundation of continued success, the literature supports that the development of these skills must be balanced, equitable, and diverse. Addressing at-risk readers is essential when working with 21st century learners (ILA, 2020). Furthermore, the literature supports that teachers must have development opportunities to obtain high efficacy in their ability to teach these foundational reading skills to the level of student mastery.

The literature on teacher efficacy concerning reading instruction indicates that the level of efficacy has a direct impact on the success of their students' reading development. Through teacher surveys, observation, and interviews, research has shown that teachers lack efficacy in developing effective literacy instruction that addresses the five key foundational skills of reading development (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021). The reviewed literature provided results of studies that found that teachers of early elementary grade levels must receive professional development that allows them to gain confidence in their ability to design effective literacy instruction and have the skills needed to teach this instruction to students who will, in turn, be successful readers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study aimed to investigate the efficacy levels of kindergarten through second-grade teachers in their ability to provide reading instruction to students with a focus on the five foundational areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, the study sought to make recommendations for how districts can enhance teacher efficacy in delivering reading instruction. The literature review emphasized that the level of efficacy teachers possess regarding their ability to deliver reading instruction directly impacts the success of their students' reading development.

When identifying the best ways to support teachers in increasing their levels of efficacy, we must seek the input of those we are supporting, our teachers. I used a mixed methods approach to conduct this study. By using both qualitative and quantitative measures in this study, I was able to analyze the data to determine what strategies teachers find to be the most effective when providing reading instruction and the levels of support they need to be able to implement and sustain professional development practices that allow teachers to gain higher levels of efficacy in their ability to provide reading instruction to students.

Through an efficacy survey and focus group interviews, I was able to gain insight from the district's K-2 teachers on their levels of efficacy in reading instruction, identify strategies they find to be effective when working with students, and determine needed support for them to implement strategies within reading instruction that will increase their efficacy levels.

Setting

The study was completed within the 10th-largest school district in the state of

North Carolina. The district serves approximately 31,000 students, ranging from

prekindergarten to 12th grade. Currently, there are 55 schools, with 30 serving elementary

students, 11 serving middle school students, and 11 serving high school students. The

remaining three serve special populations, including a virtual academy.

This study occurred during the summer school program that the district holds each

school year. The summer program is held at eight of the 30 elementary schools. The eight

elementary schools were chosen to be the summer program site due to their geographic

location within the district and the ability to serve students from the remaining 22

elementary schools close to each site. The summer school program serves 2,196 students

in kindergarten through fifth grades identified as at-risk readers due to performing below

grade level on their reading diagnostic assessment at the middle and end of the school

year.

A site coordinator and assistant site coordinator served as the summer program

administrators at each summer program site. There are 114 teachers employed through

the summer program for the eight sites. The teachers who participated in the summer

program were hired based on their application and the recommendation of their principal.

The teachers employed in the summer camp represented all 30 elementary schools within

the district. Once hired, teachers were placed at each school based on registration totals.

The teacher-to-student ratio was 1:20. In addition to grade-level teachers, each site had

up to 10 additional support personnel to work with students who receive program

services through the Exceptional Children's and English Language Learners programs or

serve as instructional specialists. Each grade level had an instructional teacher assistant.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of efficacy for K-2 teachers delivering reading instruction?

2. What strategies do K-2 teachers find most effective when delivering reading instruction?

3. What strategies need additional support for teachers to reach a level of efficacy?

Participants

The study population was all K-2 certified teachers within the summer program. I obtained permission to conduct the study from the associate superintendent of academic services in the form of a request letter. The associate superintendent of academic services served as the lead of the summer program and was responsible for the planning and funding of the program. I requested a list of all participating teachers and support personnel to identify which teachers served as K-2 teachers.

For the quantitative portion of the research, all K-2 teachers working in the summer program received an invitation to participate in the survey. Much of this research took place remotely to provide a more convenient opportunity and encourage participation from teachers who were being surveyed. The goal was to have 100% of the teachers invited to take the survey.

An invitation to teachers to participate in the focus group interviews to complete the qualitative research was given at the end of the survey. All teachers who were a part of the summer program were invited to participate. Teachers were asked only to

volunteer to participate in the focus group interviews if they were willing to be open and share their thoughts and opinions. Teachers were asked to share their names, email addresses, and current grade levels teaching. Teachers shared this information only if they consented to participate in the separate focus group interviews. Based on the responses, I conducted three focus groups representing participants from all eight sites. The total number of focus groups depended on the total number of volunteers.

Research Design

A mixed method design was used for this study. Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) defined mixed methods research as being conducted through combined qualitative and quantitative research approaches to understand the problem better. The mixed methods research design was chosen for this study because of the benefit of having both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a complete understanding of the research. It provides a broader perspective, which allows for a better understanding of the research conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

I used this approach to explore and analyze teachers' levels of efficacy in providing reading instruction and the strategies they find most effective in teaching reading among summer program teachers in Grades K-2, along with the strategies needing additional support for teachers to increase their level of efficacy in teaching reading. I first gathered quantitative data by survey and then qualitative data from focus groups. By choosing the mixed methods approach to research, I took the information gained through the surveys to guide focus group questions that provided further detailed information and explained why the teachers provided the ratings they did on the survey.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) identified quantitative research as a method

involving survey and experimental research. This type of research identifies the thoughts or opinions of a group of people by studying a sample of that group through questionnaires. By collecting data from the group sample, an overall observation can be made for the larger group being represented (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative data collected through the survey were collected, analyzed, and displayed in frequency tables to simplify understanding of the data.

Qualitative research is a way for the researcher to engage themselves in the people's lives and within the setting in which the research is being conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through this type of research, detailed reports can be developed through the inquiry process that allows the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the environment they are studying. Focus group interviews were used in this study to collect further detailed information based on the survey results to help develop answers to the research questions of this study. The focus group interviews were held through a virtual interview. Teachers had the opportunity to volunteer and consent to be a part of the focus group interviews. By having smaller focus groups that represent the larger K-2 teacher population, I met the requirements of conducting a focus group interview (Krueger & Casey, 2015). This allowed them to feel comfortable sharing their opinions and thoughts in an open and nonjudgmental manner (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Through the focus group interviews, the teachers shared their experiences in teaching reading to K-2 students, providing insight into the strategies they find effective and areas in which they feel they need additional support.

Instruments

To conduct mixed methods research, there were two instruments used in order to

be able to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. The first instrument used was the Teacher Self-Efficacy in Reading Instruction Survey (Appendix A). Following the survey results was a set of focus group interview questions. Both instruments provide questions that are aligned with the research questions.

Survey

I developed a Teacher Self-Efficacy in Reading Instruction Survey (Appendix A) to provide a way to gather and analyze data on teachers' self-efficacy beliefs that were specific to the area of reading instruction. The items were developed around the three research questions and the purpose of the study. The survey intended to collect data on the level of efficacy teachers have in their ability to provide reading instruction to students in Grades K-2. The survey has 13 questions teachers answer about their level of self-efficacy on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none at all) to 4 (strong). Questions on the survey seek to determine the level of efficacy a teacher has in their ability to provide effective strategies to students who are struggling in their reading development, adjust reading instruction to meet the needs of students, engage students in becoming independent readers, and monitor the effectiveness of the strategies being used within reading instruction.

The survey was validated using the Lawshe Method. The survey was shared with the elementary academic services team, the director, and academic facilitators, for their review. The team reviewed the survey questions and validated them for use in the study. Feedback from the team was considered in adjusting or affirming the original survey questions.

Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interviews were conducted after the survey was complete. The focus group questions (Appendix B) were also validated using the Lawshe Method concurrently with the survey. The team reviewed the questions and validated them for use in the study. The focus group interview questions presented to the team were

1. Describe the strategies you find to be most effective when teaching reading.

2. Describe the areas in which you feel students experience the most difficulty as they develop their reading abilities.

3. Describe the methods you use in determining which strategies or interventions to implement with struggling readers.

4. The survey indicated that the majority of teachers are efficacious in teaching phonics, using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction, and modeling effective reading strategies and are least efficacious in teaching students to be fluent readers, finding or creating resources and materials aligned to the proper level for individual students, and in your ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading. Why are you more efficacious in some areas than others?

The focus group questions provided further details to questions posed in the initial survey. During the interviews, additional open-ended questions were asked that allowed participants to give further details in their answers. The focus group interviews were recorded to be analyzed upon completion.

Alignment

Survey and focus group questions are aligned with the three research questions.

The alignment of the research questions, survey, and focus group interview questions is reflected in Table 4.

Table 4

Alignment Between Research, Survey, and Focus Group Questions

Research questions	Survey questions	Focus group questions
What is the level of efficacy for K-2 teachers delivering reading instruction?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 12, 13	4. The survey indicated that the majority of teachers are efficacious in ____, _____, _____ and are least efficacious in _____, _____, ____. Why are you more efficacious in some areas than others?
What strategies do K-2 teachers find most effective when delivering reading instruction?	6, 7, 8, 12	1. Describe the strategies you find to be most effective when teaching reading. 2. Describe the areas that you feel students experience the most difficulty in as they develop their reading abilities? 3. Describe the methods you use in determining which strategies or interventions to implement with struggling readers.
What strategies need additional support for teachers to reach a level of efficacy?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	3. Describe the methods you use in determining which strategies or interventions to implement with struggling readers. 4. The survey indicated that the majority of teachers are efficacious in ____, _____, _____ and are least efficacious in _____, _____, ____. Why are you more efficacious in some areas than others?

Data Collection Process

The Teacher Self-Efficacy in Reading Instruction survey was sent to the teachers currently working in the summer program. Teachers had a 2-week window to respond to the survey. The responses to the survey were anonymous. Survey results were collected and analyzed, with results displayed in a frequency table.

Within the invitation for teachers to participate in the survey, they were asked if they would be a participant in the focus group interviews. Teachers received an explanation of the study and full disclosure. This was done to encourage high levels of participation among the teachers. Teachers willing to be a part of the focus group were asked to provide the email they would like to be used for communication and which grade level, kindergarten through second grades, they currently teach. Teachers were given the same 2-week window to respond to the request to participate in the focus group interviews.

The focus groups were created using the information provided by the teachers in the link requesting their participation. Based on the number of willing participants, I grouped the teachers into three focus groups. I grouped them into groups of five to six so that at least one teacher in each group represented all three grade levels. An interview schedule was created and shared with the focus group participants at least a week before the interview. The interviews were conducted through a virtual interview. Teachers were provided a date, time, and link to access their interview through an email and Google calendar invite. To protect the teachers' identities, I identified them as Teacher A, Teacher B, etc. By protecting their identity, teachers were able to feel comfortable being open in sharing their opinions, thoughts, and feelings. The interviews were recorded, and participants were made aware of the recording and were asked to give verbal consent prior to the beginning of the interview. The recording was kept private and was not shared with anyone. After the interview, the responses were analyzed and transcribed using an online transcribing resource. Once all interviews were transcribed, I coded the data into themes consistent with the information in the research questions.

Data Display and Analysis Process

Once participants completed the Teacher Self-Efficacy in Reading Instruction survey, their answers were collected and analyzed using the frequency distribution method and displayed in a table format. This allowed me to determine the frequency of each response on the 4-point Likert scale. Structured focus group questions were prepared that aligned with the survey. I asked follow-up questions as needed to further the conversation among the teachers in an attempt to receive a deeper understanding of their thoughts, feelings, and opinions about their efficacy levels in providing reading instruction, the strategies they find to be successful, and the additional support they need to increase their level of efficacy. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to analyze the data. The responses were analyzed and thematically coded and displayed through a table that identifies the themes that emerged through the analysis with quotes included that support the themes.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy levels of kindergarten through second-grade teachers in their ability to provide reading instruction to students with a focus on the five foundational areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, the study sought to make recommendations for how districts can enhance teacher efficacy in delivering reading instruction. This was discovered by identifying the level of efficacy of teachers when delivering reading instruction, what strategies they find most effective in delivering effective reading instruction, and where additional levels of support are needed to increase K-2 teachers' levels of efficacy when delivering reading instruction. The study

occurred after the conclusion of the current school year during the summer program. The participants in the study included teachers who teach kindergarten through second grade in schools throughout the district and were working in the summer program. Eligible participants were identified and invited to participate by email. Participants were given a separate link to volunteer to participate in the focus group interviews.

I collected quantitative data through the Teacher Self-Efficacy in Reading Instruction survey in a mixed method research design. Next, focus group interviews were conducted with participants for the qualitative research portion of the study. Focus group participants represented all three grade levels. The findings are presented in Chapter 4. A discussion of the results, implications for practices, and recommendations for further research are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy levels of kindergarten through second-grade teachers in their ability to provide reading instruction to students with a focus on the five foundational areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, the study sought to make recommendations for how districts can enhance teacher efficacy in delivering reading instruction. Three research questions guided the work of the study:

1. What is the level of efficacy for K-2 teachers delivering reading instruction?

2. What strategies do K-2 teachers find most effective when delivering reading instruction?

3. What strategies need additional support for teachers to reach a higher level of efficacy?

Overview of Participants

The survey was administered to all 95 kindergarten through second-grade teachers participating in the district's summer program using their district email addresses. Of this population, 26 teachers responded to the survey. A response rate of 27.37% is an acceptable response for the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey responses were anonymous, and no personal or demographic information was collected.

Survey Description

The survey instrument consisted of 13 questions that addressed various practices and strategies when teaching reading, including the five foundational areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Also included in

the survey were questions about teachers' efficacy levels in adjusting instruction to meet student needs and motivating students to read. Participants were asked to determine their level of efficacy on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none at all) to 4 (strong) in their ability to provide effective strategies to students who are struggling in their reading development, adjust reading instruction to meet the needs of students, engage students in becoming independent readers, and monitor the effectiveness of the strategies being used within reading instruction.

The survey was validated using the Lawshe Method. The survey was shared with the elementary academic services team within the district. The team consists of the director and academic facilitators. Each team member was provided a copy of the survey to review and was asked to validate the questions on the survey. The team provided feedback about the questions, including which questions were asked, the format in which they were written, and if additional questions should be considered. The survey was updated using the information the team gave, and a final draft was shared with the team. The team reviewed the final draft of the survey and validated it for use in the study.

The survey was administered using Google Forms and distributed to teachers through school email. The survey results were analyzed based on the responses of all survey participants. Only "strong" responses for this study are recorded as favorable responses. To analyze the response rates, frequency distribution tables were used to organize the responses from the survey participants. The questions and response rates from the survey were then aligned within a frequency table per their alignment with each of the three research questions.

Research Question 1. What Is the Level of Efficacy for K-2 Teachers Delivering

Reading Instruction?

Survey Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 12, and 13 align with Research Question 1.

Table 5 shows the responses to these survey questions.

Table 5

Survey Questions That Align to Research Question 1

Question	Not at all	Very little	Moderate	Strong	Total
1. What is your level of efficacy in teaching phonemic awareness?	0% (0)	3.85% (1)	42.30% (11)	53.84% (14)	26
2. What is your level of efficacy in teaching students phonics?	0% (0)	0% (0)	38.46% (10)	61.53% (16)	26
3. What is your level of efficacy in teaching students to be fluent readers?	3.85% (1)	0% (0)	50.00% (13)	46.15% (12)	26
4. What is your level of efficacy in teaching grade-level appropriate vocabulary?	0% (0)	7.69% (2)	38.46% (10)	53.84% (14)	26
5. What is your level of efficacy in teaching students to comprehend the text they are reading?	0% (0)	3.85% (1)	42.30% (11)	53.84% (14)	26
8. How efficacious are you in finding or creating resources and materials aligned to the proper level for individual students?	0% (0)	3.85% (1)	50.00% (13)	46.15% (12)	26
12. How efficacious are you in modeling effective reading strategies?	0% (0)	0% (0)	42.30% (11)	57.70% (15)	26
13. How efficacious are you in your ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading?	0% (0)	7.70% (2)	42.30% (11)	50.00% (13)	26

The first research question sought to identify the levels of efficacy among

teachers when providing K-2 reading instruction. The questions in the survey were

written to gain an understanding of levels of efficacy in teaching the five foundational

areas of reading and then in specific actions or components that take place when teaching

reading, which include modeling effective reading strategies, finding and creating grade-

level aligned resources, and motivating students in their reading.

The first five questions of the survey focused on the levels of efficacy teachers had in teaching the five foundational areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Of the 26 responses received, 14 teachers (53.84%) have a strong efficacy in teacher phonemic awareness, indicating that over half of the teachers are confident in teaching the introductory foundational skill of reading. In response to their efficacy in teaching phonics, 16 teachers (61.53%) felt they are strong in teaching this reading skill to students in kindergarten through second grade. Efficacy levels among the teachers appear to be less strong in teaching students to be fluent readers, with 12 teachers (46.15%) rating themselves as having either moderate or very little efficacy levels.

Although teachers are overall efficacious in teaching the five foundational levels, 53.85% of teachers expressed moderate to little efficacy when tasked with finding or creating resources aligned with their student's current grade level. More feel confident in their ability to model effective reading strategies to their students, with 15 teachers (57.70%) rating themselves as having a strong level of efficacy in these areas. Last, when motivating students who show no interest to read, teachers feel less confident in their ability to motivate, with 13 teachers (50%) rating themselves as little to moderate in efficacy levels.

Research Question 2: What Strategies Do K-2 Teachers Find Most Effective When Delivering Reading Instruction?

Survey Questions 6, 7, 8, 12, and 13 align with Research Question 2. Table 6 shows the responses to these survey questions.

Table 6

Survey Questions That Align to Research Question 2

Question	Not at all	Very little	Moderate	Strong	Total
6. How efficacious are you in implementing effective reading skills strategies within your reading instruction?	0% (0)	7.69% (2)	38.46% (10)	53.84% (14)	26
7. How efficacious are you in adjusting your instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers?	0% (0)	3.85% (1)	42.3% (11)	53.84% (14)	26
8. How efficacious are you in finding or creating resources and materials aligned to the proper level for individual students?	0% (0)	3.85% (1)	50% (13)	46.15% (12)	26
12. How efficacious are you in modeling effective reading strategies?	0% (0)	0% (0)	42.3% (11)	57.70% (15)	26
13. How efficacious are you in your ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading?	0% (0)	7.69% (2)	42.3% (11)	50% (13)	26

The second research question sought to answer what strategies teachers find most effective when teaching reading to kindergarten, first-, and second-grade students. The survey questions aligned with Research Question 2 were Questions 6, 7, 8, 12, and 13. These five questions were related to the efficacy levels of teachers in using effective reading skill strategies and practices when providing reading instruction to the students. These questions asked teachers to rate their efficacy levels on strategies such as adjusting instruction to meet the needs of struggling reading, finding or creating resources aligned with their students' current reading levels, modeling effective reading strategies when working with students on their reading, and motivating students who show no interest in reading.

Of the 26 responses, 14 teachers (53.84%) believe they are strong in their ability to teach grade-level appropriate vocabulary and to teach students to comprehend the text they are reading. When asked about their level of efficacy in their ability to find or create

resources and material aligned with their student's needs, 12 teachers (46.15%) felt strongly about their levels of efficacy. In comparison, 14 teachers (53.85%) do not have high levels of efficacy when finding or creating resources to support their students in their reading. When asked about their levels of efficacy in modeling reading strategies, over half of the teachers (57.70%) felt confident in their ability to do so. When working to help students by motivating them to read when they show little to no interest, the levels of efficacy were split in half, with only 13 of the 26 teachers (50%) having strong efficacy levels.

Research Question 3: What Strategies Need Additional Support for Teachers to Reach a Higher Level of Efficacy?

Survey Questions 1-12 align with Research Question 3. Table 7 shows the responses to these survey questions.

Table 7

Survey Questions That Align to Research Question 3

Question	Not at all	Very little	Moderate	Strong	Total
1. What is your level of efficacy in teaching phonemic awareness?	0% (0)	3.85% (1)	42.30% (11)	53.84% (14)	26
2. What is your level of efficacy in teaching students phonics?	0% (0)	0% (0)	38.46% (10)	61.53% (16)	26
3. What is your level of efficacy in teaching students to be fluent readers?	3.85% (1)	0% (0)	50.00% (13)	46.15% (12)	26
4. What is your level of efficacy in teaching grade-level appropriate vocabulary?	0% (0)	7.69% (2)	38.46% (10)	53.84% (14)	26
5. What is your level of efficacy in teaching students to comprehend the text they are reading?	0% (0)	3.85% (1)	42.30% (11)	53.84% (14)	26
6. How efficacious are you in implementing effective reading skills strategies within your reading instruction?	0% (0)	7.69% (2)	38.46% (10)	53.84% (14)	26
7. How efficacious are you in adjusting your instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers?	0% (0)	3.85% (1)	42.3% (11)	53.84% (14)	26
8. How efficacious are you in finding or creating resources and materials aligned to the proper level for individual students?	0% (0)	3.85% (1)	50% (13)	46.15% (12)	26
9. How efficacious are you in using informal assessments to adjust reading?	0% (0)	0% (0)	50% (13)	50% (13)	26
10. How efficacious are you in using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction?	0% (0)	0% (0)	38.46% (10)	61.53% (16)	26
11. How efficacious are you in using assessment data to identify specific reading skills a student has difficulty mastering?	0% (0)	0% (0)	46.15% (12)	53.84% (14)	26
12. How efficacious are you in modeling effective reading strategies?	0% (0)	0% (0)	42.3% (11)	57.70% (15)	26

The survey used in the study was designed to identify the strategies that need support to reach strong levels of efficacy when teaching reading. All questions on the survey provide information that will help identify strategies teachers need additional support in developing to increase their efficacy levels. When rating their levels of

efficacy in teaching the five foundational areas of reading, teachers are most confident in their ability to teach phonics (61.53%). A little over half of the teachers (53.84%) expressed strong levels of efficacy in teaching phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension. Teachers are less confident when teaching students how to become fluent readers, with more than half of the teachers (53.84%) rating their efficacy levels as moderate or none.

When rating their efficacy levels on using assessment data to inform or adjust instruction, teachers feel the most confident in their ability to use formal assessment information to adjust instruction, with 16 of the teachers (61.53%) rating their efficacy levels as strong. Teachers were less confident in using informal assessment results to adjust instruction, with 13 (50%) rating themselves as strong and 13 (50%) rating themselves as moderate. Last, 14 teachers (54.84%) rated themselves strong in using assessment data to identify specific reading skills a student has difficulty mastering.

Regarding modeling effective reading strategies, teachers were more confident in their abilities, with 15 teachers (57.50%) seeing their efficacy level as strong. Furthermore, 14 teachers (53.84%) feel strongly about implementing effective reading skill strategies within their reading instruction and in their ability to adjust their instruction to meet their students' needs.

Selection of Interviewees

Everyone who participated in the survey indicated their willingness to participate in a follow-up focus group interview. Willing participants provided their email addresses and the grade level in which they taught. There was a total of 14 teachers out of the 95% of survey participants who agreed to be a part of the focus group interview. Due to the

low number of teachers willing to participate, all 14 teachers were selected to participate in the focus group interviews. From the 14 participants, each teacher was purposely placed into one of three focus groups in order to ensure that there would be representation for each grade level (K-2) in the focus group. For anonymity, I gave each participant a pseudonym. Table 8 provides a summary of the three focus group interview subjects and their current teaching positions.

Table 8

Focus Group Interview Subjects

Focus group	Participant pseudonym	Current position
1	Teacher A	First-grade teacher
	Teacher B	Kindergarten teacher
	Teacher C	First-grade teacher
	Teacher D	Second-grade teacher
	Teacher E	Kindergarten teacher
2	Teacher F	First-grade teacher
	Teacher G	First-grade teacher
	Teacher H	Second-grade teacher
	Teacher I	Second-grade teacher
	Teacher J	Kindergarten teacher
3	Teacher K	First-grade teacher
	Teacher L	Kindergarten teacher
	Teacher M	Second-grade teacher
	Teacher N	First-grade teacher

Focus Group Interview Description

The 14 focus group interview participants represented all three grade levels: kindergarten, first, and second. All three focus group interviews were conducted through a virtual format using Zoom. Each participant was provided a Zoom link to join in the interview. Each focus group interview was recorded using the recording feature.

Participants were asked four questions designed to further answer why the

teachers had the efficacy levels expressed in the survey regarding providing reading instruction to students in kindergarten through second grade. All interview questions were aligned with the survey and research questions. The following questions are the four questions the teachers asked during the focus group interviews. Question 4 was completed using information from the survey results.

1. Describe the strategies you find most effective when teaching reading through programs, such as the Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics.

2. Describe the areas in which you feel students experience the most difficulty developing their reading abilities through programs such as the Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics.

3. Describe the methods you use in determining which strategies or interventions to implement with struggling readers.

4. The survey indicated that the majority of teachers are efficacious in teaching phonics, using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction, and modeling effective reading strategies and are least efficacious in teaching students to be fluent readers, finding or creating resources and materials aligned to the proper level for individual students, and in your ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading. Why are you more efficacious in some areas than others?

After the focus groups were complete, responses to the questions were transcribed and coded to identify themes. Table 9 displays the identified themes that emerged from the focus group interviews and frequencies from the focus group interview data.

Table 9

Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Interview Responses

Research question	Focus group question(s)	Theme(s)	Frequency of themes
1. What is the level of efficacy for K-2 teachers delivering reading instruction?	4. The survey indicated that the majority of teachers are efficacious in teaching phonics, using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction, and modeling effective reading strategies and are least efficacious in teaching students to be fluent readers, finding or creating resources and materials aligned to the proper level for individual students, and in your ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading. Why are you more efficacious in some areas than others?	Professional development Amount of content	17 7
2. What strategies do K-2 teachers find most effective when delivering reading instruction?	1. Describe the strategies you find to be most effective when teaching reading through programs used, such as the Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics. 2. Describe the areas in which you feel students experience the most difficulty as they develop their reading abilities through programs used, such as the Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics. 3. Describe the methods you use in determining which strategies or interventions to implement with struggling readers.	Effective practices Data-informed instruction	15 10
3. What strategies need additional support for teachers to reach a higher level of efficacy?	4. The survey indicated that the majority of teachers are efficacious in teaching phonics, using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction, and modeling effective reading strategies and are least efficacious in teaching students to be fluent readers, finding or creating resources and materials aligned to the proper level for individual students, and in your ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading. Why are you more efficacious in some areas than others?	Professional development Amount of content	17 7

Question 4 of the focus group interview was aligned with Research Question 1.

This question sought to gather information on why teachers were most efficacious in

teaching phonics, using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction, and

modeling effective reading strategies. In contrast, Question 4 also sought to find information on why teachers felt less efficacious in teaching students to be fluent readers and finding or creating resources and materials aligned with the proper level for individual students, and their ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading. The themes that emerged from the answers to this question were professional development and amount of content.

Questions 1, 2, and 3 of the focus group interviews were aligned with Research Question 2. Question 1 focused on identifying strategies teachers found to be most effective when teaching reading through programs such as Lucy Calkins units of study, Spire Phonics, or other programs used within the district. Question 2 sought to identify the areas in which they feel their students experience the most difficulty as they develop their reading abilities through programs such as the Lucy Calkins units of study, Spire Phonics, or other programs within the district. Question 3 focused on identifying the methods used to determine which strategies or interventions to implement with struggling readers. The themes that emerged from the answers given by the teachers were effective practices and data-informed instruction.

Focus Group Interview Question 4 aligned with Research Question 3 and focused on why teachers feel more efficacious in some areas of teaching reading than in others. The themes that emerged from the answers to these questions are professional development and amount of content.

Research Question 1: What Is the Level of Efficacy for K-2 Teachers Delivering Reading Instruction?

When focus group participants were asked about why they felt that they were

more efficacious in teaching phonics, using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction, and modeling effective reading strategies, and are least efficacious in teaching students to be fluent readers, finding or creating resources and materials aligned with the proper level for individual students, and in their ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading, several of the participants shared that the amount of professional development they receive contributes to their current efficacy levels in this area. In addition to professional development, the participants shared that the amount of district resources that they have access to also contributes to current efficacy levels.

The theme of professional development was mentioned 17 times. When addressing the varying levels of efficacy among teachers, several teachers pointed out the district's efforts in implementing district-wide training in teaching phonics as a reason for higher efficacy levels compared to the other four foundational areas: phonic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Teacher F summarized the consensus of the group by sharing that they "feel like this has put a heavy concentration on phonics, and we have received lots of training over the last two years because we had SPIRE, and then they gave us a new phonics routine at school this year."

Teacher L added,

I do not think that we were trained as well in reading. We have been trained in phonics. We have never been trained in depth in reading comprehension and fluency. We have never been trained in running records. Certain schools have taken some money and done that on their own, but across the county, I do not think it is a universal thing we have been trained in.

Teacher N added to this statement by sharing the importance of the training piece, the

fidelity with which it is used, and the follow-up support and accountability from building-level administrators. Teacher N referenced the training and work done with Lucy Calkins's unit of study and stated,

> Now, I will say I was at a school for Lucy, who was trained more than what the county just required everybody to do. I will say that when you have that extra training, you buy all into it, and everybody does it with fidelity. We have administrators who would come in and make sure that we are doing it with fidelity and know what they are talking about because they were big into reading. I grew so much, and my kids grew so much using Lucy, and I was using it with fidelity. I will say we had the teachers' college coming in two years after we began because we began a year before the county. Then the county did their training with the teachers' college. We paid extra using some of our funds to have them come in and do it in our classrooms with our kids, have them come in and use our kids sitting there to show us how to do it. That helped, but not everybody did that. So again, we are not being trained to the full extent that it needs to be to have everybody on the same page.

Another theme evident from the interviews was centered on the amount of content teachers are expected to learn and master. Teachers shared that they often feel "overwhelmed" with the amount of content they are expected to "digest." Amount of content was referenced seven times. Teacher B summarized this by sharing,

> We get overwhelmed when there is so much information at once, and there are so many different things at one time that the downfall is that teachers are not able to digest all this great content because there is so much at one time.

Teacher D included,

It is like being a juggler. We know something will fall, no matter how skilled or

whether you have been teaching for one year, ten years, or 50 years. There is only

so much that, you know, as a human that we can juggle all at once. It seems like

especially years like this year, where we have two and three new things at a time,

and we are expected to learn and teach it in the same year, which is very stressful.

It is a lot of high pressure knowing that I am looking at these kids thinking in my

head, thinking we are learning this together. Of course, I cannot say that to them. I

must be confident in what I am doing, even though I just learned it last week.

In addressing the lower levels of efficacy in teacher fluency and motivating

students who show no interest in reading, Teacher H offered the following insight on the

challenges that K-2 teachers are facing within the district:

In training we just had the other day, they did an exercise with us for letters where

they gave us interesting-looking symbols and taught us the letter sounds for each

one, and we went through probably 20 of them over 10 minutes. Then we are

asked to read and sound out sentences based on it. Although that is an extreme

version of what we deal with, what our 5- to 10-year-olds deal with, it shows that,

especially in these lower grades, we are so focused on teaching them the

foundations that we rush through it all to try to get them to fluency.

Research Question 2: What Strategies Do K-2 Teachers Find Most Effective When

Delivering Reading Instruction?

For this research question, focus group participants were asked three questions.

First, they were asked to describe the strategies they find to be most effective when

teaching reading through programs used, such as the Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics. Second, they were asked to describe the areas in which they feel students experience the most difficulty as they develop their reading abilities through programs used, such as the Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics. Last, I asked them to describe their methods in determining which strategies or interventions to implement with struggling readers. Through their answers, the themes of effective practices and data-driven instruction emerged.

When describing the strategies, they find most effective when teaching reading, several teachers shared programs or practices used in the past, such as Heggerty Phonemic Awareness lessons, the Basil Approach, and Lucy and Spire Phonics. These different programs or practices were coded under effective practices when mentioned. They also discussed that they would take "pieces" that they found to be effective from these programs and use them along with continuous practice with the students. Teacher L echoed this by stating,

> The most effective is adapting the curriculum to fit my students because often, the curriculum might be too far ahead or too far behind. So you might look at the lesson, and it is great, but you have to make it either less challenging or more challenging. So I guess using it as a guide and then adapting.

Teacher B agreed with this by sharing,

> We manipulated Lucy a little bit based on what we learned from the class and knowing that most of our kids needed the lowest skill, we would emphasize that part. I know last year we got a little introduction into Heggerty and started using that phonemic awareness piece, and the amount of growth that my kids made just

from March till May was phenomenal.

Additionally, Teacher J shared,

> In kindergarten, when we did Lucy, it would piggyback off of her assuming that all students knew rhymes and would already know these things because they were taught in pre-K. Our students did not have that background. So, as you said, we were trying to piecemeal parts in and try to make things work and give the background knowledge they did not have.

> A fellow kindergarten colleague in the district, Teacher E, echoed, "Doing that

strategy and just practice and engaging the kids back and forth. I think that helped. Build their reading because then they can connect it to the letters."

> The theme of effective practice continued as teachers moved into answering the

question of where students experience the most difficulty as they develop their reading abilities through programs used, such as the Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics. Teachers overwhelmingly felt that the first two foundational skills of phonemic awareness and phonics are where they find students struggle the most when developing their reading skills. Teacher G summarized this by sharing,

> It seems like just basic, the basic foundational skills and phonics especially, you know, they do not have that foundation to build on, even sometimes not knowing the sounds, sometimes even not knowing the letters, you know, and being able to blend those sounds to make words and carry that over into reading a text is probably the one I see the most.

Furthermore, Teacher K discussed the lack of phonics development of students about using the Lucy Calkins Units of Study by sharing,

When I came to second grade last year from fourth grade, we did not use phonics

per se in fourth grade. So, when I came, I did not use Lucy Calkins phonics, so we

filled in many holes. Nobody in second grade used Lucy Calkins phonics last

year, and I felt like Lucy Calkins just left a lot of blanks, even in the reading part,

because in the program, she expected so much that the kids were not ready for.

We kept saying, "Oh, they will get it, finally get it." They never did get to the

point where they could learn from her program. It was always way too advanced.

The theme of data-driven instruction arose during the discussion among the focus

group as they were asked to describe the methods they use in determining which

strategies or interventions to implement with struggling readers. Teachers discussed using

both formal and informal data to help them determine where their students are in their

learning and where they need additional intervention. Teacher K discussed using the

formal assessment, mClass, "with the progress monitoring because it breaks it down for

you and helps you understand exactly where the student is struggling." Teacher M echoed

this, stating, "I find the lowest area they scored and where they are having trouble. From

there, I do interventions with them and send things home for them to use as practice."

In addition, Teacher D shared how informal assessments are used by describing

their process, stating, "Once I had them grouped, I would use lots of informal

assessments because I would see, okay, we are working on this skill now, this specific

part of that skill or this child's not getting. And then I could focus more on that specific

area."

Research Question 3: What Strategies Need Additional Support for Teachers to Reach a Higher Level of Efficacy?

For Research Question 3, teachers were asked about why they felt that they were more efficacious in teaching phonics, using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction, and modeling effective reading strategies, and are least efficacious in teaching students to be fluent readers, finding or creating resources and materials aligned with the proper level for individual students, and in their ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading. Several of the participants shared that the amount of professional development they receive contributes to their current efficacy levels in this area.

While this question was aligned with more than one research question, teachers did share insight through their answers as to the additional support needed to help them reach a higher level of efficacy in the areas. Through the coding of the answers, the themes of professional development and resources were established.

Teachers shared the importance of professional development to increase their efficacy levels in teaching students to be fluent readers, finding or creating resources and materials aligned with the proper level for individual students, and their ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading.

Several participants shared that the amount of professional development they receive contributes to their current efficacy levels in this area. Teacher J expressed how professional development in phonics instruction has increased efficacy levels:

I feel like the strength with the district trainings is that they are very detailed, very informative, and I believe that they work when you put them into practice

properly. You see the benefit in your students and want to keep pushing forward. In contrast, she continued with how it can also contribute to lower efficacy levels among teachers:

> But I think there is a feeling of being overwhelmed when there is so much information at once, and there are so many different things at one time that the downfall is that teachers are not able to digest all this great content because there is so much at one time.

Regarding lower efficacy levels in teaching fluency, Teacher H shared that the pacing of teaching the foundational skills can present frustration for teachers and lead to a lack of motivation for students in learning to read. Teacher H shared,

> Because we have rushed so fast to teach them everything in order to teach fluency that some of them just go, "Hey, I could not get it, I could not keep up" If they do not have those lower building blocks, they are never going to understand the fluency. So we will never get there if we cannot spend more time working on, you know, practicing every day and slowly getting there. So, I think that is a big part of the problem because once you have been left behind, it is really hard to get that confidence back and to get that time back.

Furthermore, Teacher M shared,

> They are the ones that are struggling; we cannot push them to fluency because they are not grasping that basis of phonics. So, I feel like that is where the lapse is due to the downfall, which leads to the small group instruction and pushing them to be fluent readers. They need that additional reinforcement.

Teacher L elaborated on this by expressing the frustration students who are behind may

feel, which leads to a lack of motivation:

> When you are already struggling, it is hard to motivate somebody to want to
> continue or to work and work and work when it just seems like they are not
> getting it. It is very hard. I mean, you know, those struggling readers, they are the
> hardest to try to motivate because they are already behind. They already feel
> frustrated, and it is hard to keep on doing something when you constantly feel
> frustrated with it.

The other area in which teachers felt less efficacious was the ability to find or create resources and materials aligned with the proper level for individual students. The theme of the amount of content emerged through the coding of the participants' answers. Teacher A shared, "Finding resources that work can be overwhelming due to the amounts out there, especially being a new teacher, I am not always sure if the resource I found is good enough to use." Teacher G warned of how this practice should be of concern by sharing,

> Teachers will go out there and find whatever they want to. When that happens,
> there is not going to be any consistency or uniformity even across the county
> because, you know, you are going to have those people that go over and above,
> you know, and then you are going to have to have somebody that's going to sit
> back and say, gosh, I am not spending all this time doing this. You know, I am
> just going to, you know, give them my scholastic news. I mean, I do not know. It
> just seems like there is not going to be any consistency or uniformity, like I said,
> across the county.

Teacher F shared the need for consistency of resources for teachers so they do not have to

create as many on their own:

>It seems like there would be some kind of guide or something to give us a recommended resource. Once you get confident using that resource, you can branch out and do what you need with your students. That has added to the frustration.

Additionally, Teacher G agreed,

>Yeah, and I think that is a big shift because I know, when I was a child, each subject was uniform, and you were learning the same thing each grade, and it followed, and it built. Now with us shifting towards standards-based learning, the teacher has to study to understand the standard and then figure out what these children need to meet that specific standard rather than going from a set textbook. That can be frustrating, especially when you are unsure which resource to use.

Summary

An analysis of data collected through this research has provided insight and a deeper understanding of the efficacy levels of kindergarten, first-, and second-grade teachers in providing reading instruction to their students. Through the use of the self-efficacy Likert scale survey data and the responses given during the focus group interview questions, I have compiled the following main takeaways:

1. Teachers collectively agree that the amount of professional development they receive aligns with their efficacy levels.

    a. Teachers expressed that due to the increased training in teaching phonics, they feel much more confident in teaching this area of foundational skills.

    b. Teachers want more training in teaching fluency and reading

comprehension to feel more confident in their teaching.

   c.   Teachers want clear guidance on the pacing of teaching each foundational area of reading. They feel that a lot of time is spent on phonemic awareness and phonics, which leaves little time to introduce and work with students on the latter areas of vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

2. Teachers understand the importance of using effective practices when teaching reading to all students.

   a.   Teachers are willing to learn new effective practices and lean on vetted practices to teach their students how to read effectively.

   b.   Teachers want to help students struggling in their reading development and use effective practices to work with them.

   c.   Teachers use data to drive their individualized instruction to address each student's needs in their reading development.

3. Teachers are overwhelmed with the amount of content to master as an instructor of reading.

   a.   Teachers expressed that the amount of knowledge they obtain through their professional development is overwhelming, preventing them from being able to digest the information in a timely and effective manner.

4. Teachers want guidance on what resources are approved and effective when working with their students.

   a.   Teachers want a guide of resources to use when addressing the needs of students in the five foundational areas of reading.

b. Teachers want one straightforward, effective program or approach as the main resource, so they do not have to combine multiple practices when teaching reading.

c. Teachers want to see the resources used consistently across the district.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Through teacher surveys, observation, and interviews, research has shown that teachers lack efficacy in developing effective literacy instruction that addresses the five key foundational skills of reading development: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021). Through this research, it has been found that teachers of early elementary grade levels should receive professional development and resources that allow them to gain high levels of self-efficacy in their ability to design and deliver effective reading instruction.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

When educators lack self-efficacy, they often cannot educate their students effectively. Studies on self-efficacy have produced data identifying the effects on teachers and learning. Self-efficacy is the most significant indicator behind a teacher's well-being, levels of innovation, ability to engage their students in their learning, and positive student performance (Mielke, 2021).

High levels of teacher self-efficacy align with the persistence and patience teachers express when working with students struggling with reading development. Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are willing to try new instructional approaches to teaching reading. Parent engagement within their schools is often higher due to these teachers feeling more confident in inviting parents to become partners with them in developing their child's reading. Students who receive reading instruction from teachers with high levels of self-efficacy experience higher levels of achievement with their reading. With high levels of teacher self-efficacy also comes lower levels of burnout and

increased job satisfaction (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). This provides a learning environment for students that allows them to grow in their reading.

Professional Development

ILA (2020) issued a What is Hot in Literacy Survey to a group of diverse educators with various levels of experience. In analyzing the survey results, professional development was ranked as needing immediate attention and improvement to increase teacher effectiveness in literacy instruction, specifically for teaching how to implement effective 21st century literacy instruction (ILA, 2020). Those who responded to the survey shared that they would like more development in incorporating digital resources when teaching literacy because literacy materials have evolved and are no longer just available in print (ILA, 2020). The current generation of students is learning how to read in ways much different than those coming before them. Although the evolution of how students learn to read has changed, classrooms continue to see similar skills being learned. Similar strategies are being used by teachers that reflect how reading was historically taught (Leu et al., 2017).

Resources

With changes in student learning behaviors happening at a rapid pace, this increases challenges in a teacher's ability to find differentiated instruction to meet the diverse needs of students (Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018). Literacy teachers must understand the obstacles students face and be able to provide instructional strategies that support their literacy development (ILA, 2020). Diverse learning gaps among students challenge teachers to provide differentiated instruction within their classrooms; therefore, a teacher's knowledge and self-efficacy in meeting students' needs through differentiated

literacy instruction is vital to the success of their students (Washburn et al., 2016).

Effective Reading Instruction

Reading is an essential skill that students need to gain in the early grades to continue learning at or above grade level as they progress through school. Reading is the foundation of learning in all academic subjects (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Sloat et al., 2007). Since the implementation of NCLB (2001) and progression to the current legislation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), teachers have been required to focus on standards-based instruction in reading based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education (Amidon, n.d.).

Literacy teachers must understand the obstacles that students face and be able to provide instructional strategies that support their literacy development (ILA, 2020). When stepping into a classroom, one might find that some students will have strong foundational skills and can decode words yet struggle with comprehension of the text they are reading. Upon further observation, one may find that in one elementary grade classroom, there are students who can decode well, while their peers struggle with fluency (Castles et al., 2018). These diverse learning gaps among students continue to challenge teachers to provide differentiated instruction within their classrooms. Therefore, a teacher's knowledge and self-efficacy in meeting students' needs through differentiated literacy instruction is vital to the success of their students (Washburn et al., 2016).

In order to increase student reading achievement, we must first understand the efficacy levels of the teachers providing the reading instruction. In this study, both

quantitative and qualitative data were collected with regard to teacher efficacy levels in teaching reading through an efficacy survey and focus group interviews. Participants completed a 13-item Likert scale survey that measured the efficacy levels of teachers in teaching the foundation areas of reading, as well as implementing effective practices and strategies for at-risk students. At the end of the survey, a question was included that provided a link to a Google Form for participants to volunteer in a focus group interview. Volunteers for focus groups were compiled and randomly selected to ensure that at least one teacher from each grade level was represented at each interview.

The research aimed to understand the self-efficacy levels of kindergarten through second-grade teachers in providing reading instruction to their students. Self-efficacy is the belief that one has the abilities and resources necessary to accomplish a set goal (Mielke, 2021). In the district of study, third-grade reading scores have remained stagnant over the past 10 years, with little changes in student reading proficiency. Students are coming into third grade with reading gaps and deficits, meaning they are not reading on grade level and will need intense instruction through interventions and differentiated strategies to support them in closing those gaps and obtaining grade-level proficiency.

At the heart of this intense intervention and core instruction is the teacher; therefore, the district's kindergarten through second-grade teachers must be equipped with the resources and training needed to ensure that they have high levels of efficacy in teaching students how to read. A teacher's level of efficacy and their personal beliefs about the successes and failures of their students help shape an understanding of how they will respond when trying new instructional approaches, working with their students who are at-risk in their learning, and implementing new evidence-based interventions in

response to the needs of at-risk students (Nichols et al., 2020). By understanding the current efficacy levels of the district's K-2 teachers in their ability to teach reading, this research can be used to guide how the district can respond to increase teacher self-efficacy levels in the area of reading instruction.

Connections to the Literature

The findings from this mixed methods study in understanding teacher self-efficacy levels in teaching reading in K-2 are aligned with the scholarly reviewed literature reflected in Chapter 2. Table 10 provides a detail of the research questions and how they are connected to the reviewed literature from Chapter 2.

Table 10

Connection Between Research Questions and the Literature

Research question	Connection to literature
1. What is the level of efficacy for K-2 teachers delivering reading instruction?	• Teacher support (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021) • Focus on foundational areas (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013) • Response to intervention (Nichols et al., 2020)
2. What strategies do K-2 teachers find most effective when delivering reading instruction?	• Instruction that builds early literacy skills (ILA, 2020) • Effective assessment practices (ILA, 2020)
3. What strategies need additional support for teachers to reach a higher level of efficacy?	• Instruction that builds early literacy skills (ILA, 2020) • Instructional strategies (Nichols et al., 2020) • Teacher development (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021; ILA, 2020)

Research Question 1: What is the Level of Efficacy for K-2 Teachers Delivering Reading Instruction?

According to survey results, 53.84% of teachers have a strong efficacy in teacher

phonemic awareness, indicating that over half of the teachers are confident in teaching the introductory foundational skill of reading. In response to their efficacy in teaching phonics, 16 teachers (61.53%) felt they are strong in teaching this reading skill to students in kindergarten through second grade. Efficacy levels among the teachers appear to be less strong in teaching students to be fluent readers, with 12 teachers (46.15%) rating themselves as having either moderate or very little efficacy levels. At the same time, 53.85% of the teachers (14) rated themselves as having strong efficacy levels in teaching students vocabulary and comprehension.

During the focus group interviews, teachers were asked about why they felt that they were more efficacious in teaching phonics, using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction, and modeling effective reading strategies, and are least efficacious in teaching students to be fluent readers, finding or creating resources and materials aligned with the proper level for individual students, and motivating students who show no interest in reading. Throughout the responses, it was evident that the amount of professional development provided to the teachers and the number of district resources provided to them contribute to their current efficacy levels in this area.

This correlates to the need for teachers to feel confident in their ability to teach their students how to read and is in alignment with research on self-efficacy and teacher efficacy theories. A teacher's individual beliefs have been directly linked to their students' achievement (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013). When teachers are faced with teaching early literacy skills, they may tend to feel more frustrated due to their low self-efficacy in their ability to teach these skills in today's diverse classrooms. They will need support in ways in which they can provide effective literacy instruction to all students (Ciampa &

Gallagher, 2021); thus, teachers who teach reading in early elementary grade levels must receive professional development that allows them to gain confidence in their ability to design effective literacy instruction that will produce students who are reading on grade level during their kindergarten through second-grade school years.

Through survey data, 53.85% of teachers expressed moderate to little efficacy when finding or creating resources aligned with their student's current grade level. Federal reform efforts have increased the need for teachers to implement research-based or evidence-based practices to address the needs of the most at-risk students within their classrooms; however, to do so, they must be able to determine which of these practices is best suited for the area in which a student is showing low achievement. If teachers cannot determine the practice they need to implement, along with the resources that are grade-level appropriate to meet these students at their current level and help them grow in their development, the cycle of low performance among these students will continue (Hamilton et al., 2009).

This also aligns with the need for teachers to have high self-efficacy levels in their ability to work with students experiencing significant gaps in their learning. The effectiveness of implementing interventions directly impacts a student's learning outcome through the intervention (Nichols et al., 2020). During focus group interviews, Teacher D shared,

> It is like being a juggler. We know something will fall, no matter how skilled you are or whether you have been teaching for 1 year, 10 years, or 50 years. There is only so much that, you know, as a human that we can juggle all at once. It seems like especially years like this year, where we have two or three new things at a

time, and we are expected to learn and teach them in the same year, which is very

stressful. It is a lot of high pressure knowing that I am looking at these kids

thinking in my head, thinking we are learning this together. Of course, I cannot

say that to them. I must be confident in what I am doing, even though I just

learned it last week.

Therefore, resources must be provided aligned with evidence-based instruction and
proven to increase reading achievement among the most at-risk students.

**Research Question 2: What Strategies Do K-2 Teachers Find Most Effective When
Delivering Reading Instruction?**

During focus group interviews, participants were asked three questions that
aligned with the research question. The first question asked participants to describe the
strategies they find most effective when teaching reading through programs such as the
Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics. Next, they were asked to describe the
areas in which they feel students experience the most difficulty developing their reading
abilities through programs such as the Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics.
Finally, participants were asked to describe their methods in determining which strategies
or interventions to implement with struggling readers. Through their answers, the themes
of effective practices and data-driven instruction emerged.

This aligns with the need for teachers to implement effective literacy instruction
in building early literacy skills (ILA, 2020). In reviewing survey results, 14 teachers
(53.84%) believe they are strong in their ability to teach grade-level appropriate
vocabulary and to teach students to comprehend the text they are reading. Additionally,
14 teachers (53.85%) do not have high levels of efficacy when finding or creating

resources to support their students in their reading; however, when asked about their levels of efficacy in modeling reading strategies, over half of the teachers (57.70%) felt confident in their ability to do so.

Teaching early literacy skills through a balanced approach that includes foundational and comprehension instruction is key when providing literacy instruction to students (ILA, 2020). Teachers must feel confident in their ability to provide these balanced instructional approaches so that students are receiving the most effective type of instruction and, in turn, will be able to reach reading achievement each year. A teacher's level of efficacy and their personal beliefs about the successes and failures of their students help shape an understanding of how they will respond when trying new instructional approaches, working with their students who are at risk in their learning, and implementing new evidence-based interventions in response to the needs of at-risk students (Nichols et al., 2020).

Responses to the survey also align with the need for teachers to implement interventions effectively (Nichols et al., 2020). When asked about their ability to find or create resources and material aligned with their student's needs, 12 teachers (46.15%) felt strong about their levels of efficacy. As society changes, teachers are challenged with finding differentiated instruction to meet the needs of diverse students in their technical, social, cultural, and linguistic abilities (Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018).

During focus group interviews, Teacher K discussed the lack of phonics development of students when using the Lucy Calkins Units of Study by sharing the following:

When I came to second grade last year from fourth grade, we did not use phonics

per se in fourth grade. So, when I came, I did not use Lucy Calkin's phonics, so we filled in many holes. Nobody in second grade used Lucy Calkins phonics last year, and I felt like Lucy Calkins just left a lot of blanks, even in the reading part, because in the program, she expected so much that the kids were not ready for. We kept saying, "Oh, they will get it, finally get it." They never did get to the point where they could learn from her program. It was always way too advanced.

To meet these demands of filling many holes left within student development in reading, teachers must be able to have the content knowledge and confidence in that knowledge to be able to work with students and determine the resources needed or to create their own. This is supported by the work of Palmer (2011) in that to be an effective teacher, one must have a sound knowledge of the content and have a good understanding not only of their students but of themselves.

To meet students at their current level and progress them in their reading to grade-level proficiency, a teacher must be confident in their ability to collect and analyze their students' reading performance data to inform the next steps in providing instruction. In focus group interviews, teachers shared how they use both formal and informal assessment data to help them determine where their students are in their learning and where they need additional intervention to provide insight into how to address the needs of their students. Teacher K discussed using the formal assessment, mClass, "with the progress monitoring because it breaks it down for you and helps you understand exactly where the student is struggling." In discussing the use of informal assessment data, teacher D described their process by sharing,

Once I had them grouped, I would use lots of informal assessments because I

would see, okay, we are working on this skill now, this specific part of that skill or this child's not getting. And then I could focus more on that specific area.

This aligns with the need for teachers to effectively implement both formal and informal assessments within their instructional practices. To know what resource to use and where to intervene, teachers must first know where their students are in their learning. In order to do this, teachers must be confident in their ability to provide formal and informal assessments to their students. Assessments have become essential to current 21st century instructional practices, including literacy instruction (ILA, 2020). Diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments are critical components of 21st century literacy instruction because they provide teachers a way to assess the needs of students' abilities as they progress through the stages of literacy instruction. Without this crucial information, teachers cannot provide the strategies needed to address the student's needs in the best manner to improve student reading achievement (Chu et al., 2017).

Research Question 3: What Strategies Need Additional Support for Teachers to Reach a Higher Level of Efficacy?

For the final research question, data from all questions on the survey were used to determine where teachers have both high and low efficacy levels. When rating their levels of efficacy in teaching reading, teachers rated themselves as having strong efficacy in the areas of teacher phonics (61.53%), using formal assessment data to adjust instruction (61.53%), and modeling effective reading strategies (57.70%). In contrast, the percentage of teachers rating themselves as having strong efficacy levels was much lower in the areas of teaching students to be fluent readers (46.15%), finding or creating resources and materials aligned with the proper level for individual students (46.15%),

and motivating students who show no interest in reading (50%).

This led to asking the teachers to explain during focus group interviews why they felt that teachers rated themselves at these levels. Responses led to the themes of professional development and resources being identified. In sharing their answers to why teachers were more or less efficacious in certain areas, Teacher J expressed how professional development in phonics instruction has increased efficacy levels. She shared,

I feel like the strength with the district training is that they are very detailed, very informative, and I believe that they work when you put them into practice properly. You see the benefit in your students and want to keep pushing forward.

In contrast, she continued with how it can also contribute to lower efficacy levels among teachers. Continuing, she stated,

But I think there is a feeling of being overwhelmed when there is so much information at once, and there are so many different things at one time that the downfall is that teachers are not able to digest all this great content because there is so much at one time.

The answers from the participants agreed with the findings of the ILA's (2020) survey sent to teachers to identify areas of strength and need in literacy instruction. Through the 2020 survey results, teachers shared that the area needing immediate attention in order to increase teacher effectiveness in literacy instruction is professional development and teacher development programs (ILA, 2020). Teachers have felt that there continue to be gaps in student learning due to this current generation of students learning how to read differing significantly from previous generations (Leu et al., 2017). Currently, students are able to access interactive content, stories, and formative

assessments quickly through the use of technology. By monitoring the content students are accessing that proves beneficial to their achievement, educators are able to make informed decisions about future content and effective instructional practices that need to be implemented (World Bank, 2019). While print-based resources are still the primary way in which teachers teach literacy, society has seen shifts in the way texts are read, which are more multisensory than with previous generations; and in turn, need to be considered in the work of contemporary literacy education (Leu et al., 2017). Therefore, literacy teachers must shift how they teach and assess these skills based on the systems in which today's students understand (Di Cesare & Roswell, 2020).

In order to work with students to increase their reading achievement, teachers must be able to find or create resources that will be effective in doing so. Survey results determine that efficacy levels for teachers in this area were not as strong as the remaining areas rated on the survey, with only 46.15% of teachers rating themselves as strong. Teacher A shared, "Finding resources that work can be overwhelming due to the amounts out there, especially being a new teacher, I am not always sure if the resource I found is good enough to use."

Therefore, it can be determined that to successfully implement an instructional intervention with struggling students, teachers with higher levels of efficacy will find more success in their implementation and, in return, will see more positive results in student performance (Nichols et al., 2020). By doing so, teachers will be able to support students in their reading development in an effective manner and allow students to see continued growth over time.

Summary of Findings

   Table 11 outlines the significant findings of this research and the connections to

the literature previously reviewed in Chapter 2.

Table 11

Connection Between Findings and the Literature

Findings	Connection to literature

1. Teachers collectively agree that the amount of professional development they receive aligns with their efficacy levels.
  a. Teachers expressed that due to the increased training in teaching phonics, they feel much more confident in teaching this area of foundational skills.
  b. Teachers want more training in teaching fluency and reading comprehension to feel more confident in their reading.
  c. Teachers want clear guidance on the pacing of teaching each foundational area of reading. They feel that a lot of time is spent on phonemic awareness and phonics, which leaves little time to introduce and work with students on the latter areas of vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.
	• Teacher Support (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021)
	• Focus on Foundational Areas (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013)
	• Teachers tend to feel more frustrated due to their low self-efficacy in their ability to teach these skills in today's diverse classrooms (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021)
	• Teachers must be trained to decrease the reading gap (Allington, 2009; Stanovich, 1986)
	• An effective teacher knows the content and students (Palmer, 2011).

2. Teachers understand the importance of using effective practices when teaching reading to all students.
  a. Teachers are willing to learn new effective practices and lean on vetted practices to teach their students how to read effectively.
  b. Teachers want to help students struggling in their reading development and use effective practices to work with them.
  c. Teachers use data to drive their individualized instruction to address each student's needs in their reading development.
	• Instruction that builds early literacy skills (ILA, 2020)
	• Higher teacher efficacy is associated with using more challenging teaching techniques and teachers' willingness to try innovative methods (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988; Rangel, 1997).
	• Effective Assessment Practices (ILA, 2020)
	• Response to Intervention (Nichols et al., 2020)
	• The reduction of barriers to effective teaching and classroom-based decision-making influence each contributed to a teacher's sense of teaching efficacy (Moore & Esselman, 1994).

3. Teachers are overwhelmed with the amount of content to master as an instructor of reading. a. Teachers expressed that the amount of knowledge they obtain through their professional development is overwhelming, preventing them from being able to digest the information in a timely and effective manner.	• Teacher Support (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021) • Focus on Foundational Areas (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013) • The reduction of barriers to effective teaching and classroom-based decision-making influence each contributed to a teacher's sense of teaching efficacy (Moore & Esselman, 1994).

Findings	Connection to literature

4. Teachers want guidance on what resources are approved and effective when working with their students.
  a. Teachers want a guide of resources to use when addressing the needs of students in the five foundational areas of reading.
  b. Teachers want one straightforward, effective program or approach as the main resource, so they do not have to combine multiple practices when teaching reading.
  c. Teachers want to see the resources used consistently across the district.
	• Teacher Support (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2021)
	• Focus on Foundational Areas (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013)
	• Teachers' high level of efficacy leads to high reading achievement levels. (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013)
	• Higher teacher efficacy is associated with the use of more challenging teaching techniques, and teachers' willingness to try innovative methods (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Guskey, 1988; Rangel, 1997)
	• Equipped teachers to work with all students (Jordan et al., 2019)

Implications for Practice

Based on the data collected and reviewed literature, the following are

recommendations to increase teacher efficacy in teaching reading.

- **Continue to provide professional development in the areas of phonemic awareness and phonics.**

Castles et al. (2018) identified that one of the major barriers to meeting grade-

level appropriate literacy skills is the ability of students to obtain their foundational

phonological skills, which are phonemic awareness and phonics. If not mastered early in

literacy-building, students are more likely to experience difficulty in mastering grade-

level appropriate fluency and comprehension skills.

Several studies have proven that having a foundation in this skill indicates reading

success for students as they progress through their early elementary years of reading. In

order to create this success for students, teachers must have strong knowledge about

phonemic awareness and be able to provide good, sound instruction to their students

(WETA, 2019). Furthermore, phonological decoding is a critical prerequisite for

developing a skilled, fluent reader. As a student applies their learned phonological

decoding skills to unfamiliar words, they make a transition from being "novices" to being "experts" who will become readers of familiar words in a manner that is quick and seamless (Castles et al., 2018).

In the survey given to teachers within the district, efficacy levels in teaching phonemic awareness and phonics were the areas in which a larger percentage of teachers rated themselves as having strong efficacy, with 53.84% of teachers providing a strong efficacy rating in teaching phonemic awareness and 61.53% of teachers providing a strong efficacy rating in teaching phonics. During focus group interviews, teachers shared that their high efficacy levels were due to the intense professional development they have received from the district. Teacher J expressed how the professional development in these areas had built their efficacy:

> I feel like the strength with the district training is that they are very detailed, very informative, and I believe that they work when you put them into practice properly. You see the benefit in your students and want to keep pushing forward.

Therefore, the district must sustain this type of professional development for current and incoming teachers so that the strong efficacy levels in teaching phonemic awareness and phonics will continue to strengthen among the K-2 teachers throughout the district. With high teacher efficacy levels in teaching these critical foundational areas, students will begin to grow in their reading development, leading to having them ready to achieve at higher levels as they begin to become fluent readers immersed in grade-level vocabulary and grade-level texts.

- **Provide professional development for the areas of fluency.**

Oral reading fluency is an indicator of a student's overall reading progress and

competence as a reader. As a student learns to read, oral reading fluency is one of the clear indicators to monitor as it is accessible and reliable; therefore, making it an effective marker of a student's progress as they learn to read (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2003). In the survey, only 46.15% of the teachers (12) rated themselves as having a strong efficacy level in teaching students to become fluent readers. This is concerning because fluency is an indicator of future student success in reading on grade level. During focus group interviews, it became evident of the need for training in this area for teachers within the district. Teacher L shared,

> I do not think that we were trained as well in reading. We have been trained in phonics. We have never been trained in depth in reading comprehension and fluency. We have never been trained in running records. Certain schools have taken some money and done that on their own, but across the county, I do not think it is a universal thing we have been trained in.

Without professional development in this area, teachers are with little to no resources on how to teach fluency but also how to pace themselves in providing the instruction to students so that a sufficient amount of time can be spent on developing students into student readers. Providing insight into this, Teacher H shared that the pacing of teaching the foundational skills can present frustration for teachers and lead to a lack of motivation for students to learn to become fluent readers. Teacher H shared,

> Because we have rushed so fast to teach them everything in order to teach fluency that some of them just go, "Hey, I could not get it; I could not keep up" If they do not have those lower building blocks, they are never going to understand the fluency. So we will never get there if we cannot spend more time working on, you

know, practicing every day and slowly getting there. So, I think that is a big part

of the problem because once you have been left behind, it is really hard to get that

confidence back and to get that time back.

It is recommended that the district provide professional development to teachers

that is focused on teaching students to become fluent readers, including training on the

pacing teachers need to implement within their classrooms in order to give sufficient

instructional focus that allows dedicated time to teach fluency so that the majority of the

time is not spent on just building phonemic awareness and phonics.

- **Provide one consistent, sustained reading program or practice to teachers within the district.**

NRP (2000) defined foundational reading skills as phonemic awareness, phonics,

fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These five skills are often referred to as the

"pillars" or components that work together as a foundation of an effective literacy

instruction strategy. By providing instruction in a structured program that introduces one

of the components at a time in their correct progression, teachers can help students

become successful readers who can fluently read and understand the English language

(Waddell, 2019).

While survey results revealed that over half of the teachers felt strongly about

their ability to use effective skills and strategies when teaching reading, 46.15% of the

participants rated themselves as having moderate or very little efficacy when

implementing effective strategies over the past decade the district has implemented

several different reading programs in elementary schools with the type of program being

used changing within a 1- to 2-year span. Programs and approaches used in the past are

Balanced Literacy, Fountas and Pinnell, the Basial Approach, Lucy Calkin's Readers and

Writer's Workshop, SPIRE, and Heggerty Phonemic Approach. Teachers shared through

their responses during the focus group interviews their frustration with the changes in

their programs or the lack of a consistent program.

During focus group interviews, teachers described their practices in that they

would take "pieces" that they found to be effective from the programs the district had

implemented, such as Lucy Calkins and Spire Phonics, and use them along with

continuous practice with the students. Teacher L echoed this by stating,

> The most effective is adapting the curriculum to fit my students because often, the
>
> curriculum might be too far ahead or too far behind. So, you might look at the
>
> lesson and it is great, but you have to make it either less challenging or more
>
> challenging. So I guess using it as a guide and then adapting.

Teacher B agreed with this by sharing,

> We manipulated Lucy a little bit based on what we learned from the class and
>
> knowing that most of our kids needed the lowest skill, we would emphasize that
>
> part. I know last year we got a little introduction into Heggerty and started using
>
> that phonemic awareness piece, and the amount of growth that my kids made just
>
> from March till May was phenomenal.

Additionally, Teacher J shared,

> In kindergarten, when we did Lucy, it would piggyback off of her assuming that
>
> all students knew rhymes and would already know these things because they were
>
> taught in pre-K. Our students did not have that background. So, as you said, we
>
> were trying to piecemeal parts in and try to make things work and give the

background knowledge they did not have.

Through inconsistency in the programs being used in the district of study, teachers have begun to take pieces from each to bring together a curriculum that they feel is best for teaching reading. This is of concern because no consistent, effective program is taking place across the district, meaning it is difficult to determine which program or approach is producing the highest reading achievement among students in kindergarten through second grades. Furthermore, the district cannot collect reliable information on student performance to help identify areas of needed professional development, trends in student performance, and where other types of support are needed.

It is recommended that the district provide one reading instruction program to all kindergarten through second-grade teachers that introduces the foundational skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension at a time in their progression of providing reading instruction. In addition, it is recommended that the district provide continuous professional development to teachers using this program so that efficacy levels will continue to strengthen among the teachers who are experiencing moderate to very little efficacy levels at this time and to ensure all newly hired teachers are well-trained in how to implement the program effectively. In doing so, the district will be able to ensure that a consistent program is being used among K-2 teachers within the district and will be able to collect and analyze data to identify the success of the program and to identify additional areas of support needed in order to help students reach higher proficiency levels in their ability to read on grade level.

- **Provide one district-wide guide of resources that teachers may use when providing reading instruction to at-risk students.**

As society changes, teachers are challenged with finding differentiated instruction to meet the needs of diverse students in their technical, social, cultural, and linguistic abilities (Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018). Literacy teachers must understand the obstacles that students face and be able to provide instructional strategies that support their literacy development (ILA, 2020). Recent research has suggested a high correlation between early reading deficiencies and future reading achievement in students (Washburn et al., 2016). For survey results in response to the question asking teachers to rate their level of efficacy in finding or creating resources and materials aligned with the proper level for individual students, over half (53.85%) of the teachers rated themselves as having moderate to very little efficacy in their ability to do so.

To be an effective teacher, one must have a sound knowledge of the content and a good understanding not only of their students but of themselves (Palmer, 2011). Focus group interview responses also shared the lower efficacy levels through the teachers' responses. Teacher A shared, "Finding resources that work can be overwhelming due to the amounts out there, especially being a new teacher, I am not always sure if the resource I found is good enough to use." Teacher G warned of how this practice should be of concern by sharing,

> Teachers will go out there and find whatever they want. When that happens, there is not going to be any consistency or uniformity even across the county because, you know, you are going to have those people that go over and above, you know, and then you are going to have to have somebody that's going to sit back and say,

gosh, I am not spending all this time doing this. You know, I am just going to, you know, give them my scholastic news. I mean, I do not know. It just seems like there is not going to be any consistency or uniformity, like I said, across the county.

Teacher F shared the need for consistency of resources for teachers so that they do not have to create as many on their own:

It seems like there would be some kind of guide or something to give us a recommended resource. Once you get confident using that resource, you can branch out and do what you need with your students. That has added to the frustration.

Additionally, Teacher G agreed,

Yeah, and I think that is a big shift because I know, when I was a child, each subject was uniform, and you were learning the same thing each grade, and it followed, and it built. Now with us shifting towards standards-based learning, the teacher has to study to understand the standard and then figure out what these children need to meet that specific standard rather than going from a set textbook. That can be frustrating, especially when you are unsure which resource to use.

Students need a general education teacher equipped with strategies and resources and the level of confidence needed to help them learn how to read at grade level (Jordan et al., 2019). Due to the low efficacy levels among teachers that are evident through survey results and focus group interviews, it is recommended that the district provide elementary teachers with a guide of resources that are research-based and vetted as being effective resources to use when providing reading instruction to students. Furthermore, it

is recommended that included in these resources are research-based practices that are specifically used to address the needs of at-risk students. By providing this guide of resources, the district can ensure that teachers are using common resources as they provide reading instruction to students and that the at-risk students receive intervention through vetted resources that are proven effective in helping students grow to grade-level reading proficiency.

Recommendations for Further Study

One recommendation for further study is for this study to be conducted in other districts within the state of North Carolina. While reading instruction may look different in other districts, the five foundational reading skills remain the same regardless of location; therefore, it would be interesting to see the efficacy levels of teachers in other districts across the state to identify similar and different levels of efficacy on the survey.

Another recommendation for further study would be to replicate this study for teachers in Grades 3-5 to see if efficacy levels increase as students age and develop. While teachers in kindergarten through second grades are often tasked with teaching the five foundational areas of reading, there are still students who are promoted to Grades 3-5 with deficits in these areas. Furthermore, these are the grade levels in which students begin to participate in standardized assessments where reading proficiency is reported at the local, state, and national levels. While this study focused on the efficacy levels of kindergarten through second-grade teachers, it would be interesting to identify the efficacy levels of the upper-grade-level teachers within the district and compare the similarities and differences of their efficacy levels to those of the kindergarten through second-grade teachers.

Poggio (2012) found that teacher efficacy is significantly related to students' achievement on reading assessment scores. Furthermore, Poggio found that a teacher's efficacy towards reading instruction is a reliable predictor of student performance on their reading assessment. Knowing this relationship between efficacy levels of teachers and student achievement, it is recommended that this study be conducted within high-, average-, and low-performing schools to compare similarities and differences in teacher efficacy levels at these schools. While this study did not ask teachers to identify the school in which they are teaching in order to identify those who serve at a high-, average-, or low-performing school, it would be interesting to compare the efficacy levels of teachers at each school level to their current performance as a school.

In this study, the number of years of experience teachers had at the time of the study was not asked. As an additional recommendation for further study, it would be interesting to ask the teachers to share their years of experience to compare efficacy levels among the veterans and those new to teaching.

In April 2021, during the state of North Carolina's legislative session, Senate Bill 387 was passed. This is an act to modify the current Read to Achieve legislation, which tasks school districts to attain reading proficiency by the third grade. Senate Bill 387 identifies educators as having a critical role in providing reading instruction, therefore requiring every prekindergarten through fifth-grade teacher to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to apply the Science of Reading to all students. This new legislation intends to make reading instruction a priority across the state. The goal is to provide training in systemic and explicit reading instruction for teachers in early grades, reinforcing these practices occurring in upper-grade levels. In addition, the legislation

emphasizes that additional support and offers intervention techniques for students who continue to struggle in their reading development. Within the district of study, teachers are required to participate in the Science of Reading training, an intensive professional development on reading instruction that will occur over the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years (Lexia Learning Systems, n.d.). As a final recommendation for further study, it would be intriguing to conduct this study once teachers have been adequately trained in the Science of Reading program to identify if teacher efficacy levels have changed with the new, in-depth reading instruction professional development being offered.

Limitations and Delimitations

Due to conducting the research portion of the study during the summer, many teachers had finished their responsibilities for the school year. They could no longer be reached in a timely manner to participate in the study. This created a much smaller sample population for the study, limited to 95 kindergarten through second-grade teachers participating in the summer program within the district during June and July. With such a small number of teachers participating, all teachers were invited to maximize the diversity and experience of the sample population.

Due to my serving as the chief accountability officer within the district of study, I hold a leadership title, and many of the participants know me due to the data integration support my department provides to the educators. While I attempted to ensure teachers that pseudonyms were being used and that their identity would not be tied to their answers, my role within the district could have impacted the teachers' responses during their focus group interviews. I did consider using a proxy for the focus group interviews;

however, I felt that the participants might be hesitant to share in the focus group due to being unsure of the intent behind using a proxy.

This study was limited to a population of summer program teachers who currently teach kindergarten through second grade. I did not ask for the name of the school that the teachers were currently serving. By not asking for the school's name, I could have multiple teachers from the same school represented during the focus group sessions. This would limit the overall perspectives of the teachers. I also did not include a question on the survey or focus group participation form to ask for years of experience among the participants; thus, there could be beginning teachers participating in the study with only 1 year of teaching experience, meaning their knowledge of programs used within the district, current instructional expectations, and overall content knowledge would differ from that of their veteran peers.

I did not provide questions on the survey to differentiate between teachers who had been formally trained in Lucy Calkins, SPIRE Phonics, or other programs used within the district. Consequently, participants had varying levels of understanding of these programs. There was no way to determine differences in efficacy levels in using these programs among trained teachers and those who received no training.

Finally, I had no input or control over whether or not teachers chose to participate in the study. The anonymous survey was sent to all kindergarten through second-grade teachers participating in the summer program within the district of study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy levels of kindergarten through second-grade teachers in their ability to provide reading instruction to students

with a focus on the five foundational areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. In addition, the study sought to make recommendations for how districts can enhance teacher efficacy in delivering reading instruction. The study was a mixed methods study that used data through survey and focus group interview participation to answer the three research questions. The information received from survey results and focus group interview responses aligned with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory.

Teachers collectively agree that the amount of professional development they receive aligns with their efficacy levels. This is validated through teachers expressing stronger efficacy levels in teaching phonemic awareness and phonics, which was attributed to the increase in professional development they had received in these areas. They expressed wanting to receive the same level of professional development in teaching fluency, in which efficacy levels are less strong.

Teachers want clear guidance on the pacing of teaching each foundational area of reading. This is due to teachers feeling overwhelmed with the amount of content to master as an instructor of reading. Teachers understand the importance of using research-based instructional practices and are willing to learn new and proven practices for teaching reading. In addition, they want to help struggling students in their reading development and work to find effective practices and resources to use when providing interventions while using data to drive their individualized, differentiated instructional decisions. Teachers expressed the need for a guide of resources to use when addressing the needs of students in the five foundational areas of reading that is used consistently across the district, including one straightforward, effective program or approach as the

main resource, so they do not have to combine multiple practices when teaching reading.

Overall, there is a positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy levels and their ability to provide reading instruction to their students. Meaning, as teacher self-efficacy levels increase, student reading achievement will also increase. The more efficacious the teacher becomes, the more likely they will implement research-based instructional practices effectively. Participants in this study indicated that they do not feel prepared to teach students to be fluent readers, find or create resources aligned with students' needs, and motivate students who show no interest in reading. Engaging teachers in professional development and providing consistent resources, including a district-wide reading program that is consistent and proven to be effective, may improve their knowledge and ability to feel better prepared to teach reading.

As overall reading proficiency remains stagnant, educators must address the reading achievement gaps that exist among students. Previous research indicates that highly effective teachers of reading are those who are efficacious in their ability to do so. It is imperative that we equip our K-2 teachers with the knowledge and confidence needed to teach reading in order to close the reading achievement gaps our students are currently experiencing.

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Appendix A

Teacher Self-Efficacy in Reading Instruction Survey

Teacher Self-Efficacy in Reading Instruction Survey

Teacher Self-Efficacy in Reading Instruction

Directions: Please indicate your level of efficacy (confidence) for each of the questions below by marking any one of the four responses in the columns on the right side, ranging from (1) "None At All" to (4) "Strong." Please respond to each of the questions by considering your current ability, resources, and opportunity to do each of the following in your current position.

		Level of Efficacy			
		None at All	Very Little	Moderate	Strong
	Question	1	2	3	4
1	What is your level of efficacy in teaching phonemic awareness?				
2	What is your level of efficacy in teaching students phonics?				
3	What is your level of efficacy in teaching students to be fluent readers?				
4	What is your level of efficacy in teaching grade-level appropriate vocabulary?				
5	What is your level of efficacy in teaching students to comprehend the text they are reading?				
6	How efficacious are you in implementing effective reading skills strategies within your reading instruction?				
7	How efficacious are you in adjusting your instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers?				
8	How efficacious are you in finding or creating resources and materials aligned to the proper level for individual students?				
9	How efficacious are you in using informal assessments to adjust reading instruction?				
10	How efficacious are you in using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction?				
11	How efficacious are you in using assessment data to identify specific reading skills a student has difficulty mastering?				
12	How efficacious are you in modeling effective reading strategies?				
13	How efficacious are you in your ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading?				

Appendix B

Focus Group Interview Questions

Focus Group Interview Questions

Question 1: Describe the strategies you find to be most effective when teaching reading through programs used, such as the Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics.

Question 2: Describe the areas in which you feel students experience the most difficulty as they develop their reading abilities through programs used, such as the Lucy Calkins units of study and Spire Phonics.

Question 3: Describe the methods you use in determining which strategies or interventions to implement with struggling readers.

Question 4: The survey indicated that the majority of teachers are efficacious in phonics, using formal assessment information to adjust reading instruction, and modeling effective reading strategies and are least efficacious in in teaching students to be fluent readers, in finding or creating resources and materials aligned to the proper level for individual students, in their ability to motivate students who show no interest in reading. Why are you more efficacious in some areas than others?