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A Generic Qualitative Study of Primary Grade Reading Teachers' Challenges and Personal Teaching Solutions

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Challenges and Personal Teaching Solutions

by
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Abraham S. Fischler College of Education
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Approval Page

This applied dissertation prospectus was submitted by Jennifer Lynn Nunes under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Jennifer Lynn Nunes
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Abstract

A Generic Qualitative Study of Primary Reading Teachers' Challenges and Personal Teaching Solutions. Jennifer Lynn Nunes, 2022: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: Foundational reading skills, reading proficiency, teacher agency, teacher efficacy

Not all children enter school with the same skill set. Teachers of young children know this. Despite this, schools prescribe curriculum and pacing guides as well as assessments that may fit only a subset of students' instructional levels. Teachers are left to determine the best way to meet the student and mandated requirements. Teachers from two elementary schools from a neighborhood area were interviewed about their perspectives and how they manage instructional expectations to help students learn grade level expectations.

The following research questions were addressed.
1. How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction for students who are deficient in foundational reading skills?
2. How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instructional pacing of the prescribed district grade level literacy curriculum?
3. How do teachers evaluate the student data outcomes for evidence of the effectiveness of the adapted literacy instruction?

Findings provided an understanding of the reflective processes and decision-making actions used to address foundational reading skill deficits in primary classrooms and emphasized a teacher's voice in literacy curriculum adaptations while using the prescribed curriculum.

Recommendations for future research are to consider replicating this study with a larger and more diverse sample. Additional recommendations are to investigate the impact of phonics instruction combined with writing instruction in third grade, whether a district provided adjusted pacing calendar for foundational reading skills would result in a reduction in lost writing instruction, and an increase in productivity during grade level PLC sessions.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Children arrive to the first day of school each year from hundreds of local homes and therefore hundreds of different home environments, learning opportunities, abilities, and expectations for literacy development. Despite the variability in children's early development, they are greeted with a prescribed set of academic expectations that some have already met, some are ready to meet, and some are not yet prepared to meet. Despite this fact, known all too well to teachers who are charged with educating all students in their grade level to a common level by the end of the school year, teachers must attempt to ensure all students reach the prescribed *finish line* by the end of the school year. In the spring of each year, across the country, children take standardized achievement tests, usually in at least reading and math, to measure the success of the children, the teachers, the schools, and the nation, irrespective of their stating points.

In Florida, for example, only 54% of third grade students are deemed proficient in reading according to the Grade 3 FSA ELA Results Report (2021). As a result of data such as this, schools often prescribe literacy curriculum for schools, as stakeholders attempt to address data trends with financially motivated reform policies such as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), Race to the Top, and Teacher Pay for Performance (Saltman, 2018).

The focus on performance outcomes frequently yields standardized expectations, some as specific as uniform daily lesson plans across the full range of incoming students, despite their incoming skills. For students who have already learned many skills expected in the grade level, this may result in a lack of challenge and rigor. For students who are

already behind on the first day of school, this may yield to rushing student learning, frustrating students about school in general, and in cases where students are very far behind, possible discussions of learning disabilities. Teachers then must individually navigate adaptations to reading instruction necessary to remove barriers to learning for diverse students, especially performing well below grade level curriculum expectations (Maniates, 2017; Null, 2017).

For teachers to successfully plan and coordinate these differentiated instructional lessons needed to address the foundational reading deficits of students, Ornstein and Hunkins (2017) advocated for teachers to gain agency, or voice, in expressing professional opinions and pedagogical viewpoints while working to implement the prescribed curriculum at the same time they are responding to students performing significantly below grade level expectations. Vaughn (2015) emphasized that teachers must be knowledgeable, and able to be reflective of their vision and instructional pedagogy during adaptations to curriculum. When teachers are supported in this process, rather than mandated by reform policies, the needs of unique students are honored, and "spaces within a curriculum are opened up" so that students can become "co-constructors of the curriculum" (Vaughn & Parsons, 2013, p. 89).

The researcher learned directly from first to third grade teachers about the processes they use to adapt literacy instruction specifically to address foundational reading deficits of primary grade students. Additionally, the researcher intends to explore with teachers how and why they choose the instructional adaptations they did and learn whether they perceived their adapted literacy instruction was successful in building literacy achievement in their students.

The Research Problem

The research problem was when students are unable to perform at a grade level expectation in foundational reading skills in the primary grades, achievement gaps in reading compound over the years. Research has indicated that students who are reading below proficiency expectations in third grade, graduate and attend college at lower rates than their peers who were performing at grade level expectations by the end of third grade (Dogan et al., 2015). As students enter school performing below grade level in reading, teachers will often adapt instruction and learning tasks to remediate deficits with isolated skill and drill worksheets and activities, especially in the primary grades. While this approach is intended as an intervention, it can ultimately result in students feeling a lack of engagement and motivation during reading over time (Stover et al., 2017).

Results from the 2021 Florida Language Arts state assessment (FSA) indicated that approximately 54% of Florida third grade students were reading on or above third grade level, which also indicates a decrease of four percentage points when compared to the 2019 results of 58% reading on or above grade level (Grade 3 FSA ELA Results Report, 2021). Knowing this, primary teachers can proactively address weak achievement while at the same time teaching grade level standards with the district prescribed curriculum and provide individualized instruction to the extent possible during the constraints of a school day. This challenge is the intersection where theory meets practice and where reforms meet reality, and as Ankrum et al. (2020) explained, equitable literacy instruction is not realistic or feasible with a one-size-fits-all approach, and adaptations to literacy instruction are crucial for teachers to be able to provide access to education for all diverse students. While teachers engage in professional development to

increase their knowledge of curriculum and instructional approaches, an overemphasis on fidelity of implementation and compliance with prescribed curriculum can result in superficial engagement with curriculum, rather than meaningful instruction based on a student's learning needs. Troyer (2019) recognized the challenges teachers face in implementing a curriculum with students reading well below grade level and suggested a lack of existing research in evaluating the adaptations made to curriculum by teachers.

The process of applying curriculum is a transformative, two-way exchange between teacher and curriculum resource, which is used to enact meaningful lessons for students. The complexity of the process of merging the use of a curriculum with the design of implementation is dynamic and can vary according to a teacher's agency and professional capacity (Choppin et al., 2018). What was not known is the distinct reasoning behind how and why teachers adjust their instruction, curriculum, and pacing to meet the needs of students to the extent possible given school achievement goals.

Background and Justification

Over the years, legislation towards using accountability measures to define the academic success of students, teachers, and schools has privatized education into operating based on cycles of economic funding initiatives (Saltman, 2018). For example, recent Florida legislation has enacted policies to ensure students receive appropriate screening, identification, and effective intervention for reading deficits. The Florida Department of Education is in the process of updating their 5-year strategic plan, which will be in place until the 2024-2025 school year and will be aligned with the requirements of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (ESSA, 2017). In July 2021, the Florida Senate enacted Senate Bill 580, which targets student reading deficits, and clearly defines the

intent of the bill "to ensure that each student's progression in Kindergarten through Grade 3 is determined in part upon the student's proficiency in reading" (Florida Senate, 2021, p. 2). This bill further requires teacher certifications, student screenings, and interventions for dyslexia in all public schools.

While the reforms are structured to build reading proficiency in students by the end of third grade, a secondary result of the new mandates is the need to study factors teachers use to discriminate and choose adaptations for curriculum, and an additional and potential professional development opportunity to support teacher adaptation choices during instruction to address the needs of the students.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Gersten et al. (2020) completed a meta-analysis of 33 research studies that measured the impact of primary grade reading interventions, with a specific focus on first to third grade reading intervention effectiveness and intervention characteristics. Results of the meta-analysis indicated a need for future research to see whether reading interventions move students past the foundational or pre-reading stage and whether learning gains are maintained over the long term. Paige et al. (2019) postulated that achievement in foundational reading skills, orthographic mapping, and fluency are likely to result in passing scores on state reading accountability assessments and declared deficiencies in the research regarding the impact of foundational reading skills on standardized reading assessments. Furthermore, Paige et al. (2019) suggested that both district and school faculty need a better understanding of the impact of foundational reading skills on the independent reading proficiency of students beginning in third grade.

Secondly, research in both curriculum components and teacher instructional strategies are evident, but there is a lack of research in the implementation of adapted curriculum. Paige et al. (2019) postulated that the relationship between foundational reading skills and student proficiency on standardized achievement tests is not fully understood by district and school personnel. Through an analysis and critique of the national evaluation of Response to Intervention (RTI), Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) discussed whether it is reasonable to expect general education teachers to be able *to attain and sustain* the academic growth of students who are performing in the lowest 25%, despite interventions and quality instruction. There is a need for further research to study the factors that teachers use to choose adaptations for literacy curriculum for below level readers in the primary grades. Standardized assessments, and the consequential accountability of achievement scores drive the focus of school curriculum (Paige et al., 2019), and this can result in teachers subconsciously limiting differentiated instruction by adhering to a strict scope and sequence of the prescribed core curriculums (Maniates, 2017). Consequently, there is also a need for focused professional development opportunities that support teacher rationale and adaptation choices away from core curriculum during instruction. By exploring ways teachers use their understanding of students, instructional vision, and curriculum knowledge to scaffold instruction and make learning timely and meaningful for students, the complexity of curriculum ergonomics, or adaptations will support both student and teacher voices in education (Vaughn, 2015).

Choppin et al. (2018) discussed the dynamics of curriculum design and implementation and the required decision-making skills and teacher capacity needed to successfully plan for curriculum adaptations which ultimately result in successful student

achievement. The gap between the "planned and the enacted" curriculum in classrooms can result in lack of instructional effectiveness and fidelity with the prescribed curriculum. Drake and Remillard (2019) advocated for curriculum designers to consider the importance of the relationship between the teacher, the student, and the curriculum materials rather than just the intended student outcomes when prescribing curriculum use. Maniates (2017) explored teacher expertise at adapting a core reading program to address student deficits and create access to the prescribed curriculum for all learners and stressed the need for teacher efficacy so that curriculum adaptations can result in achievement and be sustained over time. Without a process that includes on-going evaluation and feedback from the teacher teams, students, and administration about the prescribed literacy curriculum, schools and districts are at risk for ineffective instruction for reading deficient students, as well as a lack of professional support to navigate student deficits for teachers in the classroom. After reviewing reading intervention studies from 2003 to 2015, Moore et al. (2017) observed a need for further focus on on-going formative evaluation of interventions so that impacts can be measured and continuously inform teachers about the effects of their literacy curriculum adaptations and intervention combinations. Maniates (2017) furthered this view by expressing a need for research about teachers serving as curriculum designers so that decisions made by district and policy stakeholders can be better informed when considering prescribed literacy curriculum and accountability assessments.

The studies previously mentioned do not extend the element of teacher reflection and voice in literacy curriculum adaptations to meet the foundational reading skill deficits of students in primary grades. Thus, the research extended the works of Moore et al.

(2017), Paige et al. (2019), and Gersten et al. (2020). This study contributes to research in the field of literacy instruction and curriculum adaptation and provides an in-depth analysis of the reasoning teachers employ regarding adaptations to literacy curriculum implementation. This research also contributes to the voice of teachers in the areas of curriculum adaptation and literacy, and informs future decisions made to bridge the gap between existing prescribed literacy curriculum and trends of student deficits in foundational reading skills in the primary grades.

Audience

School districts will gain understanding of the reflective process teachers use to ensure independent reading proficiency by the end of third grade. This researcher investigated how primary grade teachers in neighborhood schools make decisions regarding adaptations to lessons and prescribed district curricula to meet student needs and address foundational reading skill deficits. Moreover, the findings of this study enhance the knowledge of school administrators and teachers in employing a responsive curriculum adaptation process to increase foundational literacy education. Results of this investigation also serve as a resource for revised professional development and professional learning community practices which will potentially increase a teacher's professional capacity and self-efficacy, as well as increase student learning outcomes in ensuring reading proficiency by the end of third grade.

Setting of the Study

The research took place with teachers who worked at two local elementary schools. Each school consisted of a student body that is primarily affluent, with no more than 18% of students considered to be from low-income families. At each of the targeted

schools, primary grade level teacher teams have approximately 10 teachers each in Grades 1 to 3 who participate in weekly grade level collaborative planning to address student achievement data and learning needs. The grade teams include teachers who vary in instructional experience and age, and who are primarily female in gender.

Researcher's Role

The researcher is currently employed by the local school district as an instructional literacy coach. Previously, the researcher served as a special education teacher. The researcher has 5 years of experience in coaching teacher participants in instructional strategies and student data review processes. In addition to this, the researcher has pursued education and training regarding literacy and is passionate about meeting the educational needs of students who have deficits in reading and learning, as the researcher has two college age daughters who previously struggled academically during their education in the same school district.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to investigate how and why teachers report adapting literacy instruction to support primary grade students who are deficient in reading skills compared to their grade level peers. The qualitative outcomes of this study provide information about teacher decision making and reflective processes used in adapting the prescribed literacy curriculum to address the foundational reading deficits of students in primary grades, and to explore their ideas about whether the implemented adaptations close achievement gaps of struggling students by the end of the grade taught. The intended research outcomes will include research contributions to the literature in identifying teacher reflective processes for curriculum adaptations, adjusted

pacing in literacy instruction, and teacher reflections about whether and how much such adaptations may have helped young readers.

Definition of Terms

For this applied dissertation, the following relevant key terms are defined.

Foundational reading skills include knowledge and application of letter-sound correspondences and effective decoding of both pseudo and high frequency words, which ultimately converge and lead to fluent reading with automaticity and sufficient comprehension of text (Paige et al., 2019).

Reading proficiency as defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the demonstration of a student's competency in reading challenging text with fluency, while also understanding the content so that the student can analyze and meaningfully apply learned knowledge from the text. Proficient reading requires the student to use language and communication skills, while employing skills based in the mechanics of reading and comprehension (Connors-Tadros, 2014).

Teacher agency is defined by Wagner et al. (2019) as the capacity for teachers to implement professional choices to meaningfully perform during classroom instruction, professional development and curriculum initiatives in ways that are professionally important to student achievement as well as their own professional growth as a teacher.

Teacher efficacy encompasses the process a teacher utilizes to set goals, and then manage and regulate behaviors to ultimately achieve the intended goals and outcomes. Teacher efficacy includes a teacher's belief about meaningfully influencing student learning despite any presented challenge that may occur during instruction (Clark, 2020).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Examination of teacher pedagogy and rationale regarding the process of curriculum adaptations used to teach foundational reading skills in the primary grades is essential, as a teacher's voice represents the human connection and student perspective in learning. Teachers must face the ongoing challenge of closing foundational literacy skill achievement gaps while simultaneously building the student's capacity within the prescribed grade level curriculum, as required to ultimately meet the district expectations of student achievement scores (Maniates, 2017). When provided with the opportunity to lend their voice to curriculum and policies regarding literacy achievement, teachers can collaborate and become an agent of change for the generation of students historically defined by standards-based achievement scores and proficiency ratings (Cloonan et al., 2019; Saltman, 2018; Vaughn & Parsons, 2013).

The researcher conducted an informational search using research strategies that included the following databases and websites: ERIC, ProQuest, U.S. Department of Education, and the Florida Department of Education. Dates from 2016 to 2021 were used to identify scholarly content and peer-reviewed research including articles, case studies, and dissertations relevant to literacy and foundational reading skill deficits. Research was conducted with a focused search aligned with relevant key terms including foundational reading skills, reading proficiency, teacher agency, teacher efficacy, and literacy curriculum adaptations related to primary grades in elementary school.

The purpose of the following literature review is to discuss the recurring trends and themes present in current literature regarding the actions primary grade teachers take to meet the needs of reading deficient students, while still complying with district and

company curriculum requirements and expectations. The synthesis of literature supports the need for teacher driven curriculum adaptations in foundational reading skill instruction and the resulting discussion will demonstrate the advantages of using teacher voice to improve foundational literacy skills in primary school students. A review of relevant and representative literature which sustains the argument for the importance of teacher agency in literacy curriculum adaptations in primary school students is included in this chapter. The researcher begins this literature review with a discussion of the theoretical framework used to guide the generic qualitative study and continues with an analysis of the current literature regarding curriculum and student achievement expectations for public school primary teachers. This is followed with a discussion of teacher agency as an advantageous factor in addressing the foundational reading skills deficits by third grade to ensure the future reading proficiency of students. Finally, three research questions that will guide the study are posed.

Theoretical Framework

This generic qualitative research study is theoretically grounded in Piaget's cognitive learning theory, which defines learning as a process where mental structures are built and continuously rebuilt as new knowledge is gained and engaged during active learning experiences designed to include the processing and storing of information through mental activities (Clark, 2018). Jean Piaget, an influential Swiss educational psychologist, characterized traits that are marked by changes within four different stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operations (Clark, 2018; Keane & Griffin, 2018; Piaget, 1970). Each the four stages of cognitive development describes a progression of skills that range from motor planning

(sensorimotor), to understanding ideas and mental imagery (preoperational), to logical

thought processing and understanding of other points of view (concrete operational), and

finally, logical and abstract thought processes during the formal operations stage. Piaget

used the terms "assimilation of knowledge" and "accommodation of knowledge" to

describe the mental processes of how knowledge is incorporated and then altered as new

experiences incorporating the learned knowledge develop into a new layer of learning

that can be accommodated within the schemata (Clark, 2018).

Based on Piaget's theories, four levels of cognitive development are important to

consider when planning instruction, especially during the elementary years (Clark, 2018;

Keene & Griffin, 2018). Students with academic deficits or special needs will often

present with different cognitive development levels from their peers. In this regard,

educators must meet the challenge of cultivating an instructional pedagogy that can allow

for cognitive developmental differences in the classroom, along with rigorous and active

learning experiences that will deepen knowledge as each student progresses through

individually different cognitive stages. Piaget advocated for teachers to support their

students by orchestrating active learning within classroom experiences that are inquiry

based so that students use mental processes to problem solve with peers (Edwards, 2017).

Piaget's cognitive learning theory is relevant to literacy instruction and the

development of foundational reading skills in the primary grades as students enter

elementary school at varying developmental progressions and with varying literacy

levels, requiring primary grade teachers to be able to accommodate multiple levels of

reading proficiency within their classroom contexts. Vaughn et al. (2020) described the

approaches needed to teach reading as including instruction for "in-the-head" knowledge

processes (phonics, fluency, problem solving, vocabulary) as well as literacy instruction that addresses cultural and social constructs that make meaning in complex relationships. Given the intersection of social, language, and cognitive development with literacy instruction, adaptive literacy instruction is a necessary approach for teachers to employ within a classroom context consisting of students and teachers who vary in experiences, knowledge, and stages of development.

Curriculum Expectations for Public School Primary Teachers

Public school primary teachers meet the challenge of addressing the developmental and academic differences of their elementary aged students daily, as educational policies continue to stress achievement gains in terms of teacher accountability, rather than diversity of instruction for students in need (Maniates, 2017). Furthermore, changes in student demographic percentages over the years indicate that teachers must be prepared to teach a more diversified student cohort, with multiple differences in student linguistic, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds (Clark, 2020). The narrowed and specific core reading curricula designated with federal and state educational policies in mind, combined with the persistently changing demographics of students, often result in an ineffective literacy program for those students who require a differentiated and accommodated approach to reading instruction (Maniates, 2017).

Unfortunately, years of literacy curriculum and instruction that meet policy expectations but do not meet the presenting needs of students result in achievement gaps in foundational reading skill proficiency. These gaps are recognized by state, federal, national, and world organizations, who respond by prioritizing their efforts to implement literacy practices through policy initiatives such as the Education for All (EFA) initiative

(Moore, et al., 2017). Despite over $617 billion dollars spent on K-12 grade education, there has been slow and unimpressive improvement to proficiency over the last two decades (Paige et al., 2019), with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (2017) documenting upwards of two thirds of elementary aged students scoring below reading proficiency levels on assessments at both the state and national levels.

Based on the 2019 NAEP Florida snapshot on the reading achievement results, 38% of fourth grade students performed at or above the proficient level with a score of 225, which was 3 points lower than the previous 2017 average student score. While Florida has performed above the average national student score since 2003, the percentage of students in Florida scoring at or above the NAEP proficient level has fluctuated between 30% and 41% for the past 16 years (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019).

Furthermore, when one considers the 2003-2019 NAEP Florida reading data separated by race/ethnicity subgroups, significant differences in proficiency levels and student subgroup scores are evident over 16 years, with a recent 23-point gap between White and Black students in 2019. While the Florida state scores have consistently averaged higher than national public-school scores in every race/ethnicity subgroup, all scores remain below the NAEP proficient level despite multiple efforts in national initiatives over a decade (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019).

The lagging progress in literacy achievement has resulted in mandated high-quality reading instruction for struggling readers in the general education classroom, along with the initiation of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and interventions for students who continue to lack progress. Intermittent federal legislation such as the No

Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 2004, and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 have layered together over the years to emphasize academic achievement in terms of state assessment data (Gersten et al., 2020; Paige et al., 2019).

Additionally, as part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) signed by President Obama, a program called Race to the Top was implemented as a competitive grant designed to generate educational reforms by motivating schools to earn points by taking action to improve teacher performance, standards-based education, and data systems (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Specifically, schools would earn a score by developing high-quality assessments, improving both principal and teacher effectiveness based on specific performance scores, and ensuring successful charter school success (Spring, 2013). Teachers, as well as schools and districts within each state, are continuously scrutinized through the lens of student achievement data results, as well as evaluated based on a cycle of proficiency score accountability and growth measures from year to year (Spring, 2013).

Mitigating the academic progress of students presenting with differences in such factors as cognitive development, language, ethnicity, race, and culture is a significant responsibility for today's primary school teachers as they are required to concurrently implement the policy-prescribed literacy curriculum designated by the aforementioned school reforms. Vaughn (2019) described the cognitive and constructivist practice of adapting instruction for student differences as a process that requires teachers to notice student needs and implement various strategies, tools, or curriculum resources in the moment to ensure that students receive effective modified instruction on a daily basis in

the classroom.

This perspective was further addressed in a recent article about the alignment of effective literacy instruction based in the science of reading methodology as well as adaptive teaching approaches. Vaughn et al. (2020) recommended viewing literacy instruction as less of a technical process where teachers transfer literacy knowledge to students and more of a teaching practice where the literacy instruction is constantly adapted to a student's individual needs so that it remains a socially and culturally relevant experience for the student. Teachers are on the front lines of this dichotomous academic achievement crusade to deliver literacy curriculum based on policy expectations as well as literacy instruction that is student relevant. While effective teachers are recognized for meeting the needs of their students in the classroom, they face constant barriers to adaptive teaching such as restrictive curriculum expectations, restrictive state standards, and the emphasis on high stakes testing and achievement scores (Ankrum et al., 2020; Parsons et al., 2018).

The legislation referenced above illustrates an ongoing and progressive federal effort to technically address the identified deficits in literacy achievement over the last two decades as well as highlight the influence of political dynamics and federal funding initiatives on educational reform and school curriculums (Paige et al., 2019). By sustaining accountability measures as the primary voice in educational reform, teachers as well as students lose their voice in curriculum and instructional policymaking. This perpetuates the use of a one-size fits all approach to literacy instruction, which ultimately denies students access to meaningful and impactful classroom instructional experiences designed to meet student literacy needs (Stover et al., 2017).

One-Size Expectations for Student Achievement

Vaughn (2019) discussed how teachers are pressured to conform to a one-size expectation for students by strictly following the scope and sequence of mandated prescribed literacy curriculum to ensure state assessment achievement and performance-based expectations for teacher instruction, despite decades of data evidence that indicate reading proficiency of students in third grade is still lagging (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017). One possible reason for the on-going proficiency deficit is a gap between the state assessments focused on evaluating the ability of students to read and understand grade level passages of text, rather than assessing the foundational and critical reading skills that are necessary to read with automaticity and fluency, so that comprehension of the presented material can be more easily attained (Paige et al., 2019). It follows that the very proficiency achievement data that teachers and students are held accountable against by state and district policy, is assessing student performance as compared to the grade level standards and expectations, rather than assessing the potential student learning gains in foundational reading skills that contribute to successful student achievement overtime and across all grade levels.

Ankrum et al. (2020) extended the argument opposing the one size fits all approach to instruction through their research using an Adaptive Teaching Observation Protocol (ATOP) to advocate for thoughtful and adaptive teaching during literacy instruction as it provides an equitable access to education for all students, regardless of demographic and academic differences. The study researchers utilized the ATOP as an evaluative instrument to capture specific teacher behaviors that are executed during adaptive instruction, in hopes that a quantified measure of the frequency of adaptations

taken by teachers could be identified and potentially used to implement educational policies so that students with diverse literacy needs can receive meaningful instruction. Parsons et al. (2018) completed a study that synthesized the research of adaptive teaching from 1975 to 2014. Results indicated that teachers were more likely to adapt instruction when working in an environment that honored their teacher autonomy.

However, the implementation of adaptations to literacy curriculum by teachers should also be continuously monitored for effectiveness, as adaptations can sometimes result a loss of productivity and fidelity from a literacy curriculum's original intent across schools. Troyer (2019) indicated that adaptations to a literacy curriculum require supports like additional curriculum materials and sustained professional development to ensure positive outcomes on student achievement. Additionally, Troyer (2019) recommended that curriculum developers seek to understand the processes teachers use to adapt literacy curriculum to meet diverse student needs. Given that there is limited research about sustained literacy curriculum implementation with adaptations, more in-depth analysis of teacher pedagogy and literacy curriculum adaptations continue to be needed to understand and sustain outcomes for diverse students (Maniates, 2017; Moore et al., 2017; Troyer, 2019).

Moore et al. (2017) studied global educational reform efforts to increase reading achievement and 12 years of reading intervention data from 2003 to 2015 and compared the outcomes and effect sizes of intervention studies from multiple countries to further understand the classroom environment and how reading achievement outcomes can be improved given differences in the fidelity, frequency, and intensity of literacy interventions. Years of results from multiple countries indicated that it is critical that

educational stakeholders expand the reach of literacy interventions by addressing the need for time, additional resources, and a persistent commitment to ensuring students acquire foundational reading skills which will strengthen student achievement over the long term. Ultimately, the aforementioned longitudinal research data indicates intervention approaches in literacy education with intentional monitoring are both needed to ensure the attainment of foundational reading skills in primary aged students (Paige et al., 2019).

Within their critique of the National Evaluation of Response to Intervention (RTI) research, Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) questioned what level of effectiveness, regarding achievement, is reasonable to expect of the curriculums delivered within the general education classroom. While the MTSS/RTI tier approach to reducing student deficits is supported by research, their findings suggested that implementation of RTI interventions by teachers is often lacking in fidelity. In their analysis of the evaluation of RTI, Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) suggested that school staff should attempt to "balance with is doable in the general education classroom with what is effective" (p. 266) so that students ultimately receive the right intervention at the right time. Based on a review of the meta-analysis of 33 reading intervention studies between the years of 2002 and 2017, Gersten et al. (2019) concluded that the implementation of RTI and multi-tiered systems of supports to address literacy deficits within elementary schools indicate intervention similarities in the use of explicit and systematic small group instruction of foundational reading skills in the areas of phonemic awareness, decoding, encoding, and reading fluency proficiency. Given the results of the meta-analysis, the authors also indicated a need for future research in reading interventions and whether the reading performance of

students who received such foundational reading interventions was improved and sustained overtime.

Vaughn et al. (2020) stressed the importance of personalized and adaptive teaching based on the science of reading to increase student achievement. Teachers who are adept at adapting instruction effectively use their knowledge of their students, along with their pedagogy to implement instructional choices during literacy instruction so that the students' instructional needs are balanced with their cultural and background differences (Parsons et al., 2018; Vaughn & Parsons, 2013; Vaughn et al., 2020). Smets and Struyven (2018) refer to the process of delivering student-centered differentiated instruction as a central aspect of culturally responsive teaching in the classroom, and further defined the application of the elements of Tomlinson's concept of differentiating instruction as a teacher's constant pre- assessment of each learner's readiness level, interests, and learning profile.

Teachers face a complex and difficult task when attempting to adapt instructional practices with lesson content, learning processes, and learning product outcomes based on each student's individual learner profile (Ankrum et al., 2020; Parsons et al., 2018; Smets & Struyven, 2018; Vagle, 2016). Allowing teachers the ability to make in the moment curriculum adaptations supports them in providing access to the curriculum for students with diverse needs, as well as allowing them to scaffold instruction so that students become independent in their literacy learning (Maniates, 2017). Though Moore et al. (2017) and Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) questioned what is reasonable and realistic in the basic general education classroom to ensure literacy of primary aged students by third grade. Troyer (2019) advocated that policy makers support teachers in making relevant

and constructive adaptations to curriculum to meet the needs of students with literacy deficits as national reforms and standards-based achievement expectations continue to restrict teacher autonomy in the classroom when adapting instruction for struggling learners (Vaughn & Parsons, 2013). Rather than limit the lens of focus to achievement data scores and specified curriculum resources, Carol Ann Tomlinson advocated for a wider focus on the connection between a student's personal experience with content instruction, with a constant link to the human condition through equitable responses during literacy experiences in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2009). To support teachers in their innovative process of instructional adaptations in literacy, policymakers should also extend differentiation to the assessment provided to each student, so that true reflection of learning gains can be defined by student progress based on the student's own learning profile, rather than grade defined state standards. When delivering instruction, teachers are ultimately committed to a student's academic success, rather delivering instruction solely focused on the prescribed curriculum and designated state standards (Maniates, 2017; Tomlinson, 2009; Troyer, 2019).

Florida Student Literacy Bill

As of July 1, 2021, the Florida Senate passed HB 7011, the Student Literacy Bill, which provides for a variety of required safeguards designed to ensure the timely identification, intervention, and monitoring of student reading deficiencies from VPK through 8th grade, as well as providing curriculum resources, teacher training and tutoring supports for all students showing a deficit in reading. In addition to the above, specific training in emergent literacy skills and evidence-based strategies to teach reading will be specifically provided to teachers, reading coaches and administrators. All teachers

providing reading instruction to students must also be currently endorsed or certified in reading as part of their certification requirements. Schools are also required to send ongoing written notice to parents if their child is performing below grade level expectation in reading (Florida Senate, 2021). HB7011 is a relevant and timely example of the evolving educational reforms that affect a teacher's pedagogy and instructional experience in the classroom. While the bill addresses student literacy in VPK through eighth grade, it also enforces multiple accountability measures that are tied to progress monitoring of student data. While the bill also provides for state and district support of curriculum resources and training in evidence-based reading strategies for teachers, it focuses on evidence of such measures through certification requirements and comprehensive reading plans submitted by school districts.

Once again, policy is looking through the lens of accountability, rather than the voice of teachers, and the intentional and innovative literacy adaptations teachers make on a daily basis. Quaglia et al. (2020) reiterated the importance of teacher and student voice in schools by explaining the impact of how teachers and students both enter the school with a strong sense of purpose and positive intention, but that same purpose is often eroded by competing priorities and external forces such as accountability scores, tests and prescribed curriculums. If teachers who adapt literacy instruction see student literacy as more than the processes required to decode and encode words and read and answer comprehension questions, and more of a cognitively developing process of assimilating and accommodating knowledge through student relevant and constructive literacy learning experiences that meet the learner where they are in the reading progression of skills, the lens to improve student literacy should be purposely focused on

the teacher and student and the human side of learning (Clark, 2018; Vaughn et al., 2020).

Foundational Reading Skills

Liben and Liben (2019) explored a student focused, rather than an achievement focused approach to teaching foundational reading skills in their book, *Know Better, Do Better; Teaching the Foundations So Every Child Can Read*. Written with the goal of helping teachers ensure that every elementary school student read fluently by the end of second grade, Liben and Liben (2019) focused on each area of foundational reading skills and provide specific resources and suggestions for intervention in each reading skill area, with the implied understanding that teachers who read their book will take their suggestions and make adaptations as needed so that students can receive relevant and individualized literacy instruction.

Students in elementary school classrooms often vary in both cognitive and reading development stages at each grade level, and thus require differentiated approaches to literacy instruction aligned with their presenting levels of performance. It is important that teachers continue to ensure that their students' developmental reading needs are addressed in a timely manner, no matter what stage of development they are in at the moment (Liben & Liben, 2019). Paige et al. (2019) discussed the importance of the various stages of reading development by Chall: the prereading stage, decoding stage, confirmation stage, where a student finally and firmly establishes their knowledge of the of orthographic mapping and spelling of word patterns based on rules. For a student to move from the prereading stage, where the focus is on alphabetic knowledge and phonemic awareness skills, to the decoding stage where students can begin to use

phonetic codes to decode words which include complex vowel patterns and multiple syllables, the students must be able to identify and make the association between letters, spelling and sounds (Chall,1983; Paige et al., 2019). As students become more proficient at reading words and text with automaticity and fluency, their word retrieval and word identification will become increasingly efficient, enabling the students to read longer passages of text and encode words correctly during writing tasks. It is important for students to progress to this stage, known as the Chall confirmation stage of foundational reading, as these primary grade skills have been found to have direct effects on future reading comprehension and reading achievement in as high as 10th grade (Paige et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2017).

The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) in the U.S. Department of Education developed an educator's practice guide to help teachers address challenges in providing instruction in foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through third grade. Based on a thorough review of 56 research studies published between 2000 and 2014, there is strong evidence to support interventions in foundational reading skills including developing the awareness of sounds, segments of sounds in speech and their correlation to alphabet letters as well as instruction in decoding and analyzing word parts, recognizing high frequency words, and writing words accurately (Beyler et al., 2016). There was moderate evidence to also include opportunities for students to orally read text on a daily basis so they can learn to build accuracy, fluency and comprehension of text and minimal evidence in the reviewed studies to include interventions in teaching students inferential and narrative language and academic vocabulary knowledge (Beyler et al., 2016). Because there is a direct

relationship between reading comprehension and efficient word reading (Carver, 1994), it is very important to build a student's foundational reading skills to the confirmation stage, so that we can ensure that students can efficiently unlock or decode words from presented text so that the vocabulary in the story can be eventually used to build understanding of what is being read (Paige et al., 2019; Perfetti & Hart, 2002).

To address foundational reading skill gaps in primary students, it is vital to examine the structure of the designated interventions and differentiation provided in the classroom environment. Moore et al. (2017) examined specific intervention factors, including the intensity, frequency, and the duration of the intervention as well as the characteristics of the environment for their effect on successful learning of foundational reading skills. Motivated by the continuing evidence of achievement gaps in literacy for students both at risk or currently identified with disabilities, Austin et al., (2019) examined evidenced-based practices in foundational reading skills by conducting a meta-analysis of 88 research studies, and the contributing factors that established the studies as quality research. Overall, they found that researchers should emphasize the importance of fidelity of implementation when using reading-based interventions, with reference to ESSA's federally mandated tiers of evidence that qualify interventions as high quality (Austin et al., 2019; ESSA, 2017).

Paige et al. (2019) concluded that proficiency in foundational reading skills will lead to strong orthographic word mapping and reading fluency, which ultimately results in successful performance on state and district wide reading accountability assessments. Proficient reading fluency is essentially a bridge to comprehension as it can compensate for foundational reading skill deficits in the moment, however, there will be more

intervention needed in this case to also ensure teachers do not generate unfinished

foundational reading skill learning in older students over time (Liben & Liben, 2019). If

direct interactions between teachers and students results in learning, it remains beneficial

to provide teachers a voice in the development and implementation of such interventions

in the classroom (Moore et al., 2017).

Primary Teacher Literacy Adaptations

Quinn and Kim (2017) described instruction under an adaptive approach as a

method that requires an increase in teacher autonomy over their instruction and

interventions delivered in the classroom. Rather than a traditional and fidelity focused

intervention approach, the goal was for teachers to combine their professional knowledge

along with their student and curriculum knowledge and make adaptations to literacy

interventions so that students' progress in their foundational reading skills. Based on the

results of their research, Quinn and Kim (2017) produced learning gains with the adaptive

approach to literacy instruction capitalizing on teacher experience and familiarity with

the curriculum so that more efficient adaptations could be made without sacrifice to the

fidelity of the program. Maniates (2017) proposed that adaptations such as these can

increase student membership and access to the provided curriculum, which will

ultimately support students in becoming increasingly independent in facilitating their own

learning during literacy instruction. The teacher participants in the research study viewed

themselves as active curriculum developers or designers of the adaptations, with a

responsibility in ensuring their students interact meaningfully during the literacy

instruction in foundational reading skills.

Given a review and meta-analysis of 33 literacy research studies focused on

primary students with reading deficits between 2002 and 2017, Gersten et al. (2020) found that students who received interventions in word reading, passage fluency, and reading comprehension were able to move students past the prereading stage of reading. Interestingly, most of the reading interventions combined multiple foundational reading skills in a systematic and explicit fashion, as the tasks presented included phonological awareness and decoding, with fluency, comprehension, and encoding practice. Ankrum et al. (2020) explored the effectiveness of such literacy adaptations by creating an instrument to evaluate and capture the literacy adaptations implemented by teachers called the Adaptive Teaching Observation Protocol (ATOP) which contributed an understanding of the reasoning and actions teachers take to adapt literacy instruction. Results of the ATOP provided an assessment of documented instructional adaptations. Ankrum et al. (2020) claimed further research is needed with a specific focus on when and why teachers choose to adapt literacy instruction.

Troyer (2019) recently evaluated adaptations to a literacy curriculum with a specific focus on proof of adaptation productivity and positive outcomes for students arguing that teacher adaptations are inevitable and should be better supported and monitored for impact on student achievement. While a single identified teaching strategy or curriculum may be effective for most, it will not always be effective for all learners. Therefore, it is important to include a diversified approach to curriculum materials and instructional strategies to address the diverse academic needs of students with varying backgrounds. Further, to manage varying teacher backgrounds and professional pedagogy, teacher professional development in such diversified instructional adaptations and strategies should also include an opportunity for teachers to communicate their level

of need within the targeted outcome of trainings (Gelmez-Burakgazi, 2020; Ornstein &
Hunkins, 2017).

Lastly, Troyer (2019) maintained that it is important to consider that curriculum
will not solely meet the individualized literacy learning needs of all students and, in
knowing this, curriculum designers should build their curriculum resources with
adaptations in place so that it can remain relevant to students and teachers in today's
classrooms. When teachers can make instructional decisions that are informed by cycles
of data based on student progress, teachers will be fostering an inclusive classroom with
equitable access to curriculum that supports a student's culture, background, cognitive
development, and motivation to learn (Ankrum et al., 2020; Parsons et al., 2018; Stover
et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2020).

Teacher Agency

Federal legislation, educational policymaking, and ongoing reading proficiency
data deficits (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2017), combined with data-
based accountability measures, pressure teachers over professional decision making used
during instruction (Ankrum et al., 2020; Maniates, 2017). Approximately two thirds of
elementary-aged students receive scores below proficiency on their national and state
assessments (Moore et al., 2017). As legislation influences policies that evolve into
school funding restrictions, mandated core reading curriculums, and state assessment data
expectations, and leave teachers in a cycle of consequential accountability (Hanushek &
Raymond, 2005; Paige et al., 2019). Consequently, they lose their voice in the
instructional decision-making processes in the classroom. Despite the years of training,
certification, and classroom experiences required to become an educator, teachers are

often found without an active voice in educational policy-making that drive education in today's classroom (Quaglia et al., 2020).

The systematic curriculum approach to addressing reading proficiency deficits in schools today is often viewed as a practical directive by districts and school administration, but the daily view from the classroom can be different. For example, students who have had disruptions to or lapses during their educational programming, or students who are already performing two grade levels below expectation often receive intensive curriculum instruction to support closing the achievement gaps evident from low standardized achievement scores. Teachers facilitate different roles in the classroom when challenged with a curriculum that is mandated, but not necessarily student-relevant: teachers can *accommodate* the expectations of the curriculum and utilization of the provided materials, or they can *rebel* by only using their preferred lesson plans, or they can pick and choose items, or *negotiate* with the curriculum to fill gaps in instruction (Eisenbach, 2012; Hos & Kaplan-Wolff, 2020). Unfortunately, teachers having to choose a curriculum facilitator "role" or sometimes multiple roles within a classroom as well as providing the varying instruction and accommodating the varying needs of multiple students deepens the difficulty level of teaching and stress on the educator. The analysis of research results from Hos and Kaplan-Wolff (2020) indicate that an intensively scripted and mandated curriculum program restricts teacher agency, autonomy, and the professional judgements of educators. Further, teachers, who believe in a student-centered pedagogical approach, will often have to exhaust themselves to extend professional efforts in adaptations and supplementing resources in addition to managing the prescribed curriculum to ensure they address their students' learning needs.

Teachers will inherently focus on individual student needs, instead of taking the big picture approach to instruction (Null, 2017), and this difference in perspectives can create the theory to practice gap evident in schools today. Connecting teachers and learners, through the use of adaptive instruction in the classroom, is essential to successfully address the humanistic side of education, and the differences in each student's cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic background (Ankrum et al., 2020; Maniates, 2017; Vaughn et al., 2020). In order to accomplish this, teachers must feel supported in using their voice to maintain a vested ownership of their students and the literacy instruction required to further their successful academic achievement and reading proficiency. Furthermore, research by Maniates (2017) and Troyer (2019) indicated that it is important for teachers to be viewed as curriculum designers through the pursuit of instructional adaptations and purposeful, thoughtful decision-making that results in on-going flexible actions that can meet students where they are and generate student achievement outcomes (Vaughn & Parsons, 2013).

Teacher agency remains a crucial factor to adaptive teaching, as there is an evident relationship between teachers and curriculum resources and how they are implemented (Choppin et al., 2018). Effective teacher agency is the capability to make and act on decisions of instructional relevance and professional importance in the classroom (Wagner et al., 2019). Troyer (2019) recommended that curriculum designers plan for adaptations, as they are inevitable, and ensure that the curriculum materials are flexible and include varied materials to support such adaptation to be productive. Sustaining teacher self-efficacy, and the confidence teachers have in their ability to meet diverse student needs from preservice to in-service in meeting the needs of the

increasingly diverse students in their classroom from year to year, requires support from school and district administrations (Clark, 2020).

Kelly et al. (2019) furthered this discussion in their qualitative research study of teacher interviews with 19 exemplary literacy teachers from Pre-K to sixth grade. Interview questions were focused on identifying the discrepancies between the literacy teacher pedagogical beliefs and the school district expectations and investigating the ways literacy teachers managed the differences between their professional beliefs and the expectations of their school and district regarding literacy instruction. Analysis of the interview results indicated overarching themes of discrepancies between the literacy mandates and required curriculum, the school and/or district provided materials, and the structure of the literacy block and the teacher pedagogical beliefs concerning their students' literacy needs. Interestingly, the primary factors that significantly impacted the successful teacher management of the above discrepancies included administrative support of teacher agency and decision-making efforts concerning literacy instruction as well as a support system with peer teachers (Kelly et al., 2019).

Ultimately, the stressors of managing misaligned curriculum and being held accountable to school and district literacy mandates, all while being observed and evaluated according to teacher performance criteria, causes teachers to leave the profession due to professional frustration and limited teacher autonomy. Factors including lack of administrative support and pressure from testing and accountability mandates influence teachers to leave the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Kelly et al., 2019). With teacher retention demonstrating a relationship to teacher agency, it becomes imperative for school and district administration to

proactively address teacher pedagogical and instructional concerns in today's classrooms with a teacher-centered and student-centered approach. Recent mandated curriculum and teacher professional development accountability measures, such as those in the previously discussed Student Literacy Bill- HB 7011 by the Florida Senate, focus on improving student reading proficiency with mandated professional development resulting in a required reading endorsement certification for teachers of students demonstrating reading deficits (Florida Senate 2021, February 14). Attempts to manage evident student achievement deficits in literacy through legislative systemic change such as this can be helpful, however, a more immediate teacher and student-centered action in the classroom is needed to address current reading deficits in current students.

The debate between the importance of reading phonetically through letter sounds versus learning to read through whole word instruction has existed since the early 1970s, with a recent shift in the research literature leaning towards the importance of explicit phonics instruction in creating proficient readers through the years (Castles et al., 2018; Double et al., 2019). By conducting a meta-analysis of a National Reading Panel's research, Ehri et al (2001) identified a critical time frame for teaching foundational reading skills and phonics instruction. Results of the meta-analysis indicated that the most beneficial time to close phonics gaps was before first grade, as phonics interventions delivered after this time resulted in less benefits to students (Double et al., 2019; Ehri et al, 2001). Furthermore, the results of the most recent Double et al., 2019 study, where the reading performance of students who passed a phonics screening were compared to those students who failed the same pre/post phonics screening over time, confirms that a more specific period of time where a phonics check or assessment of

skills is crucial in formatively identifying students with predictors of reading comprehension difficulties in later reading development, even up to 4 years later. However, it should be noted that the research in this recent study by Double et al. (2019), did not clarify what specific instructional strategies and curriculum supports the teachers used to address phonics deficits after the pre-check of student performance in reading and that the authors advocate for the importance of using large scale and mandated national assessments as formative data used to provide intervention and supports for students, rather than an instrument for diagnosing or ranking students, teachers and schools.

Cilliers et al. (2020) evaluated different models of teacher-centered support used to develop the instructional practices of primary grade reading teachers. By reviewing the effects of teacher training in literacy instructional practices versus teacher support through monthly classroom visits by a reading specialist/coach and instructional support in literacy practices, study results indicate that teachers benefit from a supportive reading coach who can monitor their progress, provide feedback in the moment, and demonstrate strategies that can benefit specific student reading achievement. Results also indicate that a combination of training, coaching, and lesson planning supports can improve primary grade reading achievement in students (Cilliers et al., 2020; Piper et al., 2018).

Vaughn et al. (2020) suggested the importance of future research advancing the understanding of adaptive teaching in literacy as additionally viewing reading as a critical and sociocultural practice in the classroom. Ultimately, mandated curriculum development will not meet the needs of all struggling diverse learners by "bypassing" teacher agency in adaptations. Schools and districts must support teachers in making the relevant instructional adaptations to improve learning outcomes (Troyer, 2019). A sense

of urgency is needed as the intersection of students, teachers, and mandated curriculum continues to leave students with ineffective learning experiences and resulting achievement gaps in literacy. Perhaps the answer to a functional and effective educational system is through the safeguarded implementation of meaningful literacy learning opportunities for every student, rather than a standardized and mandated curriculum driven from policy (Kendi, 2019).

Research Questions

The following three research questions were addressed in this study.

1. How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction for students who are deficient in foundational reading skills?

2. How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction and pacing of the prescribed district grade level literacy curriculum?

3. How do teachers evaluate the student data outcomes for evidence of the effectiveness of the adapted literacy instruction?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of first, second, and third

grade teachers and analyze how they reported adapting literacy instruction in a standards-

based literacy curriculum to systematically meet individual student needs. Varying

student backgrounds and cognitive development levels prompt teachers to adapt

classroom instruction and learning activities to remediate and address student literacy

deficits. Patterns and themes were identified from teacher perspectives via individual

interviews guided by research questions to explore teacher ideas about whether the

chosen adaptations closed literacy achievement gaps of struggling students by the end of

the grade taught. Finally, teachers contributed their perspectives about the ways they

managed instructional expectations and interventions to help all students learn grade level

expectations in foundational reading skills and in doing so, add to existing scientific

knowledge about curriculum adaptations and teacher agency in literacy instruction in the

primary grades.

Qualitative Research Approach

Marshall and Rossman (2016) merited qualitative research as a culturally

sensitive methodology that can capture and identify concepts from explored patterns in

real world contexts. Qualitative research strengths include its purpose to analyze a human

problem through a cultural lens that provides insight and understanding of a concept

based on an analysis of data gathered from persons involved in the real-world experience

in a specific setting (Saldana, 2016). Participant perspectives, and the resulting data that

can be analyzed into emerging patterns and themes can be used to interpret the participant

voices, along with any research bias, into a thorough description and interpretation of the research problem. The qualitative research study results should ultimately contribute to literature, and potentially provide a call to action (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The intent of this research study was to interpret the content of external real-world experiences, as well as the self-reported attitudes and beliefs of primary teachers as they employ literacy curriculum adaptations, rather than an examination of the internal feelings and the resulting lived experiences during literacy adaptation. Therefore, a generic qualitative research study approach was used (Percy et al., 2015). Further, given that the research study was focused on a specific context and setting along with the participant perspectives and experiences, the researcher engaged with the study data, and recognized that the interpretation of data also hinged on the researcher's own background and personal experiences in literacy before interpreting the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Though phenomenological research methods could be considered for this research study, the intent to understand the outward experiences and events regarding literacy curriculum adaptations, rather than the internal feelings and opinions of each participant regarding those curriculum adaptation experiences qualifies the generic qualitative inquiry as the preferred research method (Percy et al., 2015).

In efforts to provide a deeper understanding of the various curriculum adaptations, as well as teacher perspectives and decision-making processes, data analysis was done by examining the transcripts of each interview. The intended outcome of this generic qualitative study was to illustrate the practice of meeting the literacy needs of students through on-going curriculum adaptations that occur because of teacher decision making

and reflective processes regarding achievement data. Ornstein and Hunkins (2017), advocated for teachers to gain agency, or voice, in expressing their opinions and pedagogical viewpoints while working to implement curriculum. This researcher contributed to research in the field of literacy instruction and curriculum adaptation and provides an in-depth analysis of the rationale teachers report about their decision-making processes regarding their literacy curriculum implementation. Hopefully, this researcher also contributed to the voice of teachers in the areas of curriculum adaptation and literacy and inform future decisions to bridge gaps between existing grade level literacy curriculum and student achievement in foundational reading skills. The findings of this research study will contribute to an understanding of how teachers, coaches, and administrators can work together to address literacy needs of their diverse students through deliberate curricular adaptations that do not sacrifice the fidelity and rigor of the intended curriculum implementation.

Participants

Sampling decisions regarding research participants can be affected by practical considerations concerning site access, resources, and study efficiency factors (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher utilized purposeful sampling strategies to intentionally collect data from a sample group of teachers that represent a differentiated selection of participants to better understand the phenomenon of foundational reading skill deficits and literacy curriculum adaptations in Grades 1 to 3 (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher interviewed four teachers in each of Grades 1, 2, and 3 to understand teacher selected solutions as they instructed students with differing skills using district or company guidelines. The participants of this research

study were intentionally selected from two elementary schools based on the following criteria.

      1. Teacher participants have 3 or more years of experience so that they have a history of adapting curriculum and a pedagogical perspective that has been shaped by instructional experience in the classroom.

      2. Teacher participants were the teacher of record for a group of classroom students that fall into one of the following classroom compositions: general education classroom, gifted-blended classroom, inclusion/general education classroom.

      The research sites included two elementary schools from a neighborhood area, with similar student population rates of economically disadvantaged students and minority students under 30%. Each school consisted of approximately 80 instructional faculty members that included general education and special education teachers. In each school, each grade level team had approximately 10 teachers who together participated in weekly collaborative planning and instructional meetings to address student achievement data. Faculty meeting the above criteria were invited to participate in the research study. Participants were selected from the first 12 teachers who responded and agreed to participate. The researcher who conducted this generic qualitative research study is employed as an Instructional Literacy Coach within the same school district. The researcher had no supervisory role over any of the participants.

Data Collection and Instruments

      Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) explained that interviews are used in qualitative research studies to uncover and unfold the meaning of the participant experiences in an

attempt to understand the participants' worlds. The researcher will use a semi-structured interview protocol as the primary instrument for this study. Interview questions will be designed to make meaning of specific literacy curriculum adaptations and instructional experiences in first through third grades. See the appendix for the entire interview protocol. The researcher will solicit follow up and clarification of statements immediately during the interview process, and will use second questioning techniques, pauses, and probing follow up statements in order to solicit in-depth responses by each interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Interview Protocol

The interview questions for this generic qualitative research study were designed as a semi-structured interview protocol that includes open-ended questions to elicit participant responses relevant to the research study questions. The interview questions were pre-structured and formatted to focus on the literacy curriculum and instructional pacing adaptations that occur in response to student learning needs in literacy, as well as the process of gathering evidence of adaptation effectiveness based on student data outcomes (Percy et al., 2015). In order to simplify this process, the researcher used preliminary related literature research to plan for categorical analysis of responses, while balancing the research design with opportunities for flexibility in the continuum of data analysis through the semi-structured interview process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher submitted the interview protocol to two subject matter experts (SMEs) to examine for content appropriateness. The two experts who reviewed and provided suggestions regarding the interview protocol were two district instructional literacy coaches knowledgeable about the required literacy curriculum and pacing in elementary

school. Teachers were interviewed individually and in person, using digital transcription software to support the accuracy and access to the material for multiple reviews of each of the interview transcript throughout the research study process.

Procedures

Following the conclusion of the final Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board and the school district's Academic and Student Services Department approval process for this research study, the researcher solicited teacher participant volunteers to participate in the research study based on the identified criteria and elementary school demographic data. A consent to participate form requiring a participant signature was used to clearly communicate the rights, risks, and protections to study participants along with a description of the purpose, procedures and expected benefits resulting from the conducted research and, by doing so, rapport with the participants was built (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Each elementary school principal was contacted regarding the research study, after school district approval. The researcher generated a recruitment flyer that was emailed and forwarded to the teachers per their district email address. The flyer contained a description of the research study and the researcher's contact information and availability to answer any potential participant questions. The researcher met in person with each interested participant to gain consent and signatures in person.

Once the recruitment and consent process was completed, interviews were scheduled with consenting participants over a 4-week period, with the interviews taking place in person and located in each teacher's classroom for a 45- to 60-minute period of time. If additional time was needed to complete the interview during non-student time, a

second appointment was made. Based on participant responses, the researcher interviewed a total of seven teachers from Grades 1, 2, and 3 from the identified two elementary schools. The researcher conducted each interview by reading the questions aloud and recording participant responses so that probing and follow up questions could elicit extended responses by the participants. The responses to each interview question were documented through the recording of notes and transcription at each interview. The research study questions were addressed through data collected from the teacher participant interviews during a 4-week cycle. The interview protocol addressed the following three research questions through each interview.

1. How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction for students who are deficient in foundational reading skills?

2. How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction and pacing of the prescribed district grade level literacy curriculum?

3. How do teachers evaluate the student data outcomes for evidence of the effectiveness of the adapted literacy instruction?

After each participant interview was recorded and transcribed, the interview was sent to each participant as part of the member checking process, to support validation of the research findings (Saldana, 2016). Participants verified that their answers were accurate and that interview answers clearly conveyed their intent and intended meaning in their response. Participants were also provided with the opportunity to amend their original responses during this process. The responses made by each participant were gathered and summarized into patterns through multiple readings of each interview transcript during the research timeline and then processed through cycles of coding and

recoding for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data from the interview protocol were organized into files that were coded for anonymity and stored in a locked file cabinet when not in use. Participants were provided copies of the transcripts for the purpose of member checking and verifying the content prior to analysis. The researcher read each participant transcript multiple times using the constant comparison method. The transcription process of the qualitative data from each participant interview was transcribed using a digital application that supported a speech to text process, and recorded, transcribed, and converted the data to a document that was digitally accessible.

The model of data analysis used in this study was a thematic analysis with a constant comparison for theoretical analysis. Creswell and Poth (2018) described such qualitative inquiry as a data analysis spiral that uses evolving analysis processes to capture data using a cyclical rather than linear methodology. Percy et al. (2015) defined thematic analysis with constant comparison as a method that starts analysis of the data as soon as it is collected, and then continues to assess on-going collected data by moving back and forth between previous and newly collected data so that information can be coded and gathered into patterns.

The researcher used the step-by-step thematic analysis using the constant comparison process. Each participant interview was successively read and analyzed for patterns in a spiral fashion by highlighting meaningful phrases and sentences that were relevant to the research purpose and research questions. The identified patterns in the first interview analysis were then applied to the next interview transcript. The researcher

continued to analyze each subsequent interview by comparing each participant's data with the next, until all seven interview protocol analyses were completed. The series of patterns identified for each research question throughout each of the seven interviews were then analyzed and clustered into patterns, and then summarized into themes by the researcher. Finally, the researcher wrote a detailed analysis of each theme using supporting evidence from the interview transcripts so that all data were synthesized with the study purpose. Collected data for each of the seven teacher participants was explained and described individually, with a final section that describes and synthesizes the findings across all participants. Finally, the research data were represented in narrative form for final research study report.

Ethical Considerations

The research process followed IRB guidelines that ensure that all participants were provided with specific information regarding the research study, including the following eight areas: a full description of the research study, any benefits relevant to participation along with an explanation of any risks to the participants, contact information for the researcher, and finally a statement of voluntary participation that could be withdrawn at any moment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to assess the in-depth literacy curriculum adaptations that occurred through the interview process where questions were read aloud by the researcher, and answers were documented through transcription for thorough analysis. The interview transcripts were coded to preserve anonymity of all participants and students throughout the research process. Research documents were kept in a locked file cabinet at all times when not in use by the researcher.

Trustworthiness

The research was implemented as designed and approved by the Nova

Southeastern University IRB. Trustworthiness of both the data and the analysis of the

research findings was ensured by qualitative strategies that supported the rigor of the

research process. First, in order to ensure credibility of the data collection tool, the

interview used in this generic case study was validated by subject matter experts in the

field prior to use and was constructed based on the findings from the review of research

literature and expert recommendations. Secondly, the participant interviews were

conducted individually, in person, and in a collaborative format where the interviewer

and the interviewee are engaged in a flexible conversation to encourage authentic and

candid responses between the interviewer and interviewee (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018;

Creswell & Poth, 2018). To further the collaborative relationship and sustain study

credibility and trustworthiness, teacher participants engaged in member checking of the

collected interview data and transcripts, where teacher participants were invited to check

the accuracy of the interview transcript (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Marshall &

Rossman, 2016).

Potential Research Bias

It should be noted that the researcher who conducted this qualitative research

study is employed as an Instructional Literacy Coach within the same school district. The

researcher was a previous special education teacher within the same school and district

and has experience in coaching teachers in using instructional strategies and student data

review processes for the last four years. In addition to this, the researcher has also

personally pursued education and training regarding literacy and is passionate about

meeting the educational needs of students who have deficits in reading and learning disabilities, as the researcher has two college age daughters who previously struggled academically during their K-12 education.

Efforts to ensure an impartial and objective study will included an expert review of interview questions prior to use. After subject matter expert review, feedback was considered, and appropriate changes to the interview protocol were made as described above. Minimizing potential bias during data analysis included a process of continual checking, questioning and interpretation of the interview findings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Utilization of bracketing supported ongoing objective analysis of the research material.

Limitations

The limitations present in this study included aspects that can be addressed through future research efforts. The purpose of this study was to provide a more robust understanding of the process of how and why teachers adapt literacy curriculum, instruction and pacing in first through third grades and how the instructional adaptations are evaluated for effectiveness in the classroom. This intended sample size, and the resulting data remained limited by a set of factors. First, the experiences and thought processes of the study participants during literacy curriculum adaptations may not represent experiences of teachers at other elementary schools with varying demographic attributes. Also, an in-depth snapshot within a short period of time within a single school year was captured from a purposeful sample of primary teachers from two schools.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of primary grade teachers to learn about the ways teachers adapt prescribed literacy curriculum to address foundational reading skill deficits of their students and investigate why the primary grade teachers choose the adaptations they implemented, and whether such adaptations ultimately closed the literacy achievement gaps in their students. The analysis presented in this chapter was based on a generic qualitative research approach using a constant comparison thematic analysis of data from seven participant interviews. The participants of this research study included primary teachers from Grades 1 through 3, all from two neighboring K-8 elementary schools in a southeastern state. Participant demographics, years of experience, certifications and additional endorsements varied among participants.

The research study analysis and resulting findings are included in this chapter and preceded by an overview of the research study participants, participant background, sequential analysis steps for each interview. The research design was qualitative, and the semi-structured in-person interviews provided opportunities for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. Seven interviews were conducted in person at two different K-8 elementary schools, following approved IRB procedures. Data were collected using open ended interview questions in a semi-structured format which addressed the following categories regarding the participant's experiences: (a) adapted instruction to address foundational literacy skill deficits, (b) adapted pacing of the prescribed district grade level literacy curriculum, and (c) evidence of effectiveness of adapted literacy instruction. The interview protocol was developed and aligned with the following three research

questions.

     1. How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction for students who are deficient in foundational reading skills?

     2. How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction and pacing of the prescribed district grade level literacy curriculum?

     3. How do teachers evaluate the student data outcomes for evidence of the effectiveness of the adapted literacy instruction?

Participants

     Participants met eligibility criteria designated for the study by meeting the following three criteria: (a) three or more years of teaching, (b) working as a classroom teacher of record for the following: general education students, gifted-blended students, or inclusion/general education students in Grades 1, 2, or 3, and (c) being among the first teachers to respond and agree to participate in the research. During the four weeks of participant interviews, the researcher solicited for additional study participants. Three additional emails were sent to both participating schools on a weekly basis. The emails included the research flyer and the researcher's contact information on each email and were sent to grade level teachers in first, second and third grade.

     After receiving both IRB approval and school district approval, the researcher emailed the school principals and teachers at the identified neighboring schools to solicit for participants using the IRB approved flyer. Interested prospective participants responded to the invitation and flyer by email. After the researcher screened each interested participant for eligibility, a mutual day and time was scheduled to review consent information and complete an in-person individual interview at the identified

schools, following specific COVID-19 protocols, including: (a) teacher and interviewer verified symptom-free status before beginning the interview process, (b) teachers were seated seven feet or further away from the interviewer during the interview process, and (c) teachers and interviewer wore face shields/masks during the interview process. Seven certified elementary teachers from Grades 1 to 3 and from neighboring schools within the same school district were interviewed for this qualitative research study. Study participants were also provided the opportunity to check their own interview transcripts before analysis to ensure the transcripts indicated the participant's intended answers and meaning. The ages of the seven participants were in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. They worked in neighboring schools within the same school district and were state certified to teach.

Participant Backgrounds

Participant 1 (P1)

This participant is a White female teacher in her 50s, who taught a gifted-blended second grade class, with the class consisting of average to above average performing second graders. (P1) is in her 12th year of teaching, and has previous employment experience in business, with a bachelor's degree in finance, and a master's degree in business administration. P1 is currently certified in elementary education, middle grades math, and is endorsed in English language learners (ELL), gifted, and reading. P1 elected to teach younger children because she felt that she could "impart character lessons on younger students, better than older students" in the classroom.

Participant 2 (P2)

This participant is a White female teacher in her 50s, who taught a general education second grade class. P2 is in her 28th year of teaching, has a bachelor's degree

in science-health education K-12, and a master's degree in elementary education. P2 is certified in Gifted, ELL, Coaching, and will be reading endorsed by the end of this school year. (P2) elected to teach younger children because "My mom was a teacher; my aunt was a teacher, and my sister was a teacher. They all worked in elementary schools, and I started to sub at my old elementary school, have fun, and I really loved it."

Participant 3 (P3)

This participant is a White female teacher in her 40s, who taught a general education third grade class. P3 is in her 20th year of teaching, has a bachelor's degree in communication, and is working on finishing her master's degree in education. P3 is certified K-12 exceptional student education, general education K-6th grade, and Pre-K-3rd grade. P3 is endorsed in reading, and ELL. P3 elected to teach younger children because she "wanted to make an impact. And wanted to see that light bulb go off and be the reason for them."

Participant 4 (P4)

This participant is a White female teacher in her 30s, who taught a general education first grade class. P4 is in her 10th year of teaching and has both a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in educational leadership. P4 is certified in ESE K- 12 grade, Pre-K- primary grades and is endorsed in reading and ELL. P4 elected to teach younger children because she "liked teaching young children because they're more excited to learn and watching them go from being non-readers to readers is one of the best feelings as a teacher."

Participant 5 (P5)

This participant is a White female teacher in her 30s who taught a general

education first grade classroom. P5 is in her 12th year of teaching and has a bachelor's degree in public relations in journalism, and a master's degree in elementary education. P5 is certified in K-6 th grade elementary education and is halfway through the coursework for a reading endorsement. P5 elected to teach younger children because she "always kept coming back to kids and worked in an after-school program and just really enjoyed working with little kids."

Participant 6 (P6)

This participant is a White female teacher in her 40s who taught a general education second grade class. P6 is in her 16th year of teaching and has a bachelor's degree in elementary education. P6 is certified in elementary education, PreK-primary education and is gifted and ELL endorsed. P6 elected to teach younger children for the following reasons:

> I wanted to teach young children to help motivate, and just kind of help motivate their lives. So I've previously taught in Title I schools …and so it was inspiring, you know, for me to continue with the younger children versus the older elementary school. So, I can kind of help bridge those gaps that I'm seeing a lot in the older elementary school. And I love seeing those light bulbs come on when they're learning and the excitement, they have about learning too, they're just little sponges.

Participant 7 (P7)

This participant is a White female teacher in her 50s who taught a general education first grade class. P7 is in her 20th year of teaching and has a bachelor's degree in elementary education. P7 is certified in elementary education and as a clinical

educator. She is endorsed in reading and ELL areas. P7 elected to teach younger children because

> I actually really liked the reading process. I like watching the kids some magic of turning on that reading. So, when I moved up to second to third, I missed that piece, where you're actually putting that puzzle together to teach those kids to read. Yeah, so for me, that's where the magic happens.

Summary of Participants

The seven participants who participated in this research were all White females in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. The years of teaching experience collectively ranged between 10 to 28 years, and each teacher served combinations of general education, MTSS, and special education students within their classroom setting. Three first grade teachers, three second grade teachers and one third grade teacher participated in individual interviews at two neighboring schools within the same school district. Of the teacher participants, five previously earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree, with the remaining two teachers earning a bachelor's degree only. Six of the seven participants were endorsed to work with English Language Learners (ELL), three of the seven participants were endorsed to work with gifted students, and three of the seven held reading endorsements. Interestingly, four of the seven teachers held bachelor's degrees in concentration areas other than elementary education, including finance, health-science education, communication, and public relations and journalism.

Data Analysis

The research study was focused on learning about the ways primary grade teachers adapt prescribed literacy curriculum to address the foundational reading skill

deficits of the primary grade students and investigate why the primary teachers choose the adaptations they use, and whether such adaptations ultimately close the literacy skill gaps in their students. The data collection tool that was utilized was a 20-question interview protocol that was employed during a series of individual interviews between the researcher and each of the teacher participants over a 4-week period. Questions one through seven were designed to answer research question one. Questions eight through 14 were designed to answer research question two. Questions 15 through 20 were designed to answer research question three. Interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time at each school location, and written consent was obtained before each of the seven interview sessions. Data were collected through individual one to one interview sessions, and the researcher followed the interview protocol process by first asking demographic questions and then by reading all interview questions to the participants. The interviews were recorded, and the data were transcribed using technology. Once the data were transcribed, the interview transcripts were emailed and provided to each teacher participant for review and corrections, prior to the researcher beginning the data analysis process. The analysis process for each of the three research questions is provided below.

Sequential Analysis Steps

To explore the experiences of first, second, and third grade teachers and analyze how they report adapting literacy instruction in a standards-based literacy curriculum to systematically meet individual student needs, the researcher applied the following analysis measures for a generic qualitative research approach (Percy et al., 2015).

1. The researcher reviewed the interview transcript for P1 by repeated readings of

the collected data and then the phrases, sentences or paragraphs that appeared meaningful were noted and highlighted and color coded by the researcher.

2. The researcher then reviewed the highlighted data again and compared the content to the three research questions to determine relevance.

3. Any highlighted data that were unrelated to the three research questions was eliminated during the repeated review, and then stored and filed separately so that it could be reevaluated and used later if pertinent to the developing patterns or themes.

4. Each data set was provided a name based on the identified pattern and then clustered into connected and related patterns found during repeated readings of the transcript.

5. This process was completed for P1 and after the P1 data were clustered, the data of each subsequent participant was analyzed and compared to the previous data. The researcher used the constant comparison method of analysis for each of the seven participants' data by reviewing and analyzing each interview transcript and then comparing it to the data that were previously analyzed.

6. Any data related to a specific pattern were identified throughout the process and then placed with the corresponding patterns. Direct quotes were extrapolated from the transcribed interview data that supported or explained the emerging patterns.

7. The established patterns were further expanded and studied throughout the research process for each participant. Any related patterns were then combined and clustered into themes, resulting in the final overarching themes being identified.

8. The researcher closely monitored patterns and themes throughout the entire data analysis process to determine if any of the patterns or themes had changed during the

comparison of previous participant data to new participant data.

9. After the conclusion of the data analysis process, the researcher arranged the corresponding patterns to the corresponding themes and used the alignment of data to determine clarity of the overall research themes and results.

10. The researcher then wrote a detailed analysis of the scope and sequence of each theme with supporting quotes from each participant.

Presentation of Results

Using a constant comparison analysis process, the research analyzed each interview participant's data delineated by each of the three research questions in this study. By using direct quotes from the teacher participants to develop research question patterns among the comparison of the seven data sets, the pattern analysis determined emerging themes per each research question. By analyzing the themes developed through constant comparison, the researcher was able to arrive at the final resulting answers to the original research study inquiry.

Research Question 1

How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction for students who are deficient in foundational reading skills? This research question was addressed by questions one through seven in the interview process. Four primary patterns developed from the analysis of data: (a) small group instruction is driven by reading data and includes modeling, feedback, and practice, (b) intervention time needs to be embedded into daily schedules and instructional routines, (c) deficiencies in foundational reading skills (short/long vowels/r-controlled vowels/reading fluency/spelling) need to be addressed, and (d) higher readers need intervention and practice with foundational

reading skills. Two primary themes answering research question one emerged from the data analysis: (a) embed multiple intervention opportunities for repeated practice and (b) address all foundational reading skills until mastery.

P1 Analysis

Pattern 1. Small Group Instruction is Driven by Reading Data and Includes Modeling, Feedback, and Practice

This pattern referred to the reported belief that small group instruction needs to be driven by reading data and needs to provide teacher modeling, teacher feedback and opportunities for student practice. P1 stated that small group instruction is based on data such as "i-Ready data, formative assessment data and grade level summative data." P1 further stated that students participate in "phonics games, vocabulary practice, and worksheets using a resource called Raz Kids." P1 concluded by also sharing that small groups are important as it is stressful for teachers to move the higher performing students as well as it is "hard to leave when you have a second grader reading at a grade three, should you be upset that they didn't make grade four?"

Pattern 2. Intervention Time Needs to be Embedded into Daily Schedules and Instructional Routines

This pattern referred to the reported belief that intervention time must be embedded into a teacher's daily schedule and instructional routines. P1 stated that she intervenes more often "in small groups than I do in whole group situations" and that she "wouldn't do phonics instruction whole group because most of my kids didn't need it." P1 also explained that there is a schoolwide intervention block that enables teachers to "build in" intervention times to meet in small groups with struggling students. Finally, P1

concluded the discussion of the intervention time process by referencing the "common grade level assessments" that are used to structure the small groups during reading interventions.

Pattern 3. Deficiencies in Foundational Reading Skills Need to be Addressed

This pattern referred to the belief that foundational reading skill deficiencies (short/long vowels/r-controlled vowels/reading fluency/spelling) need to be addressed by primary teachers. P1 indicated that she felt that she needed to "tackle deficiencies" as she found in the beginning of the school year, many of her students are "whole word readers" and/or "sound spellers." Further, P1 explained that many of her students cannot "discriminate short and long vowels in words, cannot read "r-controlled vowels" and that even her higher readers tend to have difficulties when given longer vocabulary terms, as they are not "actively using decoding strategies."

Pattern 4. Higher Readers Need Intervention and Practice with Foundational Reading Skills

This pattern referred to the belief that despite demonstrating above grade level decoding skills, some higher readers need intervention and practice of foundational reading skills. P1 posited that small group interventions and practice time is necessary to remediate some of the whole word reading compensations students develop when "reading without using decoding strategies."

P2 Analysis

Pattern 1. Small Group Instruction is Driven by Reading Data and Includes Modeling, Feedback, and Practice

Students work in small groups to receive instruction in foundational reading skills

through teacher modeling and multiple practice opportunities. Students are grouped using i-Ready Reading Diagnostic data, Fountas and Pinnell reading data and work with leveled text to address both grade level and deficient reading skills.

> We use the same strategies that we're practicing in class, or we'll review so if we're working on context, clues, and author's purpose… but at the same time, we're going to be working on our fluency or comprehension… So it works for all the groups. (P2)

Pattern 2. Intervention Time Needs to be Embedded into Daily Schedules and Instructional Routines

It can be challenging to meet with every student during the school day and address the range of foundational reading skills that are needing improvement. Students need multiple opportunities to practice skills to improve their performance over time. (P2) stated that, "I'm constantly reinforcing and going to them or pulling them in a small group…Well, so their independent work is really teacher led independent work."

> We do a lot of things together. Okay, so I stop, we have discussions, we underline keywords, everything's embedded, so it's beyond just reading the text, right? It's really thinking about the task of active reading, and it's also, you know, anytime I switch into whether it's social studies or math, we use the same strategies. (P2)

Pattern 3. Deficiencies in Foundational Reading Skills Need to be Addressed

Despite curriculum and district pacing recommendations, deficiencies in foundational reading skills need to be addressed in primary grade students. Teachers feel a sense of urgency to fill literacy gaps.

> We look at the pacing guide. One of the things that we do as a team is that we

plan together, okay, and so we look at it, but we also say okay, this is our outline

for our week, right, you got to do what you got to do for your baby. Yeah,

teachers plan together and adjust for their babies. (P2)

Pattern 4. Higher Readers Need Intervention and Practice with Foundational Reading Skills

Primary grade teachers use scheduled small group instruction to both remediate

and enrich foundational reading skills of their students. Standards are taught to the entire

class, with scaffolded strategies modeled by the teacher, and students performing at a

higher reading level can apply taught skills to their text levels. P2 gave an example of

how this practice is structured:

In the beginning of the year, and I mean, like I've got kids reading on a fourth-

grade level right now. I do but I also have kids reading on level G, right, and K,

right? I'm still teaching. It's okay. Yeah, I'm still teaching them the same

strategies. My higher level are applying it to more complex text. The lower level

are still applying author's purse.

P3 Analysis

Pattern 1. Small Group Instruction is Driven by Reading Data and Includes Modeling, Feedback, and Practice

To address foundational reading skill deficits in phonics, phonemic awareness,

and comprehension, it is important to give the students instruction in small group and

then have them engage in practice until the skills are mastered. P3 reported that she adds

small group instruction for phonics and phonemic awareness, and this year, has added

targeted instruction in reading comprehension as well.

I'm thinking of comprehension, specifically, and like sequencing and taking that time and remediating the student, and then going forward, they were like, Oh, I get it now. We were able to respond in a repetitive way, to keep up and make that connection. (P3)

Pattern 2. Intervention Time Needs to be Embedded into Daily Schedules and Instructional Routines

Daily intervention time is blocked on the classroom and grade level schedules schoolwide, so teachers can incorporate purposeful interventions during predictable times during the school day. P3 reported that a combination of "PLC team grade level planning time so that teachers can share ideas" helps teachers brainstorm and choose intervention resources to use during their intervention block instruction.

Pattern 3. Deficiencies in Foundational Reading Skills Need to be Addressed

Foundational reading skill deficits need to be addressed and are continuously monitored through formative assessments during the schoolwide intervention block. "Progress monitoring data helps you know if they are making gains, if not, you change the interventions" during small groups (P3).

P4 Analysis

Pattern 1. Small Group Instruction is Driven by Reading Data and Includes Modeling, Feedback, and Practice

Frequent monitoring of student performance, along with increased time in small groups helps student literacy skill development. P4 added that if students "do not get enough practice, they get tripped up." Further, P4 emphasized that "if students can manipulate something like white boards or letter tiles, it helps them see it better" and

clarified that "it depends on the student and what they need."

Pattern 2. Intervention Time Needs to be Embedded into Daily Schedules and Instructional Routines

P4 reported that small group instruction takes place during the grade level intervention block.

So, we have it built into our schedule where we have that available, so we have time, so we give students additional instruction on what they need during that time. And so, in my plans, I already have that in place. Sometimes I'm the person giving the instruction and sometimes it's someone else. (P4)

Pattern 3. Deficiencies in Foundational Reading Skills Need to be Addressed

Students in the primary grades present with challenges in hearing how sounds go together and phonological awareness skills. "I would say phonological awareness is a significant challenge, and then some I guess, blending sounds is just really hard. A lot of phonological awareness is challenging for them. They don't get enough practice" (P4). Further, P4 elaborates on the decision-making approach as, "So we have to go backwards, not necessarily backwards, but find where they are at, so that we can catch them up to where they need to be." According to P4, "It's not beneficial to do the skill that's on pace, when they can't do it…it is a waste of their time."

P5 Analysis

Pattern 1. Small Group Instruction is Driven by Reading Data and Includes Modeling, Feedback, and Practice

Primary grade students enter the classroom each year with varied levels of foundational reading skills, and it "really depends on where the kids are coming from…

and if they have the "reading foundation, really in my opinion, nothing else matters" (P5). Additionally, P5 advocates for targeted practice and repeated instruction of phonics and phonological awareness through small groups" to help the students' close gaps in literacy skills. Further, P5 recommended that teachers "compare and reflect on data often, and see if the strategy is working, if not, revisit and see what else you can do."

Pattern 2. Intervention Time Needs to be Embedded into Daily Schedules and Instructional Routines

The intervention time block, or Whatever I Need (WIN) time, is built into the schedule in P5's classroom. Students who have foundational reading skill deficits or are lacking in "Kindergarten foundational skills like print skills and reading behaviors" benefit from the intervention time. Moreover, P5 also incorporates a "whole group phonics lesson, and an additional small group instruction session" on top of the intervention block. By having multiple opportunities for targeted small group instruction, students can practice their foundational reading skills.

Pattern 3. Deficiencies in Foundational Reading Skills Need to be Addressed

Foundational reading skills are important building blocks to becoming an independent reader. "And students that have a severe gap, you know, that very large gap? Yeah. It really, if you don't have that base, then they're never going to be able to read right so yeah, you gotta stop it" (P5). In addition, she feels that "all foundational reading skills are important, especially phonics and comprehension in first grade" (P5).

P6 Analysis

Pattern 1. Small Group Instruction is Driven by Reading Data and Includes Modeling, Feedback, and Practice

Data from the primary grade literacy program called Wilson Fundations and other grade level assessments like i-Ready and Fountas and Pinnell are used to structure the small group interventions in foundational reading skills. P6 reported that her "whatever I need time or TIDE (time for instruction, differentiation, and enrichment) time is used for differentiated instructional time. She added that it is important when you have "over a certain percentage of kids not doing well, you just want to put on the brakes, and then review and bring in some different resources… so pulling, it's pulling small groups, and pulling in other resources to help the kids" (P6).

Pattern 2. Intervention Time Needs to be Embedded into Daily Schedules and Instructional Routines

TIDE time is built into the schedule and P6 uses the time to run small group interventions for the students "And as a second grade, we do it all at the same time. Okay. And so that's when we fit that in." The embedded small group time supports team collaboration and use of resources that address student literacy gaps and enrichment. The intervention time also provides a predictable time slot for a teacher to monitor student learning, engage in individual interventions with a student, and "provide small and often instruction that can be focused "spur of the moment…a lot of it's never planned, like small and often going by teacher gut" (P6).

Pattern 3. Deficiencies in Foundational Reading Skills Need to be Addressed

The most important foundational reading skills to address in primary classrooms include phonemic awareness, phonetic rules, and phonics decoding skills. "They could be great word readers, but they can't do their sounds. So, I think if you start with the foundation of sounds and then move to words it works" (P6).

Pattern 4. Higher Readers Need Intervention and Practice with Foundational Reading Skills

While some primary students begin their school year with a solid foundation of letter/sound knowledge, phonological awareness and grade level decoding skills, there is often a remaining need for targeted small group intervention and practice in reading. "So, like they might be reading well, and sounding out well, but it doesn't carry over into their spelling" and moreover, "you lose the majority of them because you're tailoring maybe too much to those who have gaps. Yeah. But that's why the small groups are important. Yeah. Not losing the other kids. Yeah, that can happen. That's true" (P6)

P7 Analysis

Pattern 1. Small Group Instruction is Driven by Reading Data and Includes Modeling, Feedback, and Practice

The importance of data driven small group instruction is evident in primary grade classrooms. By using formative and summative assessments like running records, Fountas and Pinnell levels and i-Ready Reading Diagnostics throughout the school year, students are separated into small groups with similar literacy intervention needs.

I usually do the I do a lot of small group guided reading. So, I do my low babies five days a week, my mid babies three days a week and my higher kids will get more like two days a week. (P7)

Pattern 2. Intervention Time Needs to be Embedded into Daily Schedules and Instructional Routines

To address all student literacy needs, the intervention time for targeted practice is optimized when built into a predictive schedule for the day and week. P7 said,

I usually do the I do a lot of small group guided reading…So it's like built into

your schedule…you really have to do I mean, I still do a whole group lesson. But

that's gonna be you know, 10 to 12 minutes, and then they'll have some work time

for some reading time while I'm pulling those students around. So, I use the

workshop model. (P7)

Pattern 3. Deficiencies in Foundational Reading Skills Need to be Addressed

After baseline reading data are taken in the beginning of the school year, teachers

work to identify the deficiencies in foundational reading skills in their primary grade

students so they can plan and prepare for targeted interventions. Deficiencies can include

multiple skills such as:

I would definitely say that phonemic awareness is definitely low with my

strugglers…figuring out the sounds, and being able to isolate those sounds, put

the sounds together, take the sounds apart, and then the phonics piece of it, to be

able to sound out the words, being able to tap out the words…Some kids don't

even really know what a vowel is still, they don't know. You say they say how

many vowels are in that word? They say, well, four because they see four letters.

they don't really know the vowels from the consonants, even things like rhyming,

and onset and rhyme. All of those things are still missed by strugglers and are

really difficult. (P7)

Themes for Research Question 1

Theme 1. Embed Multiple Intervention Opportunities for Repeated Practice

During the initial segment of questions from the interview protocol, which were

focused on answering research question 1, seven out of seven participants reported

embedded intervention blocks and repeated practice sessions in foundational reading skills for their students during the school day. Intervention block times were part of the schoolwide schedule at both schools where the seven participants work. P1 reported that the schoolwide intervention block enables teachers to "build in" intervention times to meet in small groups with struggling students, and that this time was used for foundational reading skill remediation in her classroom.

According to P2, cycles of small group instruction occur often, and she stated that, "I'm constantly reinforcing and going to them or pulling them in a small group…Well, so their independent work is really teacher led independent work." P4 utilized the embedded intervention block to remediate reading deficits, and sometimes the interventions are delivered by additional staff, who are scheduled during that time.

So, we have it built into our schedule where we have that available, so we have time, so we give students additional instruction on what they need during that time. And so, in my plans, I already have that in place. Sometimes I'm the person giving the instruction and sometimes it's someone else. (P4)

Repeated practice opportunities are essential to addressing deficiencies in foundational reading skills in the primary grades so that teachers can adapt instruction to each student's instructional reading level based on assessment data. P3 reported that she adds small group instruction for phonics and phonemic awareness, and this year, has added targeted instruction in reading comprehension as well.

I'm thinking of comprehension, specifically, and like sequencing and taking that time and remediating the student, and then going forward, they were like, Oh, I get it now. We were able to respond in a repetitive way, to keep up and make that

connection. (P3)

P4 also explained how the process of facilitating multiple repeated practice of skills supports phonological awareness growth. "I would say phonological awareness is a significant challenge, and then some I guess, blending sounds is just really hard. A lot of phonological awareness is challenging for them. They don't get enough practice." Finally, P5 reported that she incorporates a "whole group phonics lesson, and an additional small group instruction session" on top of the intervention block to provide even more opportunities for repeated practice in her classroom.

Theme 2. Address All Foundational Reading Skills Until Mastery

Foundational reading skills build upon each other and develop at different rates in students with different cultural, linguistic, and schooling backgrounds. The required curriculum pacing and literacy curriculum content do not always take into account the need for intervention and remediation of many foundational reading skills, and teacher participants indicated that continued practice until mastery was an important factor for their students.

P1 indicated that she felt that she needed to "tackle deficiencies" as she found them in the beginning of the school year" and that many of her students are "whole word readers" and/or "sound spellers" indicating deficits in phonemic awareness, phonics and encoding skills. Further, P1 explained that many of her students cannot "discriminate short and long vowels in words, cannot read "r-controlled vowels" and that even her higher readers tend to have difficulties when given longer vocabulary terms, as they are not "actively using decoding strategies." P5 emphatically stated that the "reading foundation, really in my opinion, nothing else matters" (P5). Additionally, P5 advocated

for targeted practice and repeated instruction of phonics and phonological awareness through small groups" to help the students' close gaps in literacy skills. Further, P5 recommended that teachers "compare and reflect on data often, and see if the strategy is working, if not, revisit and see what else you can do."

As students begin to make progress in their phonological awareness and phonics skills, they will increase their literacy assessment scores but their skill growth may not carry over to higher level foundational reading skills like encoding or spelling accurately, comprehension and written expression. P6 explained that her students "might be reading well, and sounding out well, but it doesn't carry over into their spelling."

P2 ensured that the foundational reading skill "standards are taught to the entire class, with scaffolded strategies modeled by the teacher, and students performing at a higher reading level are able to apply taught skills to their text levels." P2 structured her instruction so that she is still teaching them the same strategies. "My higher level are applying it to more complex text. The lower level are still they're still applying same skills "so they can continue to practice until mastery. P7 also indicated a need for practice until mastery as students move from learning to decode a story to learning to decode and comprehend a text in a lesson.

> There are fluent readers. I think their comprehension is, pretty good. Although there are some kids that are even though they're good readers, they still can't tell you what they read about, or they don't give you the detail in depth that I'm looking for. So, they can use help in that. (P7)

Research Question 2

How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction and pacing of the

prescribed district grade level curriculum? This research question was addressed by seven questions in the interview process. Four primary patterns developed from the analysis of data: (a) PLC team planning processes provide teachers support to creatively find extra time in pacing requirements to intervene with students, (b) teacher gut, assessment data, and classroom observations support teacher decisions to balance instruction, (c) teachers use curriculum resources, spiral teaching, games, and group work for practice of skills, and (d) high performing readers also need explicit reading instruction in foundational reading skills (language, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension). Primary themes for research question two emerged from the data analysis: (a) the PLC process supports teachers in balancing curriculum pacing with student need and (b) teacher judgement and observations of student performance drive adaptations to literacy instruction.

P1 Analysis

Pattern 1. PLC Team Planning Processes Provide Teachers Support to Creatively Find Extra Time in Pacing Requirements to Intervene with Students

This pattern referred to the belief that the PLC process supports the teacher's efforts to creatively schedule and pace instruction and reading interventions with students. P1 reported that her team PLC sessions incorporate "engaging conversations that support accountability" and purposeful "tweaking" of the district pacing guide for reading. Further, P1 added that pacing is often adjusted as a grade level team to include a "cushion of time that leaves a few days to spiral review," intervene or add in extra practice in foundational reading skills.

Pattern 2. Teacher Gut, Assessment Data, and Classroom Observations Support Teacher Decisions to Balance Instruction

This pattern referred to the belief that teacher gut, along with assessment data and classroom observations support the decision-making process of teachers when balancing what reading instruction students do and do not need. P1 explained that's "kind of where I feel I am now" with her students as she has adjusted her instruction and pacing based on the varied needs of her students. P1 also posited that it "makes no sense to spiral through if they don't get it," meaning that pushing along the pacing regardless of student mastery is not beneficial.

Pattern 3. Teachers Use Curriculum Resources, Spiral Teaching, and Games with Group Work for Practice of Skills

This pattern referred to the belief that teachers use curriculum resources, spiral teaching, and games with group work for practice of skills. In addition to the "tweaking of the district pacing with the PLC team," P1 reported using "file folder games, compare and contrast foldable activities, games that spiral skills to help students."

Pattern 4. High Performing Readers Also Need Explicit Reading Instruction in Foundational Reading Skills

This pattern referred to the belief that high performing readers also need explicit reading instruction in foundational reading skills. P1 explained that sometimes there are "second grade students reading on a third-grade level" and that she needs to "move their reading levels to fourth grade by the end of the year." Further, P1 stated that providing the targeted instruction is "a balance of what they do and don't need."

P2 Analysis

Pattern 1. PLC Team Planning Processes Provide Teachers Support to Creatively Find Extra Time in Pacing Requirements to Intervene with Students

One of the most helpful structures for addressing the literacy deficits of primary grade students includes working with a grade level Professional Learning Community (PLC). The task of creatively addressing grade level curriculum while addressing significant literacy and foundational reading skill deficits is supported by a team approach.

> One of the things that we do as a team is that we plan together, and so we look at it, but we also say okay, this is our outline for our week, but you got to do what you got to do for your baby. Teachers plan together and adjust for their babies. (P2)

Further, P2 explained that the sharing of ideas is important for teachers to engage in together, because the collaboration is a true resource between faculty with different skills and strengths:

> We're using the curriculum planning guides from the county. So, there's a lot of stuff on there. We've also gone through the state, we're going through the standards, and we're looking at the standards and then we're kind of making our learning goals from that. I mean, it's a lot of work, and then we all you know, we all respect each other's professional opinions. So, we all have our own experience, so we sort of share our ideas. (P2)

Pattern 2. Teacher Gut, Assessment Data, and Classroom Observations Support Teacher Decisions to Balance Instruction

To complete cycles of progress monitoring and adjust the targeted literacy interventions teachers use combinations of evaluative data to balance their planned instruction.

I use the i-Ready assessment to kind of group and place them… we're also using Fountas and Pinnell to get their instructional reading level, or independent reading level. And then we also are doing oral fluency to track their fluency progress. On top of that, I try to meet and do centers and one of the centers is typically me. (P2)

It is also important for teachers to use a variety of learning activities to gain evidence of learning in the classroom, as all students vary in strengths and weaknesses. P2 describes a recent activity that is embedded in the school day:

Spur of the moment for me, I asked the kids, okay, you're gonna read your section only. And then you have to work together to come up with your reasons from the book. In your own words, summarizing what they read. They had to work together to do it. So tomorrow, I'm even kind of throwing it out there. I'm like, you know, I think I want to make them have make a persuasive poster. I was just gonna say, so we're gonna have a debate where they're going to get the two sides you're going to come to the front of the room. That was part of our plan was to have the kids debate and the team that vote, which side are you more influencing? But then I thought, you know, if they could make a persuasive poster, they're creating something on their own. They've got to make it in a way to convince people looking at the poster to do what they want. them to do. So to me, that is true evidence of learning, right? (P2)

Pattern 3. Teachers Use Curriculum Resources, Spiral Teaching, and Games with Group Work for Practice of Skills

Combination of different resources and instructional strategies can be combined to support the primary grade students in practicing their foundational reading skills. P2

purposely embeds a variety of opportunities in the classroom for her students. "I think that them being in an immersive classroom is beneficial because they're going to be listening to the language, right?" When engaging the students in whole group reading, P2 described her process as

> I get the kids highlighter bookmarks, so that then we do a lot of things together. Okay, so I stop, we have discussions, we underline keywords, everything's embedded, so it's beyond just reading the text, right? It's really thinking about the task of active reading, and it's also, you know, anytime I switch into whether it's social studies or math, we use the same strategies. (P2)

Additionally, P2 combined the practice of teacher modeling of skills with group work for practice of skills.

> And so reading something out loud with the text in front of them, so that they can follow along, or having it projected, so they can hear the fluency of the words and also talking about the sight words, and frequently using the sight words, also doing some things where the kids work together. They're building sentences and then they're reading those sentences. I also do daily writing, and I find that the reading and the writing go hand in hand and connect. (P2)

Pattern 4. High Performing Readers Also Need Explicit Reading Instruction in Foundational Reading Skills

By constantly monitoring and assessing their students, primary grade teachers plan for student literacy needs by vertically aligning their standards-based planning and combining it with targeted interventions in literacy deficits.

> So yeah, the first thing that we do is we look at the standards and we say what is it

that we need to, to focus on? And then we're looking also at third grade, and we're looking at first grade, like, what are they coming in with? And what is third grade going to expect? And what is it that we're really going to be focusing on? (P2)

The approach to addressing both high and low performing readers during instruction includes text complexity. "I'm still teaching them the same strategies. My higher level are applying it to more complex text. The lower-level ones are still they're still applying author's purpose to less complex text" (P2). In addition to this strategy, it is important to deliver explicit reading instruction to higher level readers, because the foundational decoding skills may be proficient, but an issue with encoding and spelling may still exist.

I would say one of the things is, and it works for both. High end students and low-end students. Yeah, just because they score one way with one thing doesn't mean that they're that way throughout. Right. So a lot of times you've got very high readers. Yeah, but they are not writers. Spelled Yes, true. And they may not be comprehending. So just because a child can read, does it mean that they understand, right? The reading and the reading strategies? Yeah. And the same thing with the low ones. Just because a child can't read doesn't mean that they're not processing and understanding a story that's being read to a new teacher coming. (P2)

P3 Analysis

Pattern 1. PLC Team Planning Processes Provide Teachers Support to Creatively Find Extra Time in Pacing Requirements to Intervene with Students

Teachers depend on other teachers to collaborate and gain support in making

instructional pacing decisions and choosing intervention strategies to close literacy gaps in their students. "I think it's collective collaboration with the team, right, um, during planning and just picking their brains." (P3)

Pattern 2. Teacher Gut, Assessment Data, and Classroom Observations Support Teacher Decisions to Balance Instruction

P3 utilized formative and summative data to progress monitor her students. "The biggest one is i-Ready and Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments, and then grade level curriculum assessments."

For example, P3 elaborated with an example of her decision making and action steps:

So, my class, we I did a lot with vocabulary, because I noticed in i-Ready, my kids were really struggling with vocab. And so I did a lot of the i-Ready additional lessons, and then I pulled other things that I could just find. (P3)

Pattern 3. Teachers Use Curriculum Resources, Spiral Teaching, and Games With Group Work for Practice of Skills

To progress students in their varied levels of reading and foundational reading skills, teachers must approach groups of students differently, and plan for multiple opportunities to practice skills over time. P3 reported that it is difficult but necessary.

So yes, but the hard part is that you have to just keep moving on, and you just have to, you just have to keep moving with the pacing guide and the assessments and keep going. So it's hard, you definitely have to adapt instruction for where you can keep moving on, but you know, you're gonna have to add it at a center station. So like comprehension, like for those kids, I know I have to pull

them separately, and I have to keep working on those strategies and skills so that

they can master it. (P3)

P4 Analysis

Pattern 1. PLC Team Planning Processes Provide Teachers Support to Creatively Find

Extra Time in Pacing Requirements to Intervene with Students

Teachers collaborate with other teachers and bounce ideas off their peers before

making decisions to adjust their instructional strategies and pacing of foundational

reading skill instruction. "We do have people that we can use as resources. We have

instructional literacy coaches, and we have leaders that can kind of give you some

direction, and we also work with our team to kind of discuss it." (P4)

Pattern 2. Teacher Gut, Assessment Data, and Classroom Observations Support

Teacher Decisions to Balance Instruction

Common assessments from literacy curriculum can be helpful to measure

progress and support teachers in focusing on lagging skills.

I use a lot of assessment to kind of drive that. So we do have, like, because we're

using Wilson Fundations, we have an assessment that we use and gave at the

beginning of the year. And we just recently gave it again to kind of see if we've

made any success with what we have done. (P4)

Additionally, P4 used classroom observations to drive her instruction and small

groups in the classroom. "But really your observations, when you give like dictation

quizzes that's the best opportunity to see where they're at in reading" (P4).

Pattern 3. Teachers Use Curriculum Resources, Spiral Teaching, and Games With

Group Work for Practice of Skills

Teachers balance curriculum, and practice activities with varied pacing adjustments for their students to provide time for primary grade students to practice foundational reading skills. P4 elaborated on the reality of the problem by explaining,

> The main problem is that we are supposed to keep on pace with the district's plans and they are very fast and not every student is able to keep up at that rate, even with the intervention block because the intervention block doesn't always help them. They're just not there yet. So, how are they going to ever master this next skill and we've already moved on? So that's very frustrating for them and for us as teachers. (P4)

P5 Analysis

Pattern 1. PLC Team Planning Processes Provide Teachers Support to Creatively Find Extra Time in Pacing Requirements to Intervene with Students

It is important for teachers to reflect on their student data, and problem solve solutions with other teachers. P5 recommended, "I would say you know, to reflect on the strategy working and whatever we're doing, if it's not working, to revisit and say, you know, one of the things I've begun is, you know, talking to other teachers and saying, you know, what works for your classroom, get other ideas. If this doesn't work for these kids. What else could we do?" (P5). Furthermore, it is worth making pacing adjustments to benefit the student. "Yeah, it's worth it. Yeah, it is. I'd rather the students have mastered the skills then just to check a box to say we're on pace now" (P5).

Pattern 2. Teacher Gut, Assessment Data, and Classroom Observations Support Teacher Decisions to Balance Instruction

Being able to ensure that their students achieve a strong foundation in reading is

something teacher's feel passionately about in elementary school. P5 stated, "If they don't

have that base, the reading foundation, really, in my opinion, nothing else matters" (P5).

Monitoring student progress is an ongoing task for teachers. "I keep a lot of data tracking.

So, monitoring between their reading levels and our Wilson Fundations scores, we use

the unit tests as well, and i-Ready to kind of lay all those out and kind of compare and see

if they're making progress or need to start a new strategy" (P5).

Pattern 3. Teachers Use Curriculum Resources, Spiral Teaching, and Games with

Group Work for Practice of Skills

Combinations of curriculum along with multiple opportunities using the same

resources help students practice during the school day. "We're using Wilson Fundations a

lot. My kids are seeing that two to three times a day like double dips, and then our

reading program is Fountas and Pinnell, and then some of those same kids are also

getting the language portion of Fountas and Pinnell again" (P5). In addition to this, P5

attempts to embed and integrate instruction into other time blocks, such as writing time.

> I would try to give them as much as possible and integrate it like maybe a little bit
>
> into you know, I have this writing pieces, kind of borrow that time and have you
>
> know, it's still reading but kind of marry it with something else. (P5)

P6 Analysis

Pattern 1. PLC Team Planning Processes Provide Teachers Support to Creatively Find

Extra Time in Pacing Requirements to Intervene with Students

Cycles of team planning support teachers in their efforts to structure interventions,

despite differences in classroom data and student progress.

> So, we plan a lot with each other as a team, regardless of where our classroom,

students are as individual students. We plan together and we try to keep each

other on track. Just a lot of checking in with each other. We plan to collaborate a

lot. (P6)

With adjustments made to the school and district pacing, P6 ensures fidelity by

delineating the difference between changes to time but not to the content.

The desire to make the change happens every year. And what I do change, I don't

change the content. I just change the timing, the pacing of it. Because it needs to

be slower. (P6)

Pattern 2. Teacher Gut, Assessment Data, and Classroom Observations Support

Teacher Decisions to Balance Instruction

Teachers monitor combinations of individual student data as well as classroom

data, and review students who move within the different high, medium and lower

quartiles in reading. This data review informs future instructional decisions. "And it's like

when you have over a certain percentage of kids not doing well you just want to put on

the brakes. Okay, let's review. Let's bring in some different resources and then return to

that data" (P6). Moreover, data can also be an informal observation of student

performance. "It's like, spur of the moment, a lot of it's never planned, like small and

often. It's kind of like teacher gut" and it can also be "a little assessment just to pull them

one on one. check the sounds, check the decoding, check those digraphs and blends, etc.

and just kind of go from there" (P6).

Once data are reviewed and collaborated on with other teachers, the task of

balancing the needs of the entire class is a teacher's next responsibility.

I mean, when you run out of time, when you find out, Oh, my gosh, this I'm so

behind. And then you're trying to cram some, you know, last minute skills in, right? So that I mean that for sure, and then also on the other side of the spectrum, when you're taking too long on something. You kind of lose the kids. Yeah, you know, you lose the majority of them because you're tailoring maybe too much to those who have gaps. But that's why the small groups are important. (P6)

Interestingly, P6 also recommended that primary teachers maintain a level of flexibility while limiting a hyper focus on data, as it can overwhelm some teachers.

If I had to give any advice, it would be to try to remain as fluid as possible. And to try, you don't want to put all your eggs in one basket. But at the same time, you don't want to overwhelm yourself and the student with too many, too much…you have too many ways to pick up data. So just to really focus on a few things, where you want to see the growth and where they can show growth. (P6)

Pattern 3. Teachers Use Curriculum Resources, Spiral Teaching, and Games with Group Work for Practice of Skills

To provide practice opportunities for the students, P6 utilizes resources that are both provided by the school, and additionally acquired by the teacher on her own. "But I definitely use Wilson Fundations and Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR). And, you know, that's something that's something on my own that I use. It's not provided by the school" (P6). She also elaborated on why she recommends the FCRR reading resources:

It's pulling small groups, pulling in other resources, I like to use FCRR. Because it really that program has a lot where you can specifically narrow in on different deficits, you know, between the digraphs the digraph blends, so using activities to

help them learn to keep them engaged. (P6)

Pattern 4. High Performing Readers Also Need Explicit Reading Instruction in Foundational Reading Skills

Despite being able to read and decode at or above grade level, high performing readers also need explicit reading instruction to solidify their foundational reading skills to mastery in spelling and decoding vocabulary words.

I don't know spelling is considered one. That would be encoding right? It's a part of it. So, like they might be reading well, and sounding out well, but it doesn't carry over into their spelling. And the kids, I feel like the kids read better within context than they do with the single word reading. Also, the multi-syllabic vocabulary, and then still those high frequency like trick word type things. (P6)

P7 Analysis

Pattern 1. PLC Team Planning Processes Provide Teachers Support to Creatively Find Extra Time in Pacing Requirements to Intervene with Students

Among the grade level teachers, group planning helps the teachers stay within a few days of each other in lesson planning, despite varying levels of students in the classrooms.

Yeah, we group plan, we grade level plan. So, we really do try to stay on the same track in house and I think our classes are pretty similar. We do have some that are a little bit higher, and some that are a little bit low. (P7)

Teachers strive to plan and instruct in the best interests of their students, and this results in creative pacing adjustments to the curriculum so that their students gain valuable time to master the important foundational reading skills.

But you have to change it and make it work for you and for your kids. I do think that the maps are out there for a reason. And that we should, since kids do change schools, we should try to follow it the best that we can. Sure and try to cover it within that quarter. But if we need to move it around a little bit, or you need to go a little slower, I need to go a little quicker. I think that's okay. (P7)

Pattern 2. Teacher Gut, Assessment Data, and Classroom Observations Support Teacher Decisions to Balance Instruction

Primary grade students are young, and developmentally changing throughout the school year. While teachers use summative and diagnostic data to identify learning deficits and needs, you can't underestimate the importance of daily observation and monitoring of the student's performance during the school day.

So, it's hard but you have to, that moment of teacher judgment, right? I think if you don't have that then how do you know what you tried is working? I think you cannot underestimate the watching your kids and monitoring and the data collection. And then what do you know, what do you see in your kids? You have to do that constantly. Yeah, especially the little ones. (P7)

Further, P7 also facilitated an abundance of small group table work, where she can observe and take formative data in reading skills.

i-Ready data is one piece of it Fountas and Pinnell would be another piece, assessments, running records, all of those things. You just, you know, just monitor. We do a lot of work on the table. And so I can see who's consistently not able to perform. (P7).

Pattern 3. Teachers Use Curriculum Resources, Spiral Teaching, and Games with Group Work for Practice of Skills

One example of spiral teaching is the way P7 created additional opportunities for her students to practice open and closed syllables. Instead of following the standard pacing for the foundational reading skill, she added a spiral instructional approach for the skill.

> Yeah, for syllables. And pacing wasn't long enough. So I changed it and say, Okay, we got to do that a lot longer. I think you can keep on adding, I kept on adding some closed syllable words every day, but still did the other work. Okay, just kept going. They just want to do one or two days and then forget about it. I thought it was something that should have been added or revisited. For a while. So I just kept adding it in kept doing a few examples every day. Okay, which really didn't change the pace now. Not that much. You know? (P7)

In addition to this, P7 described her instructional approach as more of a workshop that targets all areas of reading at all different levels. "I do the workshop model. The one-hour word readers workshop that helps the students …So that kind of hits all the different areas" (P7).

Pattern 4. High Performing Readers Also Need Explicit Reading Instruction in Foundational Reading Skills

Higher performing readers should be included in the targeted reading instruction groupings so that they can work to mastery of all foundational reading skill areas that are interrelated cognitively. These language-based areas of reading include reading comprehension, written expression and encoding/spelling.

Although there are some kids that are even though they're good readers, they still

can't tell you what they read about, or they don't give you the detail in depth that

I'm looking for. So they can use help in that…I have four high kids, and then they

will read? I'll usually meet with them twice a week, and they'll give I give them

books to read. And we talk more about the comprehension piece, but they don't

really need the phonics piece. Sometimes some of them need the spelling piece,

because those good readers are sometimes not very good spellers. (P7)

Furthermore, P7 reported feeling like she is "always and forever behind in writing

instruction" and that her students often struggle with the task.

There are some things like I think writing is hard, where you can, you can write

and write and write and write and write. And some kids, it's just writing, it's just

hard. And I think you can practice it and practice it and practice it and I'm forever

behind and writing. (P7)

Themes for Research Question 2

Theme 1. The PLC Process Supports Teachers in Balancing Curriculum Pacing with

Student Need

Grade level teams of teachers engage in the PLC process to create cycles of data

driven instructional decisions and planning for their students to improve learning. Each of

the seven interview participants expressed the benefits of the PLC process, and their

weekly PLC sessions in helping teachers collaborate, share ideas and information, and

plan to adapt instruction and curriculum pacing for their students. P1 reported that her

team PLC sessions incorporate "engaging conversations that support accountability" and

purposeful "tweaking" of the district pacing guide for reading. P2 explained that the

sharing of ideas is important for teachers to engage in together, because the collaboration is a true resource between faculty with different skills and strengths by stating "I mean, it's a lot of work, and then we all, you know, we all respect each other's professional opinions. So, we all have our own experience, so we sort of share our ideas."

Ultimately, the curriculum and pacing adjustments collaborated about at PLC sessions are yet again adjusted by the teachers for the specific foundational reading skill deficiencies of the students in their classrooms.

> One of the things that we do as a team is that we plan together, and so we look at it, but we also say okay, this is our outline for our week, but you got to do what you got to do for your baby. Teachers plan together and adjust for their babies. (P2)

Both P3 and P4 expressed the potential impact of PLC sessions on adapting curriculum pacing and generating literacy interventions. "I think it's collective collaboration with the team, right, during planning and just picking their brains" (P3) and "We do have people that we can use as resources. We have instructional literacy coaches, and we have leaders that can kind of give you some direction, and we also work with our team to kind of discuss it" (P4).

Finally, P5 reported that "talking to other teachers and saying, you know, what works for your classroom, get other ideas. If this doesn't work for these kids. What else could we do?" benefits teachers in approaching the problem-solving process as a team rather than going it alone. P6 feels like it benefits her to engage in the adapted literacy instruction and curriculum pacing resulting from the PLC process, but P7 stressed that you should "Change it and make it work for you and for your kids...We plan together,

and we try to keep each other on track. Just a lot of checking in with each other. We plan to collaborate a lot. (P6).

P6 and P7 described how teachers strive to plan and instruct in the best interests of their students, and how the PLC process results in creative pacing adjustments to the curriculum so that their students gain valuable time to master the important foundational reading skills.

Theme 2. Teacher Judgement and Observations of Student Performance Drive Adaptations to Literacy Instruction

Teachers utilize combinations of formal and informal data as well as teacher judgement and observations of student performance to make on-going instructional decisions in foundational reading skill instruction and adaptations to pacing so that students can continue to practice skills until they achieve mastery. While formal data may be first used to formulate small groups and plan and organize reading intervention activities, it is important to recognize the role that on-going teacher judgement and observations play in literacy curriculum adaptations.

P1 posited that it "makes no sense to spiral through if they don't get it," meaning that pushing along the pacing regardless of student mastery is not beneficial and that if her observations indicate a lack of mastery, she would make an adjustment to the interventions if needed. P2 described a "Spur of the moment" activity where she asked the students to read and work together to come up with reasons from the book and then summarize what they read. While this is a "spur of the moment activity, P2 will use it as observation of "true evidence of learning." P4 uses classroom observations to drive her instruction and small groups in the classroom. And feels that the on-going opportunities

to watch students in action are important and provide valuable and actionable information for teachers. "But really your observations, when you give like dictation quizzes that's the best opportunity to see where they're at in reading" (P4).

Both P6 and P7 summarized the use of teacher judgement and observations to make adaptations to instruction as vital steps in the process of teaching foundational reading skills. P6 stated that data can also be an informal observation of student performance. "It's like, spur of the moment, a lot of it's never planned, like small and often. It's kind of like teacher gut" and it can also be "a little assessment just to pull them one on one. check the sounds, check the decoding, check those digraphs and blends, etc. and just kind of go from there" (P6). P7 furthered this belief by stating that it is vital to continuously monitor the learning and independent demonstration of foundational reading skills in primary aged students.

> So, it's hard but you have to, that moment of teacher judgment, right? I think if you don't have that then how do you know what you tried is working? I think you cannot underestimate the watching your kids and monitoring and the data collection. And then what do you know, what do you see in your kids? You have to do that constantly. Yeah, especially the little ones. (P7)

Research Question 3

How do teachers evaluate the student data outcomes for evidence of the effectiveness of the adapted literacy instruction? This research question was addressed by the final six additional questions in the interview process. Three primary patterns developed from the analysis of data: (a) teach and reteach based on your teacher gut and observations, (b) repeat instruction and reteach skills often, (c) use multiple data sources

as evidence of learning . The data sources most frequently discussed were Fountas &
Pinnell, i-Ready, Wilson Fundations, fluency scores, high frequency word knowledge).
Research question three yielded two themes from the data analysis: (a) ongoing teacher
observations and student monitoring illustrate the effectiveness of adapted literacy
instruction and (b) small group instructional opportunities provide effective instruction.

P1 Analysis

Pattern 1. Teach and Reteach Based on Your Teacher Gut and Observations

This pattern referred to the belief that teachers need to teach and reteach based on
their teacher gut and observations of the students. P1 reported that "the whole thing is
going with your gut. If a lesson isn't working and if your kids are not getting it, don't be
worried." Further, P1 stated that teachers should not be "afraid to slow down and teach
and reteach and reteach" the skills again. P1 also reassured teachers that "they will get it
by the end… you will get it done."

Pattern 2. Repeat Instruction and Reteach Skills Often

This pattern referred to the belief that teachers will have to repeat reading
instruction and reteach reading skills often due to student differences. P1 reported that
vocabulary "has always been a struggle" and that students "get stuck and it slows them
down" at times. P1 also explained that there are times when she "obviously dropped the
ball somewhere" … and knows that "we are gonna have to go back and redo it." Finally,
P1 recommends to teachers that they "need to go with what is working best in your
classroom."

Pattern 3. Use Multiple Data Sources as Evidence of Learning

This pattern referred to the belief that the evidence of the effectiveness of adapted

literacy instruction is based on multiple data sources. P1 recommended that teachers use a variety of data sources to verify the effectiveness of literacy instruction. P1 uses "i-Ready, Wilson curriculum assessments, Fountas and Pinnell" as formal data evidence. Finally, P1 also recommends that teachers use observations of students in the classroom along with conversational performance" as anecdotal data to support evidence of effectiveness of adapted literacy instruction.

P2 Analysis

Pattern 1. Teach and Reteach Based on Your Teacher Gut and Observations

Teachers use a variety of resources along with their observations of student performance to evaluate the effectiveness of their foundational reading skill instruction. Decisions made to reteach and revisit skills multiple times can be made based on teacher gut as well. P2 cautions viewing students solely based on a data score. "Yeah, just because they score one way with one thing doesn't mean that they're that way throughout all data." Furthermore, P2 explains that students can respond to a variety of instructional activities and strategies, despite evidence of foundational reading skill deficits in decoding. "Just because a child can't read or decode, doesn't mean they are not processing and understanding a story being read aloud to them."

Pattern 2. Repeat Instruction and Reteach Skills Often

To ensure mastery of foundational reading skills, teachers ensure that the students at varying multiple reading levels have extensive opportunities to practice and receive teacher feedback and instruction during center time and small groups during the school day.

And so, it's one of those things that you know, I tried to teach it's and I try to

chunk small things. So, in my case, it might just be a sentence or a couple of

words. So, they feel like super successful, it's also just giving that practice, so I

try to embed the strategies throughout and so they're getting like multiple

opportunities with those strategies. On top of that, I try to meet and do centers.

One of the centers is typically me. (P2)

Pattern 3. Use Multiple Data Sources as Evidence of Learning

Teachers utilize multiple data assessments to guide their instruction throughout

the school year, and they remain flexible with considering the data from each assessment

and how it's used to make instructional action steps for their students.

We're using the i-Ready assessment to kind of group and place them and we're

also using Fountas and Pinnell to get their instructional reading level, or

independent reading level really. Then we also are doing oral fluency, to track

their fluency progress. So, I would say our Fountas and Pinnell running records, I

would say was reliable and then it's also just writing samples to see if they are

applying? (P2)

P3 Analysis

Pattern 2. Teachers Must Repeat Instruction and Reteach Skills Often

The repeated opportunities to practice foundational reading skills are important in

grades 1, 2, and 3. P3 explained how they all go together for students in third grade:

Before this year, I would say like phonics and phonemic awareness, but this year

in third grade, it's more comprehension I think like the phonemic, awareness,

phonics, and comprehension, they like all kind of go together, and the kids that I

would push forward to MTSS are the ones that I think are not being able to read

fluently and decode words, and then comprehend what they're reading because

they're spending all the time trying to decode. (P3)

In order to support the students in Grade 3 in their deficient reading skills, P3

stresses the importance of students practicing until mastery. "By providing like a small

group intervention and just repeated, like opportunities to practice. Yeah, practice and

master. We were able to respond in a repetitive way, so students can keep up and make

that connection" (P3).

Pattern 3. Use Multiple Data Sources as Evidence of Learning

Combinations of diagnostic and summative data used by teachers to formulate

data profiles for their students. Teachers combine data profiles with anecdotal notes from

student performance to measure progress.

The biggest one is i-Ready and Fountas and Pinnell, and then grade level

curriculum assessments so they could see like the patterns in sounds and words.

Then I was noticing that there was carryover. So, then they were applying what

they had learned. (P3)

P4 Analysis

Pattern 1. Teach and Reteach Based on Your Teacher Gut and Observations

To support her students in working on deficient skills, P4 increases small group

time and teacher feedback to encourage growth.

I increase the amount of time that I spend with that student whether that be

through small groups or people pushing in to help them through our RTI program.

And usually, I use a lot more hands on manipulatives for those students because

they're not hearing this sound. So sometimes if they can manipulate something, it

helps them to see it better. (P4)

Pattern 2. Repeat Instruction and Reteach Skills Often

It is important for teachers to be prepared to slow down their pace of instruction to address the areas of reading that are not showing progress based on student data and observations.

I mean, do your best but if your students are drowning in it, then allow yourself to slow down without feeling like you have to because otherwise you're going to get to the end of the school year, and they will not have made the progress that you had hoped. (P4)

Pattern 3. Use Multiple Data Sources as Evidence of Learning

The multiple data sources are always incorporated into teacher decision making regarding the planning of adaptive literacy instruction in the primary grades.

A lot of different sources, but our main one right now is the Wilson Fundations. Assessment, which tests letter names letter sounds, blends, words, and handwriting words and handwriting letters. I use a lot of assessment to kind of drive that… But we try to use that to help guide us, but really your observations when you give like dictation quizzes that's also the best opportunity to see where they're at. (P4)

P5 Analysis

Pattern 1. Teach and Reteach Based on Your Teacher Gut and Observations

Focusing in on needed reading skills and facilitating the additional opportunities for students to practice is coordinated through PLC team sessions as well as observations and recommendations by other teachers. Through a process of "honing in and revisiting

data" P5 recommended the following:

> Making sure that they have repeated instruction and support throughout the day,
> kind of looking at the areas of deficit and kind of honing in okay, what can we do
> to support them in these areas and make sure they get adequate like continual
> practice and monitored practice throughout the year?

In addition, P5 stressed the importance of paying attention to the data and following one's teacher gut and observations despite curriculum pacing conflicts.

> I would say you know, to reflect on is the strategy working and whatever we're
> doing, if it's not working to revisit and say, you know, one of the things I've begun
> is, you know, talking to other teachers and saying, you know, what works for your
> classroom, get other ideas. If this doesn't work for these kids. What else could we
> do? I'd rather the students have mastered the skills then just to check a box to say
> we're on pace now. (P5)

Pattern 2. Repeat Instruction and Reteach Skills Often

By reflecting on data and asking herself how her students can get predictable practice and instruction throughout the school day, P5 schedules multiple sessions of targeted practice in one school day.

> If we are hitting skills two to three times a day, they're kind of aligned together.
> They're practicing the letters and then practice writing them and then practicing
> decoding them. We're using Wilson Fundations a lot. My kids are seeing that two
> to three times a day-like a double dip. (P5)

Pattern 3. Use Multiple Data Sources as Evidence of Learning

Using a variety of data assessments becomes important when teachers are

working with students with severe foundational reading deficits and adjusting their pacing of skills practice and curriculum use in order to address student needs. While P5 uses "i Ready and Fountas and Pinnell, and we do Wilson Fundations unit assessments" she has to maintain perspective on the data results of these assessments in light of different student reading profiles.

> Where I've had things that have been on a standard, like a test that you know, we looked at the data and because we hadn't covered it, because we're still trying to work on basic skills. The student didn't know the vocabulary or comprehension, right? No, they don't know those and so when they get to you know, like i-Ready diagnostics or whatever their test is, and because it hasn't been introduced, they do not pass. (P5)

P6 Analysis

Pattern 1. Teach and Reteach Based on Your Teacher Gut and Observations

The impact that teacher gut, observations and anecdotal notes can have on student reading achievement is significant. P6 has a structure in place to "capture the moments" of growth or need when she meetings in targeted instructional groups. "By continuing small group and making anecdotal notes…so when I meet with them, especially during that intervention time, they have a folder that comes with a little note paper that I use" (P6).

Pattern 2. Repeat Instruction and Reteach Skills Often

While the pacing recommended by curriculum creators and district administration is aligned with the current state standards and summative proficiency assessments, teachers must repeat instruction and reteach skills to improve student achievement to the

mastery level, so that skills are able to be applied and eventually transfer to the next grade level. P6 makes individual and class wide decisions to problem solve and implement reteach sessions. "It's like when you have over a certain percentage of kids not doing well you just want to put on the brakes. Okay, let's review. Let's bring in some different resources and then return to that." (P6).

Pattern 3. Use Multiple Data Sources as Evidence of Learning

Multiple reading assessments and targeted progress monitoring formatives are helpful with evaluating the effectiveness of adapted literacy intervention over time.

So, one or two things we use primarily, so I use a lot with Fountas and Pinnell. It assesses and when you're listening to them read you can kind of see where they are with decoding. And also with comprehension. Okay, and that also gives like a fluency and accuracy count. So, it really sums it all up. And then Dibels would be another good one. (P6)

Further, P6 recommended that teachers remember not to overwhelm themselves with multiple data sources, and explains it is important to ultimately focus on a few data indicators when evaluating adapted literacy instruction and making instructional decisions.

If I had to give any advice, it would be to try to remain as fluid as possible. And to try, you don't want to put all your eggs in one basket. But at the same time, you don't want to overwhelm yourself and the student with too many, or too much. You have too many ways to pick up data. So just to really focus on a few things, where you want to see the growth and where they can show growth. (P6)

P7 Analysis

Pattern 1. Teach and Reteach Based on Your Teacher Gut and Observations

There is an element of teacher gut and wisdom to adapting literacy instruction for students working on foundational reading skills. A teacher should use the district pacing guidelines along with the scope and sequence of the literacy curriculum but should leave room for instructional adaptations based on teacher judgement.

> So, it's hard, but you have to…that moment of teacher judgment, right? I think if you don't have that then how do you know what you tried is working? I think you cannot underestimate the watching of your kids in the monitoring and the data collection. And what you know, what do you see in your kids? You have to do that constantly. Yeah, especially the little ones. I mentor the new teachers and I have so many interns, and they do get overwhelmed. (P7)

Pattern 2. Repeat Instruction and Reteach Skills Often

The adjustments and planning needed to repeat and reteach different foundational reading skills to students with varying needs is cumbersome but needed. Besides planning for all grade subject areas, and presenting deficits in reading and math, primary grade teachers must actively and routinely problem solve solutions to meeting the literacy needs of their students. This on-going and exhaustive process can create a sense of overwhelm and fatigue from decision making pressures.

> But if we need to move it around a little bit, or you need to go a little slower, I need to go a little quicker. I think that's okay…They just want to do one or two days and then forget about it. If I thought, it was something that should have been added or revisited for a while…So I just kept adding it in …kept doing a few

examples every day. (P7)

P7 explained how this is added into her literacy block schedule:

I mean, I still do a whole group lesson, but that's gonna be you know, 10 to 12

minutes, and then they'll have some work time for some reading time while I'm

pulling those other students around. So I use the one hour readers workshop and I

do a lot of small-group guided reading. I do my low babies five days a week, my

mid babies three days a week and my higher kids will get more like two days a

week. (P7)

Pattern 3. Use Multiple Data Sources as Evidence of Learning

Multiple data sources illustrate the differences that students demonstrate when

learning foundational reading skills in the primary grades. P7 ensures that she is

reviewing data for all reading skills and uses a combination of the following to target

strengths and weaknesses in her students:

Each Wilson Lesson has an assessment at the end of each unit, and then also

Fountas and Pinnell reading records and just looking at even their i-Ready scores,

Sometimes some of them need the spelling piece, because Sure, those good

readers are not very good spellers. (P7)

Themes for Research Question 3

Theme 1. Ongoing Teacher Observations and Student Monitoring Illustrate the Effectiveness of Adapted Literacy Instruction

The effectiveness of adapted literacy instruction can be seen through the ongoing

teacher observations and monitoring of students during instructional tasks in the

classroom. All participants recognized teacher observation and monitoring as important

factors in evaluating their literacy interventions. P1 reported that "the whole thing is going with your gut. If a lesson isn't working and if your kids are not getting it, don't be worried." Further, P1 stated that teachers should not be "afraid to slow down and teach and reteach and reteach" the skills again, showing that teacher observations, rather than waiting for summative assessment data, can be used to make instructional changes to literacy tasks in the moment. P2 extended this belief by using running records and writing samples as evaluative evidence of student progress in reading. "So, I would say our Fountas and Pinnell running records, I would say was reliable and then it's also just writing samples to see if they are applying." (P2).

P3 described the process where after reviewing recent data, and then giving progress monitoring assessments, she observes students and "makes sure that they're, you know, actually making gains with what we're doing. And if not, then you have to change the intervention" while P4 clarifies her decision-making progress using student monitoring and teacher observations. "I use a lot of assessment to kind of drive that… But we try to use that to help guide us, but really your observations when you give like dictation quizzes that's also the best opportunity to see where they're at" (P4).

P5 and P6 believe in monitored practice opportunities in the classroom and state that they want to see "what can we do to support them in these areas and make sure they get adequate like continual practice and monitored practice throughout the year?"(P5), while P6 states that she uses a system to track student progress through observations "By continuing small group, and making anecdotal notes…so when I meet with them, especially during that intervention time, they have a folder that comes with a little note paper that I use" (P6). Finally, P7 stresses the importance of teacher monitoring of

student progress be expressing "I think you cannot underestimate the watching of your kids in the monitoring and the data collection. And what you know, what do you see in your kids? You have to do that constantly. Yeah, especially the little ones" (P7).

Theme 2. Small Group Instructional Opportunities Provide Evidence of Effective Instruction

Opportunities to target foundational reading skills through small group instruction provided evidence of effective instruction in addressing literacy deficits because teachers are able to instruct, give feedback, and monitor student progress in each session. P1 stresses the value of responding to the small group session so that "If a lesson isn't working and if your kids are not getting it, don't be worried." Further, P1 stated that teachers should not be "afraid to slow down and teach and reteach and reteach" the skills again. P1 also reassured teachers that "they will get it by the end… you will get it done." P2 furthers this belief by stressing the fact that she ensures one of her small group centers includes teacher time for each student.

> It's also just giving that practice, so I try to embed the strategies throughout and
> so they're getting like multiple opportunities with those strategies. On top of that,
> I try to meet and do centers. One of the centers is typically me. (P2)

P3 believes that "by providing small group intervention and just repeated, like opportunities to practice. Yeah, practice and master. We were able to respond in a repetitive way, so students can keep up and make that connection."(P3), while P4 "increases the amount of time that I spend with that student whether that be through small groups" in order to remediate. P5 schedules multiple sessions of targeted practice in one school day and states that "If we are hitting skills two to three times a day, they're kind of

aligned together" in order to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of the foundational reading skills. Finally, P7 coordinates a readers' workshop model that uses multiple small group opportunities for all students

> I mean, I still do a whole group lesson, but that's gonna be you know, 10 to 12 minutes, and then they'll have some work time for some reading time while I'm pulling those other students around. So, I use the one-hour readers' workshop and I do a lot of small-group guided reading. I do my low babies five days a week, my mid babies three days a week and my higher kids will get more like two days a week. (P7)

Summary

In this chapter, the results of interview data gathered from seven primary grade teachers from two different multi-grade level schools in the southeastern United States are explained. The semi-structured interview protocol was conducted in individual sessions between the researcher and each participant and provided an in-depth probe into the participants' experiences as primary grade teachers working to support their students in mastering foundational reading skills in grades 1, 2, and 3. The findings were based on seven face-to face in-person interviews conducted at each school. The interviews were focused on learning about the ways teachers adapt prescribed literacy curriculum to address foundational reading skill deficits of their students and investigate why the primary grade teachers choose the adaptations they implement, and if they felt that the chosen adaptations helped address the literacy achievement gaps of their students. In Chapter 5 a discussion is included about the interpretation of the research findings, how they are related to the current literature, and emerging themes.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Teachers of primary grade students manage the varying foundational reading skills deficiencies of their students while also managing school and district instructional expectations regarding literacy curriculum and pacing of instruction. Given that the actual foundational reading skill levels of many primary grade students may differ from district or company ideals, the perspectives of the teachers who are addressing such literacy deficiencies while helping all students learn grade level expectations are valuable, and it is important to understand the teacher generated solutions as they instruct students with differing skills using district or company guidelines. Exemplary literacy teachers can be defined as educators who facilitate authentic and motivating learning activities to address the diverse literacy needs of their students, while also balancing the time they spend on classroom management and organization, and the many non-learning tasks teachers incur while abiding by school curriculum and pacing expectations (Kelly et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2009). Based on the results of the research by Kelly et al. (2019), it is essential for school leadership teams to encourage teachers to find and develop their "voice" or agency in developing a menu of strategies and tools that support their efforts in addressing the diverse literacy needs of their students while still balancing school and district requirements. Because of the crucial function foundational reading skills play in developing well rounded and proficient readers over time, educators who teach primary grades must be prepared to deliver differentiated and direct instruction in foundational reading skill areas such as phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition and fluency, while also providing grade level content and enrichment to higher performing

readers (Austin et al., 2019; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019).

Research Background

The problem addressed within this research study is when students are unable to perform at a grade level expectation in foundational reading skills in the primary grades, achievement gaps in reading compound over the years. Recent legislation, including Student Literacy Bill- HB 7011 by the Florida Senate, is focused on increasing reading proficiency in Florida students through such legislative mandates as required professional development for acquiring a reading endorsement/certification for teachers who are providing instruction for students demonstrating reading deficits (Florida Senate 2021, February 14). While legislative action steps can be helpful to solve the evident achievement gaps in reading, a more immediate approach, based on teacher and student-centered actions, is needed to address literacy deficits in real-time in the primary grades.

Research by Troyer (2019) indicates that teachers work to implement adaptations to curriculum and pacing of foundational literacy instruction to address student needs, and that such teachers need systematic support and monitoring to ensure that their instructional adaptations successfully impact student literacy achievement. Furthermore, a diversified menu of literacy curriculum materials and instructional strategies, rather than a one-size-fits all approach, is needed to meet the varying needs of students in today's primary classrooms (Troyer, 2019). By creating a classroom that recognizes each student's individual culture, background, and development with instructional decisions based on data and observations of student progress, teachers can foster a learning environment that is inclusive and motivating to students (Ankrum et al., 2020; Parsons et al., 2018; Stover et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2020).

Wagner et al. (2019) defined effective teacher agency as the capability to make adaptations and problem-solving decisions regarding curriculum, instruction and student need in the classroom. For teachers to use their agency, or voice, in advocating for adaptations to curriculum, teachers must feel supported by their administration and comfortable in their own pedagogy. As Null (2017) further explained, teachers are inherently driven to focus on individual student needs versus big picture academic factors like standards-based testing requirements, Null (2017) also advised that systems should be in place to support teachers in this regard. Teacher agency is considered a crucial piece of adaptive teaching in the classroom (Choppin et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2019), and Troyer (2019) recommended that curriculum materials be varied and flexible to support teachers in the act of adapting instruction. More importantly, it is vital that support from school and district administration is consistent and systematic so that teachers can sustain self-efficacy in their decision-making processes (Clark, 2020). Though combinations of training, coaching, and planning supports, teachers can improve the reading achievement of primary grade students (Cilliers et al., 2020; Piper et al., 2018). The stress of being evaluated and held accountable to school and district curriculum mandates, instructional pacing and standardized test scores can place competing priorities for teachers who are working to adapt daily literacy instruction for their students. Research by Hos and Kaplan-Wolff (2020) indicated that student-centered teachers tend to exhaust themselves in supplementing resources and interventions to the mandated literacy curriculum, and that teacher agency and professional judgement regarding instructional adaptations are restricted by mandated curriculums.

Literature suggested that students who received targeted foundational reading

skill interventions were able to increase their reading proficiency past the prereading

stage of reading, and that the identified critical time frame for closing foundational skill

gaps in phonics is optimally before first grade (Double et al., 2019; Ehri et al, 2001;

Gersten et al., 2020). Skill areas like word and passage fluency and reading

comprehension, along with phonological awareness, decoding, and encoding were

addressed through systematic and explicit instruction in order to create positive outcomes

for students (Troyer, 2019). Through an analysis of the national evaluation of Response

to Intervention (RTI), Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) questioned whether it is reasonable to

expect teachers to be able to provide interventions and quality instruction to lower

performing students and generate academic growth.

   The gap that existed in the recent literature was the lack of clarification on what

specific curriculum resources or intervention strategies are best suited to address

foundational reading skill deficiencies, and whether such adapted literacy instruction is

effective and successfully generates an increase in reading achievement and closes the

learning gaps of students (Ankrum et al., 2020; Double et al., 2019; Fuchs & Fuchs,

2017). Further, Drake and Remillard (2019) advocated for curriculum designers to

consider the importance of the relationship between the teacher, the student, and the

curriculum materials rather than just the intended student outcomes when prescribing

curriculum use. This study contributes to research in the field of literacy instruction and

curriculum adaptation and provides an in-depth analysis of the reasoning teachers employ

regarding adaptations to literacy curriculum implementation. This research also

contributes to the voice of teachers in the areas of curriculum adaptation and literacy, and

informs future decisions made to bridge the gap between existing prescribed literacy

curriculum and trends of student deficits in foundational reading skills in the primary

grades.

Research Questions and Findings

During the research study, seven teachers participated in a single semi-structured

interview session that was conducted individually at the participating schools. The

researcher utilized a generic qualitative research study design (Percy et al., 2015) to

address the following three research questions as the basis for the study:

1. How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction for students who

are deficient in foundational reading skills?

2. How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction and pacing of the

prescribed district grade level literacy curriculum?

3. How do teachers evaluate the student data outcomes for evidence of the

effectiveness of the adapted literacy instruction?

Research Question 1

The focus of the first research question was how and why teachers report adapting

literacy instruction for students who are deficient in foundational reading skills. During

the interviews, all seven participants affirmed that they utilized the school established

grade level intervention time that was blocked on the master schedule to address

foundational reading skill deficits. In addition, all seven teacher participants reported

embedding multiple opportunities for students to practice targeted skills during other

instructional times throughout the school day. According to P3, "there is never enough

time" for her students to practice. Teacher participants asserted that combinations of

targeted instruction in small groups along with multiple practice through structured

phonics games and centers are most effective in the primary grades (Austin et al., 2019; Gersten et al., 2020). Furthermore, participants reported bringing in various resources for students to use to increase their practice of reading skills. P3 reported that she uses her "progress monitoring data to evaluate if her students are making gains, and if not, she will opt to change intervention activities. Examples of the resources used by teachers to adapt instruction of foundational reading skills include whiteboards and letter tiles (P4 and P7), highlight trackers and leveled readers (P2 and P7), FCRR (P6), Raz Kids (P1), Words Their Way (P3) and Wilson Fundations (P5).

These seven primary grade teachers collectively agreed that it was vital to "tackle reading deficiencies" (P1) as soon as possible. Further, the seven primary teachers collectively recognized that letter sound manipulation is a significant foundational reading skill deficit in their students, and students need to learn this skill to mastery, as they need "letter sound practice before word practice" (P2) to read proficiently. Further, the skill of letter sound knowledge and consequently fluent reading has been linked directly to success on high stakes reading achievement assessments (Paige et al., 2019). P1 also posited that it was just as important to address the reading deficiencies of higher performing readers as some high readers "don't use decoding skills to read and are still sound spellers" and that it is difficult for teachers to "move a second grader reading at a third grade level to a fourth grade level." Both P2 and P3 noted that it is difficult to address each student's needs, and P3 reported feeling like she "struggles with this" during the school year. P4, P5, and P6 reported that when a certain percentage of students are not making progress, it is important for a teacher to stop and address the missing skills through targeted small group instruction. P5 stated that "it is not beneficial to teach a

reading skill that is on the pacing guide, when they can't do it… it is a waste of their time." Based on the interview responses, all seven participants reported that they repeatedly adjust the recommended or required pacing of literacy instruction in foundational reading skills each year, based on their student's needs and their PLC team recommendations.

One of the themes that emerged from the data analysis from research question 1 related to the importance of students being provided with multiple practice opportunities to work on foundational reading skill deficits during the school day. The theme that was identified was embed multiple intervention opportunities for repeated practice. According to all participants, it was crucial to implement targeted instruction and additional practice opportunities for their students during the school day. As explained by research results by Cilliers et al., (2020) and Wagner et al., (2019), increases in interventions and targeted small group instruction correlate to increases in reading skill achievement in the primary grades. Besides utilizing the predictable intervention time established by school administration, teachers also scheduled additional foundational reading skill practice opportunities throughout the school day by combining the practice times within other scheduled tasks. P2 reported that she is "constantly reinforcing and going to them or pulling them in a small group and that their independent work is really teacher-led independent work" so that she can give students feedback and continuously monitor student progress. By implementing additional intervention sessions, the teachers reported making continuous adaptations to instruction and literacy curriculum pacing on top of the established school intervention process. P4 described her decision-making process as first "considering where the student is and what they need" and then reported that "sometimes

we have to go backwards… find where they are at, so that we can catch them up to where they need to be." This viewpoint is also supported by Gelmez- Burakgazi (2020) as research demonstrated that teachers, as curriculum implementers, continuously strive to create a student-friendly learning environment that meets the diverse needs of their students. P5 advocated for students to continuously receive "targeted practice, repeated instruction and support, along with continual monitoring by the teacher" when working on foundational reading skill deficits.

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis from research question 1 related to the significance of addressing foundational reading skill deficits until students can demonstrate them independently without any scaffolded instruction or support from the teacher. The theme that was identified was to address all foundational reading skills until mastery. According to all seven participants, continued practice of reading skills such as phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics and spelling are important for students to practice until mastery, as lingering issues with these skills often result in poor fluency, spelling and written expression (Troyer, 2019). P5 emphatically stated that the most important consideration is the "reading foundation, really in my opinion, nothing else matters" and P6 explained that her students "might be reading well, and sounding out well, but it doesn't carry over into their spelling." While teachers are orchestrating a symphony of literacy instruction designed to support students in remediating skills while also working on grade level curriculum, the primary grade teachers stressed the importance of repeated practice, even if a student demonstrates improvement in their data. P7 reported that this is also the case for her higher performing readers in her classroom with the following description, "There are fluent readers. I think

their comprehension is, pretty good. Although there are some kids that even though they're good readers, they still can't tell you what they read about" and P6 concurred by stating that her students "might be reading well, and sounding out well, but it doesn't carry over into their spelling." The challenge of balancing below grade level intervention with the prescribed curriculum and expected pacing can make the act of ensuring students practice foundation reading skills until mastery challenging. Research indicated that while in the best interest of students, teaching from initial pre-teaching of literacy skills with explicit instruction, then gradually lessening in support and focus so that students can extend their learning to mastery requires multiple teacher decision-making processes (Smets & Struyven, 2018; Tomlinson, 2009). Hence, the primary grade teachers in this study described their problem-solving and decision-making processes as embedding additional opportunities for their students based on need. The importance of the decision to embed multiple activities that provide students with authentic learning experiences that move the students through scaffolded instruction to opportunities for independent practice not only widens access to literacy for diverse learners, it propels students toward mastery of their foundational reading skills (Maniates, 2017).

Overall findings from the first research question indicate that primary grade teachers approach their lesson planning, curriculum, and instructional strategies with a student- centered perspective, as they are committed to remediating missing foundational reading skills with a true sense of urgency and professional dedication. The primary grade teachers unanimously reported adapting literacy instruction by resource, skill, and pace, must accommodate the presenting needs of their students from year to year. Finally, the seven teachers created additional learning opportunities and practice by also adapting

their daily schedules to accommodate multiple small groups and center activities beyond the already established intervention block.

Research Question 2

The focus of the second research question was how and why teachers report adapting literacy instruction and curriculum pacing for students who are deficient in foundational reading skills. During the interviews, all seven participants affirmed that the Professional Learning Community (PLC) process, as well as their grade level teacher teams support their efforts in decision-making about when and how to adapt instruction and pacing of grade level curriculum during the school year. Research by Nevenglosky et al. (2019) also indicated that teachers who need to engage in curriculum-based problem solving concerning the academic needs of their students, often seek peer collaboration along with established resources to support their efforts. In addition, all seven participants reported not only adapting the pacing of literacy curriculum based on PLC team decisions, but also adjusting the newly changed pacing sequence a second time to meet the individual needs of students within their own classrooms. P2 reported that the "PLC team looks at the district pacing guide for reading, and then plans together as a team, but the expectation is for you to do what your kids need." P5 added that the "district pacing guide is always too fast, especially for students who have severe gaps in foundational reading skills." Finally, P6 clarified that when making adaptations to the literacy curriculum and pacing, the PLC teams "don't change the content of instruction, just the timing of it" and that the adjustments are necessary because in her opinion "it just needs to be slower."

All seven primary grade teachers consistently advocated for the adaptations to

literacy curriculum and pacing during the interviews. P7 stated that "if they didn't really get a skill and the district curriculum pacing was only a couple of days, then it wasn't long enough, so I will change it." P6 further agreed that if a percentage of students were not doing well, she would "put on the brakes…. review the skill again… and bring in different resources." P1 reiterated that it "makes no sense to spiral through the standards if the students don't get it" and that the adaptation and "cushion of time" based on a student's need is worth the effort. As P5 stated, "if students don't have that base of foundational reading, then they will never get the next skill, or read." By committing to enacting adapted instruction in their classroom, teachers provide equitable access to the literacy curriculum while supporting a student's culture, background, cognitive development, and motivation to learn (Ankrum et al., 2020; Parsons et al., 2018; Stover et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2020).

One of the themes that emerged from the data analysis from research question 2 related to the role the PLC process plays in supporting teachers in balancing literacy curriculum and pacing throughout the school year. The theme that was identified was the PLC process supports teachers in balancing curriculum pacing with student need. According to all seven participants, routine grade level PLC collaboration and problem-solving processes are consistently vital to all teacher decision making processes involving curriculum and instructional pacing during the school year. P3 expressed that she "knows that she will have to adapt for her student's literacy needs," and that she also knows she is "gonna have to add time in for interventions" for her students every year. P4 further noted that the PLC process also provides a layer of support in the form of other staff members who help out during the intervention blocks. P4 stated that "her team PLC also

has people who serve as resources, like the Instructional Literacy Coach" who advises the teachers in adapting literacy instruction and provides intervention resources to the team. Teacher management of on-going adaptations to literacy instruction is successfully impacted by the administrative support and a support system with peer teachers (Kelly et al., 2019).

However, there are consequences that can arise from the adapted instruction and pacing. Given that each teacher on a grade level team will have a classroom of students with a wide variety of literacy needs, the PLC team problem solving and pacing decisions may not apply to every student, leaving teachers alone to solve problems again regarding the instructional adaptations and pacing for their specific students. P3 reported that she feels like "it is all on my shoulders, like I have to figure it out… it's hard." P4 also reported feeling like progressing at the mandated district pacing of literacy instruction is "too fast… ant that is very frustrating for students and for us teachers." P1 said that at the moment of making such decisions for student foundational skill deficits, "It is a balance of what they do and don't need." A recent study by Clark (2020) recommended that teacher educational programs, as well as teacher in-service programs strive to implement processes and professional development that support and mentor teachers as they work with the changing demographics in today's classrooms so that they are prepared to meet the literacy needs of diverse students.

In order to creatively address student needs, many of the teachers reported responding in various ways, such as mixed ability groupings of students with games and center activities (P1, P2), structure the classroom so that students are immersed in a language rich environment that has embedded supports as the integrated practice

opportunities benefit all readers, no matter the difference in reading levels (P2, P5),
integrated interventions during scheduled writing time (P5), mini-tasks for skill practice
and changing student groupings often so that students can practice foundational reading
skills at different levels (P7). While the above solutions creatively address the
foundational reading skill deficits of students, the instructional time that is used to
implement them can result in students missing writing and spelling practice time. P7
reported that while she addresses deficits systematically every year, she is "forever
behind in writing" and P6 stated that "sometimes you say, oh my gosh, I'm so behind,
and then you cram some last-minute skills in."

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis from research question 2
related to the teacher judgement and observations of students that teachers use to adapt
literacy instruction and curriculum. The theme that was identified was teacher judgement
and observations of student performance guide adaptations to literacy instruction. P4
explained how she uses classroom observations to inform her instruction and small
groups in the classroom. "But really your observations, when you give like dictation
quizzes, that's the best opportunity to see where they're at in reading" and P2 additionally
described a "spur of the moment" activity where she asked the students to read and work
together to come up with reasons from the book and then summarize what they read.
While this is a spur of the moment activity, P2 will use it as observation of "true evidence
of learning" because observations in the moment are just as important as summative or
diagnostic data. Both P6 and P7 expressed the importance of teacher observation and
teacher gut in addressing foundational reading deficits. P6 stated that "It's kind of like
teacher gut" and it can also be "a little assessment just to pull them one on one. Check the

sounds, check the decoding, check those digraphs and blends, etc. and just kind of go from there." Finally, P7 captured her personal process:

> So, it's hard but you have to, that moment of teacher judgment, right? I think if you don't have that then how do you know what you tried is working? I think you cannot underestimate watching your kids and monitoring and the data collection. And then what do you know, what do you see in your kids? You have to do that constantly. Yeah, especially the little ones. (P7)

Overall findings from the second research question indicated that primary grade teachers intermix the PLC process and grade level team problem solving, along with teacher judgement and student observations to initiate literacy adaptations and adjusted pacing throughout the school year. Teacher judgement and observations of students were considered significant factors in adapting literacy instruction and pacing by five out of the seven teacher participants. In a study by Cloonan et al. (2019), action research problem-solving, much like the PLC process for grade level teams, was found to increase teacher agency, as well as linking teacher team collaboration, creativity, and instructional best practices to generate positive literacy outcomes in primary schools. Moreover, teachers unanimously expressed their viewpoint that it is vital for primary grade students to have a strong underpinning in foundational reading skills, and that they felt a deep sense of responsibility in addressing student deficiencies despite having to perform extra work adjusting prescribed curriculum and not following established district pacing guidelines.

Research Question 3

The focus of the third research question was how primary grade teachers used

data outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of their adapted literacy instruction. During the interviews, all seven participants cited using combinations of data as evidence of student progress when remediating their foundational reading skill deficits. During the interviews, the participants reported using similar combinations of curriculum, school, and district data sources as part of their efforts to increase foundational reading skill proficiency in their students. Troyer (2019) maintained that it is important to consider that curriculum will not solely meet the individualized literacy learning needs of all students and, in knowing this, curriculum designers should build their curriculum resources with adaptations in place so that it can remain relevant to students and teachers in today's classrooms. Among the common data sources used were Wilson Fundations grade level assessments, Fountas and Pinnell running records, and i-Ready Reading Diagnostic data, which is gathered three times a year per the school district testing calendar. P4 stated that she uses "a lot of different sources" and P3 further agreed that "the biggest one is i-Ready and Fountas and Pinnell, and then grade level curriculum assessments," and then she clarified the value of grade level curriculum assessment data be stating, "that she looks for evidence of mastery and application of the foundational reading skills in the grade level reading content, "so then I was noticing that there was carryover. So, then they were applying what they had learned." P2 concurred with the statement that, "So, I would say our Fountas and Pinnell running records, I would say was reliable and then it's also just writing samples to see if they are applying?" (P2).

Primary grade teachers also ascertained various secondary evidence of adapted literacy instruction effectiveness and skill mastery. P1 reported that vocabulary "has also been a struggle" for her students because they "get stuck, and it slows them down" and

that she also uses observational data to monitor conservational performance of student language as evidence of the effectiveness of her targeted vocabulary interventions. P4 suggested that she uses fluency scores to monitor her phonics and phonemic awareness intervention effectiveness by noting if her students' "fluency scores have increased and their asking and answering reading comprehension skills have improved." P6 furthered that evidence of her effective foundational reading skill instruction by looking at her student's writing pieces and monitoring the "encoding, spelling and vocabulary," and stated that, "so they might be reading well and sounding out well, but it doesn't carry over to their spelling."

One of the themes that emerged from the data analysis from research question 3 related to the ways ongoing teacher observations and student monitoring can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of adapted literacy instruction. Despite mandated district assessments and required school assessment data for PLC sessions, all primary grade teacher participants maintained that teacher observations and on-going student monitoring are valuable in measuring the effectiveness of adapted literacy instruction. P1 recommended that "the whole thing is going with your gut. If a lesson isn't working and if your kids are not getting it, don't be afraid to slow down and teach and reteach and reteach." Rather than waiting for summative assessment data, teacher observations of students during the moment of learning are pivotal in teacher decision-making instructional changes to literacy task instruction. P4 concurred with the following statement, "I use a lot of assessment to kind of drive that… but really your observations when you give like dictation quizzes that's also the best opportunity to see where they are at in their reading" (P4). Vaughn (2019) described this process as a metacognitive

approach to adaptive teaching, where the teacher is making frequent and thoughtful instructional decisions so that they can take action to support the literacy learning of their students.

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis from research question 3 related to the ways teachers gather evidence of effective adapted literacy instruction specifically through small group instruction opportunities throughout the school day. Based on longitudinal research data, intervention approaches in literacy education along with intentional monitoring are consistently needed to ensure the attainment of foundational reading skills in primary aged students (Paige et al., 2019). During the interviews, all seven participants reported the importance of small group instruction and how they engage in data tracking during the school day, P2 uses multiple opportunities to give practice and will "try to embed the strategies throughout and so they're getting like multiple opportunities with those strategies. On top of that, I try to meet and do centers. One of the centers is typically me." Furthermore, both P4 and P5 reported that they purposely schedule multiple small groups for targeted practice of foundational reading skills and that in turn "increases the amount of time that I spend with that student whether that be through small groups" to remediate (P4). Additionally, P5 stated that "If we are hitting skills two to three times a day, they're kind of aligned together" to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of the foundational reading skills for the teacher. Finally, P7 emphatically stated that teachers cannot "underestimate the value of watching your kids, monitoring, and data collecting" throughout the school day. Rather than relying solely on the periodic summative and diagnostic data pieces, all seven participants cited that teacher observation of their student's mastery of foundational

reading skills as a primary means of evaluating the effectiveness of their adapted literacy instruction.

Overall findings from the third research question indicated that primary grade teachers primarily utilize teacher observation and frequent student monitoring during small group instruction and repeated practice opportunities to gather data for evidence of their effective adapted instruction in foundational reading skills. While each of the seven teachers cited specific combinations of formal data collection, such as Wilson Fundations grade level assessments, Fountas and Pinnell running records, and i-Ready Reading Diagnostic data, the participants recommended that teachers focus on daily monitoring of their student's daily performances in reading to gather evidence of true skills mastery. As P6 cautioned, "…they might be reading well and sounding out well… but it doesn't carry over to their spelling" and as P7 concurred that daily monitoring is vital, "Yeah, you have to do that constantly… especially the little ones."

Limitations

The limitations present in this study include aspects that can be addressed through future research efforts. The purpose of this study was to provide a more robust understanding of the process of how and why teachers adapt literacy curriculum, instruction and pacing in first through third grades and how the instructional adaptations are evaluated for effectiveness in the classroom. The intended sample size, and the resulting data were limited by a set of factors. First, the limited number of teacher participants composed a small sample size, not representative of the full scope of experiences for all primary grade teachers working to remediate the foundational reading skills in their students. The research sample included a total of seven participants from

two neighboring schools, and included three first grade teachers, three second grade teachers, and one third grade teacher. The results of this study may not generalize to all primary grade teachers in these grade levels. The experiences and thought processes of the study participants during literacy curriculum adaptations may not represent experiences of teachers at other elementary schools with varying demographic attributes. Also, an in-depth snapshot within a short period of time within a single school year was captured from a purposeful sample of primary teachers from two schools that represented a limited geographical area in the southeastern United States, so the findings also may not be representative of the views of teachers in a wider geographic area. Additionally, the demographics of both the teacher participants and the school environments represent an affluent area, and the funding, resources, and curriculum available both school populations may not reflect a more traditional school campus nationally or internationally.

Finally, this research study was implemented by a novice qualitative researcher who hand coded the research data for analysis. If the researcher had used qualitative analysis software to investigate data from the participant interviews, additional comparisons of the data could have occurred. In addition to this, different perceptions and data interpretations may have resulted in different theme outcomes if additional researchers had participated in this research study.

Conclusion

The focus of this dissertation was to conduct a generic qualitative research study to learn about the firsthand experiences of primary grade teachers as they adapt prescribed literacy curriculum to address foundational reading skill deficits of their

students. Moreover, the focus was to investigate why primary teachers choose the adaptations they use, and whether their chosen adaptations ultimately address the foundational reading skill gaps in their students. Seven interviews were conducted at two neighboring schools, and included teachers from first, second, and third grades.

The results of this study aligned with existing literature previously detailed in Chapter 2. The interview responses of the participants captured the level of commitment and pedagogy teachers have for their struggling students and provided aligned responses that comprehensively answered the three research questions so that patterns and themes could be identified and analyzed to demonstrate a convergent or divergent relationship with the existing current literature. The participant's interview responses also highlighted the problem solving and decision making of primary grade teachers as they navigate adaptations to reading instruction which are necessary to remove barriers to learning for diverse students, especially those performing well below grade level (Maniates, 2017; Null, 2017). As evidenced by the previously discussed analysis of findings in Chapter 4, there was evident consensus among the seven research participants regarding identified patterns and themes for each of the three research questions.

Interview participants unanimously reported that they have routinely adjusted the recommended or required pacing of literacy instruction in foundational reading skills in their classrooms and cited that within the "required and documented" block schedules for each curriculum area during the school day, the teachers consistently make pacing and activity adjustments to accommodate student foundational reading skill needs. Participants also unanimously reported that the district pacing guide for literacy instruction is adjusted at the grade level team level and then adjusted again a second time

for each of the individual teachers across grade levels, in order to accommodate the student foundational reading skill needs and address the diverse learners in their classrooms (Vaughn, 2019). Grade Level PLC collaboration and problem-solving processes were consistently viewed as vital to all teacher participants, as they support the primary teachers' efforts in decision making processes involving curriculum and instructional pacing and help teachers build agency and voice in curriculum implementation (Kelly et al., 2019; Nevenglosky et al., 2019). Furthermore, the findings corroborated the findings of Ankrum et al. (2020) and the need for frequent differentiated instruction in foundational reading skills for diverse primary grade students. Despite challenges of conforming to a one-size expectation for students by strictly following the scope and sequence of mandated prescribed literacy curriculum (Vaughn, 2019), the teacher participants described specific ways that they implemented multiple instances of targeted interventions and indicated that they primarily utilize teacher observation and frequent student monitoring during small group instruction along with repeated practice opportunities to gather data for evidence of their effective adapted instruction in foundational reading skills.

This generic qualitative research study is theoretically grounded in Piaget's cognitive learning theory, which defines learning as a process where mental structures are built and continuously rebuilt as new knowledge is gained and engaged during active learning experiences designed to include the processing and storing of information through mental activities (Clark, 2018). The analysis of the study data supports the theory that primary grade students will often present with different cognitive development levels from their peers and that educators must meet the challenge of cultivating an instructional

pedagogy that can allow for cognitive developmental differences in the classroom, along with rigorous and active learning experiences that will deepen knowledge as each student progresses through individually different cognitive stages (Clark, 2018; Keane & Griffin, 2018; Piaget, 1970). Additionally, the study data and resulting themes evidenced a substantial concern by the teacher participants regarding meeting of the individual developmental reading needs of their students. Due to competing scheduling and tasks, and the need for repeated practice opportunities until mastery teachers purposely embedded and integrated foundational reading skill practice throughout the school day in different ways: whole group with modeling, small groups that are leveled, mixed level groupings that allow for practice of multiple skills and center-based activities that extend learning until independence and mastery. Based on this research, a primary grade teacher could be viewed as a "conductor of the symphony of learning" among these different instructional tasks throughout the school day, with the most optimal evidence of learning coming from teacher monitoring and student observation in the moment of relevance during the embedded foundational reading skill tasks throughout the school day.

The results challenge existing theories in supporting efforts to remediate evident foundational reading skill deficits in the primary grades through prescribed curriculum, required pacing and a one size fits all approach to literacy instruction (Troyer, 2019; Vaughn & Parsons, 2013). The practical implications of the study results are new insight into the relationship between teacher collaboration during PLC sessions, adapted literacy instruction, and adapted curriculum pacing based on teacher judgement and observations of student performance during embedded and differentiated literacy tasks throughout the school day. These results should be taken into account when considering how to support

teachers in managing lesson planning and instructional strategies to support primary grade students in foundational reading skills.

Overall, the data contribute a clearer understanding of a teacher's voice in literacy curriculum adaptation for students performing not at grade level and is valuable as it represents the human connection in the classroom as well as a student-stakeholder perspective of classroom instruction and learning based on the existing prescribed literacy curriculum in schools today. If we could adjust the lens of perspective towards a tighter focus on the humanistic side of teaching, which is ultimately a symphonic conversational moment between a student and a teacher, functional moments of literacy learning could take place barrier-free. It would be more important and more impactful to support teachers in navigating the rigidity of prescribed curriculum and pacing so that they can be creative artists as they implement the grey areas of adapted literacy instruction and curriculum pacing in the purest interests of students, our most important educational stakeholders. The knowledge gained by this research study benefits teachers who are acting as exemplary agents of change in literacy instruction (Kelly et al., 2019), and provides a platform for teacher agency in the reflective processes and decision-making actions used to address foundational reading skill deficits in primary classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given the sample size of this study, it would be beneficial to use a larger and more diverse sample size in future research, as it may yield more generalizable results. Also, a limited number of third grade teachers participated in this study. It may be beneficial to replicate this study with only third grade teachers and with a tighter focus on the students' decoding, encoding, and writing skills as a measure of what mastery of

foundational reading skills can look like in third grade. Many curricula make a "switch" from second to third grade, with less focus on scaffolded phonics instruction, but if students have not achieved true mastery of their foundational reading skills by the end of second grade and are not applying their decoding and encoding skills in spelling and in writing, they will need intervention, and teachers will need foundational reading curriculum resources to ensure student mastery and fluency. One possible recommendation is to research the benefits of spiral phonics instruction combined with direct writing instruction in third grade as part of newly added curriculum pacing. Finally, this study could be replicated targeting and further exploring the data outcomes specific to research question 3 to better quantify what measures of data and proficiency teachers consider as consistent evidence of their effective foundational reading skill instruction.

Further research is needed to establish possible solutions for deliberate pacing for spelling/encoding practices and modeled spelling instruction with specific writing instructional time included after daily phonics lessons in primary grade classrooms. Scaffolded practice time in the literacy blocks for specific areas like vocabulary, writing instruction, and spelling were recurring topics in the study data, especially in the sense that they are evidence of mastery of the foundational reading deficit areas. An additional area for future research is the investigation of whether a district provided adjusted pacing calendar for different foundational reading skill areas that provides teachers with a decision tree flowchart so that they can make pacing adjustments to the original district pacing guide, without sacrificing writing time, as was pointed out by many of the study participants would be useful. If districts were able to add an outline of reteach time to their existing curriculum pacing guides for foundational reading skills in grades 1, 2, and

3, then teachers could possibly spend less time in PLC sessions adjusting curriculum pacing, instruction and assessments, and more time supporting each other in instructional strategies. Given the findings of this study, it may be useful to explore why districts create a pacing guide if the unwritten understanding is that it will be adjusted, and then possibly adjusted again per each teacher and class in the district. The purpose of the pacing guide is to move students through skills to meet grade level expectations, however, based on study findings it could be creating lack of mastery of foundational reading skills due to lack of overall fidelity of implementation of literacy curriculum over time. These future research recommendations may be helpful to school-based administrators and grade level PLC teams of primary teachers as a sense of urgency is needed about the intersection of students, teachers, and mandated curriculum and how it has the potential to leave students with ineffective learning experiences and resulting achievement gaps in literacy.

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Appendix

Teacher Interview Protocol

Teacher Interview Protocol

Date/Time:
Interviewee:

Pre-Interview Script
        "Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am investigating why teachers report adapting literacy instruction to support primary grade students who are deficient in reading skills compared to grade level peers. The purpose of this interview is to learn your views and experiences about adjusting instruction and pacing in literacy instruction, and about how much you think adaptations may have helped young readers. Your participation will consist of one formal in-person interview that will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes to complete. The interview will be recorded, as explained previously. The transcript of the recorded interview will be available for you to review for accuracy. You will be able to make any adjustments you like to your responses. Before we begin, do you have any questions?"

Demographic Information
1. Why did you elect to teach young children?
2. What is your formal education (degree)?
3. How long have you been teaching English Language Arts?
4. Gender _____ Male _____ Female _____ Not disclosed
5. Age: _____ 20s _____30s _____ 40s _____50s _____ 60s _____ 70s _____
    _____ Not disclosed

Research Question 1: How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction for students who are deficient in foundational reading skills? *(**Keep each research question in mind, but do not read them to the participants**)*

Read: "The following questions are about why and how you adapt literacy instruction if students struggle with or are deficient with foundational reading skills."

1. In your personal experience, what foundational reading skills are consistently deficient in your students?
2. What foundational reading skills are most often mastered by your students?
3. How do you adapt reading instruction to support your students' deficiencies in foundational skills?
4. How do you translate curriculum adaptations into lesson plan actions?
5. How do you ensure you are meeting each student's individual literacy needs?
6. Describe some recent curriculum adaptations that were successful (please be specific)?
7. Describe some recent curriculum adaptations that were not successful (please be specific)?

Research Question 2: How and why do teachers report adapting literacy instruction and pacing of the prescribed district grade level literacy curriculum? *(**Keep the research question in mind, but do not read to the participants**)*

Read: "The next questions are about how and why you adapt literacy instruction and curriculum pacing if you do."

1. Have you ever had to or wanted to adapt your literacy instruction or curriculum pacing?
2. Please describe a time when you needed to adapt the pacing of the literacy curriculum to support your student's academic needs?
3. How do you adjust the pacing of literacy instruction based on student needs?
4. How do you ensure that you are teaching the intended content with fidelity despite pacing adjustments?
5. Describe an example of when pacing adjustments were successful with your students? How do you know?
6. Describe an example of when pacing adjustments were unsuccessful? How do you know?
7. What existing supports or resources at your school assist with your decisions to adapt instruction or pacing?

Research Question 3: How do teachers evaluate the student data outcomes for evidence of the effectiveness of the adapted literacy instruction? ***(Keep the research question in mind, but do not read them to the participants)***

Read: "The final questions are about how you determine if your adaptations helped students succeed in literacy."

1. What data do you use to measure foundational reading and overall literacy skills?
2. Based on data, what foundational reading skills were improved because of your adaptations? Please give specific examples.
3. Based on data, what foundational reading skills were not improved because of your adaptations? Please give specific examples.
4. Based on data, what general literacy skills were improved because of your adaptations? Please give specific examples.
5. Based on data, what general literacy skills were not improved because of your adaptations? Please give specific examples.
6. Before we conclude this interview, are there other insights or experiences adapting literacy instruction and curriculum adaptations you would like to share?

Post-Interview Script

"Thank you for your participation and for providing me with an opportunity to learn from your experiences in teaching primary students to read. As discussed previously during the consent process, I will contact you by email to review the interview transcript. You will be able to verify that your answers are accurate. You may amend your responses if you like. Thank you again for your time!"

Verify each participant's contact information (phone and email) before concluding.