

The Influence of Teacher Perceptions on Reading Instruction

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Sherri Loyd Moorman

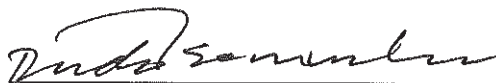
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MA, Georgia College and State University, 1998
BS, Georgia College, 1992

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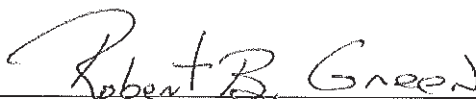
This dissertation, "The Influence of Teacher Perceptions on Reading Instruction," by Sherri Moorman, is approved by:

**Dissertation
Committee
Chair**



Rudo Tsemunhu, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Curriculum, Leadership, and
Technology

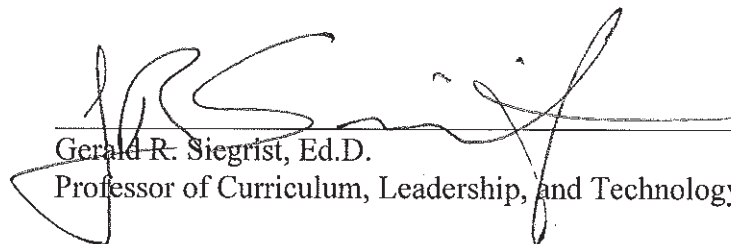
**Committee
Members**



Robert B. Green, Ph.D.
Professor of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology

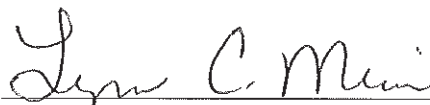


James L. Pate, Ph.D.
Professor of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology



Gerald R. Siegrist, Ed.D.
Professor of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology

**Interim Dean of the
College of Education**



Lynn C. Minor, Ed.D.
Professor of Early Childhood and Special Education

**Interim Dean of the
Graduate School**



James T. LaPlant, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science

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ABSTRACT

Reading and reading instruction are highly researched and debated topics. Reading is the foundational skill for future learning. Educational attainment of citizenry is generally a strong determinate of a nation's well-being. International business decisions regarding developing industry are frequently dependent upon the ability of the possible employees to nurture, support, and grow business. Reading proficiency is one of the two major components of literacy rates. Understanding reading instructional methods and improving literacy rates deserve serious consideration when planning for economic prosperity of future generations.

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of teachers' perceptions on reading instruction. One goal of the research was to determine teacher perceptions of reading instruction and how these perceptions influence professional performance. A natural extension of this research would be to evaluate how these perceptions influence student learning.

The research study utilized a basic interpretive qualitative research design using descriptive narratives. The research was conducted over a 12-month period and focused on individual teacher perceptions. Qualitative inquiry was the appropriate research technique to give a voice to reading teachers.

The participant sample was purposeful. The initial survey of elementary teachers was emailed to 219 teachers currently employed by a middle Georgia school system. Four elementary teachers were interviewed from initial survey respondents who volunteered to participate in focused conversations on the subject of reading instruction.

Collected data included teachers' perceptions of reading instruction. Survey responses provided both demographic information and open-ended remarks pertaining to reading instruction. Interview participants provided more explanatory data to expand on survey responses. Interview data were recorded and transcribed.

This qualitative study provided the descriptive data needed to promote a deeper understanding of the influence of elementary 6-12 teachers' perceptions on reading instructional methods. Results revealed five themes: reading instructional characteristics, home-school disconnect, background knowledge, professional collaboration, and institutional factors.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Educators see evidence of reading deficiencies and problems associated with deficiencies very clearly via interactions with students and data gathered from formative and summative assessments (Azano, Missett, Callahan, Oh, Brunner, Foster, & Moon, 2011; Auel, 1988; McCardle & Chhabra, 2004). Considerable research has revealed no clear solution for correcting reading deficiencies (Morris & Slavin, 2007). Research results have exposed numerous attempts to address reading issues (Chall, 1983; McCardle & Chhabra, 2004; Morrison, Wilcox, Billen, Carr & Wilcox, et al., 2011). Researchers have utilized qualitative methods (Cankar, Deutsch, & Sentocnik, 2012; Auel, 1988; Nelson, McMahan, & Torres, 2012; Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000; Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, Wisenbaker, & Strauss, & Morris, 2007) and quantitative methods (Flowers, Meyer, Lovato, Wood, & Felton, 2001; Reis, McCoach, Little, Muller, & Franck, 2011). Only two mixed methodology studies were found that evaluated the phenomena of reading deficiencies (Menon & Hiebert, 2005; Wilfong, 2008).

The importance of reading as a fundamental skill is supported by the vast number of research studies on the topic (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004; Morris & Slavin, 2007). Teachers and parents spend many hours working with children to build this foundation (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004; Morris & Slavin, 2007). Nations, states, and local school systems spend millions of dollars on instructional reading programs to aid students in

their pursuit of reading skills (Morris & Slavin, 2000; Wagner, 2010; Flesch, 1987; McCardle and Chhabra, 2004; and Morrison et al., 2011) have suggested ways to improve students' reading skills; however, "Johnny, still can't read." just as Flesch stated in this book.

Wagner (2010) found reading ability strongly impacts not only individual success, but also the general well-being of entire countries and societies. Wagner concluded literacy rates are a prime indicator of economic development. In fact, he found economic progress often occurs in tandem with rising literacy rates. Wagner claims literate populations are a more employable workforce.

Popular and scholarly media outlets alike maintain American students are not reading at proficient levels (Morris & Slavin, 2000). "A Nation at Risk," published in 1983, reported these deficiencies had caused the United States to fall behind both intellectually and economically (Cavanagh, 2004). Other theorists have found little correlation between years of schooling, literacy rates, and economic development (Blaug, 1985).

Patrick (2004) concluded the way students perceive a teacher's disposition towards them directly impacts student-teacher interactions either positively or negatively. Patrick noted teachers feel a strong connection between their own confidence in content knowledge and their ability to foster academic success of their students. Teachers who hold high expectations for students, and deem enrichment program strategies appropriate, contribute adherence, and quality of delivery" (Azano et al., 2011).

Statement of the Problem

The number of elementary children with reading deficiencies is unacceptable (Azano et al, 2011) (Auel, 1988) Research results show many different factors, such as teacher influence, contribute to improved reading skills among elementary school children (Azano et al, 2011) (Patrick, 2004) However, there is limited literature on the reading teacher's perceptions of their reading instruction (Morrison et al, 2011)

There has never been a grand age of reading in American society (Morris & Slavin, 2007) The research of (Auel, 1988) and Christ and Wang (2010) determined gaps in reading ability continue to widen along ascending grade levels, becoming increasingly apparent by grade four (Samuels, 2007) (Morris and Slavin, 2007) determined rather than a decline in reading ability, performance levels were stagnant Statistics from the National Association for Educational Progress (NAEP) showed no significant gains in reading attainment levels since 2005 for students in the 9th year old age category (NAEP, 2011) Given the findings of Morris and Slavin (2007), Samuels (2007), and NAEP (2011), direct questions must be asked (1) Has the United States reached an educational plateau in reading attainment? (2) If so, why have we reached this plateau? (3) Can we be satisfied with the current status quo? and, (4) Does the current educational climate of common core education standards negate the adage one size does not fit all (Menon & Hiebert, 2005) (Morris & Slavin, 2007) (Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2007) To develop a more thorough understanding of the influence of teacher perceptions on reading instruction, a qualitative study exploring teacher perceptions on reading instruction was conducted

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of teachers' perceptions on reading instruction. Patton succinctly states, "...the common aim is to use qualitative methods to describe and explain phenomena as accurately and completely as possible so that their descriptions and explanations correspond as closely as possible to the way the world is and actually operates" (2002, p. 54). The importance, as Patton points out, is -multiple realities [are] constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (2002, p. 9). Therefore, qualitative methodology echoes Patton's philosophy; understanding another's perspective requires viewing the situation through their eyes.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What are elementary teachers' perceptions of successful reading instruction?

RQ 2: How do elementary teachers' perceive their methods of reading instruction affect elementary students learning experiences?

RQ 3: How does a teacher's perception of reading instruction influence the number of elementary students with reading deficiencies?

RQ 4: Do elementary teacher demographics (gender, age, race, years of practice, and level of educational degree) influence teacher perceptions and student performance?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides current literature on the influence of teachers' perceptions on reading instruction. The results have the potential to inform the practice of reading instruction. The results are informative to any population, whether rural or urban. This study provides critical understanding of connections between *teaching to read* and *learning to read*. Study findings could make significant contributions to numerous areas of educational society: researchers (both in field and others), teachers, developers of teacher preparation programs, policy makers, textbook companies, designers of professional development, parents, and, most importantly, students learning to read. Findings from this study are extremely relevant to beginning readers. Reading is a foundational skill and the need to understand the *how* and *why* of reading is critical in improving reading instruction (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004a; Morris & Slavin, 2007). NEA plateau in reading attainment should not be acceptable (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004).⁷

Theory and Debate

The debate over the best methods of instructing students to read is long standing (Chall, 1987). The debate can be traced back to seminal theories on how children learn offered by Piaget, Skinner, Vygotsky, and more recently Weiner (Hawkes, 1992). The recent push for the restructuring of education and a new system of accountability for students and teachers has again brought the 'how and why' of instruction to the forefront of education policy. Ely (1991) points out the awareness of the need to reform education, limited progress toward improving the overall state of education has occurred. He concluded classroom instruction today looks much like it did years ago.

In a study examining teacher and student perceptions regarding learning of language, Schulz (2017) found inconsistencies between the two, possibly inhibiting knowledge acquisition. Jerome Bruner (1987), a linguistic theorist, carefully reviewed the work of other theorists who had contributed to the study of language and language acquisition. He expanded on the contributions of several prominent authors and their theories. Earlier theorist, such as Michotte, discovered the connection of instilling curiosity with reading instruction and Jakobson who expanded Michotte's thought process to include choosing and conjoining original language creating acts, as the "vertical and horizontal axes [sic] of language" (Bruner, 1987, p. 227). By studying the work of earlier theorists, Bruner determined readers become proficient and determine meaning attribution through interpretation according to their beginning knowledge base. Readers use their base knowledge and build upon or construct knowledge from their basal understanding (Bruner, 1987).

The lack of improvement in the current state of education makes one wonder if the theories and studies of Piaget (1987), Skinner (1987), and other theorists were truly understood. Piaget's (1987) theories of cognitive development focused on the various stages of learning. He contended children develop qualitatively over time. A child at age nine does not simply understand more than a child at two, or simply possess more knowledge, but children go through stages of development as they mature. The way they think and learn about the world fundamentally changes. He argued with the educational practice of delivering lessons verbally in a teacher centered classroom, contending lessons need to be student centered to allow for construction of knowledge.

Skinner (1957) was at odds with instructional methodologies, challenging traditional classroom practices arguing they lead to artificial learning unrelated to real world experiences. Vygotsky (1978) believed children learn through a process of socialization and interaction. Student-Teacher interaction is a viable instructional element which should be measured. Vygotsky, (1978) Weiner (1957) favored small group instruction with a collaborating focus to encourage a more positive learning environment without competition. Historically, instructional theorists have discouraged excessive noise in the classroom. Hawkes, (1992) The prevailing thought is a quiet, focused room is the best environment. Fox & Riconscente, (2008)

Vygotsky (1978) considered the aspect of human interaction on instruction whereas, Piaget (1987), Skinner (1957) and Weiner (1957) focused more on instructional delivery. Studies conducted by Hawkes (1992), Piaget (1987), Skinner (1957), Vygotsky (1978), and Weiner (1957) reveal ongoing concerns regarding instructional practices. The current focus of educational accountability and the State of Georgia's newly implemented process for evaluating teachers and school leaders bring these components of prior research to the forefront of current educational debates. (GADOE, 2017)

Conceptual Framework Model

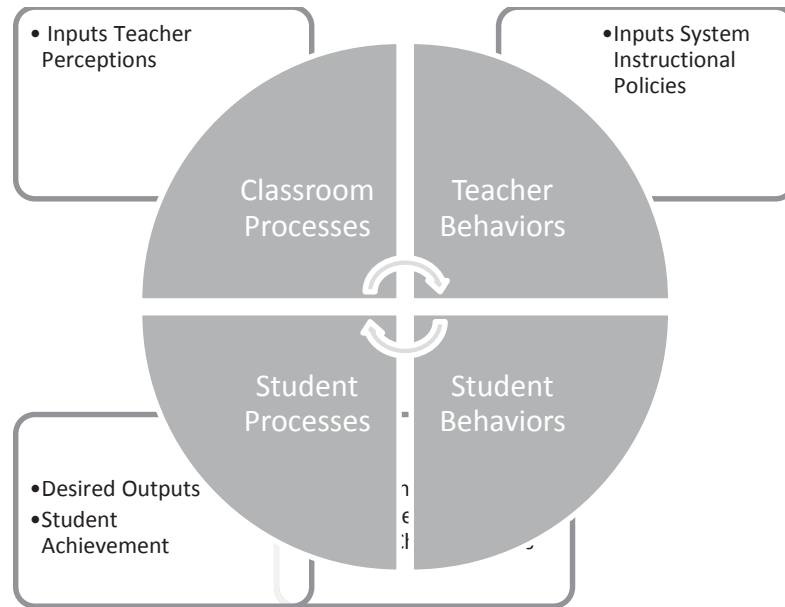


Figure 1 Teaching and Learning Cycle

Teaching and learning takes place in a circular motion. The conceptual model depicts the many interactive processes that take place in the learning cycle. Teachers bring certain characteristics and styles to the classroom. These characteristics affect their classroom processes. Governmental agencies and local boards of education implement rules and policies affecting the classroom environment. The added influences also affect teacher behaviors. Students come to the classroom with previous learning and behaviors. These behaviors affect learning interactions and relationships in the classroom. The student behaviors and interactions become the student processes in the classroom. Huitt, 2007. The desired output would be student achievement; however, progress is not always the outcome. Where is the breakdown? Why do some students progress while others lag behind their peers? Are teacher perceptions an influencing component in this cycle?

Research Design

This qualitative study explored elementary K-5 teacher perceptions of reading instruction. The study was conducted over a period of 12 months. The study employed a basic interpretive qualitative approach using descriptive narratives. The participant sample was purposeful. Two hundred nineteen teachers employed at four elementary schools in a rural middle Georgia school system were surveyed. Four teachers were interviewed. Surveys and interviews were used to collect data.

Setting

This study was conducted in a rural middle Georgia school system comprising ten schools: three elementary schools, one primary school, two middle schools, two high schools, a college and career academy, and one alternative school. The system currently employs 219 elementary K-5 teachers at four schools. The northwestern portion of the county contains the largest Pre-K elementary school with 1100 students. Approximately 413 (GADOE, 2014) of the children in the northwestern district come from economically disadvantaged families. The southwestern portion of the county has a larger economically disadvantaged population than the Northwest area and comprises another large Pre-K elementary school with 950 students. The eastern half of the county is less populated than the west and has a larger economically disadvantaged population of approximately 813. There is an elementary school housing grades three through five and a primary school houses grades Pre-K second. The elementary school has 450 students and the primary school has 200 students (GADOE, 2014).

Study Sample

This study utilized multiple data. The first phase consisted of a survey (see Appendix A) distributed to a purposeful sample of 219 teachers currently employed by a middle Georgia school system, sharing a common email system. Elementary teachers (6 D 57) were purposefully chosen as the sample because students are taught to read in the elementary grades. Therefore, elementary teachers provided the best data pool to address the research questions.

The survey consisted of 10 questions. The first five survey questions addressed participant demographics, (gender, age, race, years of practice, and level of educational degree). The final five survey questions were relevant open-ended questions pertaining to perceptions and reading instruction.

All currently employed elementary (6 B 57) teachers were asked to complete the survey. The survey results were used to select four teachers from a volunteer pool to participate in semi structured interviews. It was desirable a variety of teachers of different races, genders, and length of teaching service agree to participate in the interview process to produce rich descriptions from a variety of perspectives (Patton, 2002) .

Instruments

The original survey instrument and the interview guide were developed by the researcher. The initial survey was provisionally tested using the procedures of the Survey Fundamentals guide produced by the University of Wisconsin (Thayer, Hart, Dykema, Elver, Schaeffer, & Stevenson, 2010). Permission was granted by the University of Wisconsin to use the Survey Fundamentals guide. (See Appendix F) The survey contained 10 questions and was read by two other educators checking for spelling and

grammatical errors, clarity of questions, and flow. It was field tested for validity by emailing to 10 respondents not in the possible sample pool.

The interview guide for the semi structured interviews expanded survey results. Interviews were designed to help make deeper meaning of the survey data. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Member checking was also used after transcription to ensure accuracy of interview data. This process allowed interview participants to validate data.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data analysis began using Seidman's (2006) method of developing participant profiles through the process of reading and rereading interview transcriptions looking for passages of strong feeling or emphasis. Coding followed the process of Maxwell (2005), using organizational, substantive, and theoretical categories to breakdown the interview information into storage divisions to assist in coding. Connecting categories were used to link data. Coding was reviewed by an additional educational professional, not tied to the study, to add validity to the analysis. The data was stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office during data analysis.

Limitations

The assumption was made that participants would respond honestly to the survey and interview questions. The study may have been limited by researcher bias. The bias may have occurred unintentionally. The sample did not include a significant number of male respondents, therefore limiting the male teacher perspective in the findings. The sample size was small but met the requirements of a basic interpretive study (Merriam, 2002).

Delimitations

The focus of the study was perceptions of elementary 6-7 teachers. Students are taught to read in the elementary grades. Only elementary 6-7 reading teachers served as study participants. The study utilized a basic interpretive qualitative approach. This qualitative research method was the best method to use when working with perception data.

Definition of Key Terms

Balanced Approach. A reading strategy including reading, writing, spelling, phonics, and other skills based instruction. It is a multifaceted process involving teacher planned assessments based on instruction incorporating research based practices (Zygounis & Coe, 2001).

Bottom Up. A method of reading instruction stressing the importance of language and cognitive skills (Chall, 1981).

Decoding. The ability to apply your knowledge of letter sound relationships to correctly pronounce words (Reading Rockets, 2014).

Fidelity. The consistency of implementation of any instructional practice (Fidelity, 2014).

Formative Assessment. A diagnostic tool for monitoring learning through ongoing feedback (Carnegie Mellon University, 2014).

Perception. For the purposes of this study, perceptions were defined as the way a person makes meaning, regards or understands something. A person has formed an opinion or has an insight about a certain situation or phenomenon. This definition most closely aligns with a definition found in the Oxford dictionary (Perception, 2014).

Phonemic Awareness. The ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in words (Reading Rockets, 2014)

Scripted Instruction. A commercial reading program with predetermined speech line of what the teacher says and the time allotted for the teacher's and student's actions (Ed Research Info, 2014)

Summative Assessment A diagnostic tool which evaluates student learning at the end of a unit of study (Carnegie Mellon University, 2014)

Top Down. A method of reading instruction focusing on the importance of word recognition and interaction (Chall, 1981)

Summary

An overview of the complexities associated with reading instruction and teacher perceptions were provided. Debates pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of instructional methods have also been discussed. Theoretical influences affecting the selection of the research design are briefly described. Further, the impact of current educational reforms on reading instruction have been mentioned, most notably teacher and leader effectiveness evaluations. All of these elements support the importance and timeliness of this study.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers' perceptions of reading instruction influenced a student's learning to read in elementary school. The research determined elementary teachers' perceptions of reading instruction and how these perceptions influenced their professional performance.

The study's purpose was closely related to longstanding problems with students learning to read. The areas of reading and reading instruction are highly researched and debated (Chall, 1983; McCordle & Chhabra, 2004; Morrison et al., 2011). Current and past literature included in this chapter explored various aspects of the reading debate: reading theory, instructional methods, plus the influence of perceptions on reading instruction. Current education reform efforts have shifted the focus from learner to teacher and school leader (GADOE, 2017).

Education in America has undergone numerous overhauls prompted by shifting paradigms tied to historical events (20th Century Education, 2014). The United States Constitution created a working democracy. Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, set the standard for a literate populous. He felt this was necessary for a democracy to thrive (Cullinan, 2007). In the late 1950s, the United Soviet Socialist

Republic launched the first manned rocket into outer space named Sputnik
Sputnik, 2014) This event created panic in America, both militarily and educationally
Americans had grown complacent after the victory of World War II The arms race of the
Cold War arose out of the lackadaisical attitudes toward foreign relations To build more
advanced weapons and rockets, a more educated society was demanded America was
concerned the great democracy was falling behind other industrialized nations This and
other events of the early 1950s, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, fed fears of America
being physically overtaken by the Soviet Union (Sputnik, 2014)

President Lyndon Johnson initiated a program to address poverty in the United
States His aim was to develop a more literate society which could actively participate in
the economy and democracy He dubbed his new program the *War on Poverty* A
component of Johnson's policy with lasting effects on society was the Head Start
program aimed at increasing literacy skills for prekindergarten children in poverty
stricken areas (War on Poverty, 2014)

In the early 1980s another significant event transpired the report, *A Nation at
Risk*, was released This report once again produced the fear of uncertainty in America
Action was needed to maintain America's position of dominance in the world (Cavanagh,
2004) Education reform became common words in American society

These events produced change in the United States With each significant event,
changes were made to education Researchers were employed to look at the how and why
of teaching (Morrison et al 2011) Reading is the foundational skill and all other
knowledge builds on the base of reading (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004a; Morris & Slavin,
2004)

This review of literature deliberates the developments and debates of reading instruction. The literature provides information on the various types of reading instruction and their phases of popularity. Regardless of the instructional method, the human component of the teacher must also be studied. Human interaction is a central concept of society and teaching. American society is very diverse and known as a *melting pot* of cultures (Oswego City School District, 2014). Perceptions are a very strong component of human interaction.

Thomas and Thomas, (1928), contended what a person determines as real is real in its outcomes. This statement is also known as Thomas' Theorem (Patton, 2002). In other words, our behavior depends not on the objective reality of a situation but on the subjective interpretation of reality. The consequences and results of behavior make it real (Thomas & Thomas, 1928).

Perception and Reading Instruction

Miller (2008), a sixth grade reading teacher contends all students struggle with comprehension. She viewed all of her sixth grade students as readers and never required them to read aloud. She believed this created anxiety in children, and therefore, hindered the learning process. She read to them, constantly checking for understanding as they listened. She nurtured the process of comprehension through exhibition and informal assessment. Miller's perceptions are evident in her philosophy: all children can be readers given the appropriate approach and attitude to instruction. While perhaps not measured scientifically, Miller's successful connection with her students earned her the nickname of the 'book whisperer'. Her perception of instruction is inclusive for all students.

When evaluating fidelity of implementation of prescribed reading programs, it is imperative to examine effects of teacher perception (Azano et al, 2011) (Schulz, 2001) noted, "...any sizeable discrepancy in teacher and student perceptions regarding the efficacy of instructional practices can be detrimental to learning, regardless of the methodological convictions of the teacher" (2005) (As previously noted by Miller, children can be readers if given the appropriate approach and attitude toward instruction (2005))

For most children, reading is taught in a classroom environment (Wagner, 2010) (Wagner, 2010) argued most determinants of a child's reading ability are outside the classroom (These determinants include family interactions, the reading levels of the parents, and the amount of time the child's parents read to them at home (Wagner, 2010)) (The instruction a student receives in a classroom tells only a part of the story (Durkin, 1999) studied this concept years earlier (Her research consisted of two studies, one in New York and one in California (The focus of her research was children who learn to read early (At the time of her research, reading was taught in first grade (She contended reading should be taught in kindergarten (The only noted difference in her sample populations was the educational level parents had attained (The parents in the New York sample had higher levels of education than the California parents (Findings in both studies indicated neither socio economic status nor parents' education levels were predictive determinants of a child's reading ability. Children of similar abilities were present in groups of early readers and non-readers (She found the largest differentiating factor to be parental influence (Parents who spend time with their children, read to them, answer their questions, and demonstrate the importance of reading, produce a rich

environment for developing readers (Durkin, 1997). An important aspect of her work was the student's socio-economic factors did not affect their ability to read. Another strength and reason for the endurance of her findings was the rigor and comprehensiveness of her study. She was systematic and exhaustive in her approach. Her approach is a model for further research.

Reading Methodologies

Taylor, Ahlgrim-Delzell, and Flowers (2010) examined special education reading programs using scripted instruction curriculum. They found it reduced teacher planning in implementation of reading intervention programs and, thereby, positively enhanced teacher perceptions of validity. Though the focus of Taylor, Ahlgrim-Delzell, and Flowers' research was in the area of improving reading ability of special needs children, it is certainly applicable to regular education classrooms. Teachers who participated in the study reported improved student self-efficacy, which prompted a shift in teacher mentality from a "deficit orientation" to an "ability orientation" when teachers described the performance of their students (p. 59). Teachers reacted positively to the scripted nature of interventions, which they viewed as specific and concise, not ambiguous overviews. In other words, if a program lacked structure, teachers believed it to be intrusive and inhibitive (Taylor, Ahlgrim-Delzell, & Flowers, 2010). In fact, teachers' beliefs and experiences severely impact the fruition of programs and fidelity of design implementation if deemed as such (Azano et al., 2011). Another noted area of importance in their study centered on fidelity issues. Researchers might argue the assumption of more classroom experience or a greater educational degree might increase the fidelity

with which instruction is completed. Azano et al (2011) found the opposite to be true. These findings illustrate the complexity of the human influence on instruction.

A Balanced Approach as a Type of Methodology

Chall (1987) argued there is no one best approach to reading. Reading instruction requires a balanced approach (Benjamin, 2011; Chall, 1987; McCordle & Chhabra, 2004; Morris & Slavin, 2001; Pressley, 2002). Chall (1987) promoted the idea of moving from a word meaning focus to a code emphasis for beginning readers. Quel (1988) referred to code emphasis as decoding. Quel (1988) further stated the ability to mesh phonemic sounds is essential in learning to read. Pressley (2002) referred to the decoding process as phonemic awareness. He went on to say possessing a strong phonemic awareness promoted increased reading achievement. O'Connor (2007) agrees, phonemic awareness is the cornerstone of learning how to read.

Chall's (1967) seminal work caused textbook companies to take notice. They changed their offerings to include phonemic activities. Also paying attention to the trend in phonemic awareness were the producers of children's television. (Chall, 1987). *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company* acknowledged the decoding focus to instruction for beginning readers (Chall, 1987; Manzo, 2009). These television programs provided children with the ability to form a relationship between letters and sounds and how they form words.

Bottom Up versus Top Down

Another debate occurs between *bottom up* theorists (Chall 1987; Manzo, 2009; O'Connor, 2007; Pressley, 2002) and *top down* theorists (Cattell, 2014; Goodman 2000; Smith, 2004). Bottom up theorists stress the importance of language and cognitive

skills, whereas, top down theorists stress the importance of word recognition and interaction (Chall, 1981; Bruner, 1987) discussed the differences in bottom up and top down theory from a psychological perspective. He espoused such up and down discussions prompted psychologists to consider how basal knowledge determines learning experiences. Language is the most powerful tool for organizing knowledge and experience. Reading is the key to language exploration (Rasinski, Rupley, & Nichols, 2008).

Pressley (2002) discussed the differences of bottom up versus top down processing. Theorists focusing on reading from a meaning-making perspective think in a bottom up manner. Reading is about processes. When sounding out letters and words, even when reading silently, sound processes take place in the brain, developing meaningful connections to previously acquired knowledge whether it is written or spoken (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004a; Pressley, 2002). This is a simple way of thinking about reading. When the phonemic process pairs with fluency instruction, the result is synergistic (Rasinski, Rupley, & Nichols, 2008). Alone, neither aspect of instruction adds significantly to reading attainment. However, together they make significant contributions to reading achievement (Pressley, 2002). These methods of reading instruction, in addition to top down reading instruction, espouse practice matters (Benjamin, 2011; Ostewicz, 2012a; McCardle & Chhabra, 2004). Those who focus on making meaning from the top down, base the idea on knowledge. Every person has a certain knowledge base. People use this base to understand what they read, adding to their knowledge base (Pressley, 2002). Dunn, Carbo, and Burton (1981) found learning styles also play a large part in student reading attainment. When instruction matched

student learning style, significant gains were obtained. The work of Dunn, Carbo, and Burton (1981) contributed four significant strategies in promoting reading ability: V identify each student's learning strength; teach greatly different words; use resources matched to student learning strengths; and use smaller bytes of information with more dependent readers.

Decoding

Beck and Quel (2002) affirmed the view, the best tools we give children for learning to read, "...are the ones that allow them to decode printed words for themselves." (p. 17) Decoding has a variety of definitions. Many terms commonly used to describe decoding are word recognition, word identification, and sight word recognition. Beck and Quel explained individuals have "broken the code" when they have learned the mappings of an alphabetic language and applied them to their own knowledge to determine pronunciations of printed words. (p. 27)

Pressley (2002) speculated a possible intermediate position. In observing first grade readers, he realized they use their knowledge of letters and sounds to sound out words. They then use the knowledge base to construct new meanings and generate inferences. The two concepts operate in balance. Pressley, like Chall (1981), agreed a common problem in learning to read is decoding and for phonemic awareness.

Influence of Perceptions

Teacher perceptions of instruction and teaching are evident in the classroom environment. (Roskos & Newman, 2011) Creating an environment for learning can be a challenging task. Roskos and Newman (2011) contend six factors are imperative for a successful reading classroom: helping students create and share, encouraging mentorship

for those who are more experienced to share with less experience, fostering beliefs a student's opinion matters, introducing new creative forms of student expression, forming partnerships and teams working together to complete tasks and produce working knowledge, and increasing the capacity of the individual student to serve the classroom group

Numerous factors affect the educational success of students: parent education, income, physical abilities, diet, motivation, and the quality of instruction are a limited number of influences

Pirog & Magee, 1995; Potter, Schneider, Coyle, May, Robin, & Seymour, 2011; Fleith (2007) found teacher and student perceptions about certain characteristics either stimulate or inhibit the classroom environment

Fleith argued an environment fostering creativity is enhancing, harmonious, and meaningful

(2007) Fleith used a convenience sample to study third and fourth grade reading instruction classrooms

Teachers and students from two elementary schools in Connecticut participated in the study, along with a panel of seven experts on creativity

The study employed an exploratory qualitative approach using interviews

The interviews were designed to capture the data in the subject's own words. The author noted the limiting data aspect of the group interview process

The use of observations and individual interviews could have enhanced the collected data

The student pool appeared to be swayed by the answers of other students

Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2007), reported there is an abundance of research on what constitutes an effective classroom

Key findings from the report include the idea students come to the classroom with preconceived notions of how the world works

They also cautioned students may not understand new concepts especially if the preexisting concepts are not addressed

Bransford, Brown, and Cocking's (2007) report also noted various factors necessary for developing proficiency in a particular content area. These factors include a base of factual knowledge, understanding ideas in a theoretical framework, and establishing knowledge in a way to allow the student to retrieve and apply the knowledge. This report also addressed the need for a reflective approach to instruction, allowing students to have knowledge of their own thoughts along with factors influencing their learning plus the ability to monitor their progress in fulfilling goals. The report highlighted a number of strategies to facilitate learning. Classrooms should be a student-centered learning environment, teachers should understand preexisting knowledge to build a firm foundation of factual knowledge, increased use of formative assessments, and considering student preexisting knowledge when developing instructional plans (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2007).

Morrison et al. (2017) compiled a 50-year review of research pertaining to literacy. Their findings revealed the three most thoroughly researched topics: comprehension, teacher practices, and assessment. Comprehension research comprised the majority of this body of work and peaked in the 1980s. The impact of accountability has led to a steady increase in research pertaining to teacher practices and assessment. Surprisingly, evaluation of teacher perceptions concerning reading performance is one of the least researched areas (2017).

Plut and Jacobs (2007) examined teacher attitudes and aggregate school performance in R2 schools. They conducted a quantitative analysis seeking a relationship between district-wide student reading performance and teacher perceptions and satisfaction with various aspects of their job. They developed a scale from Pennsylvania

job descriptions and responsibilities containing 18 different indicators. Three scales were developed: perceptions of their work environment, satisfaction with their work environment, and perceptions and satisfaction. Their findings revealed several areas of correlation between teacher perceptions and satisfaction and reading performance using a less conservative alpha of .05. Community support minimized discipline problems and sufficient services for special needs students. Using a more conservative alpha of .008 there was only one significant correlation between reading performance and teacher perceptions. In districts where teachers perceived adequate community support, student performance in reading was higher. Two different levels of significance were used because two different sets of data were used. It is important to note no areas of significance were found in other academic areas such as math. Another limiting factor was the lack of generalizability. The findings in this study are specific to the state of Pennsylvania. (Plut 4 Jacobs, 2007)

Preservice and In-service Teacher Perceptions

Witcher et al. (2008) completed a study about perceptions of preservice teachers on classroom effectiveness in relation to discipline styles. The study used interventionist, interactionist, and noninterventionist styles. Wolfgang and Glickman (1987) developed similar styles in a separate study. Wolfgang and Glickman formulated the categories based on major child development theories. Interventionist teachers subscribe to a more traditional style of classroom management, and interactionists engage with students in a more proactive manner. Noninterventionists are more concerned with encouraging self-actualization. Most teachers conform to one style or the other, but some may incorporate aspects of all three styles. Witcher et al. (2008) revealed seven perceived areas

determined to reflect effective teaching including student centered and effective classroom and behavior management a competent instructor ethical behavior enthusiastic teaching knowledgeable about subject and professionalism Interventionist and interactionist types were perceived as teachers who are more effective Similar results were yielded in additional studies pertaining to preservice teachers (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002)

In another study, Mather, Bos, and Babur (2017) studied perceptions and knowledge of preservice and inservice teachers Their research concentrated on major research findings from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development They wanted to know if teachers would believe: “phonemic awareness plays an important role in reading development and failure beginning readers need to be able to segment words into phonemes and blend phonemes into words and the ability to recognize words accurately and easily is essential for rapid decoding” (p. 473). Their study concluded a positive perception of systematic, explicit instruction is needed to effectively reach at risk students, because most preservice teachers do not have the knowledge necessary to reach struggling and at risk students (Harrison, 2011 and Narkon, Black, and Jenkins, 2009) have been confirmed studies by other researchers

In a collective description case study, Narkon, Black, and Jenkins (2009) also confirmed these results with perceptions of reading being the most difficult subject to teach to struggling and at risk students The study was guided by the research questions (1) What were the participating pre service teachers’ beliefs about how to teach reading to students with learning disabilities (2) What were their beliefs about how to teach

reading to students without learning disabilities (N) Did a conceptual difference exist in their beliefs about teaching reading to these two groups of students?

Narvon, Black, and Jenkins, (2009) were limited in several ways including generalizability due to the purposeful and small size of the sample, the fact the coordinator of the teacher program was the researcher, and the limited collection of data. They recommended future studies should consider more longitudinal data and the use of qualitative studies, the addition of experience with struggling readers for preservice teachers and to complete the research later in the teacher preparation program.

Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2004) synthesized existing research about teacher practices and student learning. Through their synthesis, three areas of perceptions about efficacy were determined: self-efficacy judgments of students, teacher perceptions of their own instructional efficacy, and teacher perceptions about the collective efficacy of their school. They found both teaching and learning are affected by perceptions of efficacy. The effect of teacher perceptions on reading instruction relates closely to teacher efficacy. Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy went on to link these findings to other areas such as business, management, and sociology. All efficacy beliefs are future oriented judgments about one's ability to meet or complete a certain task. Belief in one's performance significantly influences ability perceptions. Teacher self-efficacy is a prime predictor of effective teaching practices (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2004). The higher the teacher's perceptions of his own effectiveness or efficacy, the more organized and better planned are the classroom instructional strategies. Adversely, negative ability perceptions lead to less successful implementation of effective instructional strategies (2004).

r ranz 619S07 used a quantitative approach to study the relationship between teacher perceptions and the teacher's behavior toward the students. Her research questions addressed significant differences between the substantive, positive appraisal, negative appraisal, and managerial behaviors a teacher exhibits towards students with regards to both academic potential and achievement level (r ranz, 19S0, pE27E

Data for this study included teacher verbal behavior data and teacher perception data (r ranz, 19S07E). The sample contained 285 urban elementary students and 11 classroom teachers. The Observational System of Instructional Analysis was used during observations to quantify data. The 1R point scale was trimmed to four categories for analysis: Substantive, positive appraisal, negative appraisal, and managerial behaviors. E

In the substantive category, the most common finding was the perception of the higher the student achievement, the more attention the student received (r ranz, 19S07E). They also found positive appraisal data indicated significant differences to students based on their perceived academic levels. The negative appraisal category produced no significant findings; however, this could have been due to a lower occurrence of recorded negative appraisal behaviors. Six of the eleven teachers yielded significant differences in managerial behaviors adding little support to the hypothesis (r ranz, 19S07E).

Even though the results in this study were not clear they suggested higher performing students receive more substantive and positive behaviors, while perceived lower performing students received more managerial behaviors. Suggestions for future research included the need to study individually directed teacher behaviors and investigate the effects these behaviors may have on student productivity (r ranz, 19S07E).

Literature regarding teacher perceptions illustrates teachers, knowingly or unknowingly, act differently toward students depending on the socioeconomic status of parents (Cakmak et al, 2011; Campbell, 2008; Redding, 1995). Racial stereotypes have been studied in relation to perceptions in student underperformance (Eccles, Wong, & Peck, 2007), in relation to lower expectations for success by teachers, in relation to more limited opportunities (Grouws & Lembke, 1998; Hart & Alexander, 1997), and in relation to increased absences and sense of alienation (Osborne & Walker, 2007).

Davis, Gabelman, and Wingfield (2017) researched the role of teacher-child relationships as a form of social capital, which contributes to student engagement through perceptions. Several questions guided their research: How do children understand their relationships with their teachers, specifically with regard to teacher closeness and influence? To what extent are their understandings of these concepts malleable? How might their feelings of closeness and influence relate to their motivation to engage in mathematics activities? Their research sample included 25 African American students from two schools, 13 boys and 11 girls. Students were interviewed for 10-15 minutes each. The students acknowledged three ways in which their teachers exercised influence over them: by making them feel or act a certain way, through classroom discipline, and by affording them responsibilities in the classroom. Students also described teacher influence as the power to get students to complete different behaviors and activities, such as, homework. Many students felt their teacher influenced them by rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior. The students' and teachers' perceptions of equity were embedded in the influence and closeness of teacher student relationships (Davis, Gabelman & Wingfield, 2017).

A student's confidence in their teacher, and the teacher's perception of the student, are vital to student learning (Tyler & Boelter, 2008). Tyler and Boelter studied 222 black middle school students to determine the relationship between student and teacher perceptions, academic engagement, and efficacy. The middle school selected for the study was by random selection. The research used a quantitative hierarchical regression analysis. Limitations noted include the lack of generalizability due to the type of sample. The majority of students were low income and the student opinions of teacher expectations may have been overrated. Tyler and Boelter's (2008) study found teacher expectations are predictive of student's academic engagement and academic efficacy. They recommended future research considerations should examine student based perceptions of teacher expectations as predictors of academic engagement and academic efficacy (Tyler & Boelter, 2008).

Graybill (1998) suggested attitudes and expectations of Caucasian teachers negatively influenced minority students' academic achievement. She suggests teachers can be the deciding positive or negative force in their students' learning. Teacher prejudices and stereotyping can produce assumptions influencing teacher actions and interfere with teacher effectiveness. She believes teachers need cultural training to understand the subtle differences in cultural norms. She urges teachers to remember students are individuals. Her most important concept is all teachers should believe their students can succeed.

Burt, Ortlieb, and Cheek (2017) conducted a mixed study of 15 preservice teachers to determine the impact of teacher ethnicity on the development of students' reading skills and achievement. They concluded "an educational problem exists of

effectively linking beliefs, qualities, and actions affect instructional decision making, collaboration, resourcefulness, and experiences” (p.107) This study provided a link between beliefs and teaching styles. This study helps to understand the professional development required to meet the needs of the teachers and students alike. Study results indicate students have positive feelings toward their teachers regardless of race, and no difference was noted in achievement scores on the fourth grade performance tests for teachers of differing races.

Instructional Factors Influencing Teacher Perceptions

Brooke (2014) noted effective teachers with high expectations and accomplished skills exist in almost every school. However, teacher perceptions indicated feeling overwhelmed at determining how to support specific student needs. Perceptions of administrative support and appropriate resources are also important factors. Scripted, researched based instructional resources may be the most important elements to effective teaching in creating teacher perceptions of higher self-efficacy (Brooke, 2014; Harrison, 2011; Mather, Box, Babur, 2001; Narkon, Black, Jenkins, 2009).

Cheek, Steward, Launey, and Borgia (2004) found perceptions of strength and beliefs impact reading instruction and student learning. They studied facilitative, experiential, and provisional styles of teaching. Their findings suggest schools should consider these teaching styles when setting up teaching teams and include a variety of styles on a team with the facilitative type of teacher teaching reading (Taylor, Pearson, Clark and Walpole (2007) investigated school and classroom factors related to primary grade reading achievement in schools with high numbers of economically disadvantaged students. Fourteen schools across the United States participated in their study. The study

used a mixed methods application. Eleven schools were chosen for their innovation and high reading results. Three schools were chosen because of ordinary achievement. Findings indicated small group instruction, time spent on independent reading, high levels of engaged behavior, and strong home communication are instructional strategies positively influencing student reading instruction. (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole, 2007)

Frey and Fisher (2010) expanded on the idea of the critical component of small group instruction. Their study indicated scaffolding, “the intersection of the art and science of teaching” (p. 47), as a key component. Scaffolding involved the teachers leading with questions, providing direct explanations, and modeling when necessary. (2010)

Law and Ruffolo (2009) completed an analysis on the instructional approach of critical thinking in reading instruction. Their work confirms previous theories that students who engage in critical thinking activities perform higher on critical thinking tasks. A mixed methods approach was utilized. Nine research questions about the varying levels of student performance and teacher beliefs guided their study. Qualitative results were used to validate quantitative findings. Quantitative findings indicated when teacher efficacy and expectations were higher in the area of critical thinking, so also was the students’ ability. Qualitative findings indicated a connection between administrative perceptions and a teacher’s ability to promote critical thinking. This connection was more obvious in the high and low performing schools and less obvious in the middle or average performing schools. Implications from this study for schools include: students perform at

the level of teacher expectations, and teachers perform at the level of administrative expectations (Law & Ruffolo, 2009)

Ness (2009) conducted a mixed methods study to understand the frequency of reading comprehension at the high school level. Her study's purposeful sample was comprised of teachers employed at and students enrolled in a rural middle and high school. Study data contained direct observations and teacher interviews. Ness found only 13% of reading comprehension instruction was observed. Teachers in the study felt unqualified to teach explicit reading comprehension instruction. They were stressed trying to cover content standards and wanted to publicize the fact reading instruction is important for students at every level (Ness, 2009)

Teaching Factors Found Not to Influence Student Performance

Many topics influencing student learning and teacher perceptions have been reviewed which do not consistently or significantly influence student performance. Miller, Ruykendall, and Thomas (2017) reviewed individual and institutional factors and discovered many significant and insignificant factors influence student performance. They found teacher gender, marital status, nor did educational level have significant influence on student performance (2017). The work of Plut and Jacobs (2007) also provided factors not found to influence student performance. Curriculum was not found to be a significant factor (2007). Neither teacher satisfaction nor principal support was significant in their study. Plut and Jacobs pointed out even though these factors were not important in their study did not mean they would not be significant factors in another study. Many of the factors influencing student performance are situation specific (2007)

Summary

Teacher expectations have been found to be continuous indicators of student performance (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Rubie-Davies, 2010; Cakmak, Demirkaya, and Derya, 2011) noted how well students perform influences teacher perceptions and attitudes. Eranz (1980) determined teachers were more engaged with students whom they perceived to have a high achievement level than they were with students perceived to be low achieving. Although much research has been compiled in this area, there is no agreement on why these phenomena occur. Tyler & Boelter (2008) and Campbell (2007) put the perplexity of the situation succinctly in words, “One is reminded of the complexities of empirically studying phenomena that are so influenced by philosophical concepts” (P4S7E).

In the view of Chall (1981, 1987), reading instruction and the best way to approach it is *The Great Debate*. The subject of reading instruction has been considered, studied, and revisited on numerous occasions. Until a process of ensuring all students obtain the ability and knowledge to read can be determined, the debates will continue on the impact of teacher perceptions, effectiveness of instructional programs, and their positive or negative benefits on student performance levels.

This chapter provides insights to understanding the ongoing debate over the process of teaching students to read. A contributing factor to this process is teacher’s perceptions. Perceptions can be ‘*stepping stones or stumbling blocks*’ depending upon the positive or negative aspect of these perceptions. Wagner (2010) and Chall (1987) both surmised the issue of learning to read as a great debate for the decades. Learning to read will continue to be an issue until a process for insuring every child learns to read is

establishedEChapter Nwill provide clear details on the methods and procedures used to
complete the research on teacher perceptions of reading instructionE

Chapter III

METHODS

Social constructivists' philosophical foundations value human perceptions and how these perceptions affect engagement with their world. Constructing reality is part of interacting with the social world (Patton, 2002a; Merriam, 2002). The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. (Creswell, 2009, p. 97) Patton (2002) contends what the various phenomenological approaches share is a common focus on "how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness" (p. 104). The process requires cautious and methodically derived descriptions of how people experience certain phenomena.

An approach used pulling from the areas of phenomenological research is a basic interpretive qualitative study. This is the most common form of research used in an educational setting, but can be used in many disciplines (Merriam, 2002). Glesne (1999) stated phenomenology studies focus on "descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experiences of the phenomena under study" (p. 5). The collected data will include teacher perceptions through surveys and in-depth interviews and the collection of ancillary documents. The use of multiple strategies enhances the construct validity by offering multiple data from multiple points of view (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2000). The purpose is to make sense of others' ideas about teacher perceptions and reading instruction (Creswell, 2009). The strength of a basic interpretive study is the rich descriptions produced from the collection of data.

Merriam, 2002) A basic interpretive qualitative study will provide the descriptive data needed to promote a stronger understanding of the influence teacher attitudes and perceptions have on students learning to read.

Research questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are elementary teachers' perceptions of successful reading instruction?

RQ2: How do elementary teachers' perceive their methods of reading instruction affect elementary students learning experiences?

RQ3: How does a teacher's perception of reading instruction influence the number of elementary students with reading deficiencies?

RQ4: Do elementary teacher demographics (gender, age, race, years of practice, and level of educational degree) influence teacher perceptions and student performance?

Methodology

Setting

A rural middle Georgia system was the setting for the research. The county is one of the largest in the state of Georgia. The Board of Education is the second largest employer in the county ranking only behind the Veterans Administration. In the early 20th century, the county was a hub for manufacturing, employing many people from surrounding counties. After the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, most of the larger manufacturing plants in the county closed. The unemployment rate is currently 11.8%.

The county is home to approximately 49,000 people. The average per capita income is 129,510. Food stamps are received by 4,550 households. The county school system is responsible for educating 2,121 students and employs 484 certified personnel of which 420 are classroom teachers. The system teaching staff comprises 288 male and 296 females. There are 55 African American teachers, two Hispanic teachers, one Native American, one other ethnicity and 211 Caucasian teachers. The average length of teaching experience is 15.8 years. (GADOE, 2014)

There are three elementary schools, one primary school, two middle schools, two high schools, one college and career academy, and one alternative school. The county is divided by a major river. The river serves as a dividing line for cities as well as the county dividing line for school zones. The western side of the county is more affluent than the eastern side. (GADOE, 2014) The eastern side has one primary school, one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. The western side has two elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, the college and career academy and Alternative school. All of the elementary schools, the primary school, and Sunnyside Middle School are Title I schools.

The elementary schools and primary school were the emphasis of the research because students are taught to read in the early grades. Therefore, it was necessary to describe the individual schools. Pseudonyms have been used for the names of the elementary schools. South Sunset Elementary (SSE) is located in the southwestern end of the county. SSE employs 31 teachers. There are three males and 28 females composed of seven black and 24 white teachers. The majority of the teachers have advanced degrees with the average years of experience being 15. SSE is located in a very rural area. The

prekindergarten through fifth grade student population is comprised of 950 students: 43 White, 193 Black, 53 Hispanic, and 13 Asian.

North Sunset Elementary (NSE) is a more affluent school. It is often referred to as the 'private academy.' Many of the 'pricier' subdivisions are located in this area. NSE employs 81 teachers, three males and 58 females comprised of seven Black teachers, 54 White teachers, and one Hispanic. The majority of the teachers have advanced degrees with the average years of experience being 15. NSE is located in the northwestern part of the county. The prekindergarten through fifth grade school serves 1,100 students comprised of 53 White, 193 Black, one percent Hispanic, one percent multiracial, and 13 Native American.

Sunnyside Primary School (SSP) contains prekindergarten through second grade. It serves 800 students comprised of 583 White, 83 Black, 43 Hispanic, and 23 multiracial. There are 44 teachers, one male and 43 female. The majority of teachers have 4-year degrees with an average 15.4 years' experience. SSP is located in a nearby city along with Sunnyside Elementary. Sunnyside Elementary serves grades three through five and houses 450 students. There are 11 teachers comprised of three males and 8 females. The majority of teachers have advanced degrees and the average years' of experience is 14.5. The student population contains 583 White, 413 Black, 83 Hispanic, and 23 multiracial.

Participants

The sample for the study was purposeful. The study was qualitative and focused on teachers' perceptions, therefore, the most appropriate sampling strategy was non-probabilistic and purposeful. Non-probabilistic or purposeful sampling was utilized in

order to choose a diverse group of participants who had experienced the phenomenon being studied. Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, and gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (Merriam, 1988, p. 487).

Teachers from four rural elementary (K-5) schools within one middle Georgia school system were surveyed electronically. The survey collected demographic data and gave participants a means to volunteer for interviews. The four schools employed 219 certified teachers and elementary (K-5) teachers were purposefully selected for this study because students are taught to read in elementary grades. The data from the survey provided descriptive, demographic, and inferential statistics. There were minimal problems contacting teachers as they all shared a common email system.

Materials and Procedures

The initial survey (see Appendix A) was developed using the *Survey Fundamentals* guide produced by the University of Wisconsin (Thayer, Hart, Dykema, Elver, Schaeffer, & Stevenson, 2010). The survey contained 10 questions and its validity was tested by two other educators for spelling and grammatical errors, clarity of questions, and flow. An instrument is considered reliable if repeated efforts to measure the phenomenon produce the same result (2010). The instrument was field tested by emailing the survey to 10 respondents at a school not included in the potential participant pool. Respondents' answers to the field test were similar. In the initial email, respondents were asked to notify the sender of any questions they found confusing or unclear.

The first five survey questions address participant demographics, and the final six survey questions are open ended. The survey link was emailed to participants. Survey Monkey, a commercially marketed survey program, was used to insure anonymity of participants. If a participant volunteered, they had a chance of being chosen for the interview phase. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality in final reporting. Assigned case numbers linked surveys, interviews, and coding data.

From the results of the survey, a smaller purposeful sample was chosen for interviews in phase two of the study. It was desirable a sufficient number of teachers participate in the survey so the sample for the interview group could be demographically representative of all elementary teachers in the system. Survey results were used to enhance development of additional semi structured interview questions which clarified, expanded, and refined respondents' survey answers. Four reading teachers participated in semi structured interviews. Participants were asked to "reconstruct their experience and explore the meaning" of these experiences (Seidman, 2008, p. 27).

Interviews were conducted at a time and location of the participant's choice. The research set no time limit, but allowed the interviewee to fully explain their perceptions. The researcher assigned pseudonyms to all participants to provide anonymity. An assigned number on an index card linked survey and interview data to assist in organization. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. After transcription, member checking was employed to allow participants to read, clarify, or remove any statements. All data collected during the research study was maintained by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet. Upon completion of the study, collected data was shredded by a professional shredding service.

Participant profiles used an assigned case number to link information. Participant profiles were completed on each interviewee using the methods described by Seidman (2007). Profiles are a sequential process. When the interview was transcribed, it was marked for important passages and these passages were labeled. Two additional copies of each transcription were made to preserve the original. Original transcripts were referred to and used as a reference during the analysis stage. Marked passages were cut and pasted into folders with corresponding labels. The selected passages were further arranged into a new transcript. This version was used to determine robust commentary. Chosen commentary was underlined and used to produce detailed narratives. The strength of this process was in the words of the participants, not the researcher. (2007) The original transcript was referenced to clarify the context of the participant's words. It was necessary to use connecting words to add clarification to the participant's statements. (Seidman, 2007) Added connecting words were clearly noted in findings.

Participant profiles were coded as described by Maxwell (2005). The purpose of coding is not to count in the coding process, but to fracture the data into categories. (p. 9) This process aided in developing themes. Coding arranged the data into categories facilitating the development of theoretical concepts. By placing data into categories, themes and theories were formulated. Maxwell recommends organizing data into three categories: organizational, substantive, and theoretical. (Maxwell, 2005) Organizational categories served as a folder for sorting data further. They were useful for section headings in discussing the data. Substantive categories or categories made from the participant's own words are called emic. (2005) Substantive categories are descriptive. They included participant beliefs that were derived from their own words. Theoretical or

etic categories place data in researcher determined concepts. These categories can be determined by prior theory or inductively developed (Maxwell, 2005).

The difference between categories was very important (Maxwell, 2005). Systematically developed categories are integral to drawing proper conclusions and developing theory. The profiles, coded categories, and demographic information were studied concurrently to identify connecting ideas and develop relevant themes.

The analysis of the qualitative text data collected in phase one informed the selection of the interviewees for phase two. In addition, the text data collected in phase one was used to refine the interview questioning protocol used in phase two. Survey text data collected indicated areas of convergence or divergence warranting further investigation in phase two.

Member checking was employed to insure accurate documentation of interview data. Interviewed respondents were emailed a copy of the completed interview transcript. Any phrasing or other areas of concern from the interview were changed or stricken from the record if the interviewee requested. The purpose of member checking was to insure the interviewer has captured the essence of the interviewee's perspective.

Data analysis began with the coding of collected interview data. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), "reliability has limited meaning in qualitative research" (p. 217), but it does "serve the purpose of checking on the quality of data, results, and interpretation" (p. 210). To increase validity of coded data, an additional educational professional reviewed the emergent codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Further, considering each step was connected, it was important to give data systematic thought and consideration in each phase and not rush to findings.

By following the methods of scientific inquiry and the established protocols for qualitative research, it was a goal of the research to provide the reality of the situation from the participant's perspective. The methods of Maxwell (2005) and Seidman (2006) were chosen for analyzing data and giving voice to participants. These methods maintain the words of the participants and are acceptable scientific methods of qualitative inquiry. Further, the use of another informed person to check the data analysis procedures added validity. Abundant, lush descriptions of participant's experiences, thoughts, and feelings assisted in maintaining the focus of the findings on the participants and not the researcher. Member checking insured the participants' words were their own. The use of multiple sources of data helped to enhance validity of data. Finally, contrary ideas or thoughts were also presented (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Considering the vast differences present in our world, there will always be outliers.

Institutional Review Board Approval Process

The study was technically exempt from Institutional Review Board approval as prescribed in 45CFR46.101(b)(7)(HHS, 2014). The focus of the study was elementary teachers' perceptions of reading instruction and pseudonyms were used for anonymity in reporting (see Appendix I).

Validity

Challenges were found in maintaining the magnitude of qualitative data and the confidentiality of participants. Organization and record keeping was necessary. There was limited access by others to collected raw data to protect privacy. Data was stored securely in a locked file cabinet. An index card system containing the master information provided a numbered means to keep data connected with names removed. The researcher

was the only person compiling survey data, conducting interviews, handling data files, transcribing interview data, coding and analyzing data, even though another education professional reviewed the developed participant profiles and codes. This review added reliability to findings.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) recognized qualitative research is often viewed as weak due to personal interpretations of the researcher's personal bias. Creswell (2009) encouraged researchers to clearly state -biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status, which may shape their interpretations formed during a study. By stating researcher bias thoroughly, the researcher's role in the study can be more easily understood (Creswell, 2009). The literature review provides the reader with an increased understanding of existing literature in the area of teacher perceptions and reading instruction thereby producing a method to inform the reader if bias appears present in findings.

Challenges were inevitable as with any research project. One concern involved researcher bias. As an educational professional, it was necessary to remain neutral while collecting and coding data. As the principal of Sunnyside Primary School, there were 44 teachers from Sunnyside Primary receiving the survey with the possibility of being chosen for an interview. As the research I deemed it necessary to formulate a letter to my own employees in a different manner than the other three participating schools. The purpose in this action was to explain to employees they were not required to participate and nonparticipation would not negatively impact their professional standing. All survey responses were anonymous unless the person agreed to be interviewed.

Patton (2002) urges the researcher to be reflexive, “attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, ideological origins of one’s own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews” (p. 65). Patton contends “no absolute rules [for validity and reliability] exist except perhaps this: Do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study” (2002, p. 4). Because the researcher is the instrument, the credibility of the study depends on the skill and rigor with which the study is completed (Patton, 2002).

Empathic neutrality (Patton, 2002) was a qualitative strategy which allowed me to enter into the world of reading teachers to understand their views. Even though the terminology may have seemed misleading, the purpose was to allow me to enter the world of the participant by showing empathy for their feelings and opinions and trying to fully understand their point of view. This practice helped me understand the data, while it is still in the words of the participant.

Special Permissions and Agreements

Permission to conduct the research study, *The Influence of Teacher Perceptions on Reading Instruction*, was requested by the researcher (see Appendix D) and granted by the Superintendent of the county school system (see Appendix E). A request was sent to John Stevenson of the University of Wisconsin to obtain permission to use and cite the survey guide, *Survey Fundamentals: A Guide to Designing and Implementing Surveys*. Permission was granted by Nora Cate Schaeffer, University of Wisconsin (see Appendix F). A letter to counsel participants of their rights and consent to participate in the survey

was developed (see Appendix G) An email was developed to preface the survey in which the procedures and purpose of the research were explained (see Appendix H)

Summary

Chapter N specifically described the methodology used in the study An understanding of the philosophical foundations is presented and the reasons for choosing qualitative methods Research questions are reintroduced The setting is described to the extent a nonresident has a mental picture of the research locations Each elementary school involved in the study is described along with complete demographic information for the staff and students The reasons for choosing the sample described and the nature of the two samples are discussed

Procedures for each step of the research process are explained in detail along with the qualifying literature insuring rigor in the study The analysis process is described and validity added with the addition of another education professional reviewing the analysis process IRB discussion is presented Validity, challenges, and bias are explained along with procedures incorporated to address concerns The researcher is confident each step of the study is explained to a level of satisfaction for complete understanding

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the influence of teacher perceptions on reading instruction. Reading is the foundational skill to future learning and occupies an important position in a child's learning process (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004a; Morris & Slavin, 2007). This study was both timely and necessary. A basic interpretive qualitative design with descriptive narratives was utilized to provide a more thorough understanding of elementary school teachers' perceptions of reading instruction. Teaching and learning evolves in a circular fashion (Huitt, 2007). Students come to the classroom with previous learning and behaviors. Teachers bring perceptions to the classrooms which affect their instructional practices. Governmental agencies implement rules and policies, which permeate classroom environments and further influence teacher behaviors and perceptions about reading instruction. The combination of these factors greatly impact learning interactions and teacher-student relationships in the classroom. The conceptual framework for this study is based on the circular nature of the learning cycle and the many interactive processes it includes. The desired output of the learning cycle is student achievement. However, breaches in the cycle inhibit continuity, consistency, and impede progress (Huitt, 2007).

A survey and interviews were used to collect data on teacher perceptions of reading instruction. First a survey comprised of open ended questions was used to illicit teachers' constructed responses. Data from these responses yielded five themes across

perceptions. Sixty one respondents of 219 teachers returned surveys. Secondly, teacher interviews were used to gain deeper understanding of issues raised in the surveys. Data analysis involved a thorough examination of the survey and interview data to develop codes, categories, and themes to answer the research questions for this study.

The purpose of this chapter was to present a detailed description of the findings of the inquiry into teacher perceptions of reading instruction. This chapter begins with a review of the research questions, and then provides a descriptive summary of all data collected as part of the research. This chapter also provides a demographic description of the reading teachers from both the survey instrument and the individual interviews. Finally, this chapter provides a detailed description of data analysis. Codes, categories and derived themes from the data analysis process and also a description of the interview respondents who participated in the study.

I sought to determine whether teachers' perceptions on reading instruction influenced their instructional practices. In order to investigate this phenomenon and better understand current practices, a basic interpretive qualitative study was designed to survey 219 elementary school reading teachers and investigated specific teacher instructional practices and perceptions.

This study was guided by four research questions.

Rx 1 What are elementary teachers' perceptions of successful reading instruction?

Rx 2 How do elementary teachers perceive their methods of reading instruction affect elementary students learning experiences?

RQ3: How does a teacher's perception of reading instruction influence the number of elementary students with reading deficiencies

Rx 4 How do elementary teacher demographics (gender, age, race, year of practice, and level of educational degree) influence teacher perceptions and student performance

The data derived from this study provides descriptive information serving to explain common instructional practices used by reading teachers, specifically looking at how a teacher's perception of reading instruction impacts the number of elementary students with reading deficiencies. The data also provided descriptions of strategies used by teachers to teach reading and reach struggling students. Interviews provided rich descriptions of the context into reading teachers' work environment, teacher-student relationships, and overall teaching experiences. Additionally, instructional participants' insights were provided on positive and negative influences on reading instruction plus hindrances and inhibiting factors. This study documented how teachers' perceptions of reading instruction influence students' reading performance and common reading instructional practices at the elementary level.

Context of Study

Survey Respondents

Phase one of the study consisted of a survey of teachers from four elementary schools in a rural middle Georgia county. The survey was emailed to 219 teachers with instructions and time constraints. There were 11 respondents. The survey was conducted using a commercially marketed program, *Survey Monkey*. This program was purchased due to ease of usage for participants and to assist, specifically, in categorizing

distinguishing words, phrasing, and themes in open ended responses. Teachers surveyed were employed in grades prekindergarten through fifth grade. Data collection of survey information was conducted as described in the Methodology section. Because the survey program was preset for 10 questions, survey questions 8 and 9 were combined and question 11 was moved to the number 10 position.

Surveys were transmitted via a common email system. The survey was open to participants for a 2 week window. After 1 week, an email reminder was sent to potential participants. At the end of the 2 weeks, survey access was closed and survey results printed. The survey program printed each individual answer in alignment with the correlated question.

All survey respondents were female with the exception of one male. The years of teaching experience ranged from 1 year to 30 years. No teachers in the survey ranged in service years 25 through 29. The largest participation rate was from Sunnyside Primary at 48.3%. Questions 4 and 5 addressed grade level taught, instruction and ability grouped classrooms, and whether or not the teacher taught, or had previously taught, reading. Sixteen of the 61 respondents had never taught reading.

Table 1

Surveyed Teacher Information

Years Teaching Experience	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30
	11	15	14	12	9	4

n = 61

Responses from the surveys identified grade levels in which respondents worked. Among the RI teachers surveyed, the majority (n = 527) taught in the primary grades from pre-kindergarten through third grade as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Grade Level Taught and Total Number of Respondents

Grade Level	Total Respondents
Pre-kindergarten	11
Kindergarten	11
1 st	11
2 nd	11
3 rd	11
4 th	2
5 th	5
Multiple Grade Level Special Education Teachers	11

Survey data was summarized for each question. Most frequently occurring answers were tabulated and ordered. Tables were developed to allow for easy access to coding abbreviations. Tables were also developed to allow for simplicity in studying and comparing collected survey data.

Interview Participants

Phase two of data collection consisted of semi structured interviews with four survey respondents chosen from volunteers. The purpose of the interviews was to clarify survey findings and add depth to the perception data. One teacher from each elementary

school in the surveyed district was chosen to be interviewed. The goal of conducting one interview at each school was to provide an understanding of perceptions across the school districts allowing for comparisons of culture, leadership, instructional practices, and student socio economic status from the interviewees transcript.

Interviews were held at a location and time of the participant's choice to insure interviewees were comfortable, and also to encourage freely sharing of information. Each interview participant was given a pseudonym to insure anonymity. The four participant pseudonym names are Samantha, Elizabeth, Hannah, and Madeline. Upon completion of each interview, hand written notes and recordings were reviewed. I transcribed the recording of each interview while my recollections were most vivid. After completing transcription, each participant received an emailed copy of the transcript. The purpose was to allow review of their commentary as a member checking procedure to strengthen validity and reliability.

Participant profiles were compiled on each interviewee (Seidman, 2007). Three categories were used to chunk data, including organizational, substantive, and theoretical. The research questions served as the organizational element or folders for the collected data. All collected data related to one of the research questions. Substantive categories were comprised of the participants' words and phrasing. Theoretical categories were determined and allowed for placement of collected data into deductively developed themes (Maxwell, 2005).

Participant profiles were created using Seidman's (2006) process to produce rich and robust commentary. Participant profiles, interview notes, and survey data were continuously reviewed in a logical consistent manner. Table N provides interviewee

participant profile information including, gender, race, marital status, number of children, age, years of teaching, and highest degree obtained

Table N

Demographics of Interview Participants

Participants	Gender	Race	Marital Status	Children	Age	Years Teaching	Highest Degree
Samantha	Female	White	M	2	34	15	Masters
Elizabeth	Female	White	M	1	34	12	Masters
Hannah	Female	White	M	2	35	8	Masters
Madeline	Female	White	S	0	25	4	Masters

n = 4

Three of the participants responded to the member checking email within 24 hours. Elizabeth and Madeline agreed to the interview transcription as presented. Hannah wanted a portion of her interview clarified. She did not want to make changes as simply to clarify her answers so they would be easier to understand. Samantha was emailed the original transcript and sent two reminder emails before confirming acceptance of the interview transcription. Once all interviewees confirmed accuracy of the transcripts data analysis began.

Samantha

Samantha was interviewed in her classroom on Monday, March 1st, 2015. The interview was conducted over a span of 58 minutes. She is a white, female, 34 years of age, married with two children. She asked to be interviewed in her classroom at the school where she works. She has two daughters ages 8 and 9. She currently teaches fifth grade at Sunnyside Elementary. Sunnyside is home to grades third through fifth and has approximately 450 students. She has previously taught resource classes and kindergarten.

Her highest degree level is a MastersE She has been teaching for 15 years, with part of her service time being in another Georgia cityE

Having taught the same subject for the last 8 years, she is fairly confident in her lessons and planning abilitiesE She and another teacher are the only two who teach Language Arts in fifth gradeE They collaborate on lesson planning and try to stay at a similar paceE

I have taught the same thing for the last 8 years so it does not take me all that long to start preparationE I start preparation usually around Wednesday so that I am ready for MondayE I would say I work on plans Nto 4 hours a weekE I always remember previously taught lessons when I pull out the plans for the upcoming weekE I make notes in the margins each time I teach it so it will remind me of items I want to change before I teach it againE

Samantha found her favorite reading program while teaching kindergarten, *100 Easy Lessons to teach your Child to Read*, by Phyllis Haddock and Elaine Bruner, 198NE She bought this book to assist her in the classroomE The materials and programs available to her were not providing the results she desired with her studentsE She elaborated confidently this “is a program for reading that really worksE”

When discussing positive effects, Samantha found paired passages make the students think differentlyE Paired passages are an activity where she pairs a student of lower reading ability with a student of a higher level. “Constructed Response paired passages stretch the students or make them think in a different mannerE I have found the paired passages more beneficial than the guided or leveled readers.” She believes this activity works well for practicing constructed response questionsE Another effective

measure or one producing a positive impact on her students is concern and encouragement. "Show them you are proud of their successes and accomplishments." She feels showing a student you care makes them work harder and longer to achieve. She said, "A lot of kids really and truly seem to care if they disappoint me." Her students try to please her because she is encouraging and positive.

I believe I need to know that my students will be ready for the next school year. I want to insure that my students are ready for success at the next level. When we hit this time of the school year, I want to know that my students are ready for the Milestones test. I have a check off list. I want to feel like I have provided students the information at least three times by this time of year. It may not be three times, but I want to make sure they have had a review before the test. One hindrance she noted was depth of expectations. She explained, "Many kids that are struggling with reading will get bogged down. They will push it aside. We have to recognize when they are becoming overwhelmed. When students consistently see others succeeding and they are constantly failing it also becomes discouraging to the students."

Samantha stated students are more likely to give up when discouragement takes over. The students engage in problematic behaviors. She went on to explain students would rather be known as a trouble maker than someone who is slow. Another hindrance she often sees is apathy, both from the student and the parent. "Students do not do homework and parents will sign the zeroes for homework, but nothing ever changes. Parents are not concerned." It is hard to instill an importance for education when it is not reinforced at

home. It sets the wrong precedent. Her students' see their parents do not work or did not finish school; therefore, they do not see the value in completing their education.

Samantha does believe her perceptions influence her teaching. She tries to show her students how not doing homework or studying affects their grades. "I show them that the kids that practice and do homework consistently make better grades." She compares instances where homework was completed and their test or quiz grades are positive to illustrate her point. "I believe I need to know that my students will be ready for the next grade." She also sees her perceptions being influenced by the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System or Tr ES.

Tr ES has shown me that I need to differentiate more, especially in assessments. I noticed that I was doing just one type of assessment, like a multiple choice test, matching, or a fill in the blank. I was doing all the work, instead of letting the students have some control over their learning. I needed to expand my thinking. One week they may have a book test and the next week constructed response questions.

The standards imposed by the new evaluation system made her realize she did not differentiate her assessments. She explained, "I realized that I was doing just one type of assessment. I was doing all the work, instead of letting the students have some control over their learning. I had to expand my thinking." Both differentiation and assessments are specific standards in the Tr ES evaluation process. The new process compares a teacher's students' results year to year to produce a continual growth rate. Teachers are evaluated based on attaining a targeted growth rate. Samantha believes, "You cannot compare students year to year. Each year my students are unique."

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was interviewed at the local Starbucks on Friday, March 1st 2018. Her interview was conducted over a span of 90 minutes. She is 34 years old, white, and female. She has been teaching for 18 years. She currently teaches fifth grade at North Sunset Elementary School. North Sunset Elementary contains grades prekindergarten through fifth and has approximately 1200 students. Elizabeth is married and has an adopted daughter. She originally taught elementary grades in another county in Georgia.

Elizabeth originally taught in another county but transitioned to her current position because she wanted her daughter to attend school in the system. She stated,

We thought about getting into this county system just to get our daughter in the system. This system still has traditional values. In my previous county everything has changed probably because of the different cultures the [Air Force] Base brings in, but no birthday parties at school or Valentines. Everything has become 'politically correct'. So I made the transition. The Air Force Base and the diverse community supporting it have caused the system to change to a more neutral politically correct atmosphere. The system does not want to deal with ideological conflicts.

Elizabeth lives in a nearby county. Her husband is also a teacher. He is currently employed as a middle school teacher. He has been teaching for 18 years. Elizabeth relates she grew up in northern Alabama which is mostly white, while southern Alabama is mostly black. "Until I attended college at Troy State University I had never been in a racially diverse group." She has earned a master's degree and her gifted endorsement.

Elizabeth relates planning takes her an hour and a half. She plans out the connections, mini lessons, and resources. "If you count the time it takes me to pull resources, it is more like 1.5 hours." She and her peers do not collaborate on lesson plans. She stated, "My principal wishes the teachers would collaborate more, however, to date we still do not."

Elizabeth's favored reading program is the *Lucy Calkins Units*. It is all inclusive containing reading and writing elements. It is considered a balanced literacy approach. She stated,

When I went through my undergrad, we learned about balanced literacy and guided reading. They have been huge for me. I was surprised how much the teachers in this system did not know about guided reading. In Houston, we used the Lucy Calkin's units, instructional frameworks, writer's workshop, and reader's workshop. Reader's workshop is really beneficial. The conferencing with kids is so important. The independent time and small group instruction allows for conferencing.

She senses this program has been very beneficial for students. The program is so varied and contains different approaches that the students respond well. The actions most positively effecting reading in her opinion are guided reading activities and conferencing with the student. She feels, "The conferencing with kids is so important." This provides her with an opportunity to discuss strengths and weaknesses with the student and develop activities and strategies to address the student's weaknesses. Another positive aspect in letting students give their input is the students take ownership of the corrective actions.

“Balanced literacy with conferencing and guided reading are two things that can help you determine where your students are struggling.”

When discussing hindrances, Elizabeth feels the home is a large factor

“At home [sic], They are not being exposed to books or read to at home. They are given a device or put in front of the television. This computer generation just does not take the time to talk with their children.” She reads to her daughter every day. They are constantly reading. Books are considered an important possession in their home. Unfortunately, she states many of her students do not have any books at home. Another aspect she contends may be a hindrance is the teacher’s approach to reading instruction, “The way that teachers approach reading [instruction] is also very important. You have to have a passion for what you teach and the students.” Students’ have personalities. Reading instruction has to be planned considering those personalities. She feels it is not just about what she likes, but what her students like. She is concerned teachers are “turning students against reading.”

Elizabeth believes her perceptions influence her teaching. She stated, “I love teaching reading.” She likes to read books on the level of her students so she can confidently recommend books she knows the students will like. “Percy Jackson [and] Harry Potter are the type of books that get boys interested in reading.” She enjoys teaching reading because it is something she personally enjoys. It shows in her exuberance for the subject. She indicates evaluations and testing of students for growth rates does drive her instruction. However, “it does need to be useful.” If the testing and evaluation become the only focus you lose on instruction. When she was teaching in Houston County, a data evaluation noted an area in which students were weak. She

stated, “When you focus on one [area] you lose on the other. Fluency is so important. Students must have decent fluency to be able to string thoughts together and hold onto that concept.”

Hannah

Hannah was interviewed at the school where she works on February 2nd, 2015. The interview was conducted over a span of 50 minutes. She is a white, 35 year old, female. She has been married for 18 years and has two girls, ages 11 and 9. She has her Master’s degree and is dually certified to teach special education and early childhood. She is employed at Sunnyside Primary school as a co-teacher in a second grade Early Intervention Program (EIP) classroom. This classroom is a regular education environment with a smaller number of students to help struggling students reach their potential. Sunnyside has 88 students in grades prekindergarten through second. Hannah has taught for 8 years with one year being in a nearby county where she taught third grade. While at Sunnyside she has co-taught in first and second grades and also taught resource classes for pre-kindergarten through second grade.

Hannah plans 1 to 2 hours weekly. She stated,

I spend several hours on initial planning. However, I do a great deal of supply and demand planning. This planning allows me to customize things on an individual student level through the use of constant informal assessments and observations. I do this for regular education students and special education students. In addition, I use data to determine the need for modification of my lessons. If students are having difficulty understanding a lesson, I may determine that I need to present

something in a different way, implement a new technique, etc. A lot of planning is done on the fly.

Because she has taught many students with diverse needs she finds this process is often necessary to assist students. When discussing collaboration she related, “I collaborate constantly with the other teachers.” Not only is this effective for helping students succeed, but also when addressing parents she feels it is important for all the team teachers “to be on the same page.”

Hannah does not use just one reading program, but feels there are parts of different programs when combined have the desired result. “I do not use just one program because I haven’t found one that meets the needs of all my students.” She does have one favored program called Sonday reading program. “It uses a well-rounded approach by offering learners reading, spelling, and writing opportunities using phonics and sight words.” She is convinced we are making students dyslexic by the way we teach them to sound out words. She feels the chunking method advocated in the Sonday program does not

This method seems to assist students that have characteristics of true dyslexia and those that struggle with taught dyslexia. According to this online program, programs that focus on site word only approaches neglect to instill the importance of left to right reading resulting in a taught form of dyslexia, in addition, programs that focus on putting together individual letters sounds to form a word often leave struggling readers with a disconnection.

Hannah contends,

We spend so much time teaching students how to read that we struggle to find time to teach students why they should read. I am afraid we are boring them. I want to nurture a love for reading. I want them to create images in their minds from reading.

Hannah believes the most positive aspect of teaching is instilling in the students the value of what they are doing. Teachers have to make the real world connections to get students to understand how what they are learning will benefit them in the future.

When discussing hindrances she knows education or reading is not valuable to the parents of the students she serves. She states, "I am not one to typically pass the buck, however, education and reading is not important or valuable to the parents of the students we serve." She also contends gaps in the state required standards are also a hindrance.

There is a lot of holes and gaps. [Reading Instruction] does not transition well from grade to grade. We need to work to adjust and smooth those transitions to eliminate gaps. The gap between kindergarten and first grade is vast and first to second is lacking. I think there will continue to be gaps until we address this issue.

She is certain there will continue to be gaps in student learning until the gaps in the state curriculum standards are addressed.

Perceptions do influence her teaching performance. She tries to be open minded when collaborating with other teachers. She is a strong proponent of working together because she feels she learns so much more in this manner. Her strongest feelings are succinctly illustrated in a quote from Albert Einstein which is her tag line on her email. "Everyone is a genius but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its

entire life thinking it is stupid.” She conveys that “talents lie in different places or why else are we on this earth?”

Hannah’s perceptions do not influence her thoughts of the evaluation process; however, she fears the evaluation process influences others’ perceptions of her teaching. She explains this confusing idea in this manner:

They do not influence my passion for my students, but it does chisel away at my passion for teaching. It is nicking away at a teacher’s confidence in their teaching. It is very obvious that if a person has confidence in themselves they will do a better job.

Madeline

Madeline was surveyed in the food court at the mall on Tuesday, March 10, 2015. The location of the interview was chosen by Madeline. The interview spanned a period of 40 minutes. She is the youngest teacher surveyed at 25. She is a white, single, female. She has been teaching for 4 years. This is her first year in the county system. She currently is a co-teacher in fifth grade at South Sunset Elementary. South Sunset houses grades prekindergarten through fifth and has 1100 students. She is originally from a nearby county and taught in north Georgia for her first 3 years in a Severe and Moderately Profound Special Education class (MI/MO). She has her Master’s degree and is dually certified to teach special education and early childhood.

Madeline expresses she and her team teachers often eat lunch together and discuss their plans, but they do not necessarily collaborate. Her co-teachers are the content teachers and she is trying to assist students and make learning accommodations. She stated, “What we are doing is so different.” Many times she feels her students are so far

behind the others there is no way she can collaborate with the other team teachers on lesson plans. “I try to collaborate with all four teachers on our team in all four content areas, Science, Social Studies, Math and Language Reading. It can be hectic.” She feels for collaboration to be successful the collaborating teachers need to be like minded or at the very least open minded. She stated, “I am not new to teaching, but unfamiliar with the concept of co teaching. Personality is a lot of co teaching. You have to look at styles, structured versus unstructured [of the teachers placed in a room to work together].”

Madeline does not use a set reading program, but a variety of bits and pieces to meet the needs of her students. She uses a lot of different resources. Her favorite program is Scholastic leveled or guided readers. “I really like to use the leveled readers in small group instruction.” This system contains many different Lexile levels of books and it is easy to accommodate the various needs of her students. She is an advocate of whole language instruction,

Life skills are really important. Whole language is important for understanding life skills. They [students] have to be able to recognize things. I want my students to be able to look at something and understand it, especially when dealing with MIMO kids.

When discussing the greatest hindrance, she feels “discipline is a large issue. If they cannot behave, they cannot learn.” If she is not supported by administration in discipline issues and the classroom is not under control, she cannot teach. She also believes more parent support is needed. When trying to address the needs of special education students she can never get parents to come in and meet with her. Parents are not interested.

Madeline does not believe her perceptions influence her teaching. She is open and flexible. Her concern is her students. She does feel her perceptions are compelled by the evaluation process. She relates,

Last school year was not stressful because I did the Georgia Alternative Assessment (GAA) with my [MI/MO] students. It is a load of ‘bohunkus. This year, definitely I am stressed. We are having to teach the students how to take the test. It is a new test. We are all stressed, especially because this is such an advanced test.

This year students will take the new Georgia Milestones Assessment. She confides, “It is always unnerving when the test is new and you do not know what to expect, but you do know student performance on the test will affect your evaluation [as a teacher].” The Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS) replaces the CRCT or Criterion Referenced Competency Test which was retired after the 2014 school year summer test administration. The GMAS measures how well the students have learned the knowledge and skills outlined in the state adopted content standards. This change in assessment was due in part to the adoption of new Georgia curriculum standards (GaDOE, 2015).

Data Analysis

In this chapter five themes were revealed as data was carefully and continually reviewed. The data was used to answer the research questions and fill the gaps within the literature related to perceptions of elementary school teachers.

Participant profiles, interview notes, and survey data were continuously reviewed in a logical consistent manner. Participant profiles were compared to original interview

transcripts to insure accurate understanding of data. After several thorough reviews of the data, a list of codes was developed. As survey data was analyzed, reoccurring answers were noted and tabulated. Most frequently occurring answers were given a data code, for example, phonemic awareness was coded as 'PA.' Future occurrences of a similar answer in the collected data were given the equivalent code. After thorough review of the data, codes were grouped in deductively determined categories. Tables 4, 5, R, and S show how analytic does developed from the data.

Table 4

Coding Symbols for Preferred Reading Program

Codes	Code description	. of mentions in the survey
CC	Cindy Cupp	15
SX	Saxon	11
GR	Scholastic Guided Reading	5
HM	Houghton Mifflin	2
SRA	Reading Laboratory	2
HR	Harcourt	1
LC	Lucy Calkins	1

Table 5

Coding Symbols for Positive Influencing Factors

Codes	Code Description	. of mentions in the survey
PA	Phonemic awareness	22
FC	FluencyIComprehension	1N
RP	RepetitionIPractice	8
SWR	Sight word recognition	4
SGI	Small Group Instruction	R
EX	Early Exposure	S
TA	Teacher Attitude	1

Table R

Coding Symbols for Hindrances to Reading Instruction

Codes	Code description	. of mentions in the survey
OS	One size fits all	2
FD	FocusIDevelopment	12
HO	HomeIParents	18
TI	Time	N
RS	Resources	1
GP	Gaps	10
LE	Lack of experiences	9
DM	DesireImotivation	2
SP	Social Promotion	1

Table S

Coding Symbols for Inhibiting Factors

Codes	Code description	. of mentions in the survey
EP	Exposure	5
TI	Time	5
FD	Focus/developmental	5
CR	Curriculum	10
PA	Lack of phonemic awareness	2
HO	Home/parent support	5
PD	Peer distraction	1
GP	Gaps in Achievement	2
TM	Teacher mindset	2
RS	Lack of resources	2
DM	Lack of desire/motivation	2

Data analysis involved a thorough review of all collected data to establish the foundation for the analysis of data, data was tabulated and summarized into the most frequently occurring subject matter. Participant profiles were created to produce rich and robust commentary (Seidman, 2007). The survey data, interview transcripts, and profiles were also further explained using Maxwell's (2005) categorizing procedures.

Just as the conceptual framework for this study is based on the circular nature of the learning cycle, so also is the process used to develop themes. A continual or cyclical review of data helped focus the data into chunked topical categories. In qualitative research data is created by “chunking experiences into recordable units” (Introduction to text & qualitative data Analysis, p. 5, 2015). Figure 2 shows the interconnectivity of categorical, substantive, and theoretical processes used to analyze the data.

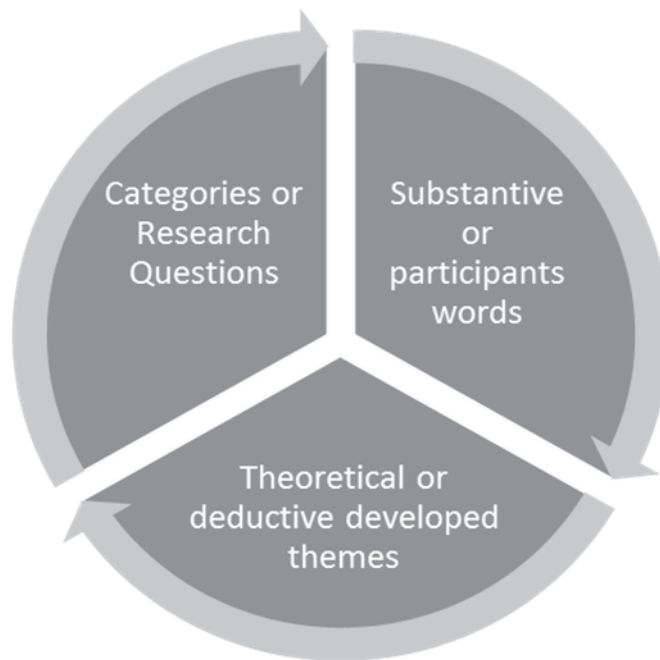


Figure 2 *Interconnectivity of Categorical, Substantive, and Theoretical Categories*

Chosen commentary excerpts for categories were taken from integrated survey and interview data. Codes were chunked together to form categories and at that juncture categories were further chunked to develop five themes. (2015). Table 8 provides a synopsis of themes, categories, and supporting commentary.

Table 8

Matrix of Chunked Themes, Categories and Supporting Commentary

Theme	Category	Supporting commentary
Instructional Characteristics	Phonemic Awareness	<p>“phonics are key to further developing, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.”</p> <p>“I believe phonics works well in helping students to learn how to read.”</p>
	Fluency	“comprehension and fluency”
	Comprehension	<p>“students must be able to comprehend what they read”</p> <p>“when students are able to read quickly it builds confidence”</p>
	Repetition/Practice	<p>“Spending time on task reading”</p> <p>“frequent reading”</p> <p>“Read and re read”</p>
	Sight word recognition	<p>“Some struggle with sounds while other cannot recognize site words”</p> <p>”sight word recognition and the ability to blend”</p>
	Small group	<p>“small group instruction”</p> <p>“Small guided reading groups”</p>
	Early exposure	<p>“Early exposure, children raised in a literature rich environment ready earlier than others.”</p> <p>“an environment of early exposure”</p>

Home School Disconnect	Home Life	“students have no help at home” “limited support at home”
	Gaps	“lack of preparation”
	Desire	“no desire to learn” “lack of interest”
	Value	“education not valued at home” “parents do not see value in education”
Background knowledge	Developmental	“students are not developmentally ready” “age and maturity”
	Lack of Experiences	“lack of exposure to reading” “students have no exposure or experiences to be able to understand”
Collaboration	Similar planning	“work on plans together with other teachers” “I collaborate with team teachers on planning”
	Collaboration	“the other teacher and I collaborate often” “...we do not plan together”
Institutional factors	Insufficient time	“not enough time to remediate” “not enough time spent on reading”
	Gaps	“gaps in curriculum standards”
	Resources	“resources are not sufficient” “reading programs are not scripted”

Research Question One

Research question 1 addressed teacher perceptions of successful reading instruction. Respondents were asked for their preferred reading instructional program. The study findings revealed seven different instructional reading programs specifically mentioned, or perceived as good, in producing positive results. The top three mentioned programs were Cindy Cupp Reading Program, Saxon Phonics, and Scholastic Guided Reading. All other programs received only one or two mentions in the survey. Table 4 shows the codes developed from the reading program identified and number of respondents who chose each reading program.

The four interviewees all relied on more than one program for what they perceived to be a successful lesson. They pulled from many different resources to meet the needs of the students. Forty one percent of survey respondents also recorded usage of a variety of resources to ensure student success. Interview participants also disclosed information on time spent in preparation for reading instruction and collaboration with peers in addition to the survey questions. Three of the interviewees spent in excess of N hours planning each week, with one spending 2 hours or more. Three of the interviewees related they collaborated with peers on lesson plans. One related she spoke with other teachers on a daily basis regarding planning and instruction, but did not plan collaboratively. When asked was collaboration with peers required, only one responded yes. Others said they were encouraged to collaborate, but not required. Supporting commentary for derived categories presented in Table 9 was taken from interview transcripts.

Table 9

Interviewee Responses Correlated to Research Question 1

Response	Interviewee	Supporting Interview Commentary
Similarities in planning Hours	Samantha	“I would say I work on plans Nto 4 hours a week.”
	Elizabeth	“If you count the time I am pulling resource, it is more like three hours.”
	Hannah	“I spend several hours [each week] on initial planningE
	Madeline	“I collaborate with all four teachers on my teamEI really have to do my own planningE I probably spend 2 to 3 hours a week.”
Collaboration	Samantha	“Yes, the other fifth grade teacher who teaches Language Arts and Reading and I collaborate oftenE We always try to stay together.”
	Elizabeth	“...we <u>do not</u> plan together.”
	Hannah	“I collaborate with my peers constantly.”
	Madeline	“I collaborate with all four teachers on our team.”
Various Reading Program	Samantha	“I use a variety of resources.”
	Elizabeth	“balanced literacy and guided reading with conferencing”
	Hannah	“I use a variety of programs.”
	Madeline	“We use a lot of different resources to teach reading.”
PositivesDValue	Samantha	“Value their successes”

Research Question Two

Research question 2 related to aspects of reading instruction teachers perceived to positively influence student reading ability and what they perceived to be the greatest hindrance to students being able to learn to read. Results for perceptions of positive influence from the survey were numerous. Examples of noteworthy commentary include: “Spending time on task practicing the weakest areas is most helpful in producing better readers. Some students struggle sounding, while others can’t recognize sight words, and yet others don’t comprehend.” “Help at home and phonemic awareness. Students need to hear the sounds and put them together to make words.” “Students seem to advance with reading fluency when they are challenged and able to read content interesting to them.” “Guided reading groups and a variety of book topics make students enjoy reading.” “Early exposure, students who are raised in a literature rich environment and are exposed early on will be much better readers.” “Exposure is a biggie! Some children come to school having never seen a letter before. Plus they have to be mature enough in order to learn to read.”

Table 10

Positive and Negative Aspects of Reading Instruction from Participants

Ranking Order	Positive Influences on Reading Ability	Negative Influences on Reading Ability
1	Phonics Phonemic Awareness	Absence of Importance of Reading Ability in Home Life
2	Fluency Comprehension	Lack of Focus Developmental Delays
N	Repetition Practice	Gaps in Learning
4	Early Exposure to Reading	Lack of Reading Experiences
5	Small Group Instruction	Insufficient Time to Implement Reading Programs with Fidelity
R	Site Word Recognition	Lack of Desire One Size Fits All Approaches

n = 59

Respondent commentary from the interviews was similar to the survey. A real life connection was noted, along with teaching students the value of reading. Interviewees perceived conferencing with students and discussing strengths and weaknesses as essential to student success in reading. Interviewees also had an opportunity to discuss their perceptions in relationship to their performance. Table 11 relates commentary on how interviewees feel their teaching was compelled by their perceptions.

Table 11

Interview Responses Relating to Research Question 2

Area	Interviewee	Supporting Interview Commentary
Perceptions effect Teaching	Samantha	Yes. Completers of homework make better grades because it provides a practice for the students, just to tie in to what we were talking about. I show them that the kids that practice and do Homework consistently make better grades.”
	Elizabeth	“Yes, I can see that. I love teaching reading. I worry about losing boys as readers.”
	Hannah	“Yes, I think my perceptions influence my teaching performance. I try to be open minded when collaborating with others. I am not the end all to be all, and I realize there is a lot I don’t know. When we work together, we learn.”
	Madeline	“Yes, I am open and flexible. Whatever my co teacher is using I am happy to use also. In fifth grade students should already be able to read, but that is not the case. Some of my students are working on site words and some are working on decoding.”

Research Question Three

Research question 3 related to perceived hindrances. The most mentioned perceived hindrance was the home with 103 of respondents choosing this answer. The second most perceived hindrance was focus or developmental age of the student. The

third and fourth most perceived hindrances were very close at 15 and 13, lack of experiences and gaps in instruction, respectively, 29% of the perceived findings receiving one or two mentions were the one size fits all approach, resources, insufficient time, student desire, and social promotion.

Research question 3 also related directly with inhibiting perceptions. The survey results for this question were somewhat surprising. The number one perceived inhibiting factor was curriculum resources to teach reading. Insufficient time and students' developmental level tied for the second most perceived inhibiting factors. While the third perceived hindrance was also a tie. Exposure to reading, reading materials, being read to at home, and parental support had five mentions.

Interview findings were similar to survey perceptions. While there was agreement in the perceived hindrance of parental support or involvement, but all four interviewees had a different opinion on the 'why.' Their perceptions of hindrances were: discipline and parental support; home and the teacher's approach or excitement in teaching; depth of expectations and parent apathy and parent apathy and gaps in curriculum. This information is also presented in Table 12.

Table 12

Interviewee Perceptions on Hindrances to Reading Instruction

Hindrances	Interviewee	Interview commentary
Home	Samantha	“Parent apathy”
	Elizabeth	“home”
	Hannah	“Parent apathy”
	Madeline	“Parental Support”

Research Question Four

Research question 4 correlated to demographics. The majority of survey respondents were women. Only one man responded to the survey. Length of teaching service crossed the entire continuum from beginner to 20 years. The respondents represent a variety of grade levels with the majority being in kindergarten through second grade. Sixteen of the respondents had never taught reading. Sixteen respondents volunteered to be interviewed. The survey did not ask the participants to reveal their race. Thus the researcher had no way to know the race of the interview volunteer. Interview participants were all white females. All interviewees had obtained a Master’s degree. Each interviewee was also dually certified in Early Childhood Education and Special Education. The length of teaching service also varied from 4 years to 15 years. Ages ranged from 25 to 35 with the majority being in their low to mid-thirties. Three of the interviewees were married with two children each. One interviewee was single with no children.

Interview participants provided insight into the effect of the new teacher evaluation system on teacher perceptions. While this topic may not seem related to

demographics, it is when given certain considerations. New teachers to the profession have the expectations of the new evaluation system already instilled in them through college preparation programs. Teachers with more years of service will have a much different view than teachers in the induction phase of their career. Teachers with many years of service will have seen the evaluation instrument and process change over time as varying policies and procedures have been put in place. This continual change gives an experienced teacher a more skeptical attitude of ‘this also shall pass. Table 1N presents information on teacher demographic, mainly how certification, degree and years of service influence their professional practice.

Table 1N

Commentary from Participant Interviews Relating to Research Question 4

Topic	Interviewee	Supporting Interview Commentary
Dual Certification	Samantha	“I received my BS & MS from Georgia Southern University in Special Education. I took the Praxis for Early Childhood and added that certification also.”
	Elizabeth	“I got my four year degree from Troy State University in Early Childhood and Special Education. I obtained my master’s degree in Early Childhood from Georgia College and State University.”
	Hannah	“I have my master’s degree in education. I also have a bachelor’s degree in special education and regular early childhood education.”
	Madeline	“I received my Bachelor’s 6Demorest, GA campus7 and my

		Master's degree (Athens, GA campus) from Piedmont College. I am certified to teach in D2 adaptive, D2 General Education within certain content areas, D5 general special education, and D5 early childhood."
Perceptions compelled by evaluation	Samantha	"Yes, TKES has shown me that I need to differentiate more especially in assessments."
	Elizabeth	"Yes, Testing does drive my instruction, but it does need to be useful. Everything we are using is not necessarily helpful."
	Hannah	"Yes, I think teaching evaluations influence others' perceptions of your teaching; therefore, it influences your perceptions of your teaching."
	Madeline	"This year, definitely."

Derived Themes

This chapter provides a synopsis of collected data and the themes which emerged after careful and continuous review of the survey data, interview transcripts, and reflection on audio recordings. Survey data was tabulated and summarized into the most frequently occurring subject matter. Interview questions aligned with research questions. Participant profiles were used to produce rich and robust commentary (Seidman, 2007). Survey data, interview transcripts, and profiles were dichotomized using Maxwell's (2005) categorizing procedures and data chunking (Introduction to Textual Qualitative Data Analysis, 2015). Organizational, substantive, and theoretical were categories used to develop the themes. Research questions served as the

organizational element or folders for the collected data. Substantive categories comprised the participant's words and phrasing. Thematic categories were determined and allowed for placement of collected data into deductively developed themes.

Data from the study resulted in five major themes. Many of the data elements were overlapping, fitting into more than one category. The five deductively derived themes include reading instructional characteristics, home/school disconnect, background knowledge, collaboration, and institutional factors.

Reading Instructional Characteristics

Many instructional characteristics were mentioned repeatedly in the data. Phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, repetition, sight words, small group instruction, leveled readers and repeated practice were mentioned numerous times throughout the data. Teachers use a plethora of instructional methods daily.

Home/School Disconnect

Teachers complain parents do not take an active role in their child's education. Teachers contend reading fluently is dependent upon practice and review of lessons taught at school. Teachers also related parents do not assist students with homework or practice sight words with their children. Teachers feel a lack of parent involvement, whether because of apathy or other issues beyond the parents' control, negatively affects the learner.

Background Knowledge

The teachers contend a lack of early exposure to language and limited vocabulary are indicative of a child will experience reading difficulties. Teachers reported many students come to school without basic knowledge or background experiences. Teachers

believe this fact inhibits a students' ability to read and comprehend because they have no real world experience to relate with the information

Professional Collaboration

Teachers reported collaboration with peers continually or not at all. Teachers who collaborate in planning and sharing what works in a classroom contend it would greatly benefit the profession if more teachers would collaborate. Teachers also conveyed feeling overwhelmed by student needs. If more teachers understood how collaboration could support them and the student, it may be possible to reduce said feelings of being overwhelmed.

Institutional Factors

Throughout the data there are mentions of hindrances teachers have no control over adding to their concerns of being overwhelmed. Many of the reported problems revealed in the data deal with teaching schedules, time constraints, resources, and state defined curriculum standards. These are all issues needing to be addressed by the school, local, and state administrators.

Summary

The collected data consisted of surveys and interviews from teachers at four rural Georgia elementary schools. The survey was emailed to 219 teachers. The number of respondents to the survey was 143. Four teachers, one from each elementary school, was chosen from a volunteer pool of survey respondents to be interviewed. The majority of survey respondents were female, 98%. The four interviewees were female. The length of teaching service for respondents ranged from beginner to 20 years. Sunnyside Primary

had the majority of survey respondents at 483 , South Sunset Elementary at 2R3 , and Sunnyside Elementary and North Sunset Elementary both at 1N eachE

Garnering an understanding of teachers' perceptions on reading instruction was the goal of the research. Perceptions for this study associated to teachers' awareness of issues affecting reading and how their awareness influences them as teachersEMany words could interchange with the term awarenessERecognition, realization, knowledge, or even understanding, could easily be considered synonymsEUnderstanding what influences teachers with regards to instruction is an issue warranting further research 6Morrison, Wilcox, Billen, Carr, 4 Wilcox 20117E

Data gathered in this study variedahowever, there were commonalitiesEIn the areas of positive effects on reading instruction, survey respondents replied phonics, fluency and comprehension, practice, sight word recognition, small group instruction and early exposure to readingEIn the interview group the positive importance was not so specific but more general or categorized, the value of reading and learning successes, real life connections, and a balanced approach to reading instructionEIn the hindrance category however, the response was overwhelmingly the same in both areas, influence of home and family on a students' learning. From this point the two types of data diverge with surveys going toward a student's ability to focus or mental development, gaps in learning and curriculum and lack of experiencesEInterviewees also pointed out discipline issues, a teacher's approach to instruction, depth of expectations, and another commonality curriculum gapsE

Perceptions influencing evaluations also produced interesting dataETwo interviewed teachers perceived evaluations affected others perceptions of their teachingE

Another teacher perceived evaluations had shown her areas of weakness in her teaching instruction she had been blind to and it had allowed her to grow professionally. One teacher perceived testing does impact her instruction, but she contends it should not need to be the driving force. Regardless of the methodology, she continued, instruction must be beneficial to students.

Analysis of integrated data produced five overarching themes. These themes are apparent across all collected data. The five deductively derived themes include reading instructional characteristics, home/school disconnect, lack of background knowledge, professional collaboration, and institutional issues. These themes will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this Basic Interpretative qualitative study of teacher perceptions was to examine the influence of these perceptions on reading instruction. Because of the importance reading plays in a child's learning process, this study was both timely and necessary (McCardle & Chhabra, 2004; Morris & Slavin, 2007). The purpose of the research was to better understand teacher perceptions of reading instruction and inform the practice of reading instruction.

Research questions

RQ1: What are elementary (K-5) teachers' perceptions of successful reading instruction?

RQ2: How do elementary (K-5) teachers perceive their methods of reading instruction affect elementary students' learning experiences?

RQ3: How does a teacher's perception of reading instruction influence the number of elementary students with reading deficiencies?

RQ4: Do elementary (K-5) teacher demographics (gender, age, race, years of practice, and level of educational degree) influence teacher perceptions and student performance?

For this study purposeful sampling was utilized to survey and interview four elementary school reading teachers. After identifying the teachers, a survey and interview

protocol was utilized to collect the data. Survey data provided perceptions on favored reading instructional programs, greatest hindrances and inhibiting instructional factors noted by teachers, most positive instructional aspects, and teacher demographic information.

After completing the interviews, transcripts were sent to the teachers as a validity check measure (Maxwell, 2005). For data analysis, Patton's (2002) process for coding data was utilized, developing categories and themes focused on emerging meaningful patterns. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to break down the data into first level concepts, or master headings, and second level categories. Thematic or Axial coding was used to develop refined themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I also used Glaser and Strauss' (1990) constant comparative analysis methodology focusing on comparing and contrasting the interview transcripts and the survey data throughout the analysis process. Through this process the (Merriam, 2002) five major themes were uncovered and interpreted. They are as follows: reading instructional characteristics, home/school disconnect, influence of background knowledge, professional collaboration, and institutional factors.

The purpose of this final chapter is to discuss each theme in relation to the teaching and learning cycle, relevant literature related to reading instruction. Finally, at the end of this chapter study's limitations, recommendations and opportunities for future research will be highlighted.

Discussion of Themes

Reading Instructional Characteristics

Reading instruction teachers expressed different notions of the characteristics of teaching. Data results reveal teachers have strong feelings about the best methods to use in reading instruction. Of the five derived themes, this area produced the most commentary from both a positive and negative aspect. This area correlates strongly to prior research. Examples of reading instructional characteristics include the following: phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, small group instruction, site word practice, and repetition.

The majority of teachers in this study favored reading programs to be scripted in nature. A scripted instructional program is one specifically prescribing what the teacher is to do and say during instruction. This type of program provides a level of confidence to a teacher producing a perception of successful instruction. Collected data supporting this concept can be found in the type of favored reading programs chosen by survey respondents. The favored programs listed by teachers in the data are highly scripted instructional programs. The idea of using scripted programs for reading instruction is verified by Taylor, Ahlgrim-Delzell and Flowers (2010) who examined explicit or scripted instructional programs. They found the use of scripted programs decreased teacher planning of interventions yet positively boosted teacher perceptions of validity.

The fact teachers tend to use diverse reading programs is supported by Chall (1981) who argued there is no one best way to teach reading and was an early advocate of a balanced approach (Benjamin, 2011; McCardle & Chhabra, 2004a; Morris & Slavin, 2003; Pressley, 2002). Chall (1967), Juel (1988), O'Conner (2007), and Pressley (2002) all agree phonemic awareness is the cornerstone of learning how to read.

Phonemic awareness ranked number one in the collected data (R3 7) as a positive perception of learning to read (Rasinski, Rupley, and Nichols 2008) found phonemic awareness nor fluency alone had a significant impact on learning to read; however, when paired together they are a synergistic combination. Fluency and comprehension ranked second (23 7) in the data as a positive perception of reading instruction. Another instructional concept discussed by Rasinski, Rupley and Nichols (2008) along with others is practice or repetition (Benjamin, 2011; Ostewicz, 2012; McCardle & Chhabra, 2004). Practicing sight words and repetitive reading (203 7) also produced strong results. Interviewee Elizabeth also agrees with Chall (1985) arguing a balanced approach is necessary; she contends, “Balanced literacy with conferencing and guided reading are two things that can help you determine where your students are struggling.” She is also a proponent of repetitive reading, she urges students, “read and then read some more.”

Most interviewees rejected the idea of using one instruction program for teaching reading. Dunn, Carbo, and Burton (1981) refer to this as a “one size fits all” approach. Dunn, Carbo, and Burton were strong proponents of teaching to a student’s learning style. They listed it as one of the four significant strategies in promoting reading ability (1981). Likewise, the “one size fits all approach” did not rank a high percentage in the survey data, (23 7) but was a strong factor in the interviews. Elizabeth confirms, “Balanced literacy and guided reading have been huge for me.” Madeline contends, “We do not have a set reading curriculum. We use a lot of resources to teach reading.” Hannah said, “I do not use just one program because I haven’t found one that meets the needs of all of my students. So, I use a variety.”

Mayer (2003) asserts instruction should be personalized to the student's learning style. Mayer studied computerized learning. His work suggests students learn more deeply and retain information better when it is presented in multiple formats.

Teacher responses in the survey indicated they perceive enthusiastic teaching and competent instruction to also be an influential factor in reading instruction. Survey commentary supporting this concept included: "an encouraging atmosphere;" "reading instruction that supports learning styles and interests the students;" having fun activities incorporated into the lessons;" "the teacher's attitude plays a great part in students reading ability;" "a positive reading environment at school". This concept is also supported by the research of Witcher, Qiao, Onwuegbuzie, Collins, Qames, and Minor (2008) who found seven perceived instructional areas reflecting effective teaching: student centered instruction, effective classroom and behavior management, competent instruction, ethical behavior, enthusiastic teaching, knowledgeable about subject, and professionalism.

Interviewee Samantha provided an interesting version of successful reading instruction. She uses a method she calls constructed response paired passages. She also pushes high expectations for all students, providing support to insure those goals are met. She said, "Constructed response paired passages stretch the students or make them think in a different manner. I have found the paired passages more beneficial than the guided or leveled readers." Her definition of a paired passage is to place a higher functioning student with one of less familiarity with a concept and have them work together to complete a reading or writing passage. Along this same strain, Roskos and Newman (2011) found six factors imperative to a successful reading classroom: helping students

create and share, encouraging mentorship for those who are more experienced to share with less experience, fostering the belief a student's opinion matters, introducing new creative forms of student expression, forming partnerships and teams working together to complete tasks and produce working knowledge, and increasing the capacity of the individual student to serve the classroom group

Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2007) synthesized existing research about teacher instructional practices and student learning. Belief in one's performance significantly influences ability perceptions. They argued the higher the teacher's perceptions of their own effectiveness, the better organized and planned are their classroom instructional strategies. Conversely, negative ability perceptions lead to less effective instructional strategies. Hannah neatly captured these sentiments:

I think teaching evaluations influence others' perceptions of your teaching; therefore, it influences your perceptions of your teaching. When you have teachers running around like a chicken with their head cut off trying to find the next big thing to help their students, it nicks away at their confidence in their own teaching. If a person has confidence in themselves, they will do a better job.

Tyler and Boelter (2008) studied a student's confidence in their teacher and the teacher's confidence in their students. They found both concepts are vital to learning. Hannah echoed similar beliefs about reading instruction in her classroom. She stated:

I think my passion for teaching comes across to my students. If you have a passion for what you teach, it shows. I often think of Einstein's quote, "Everyone is a genius but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its entire life thinking it is stupid." In my opinion, this sums up the problem with education.

On an elementary level especially, we overtest students in specific areas. If they don't perform well in these very specific areas, we consider them below average. Every year, I teach students that have been beaten up by public education. They have been deemed inadequate because they didn't measure up to said standards considered important by the government. I look at these disheartened students and see the many abilities they [do] have, things that are equally important but are not on the test.

Graybill (1998) urged teachers to remember the important concept of all students can learn and to believe their students can succeed. Samantha also emphasized the need to develop different teaching strategies to meet the different learning styles of her students. She shared:

You cannot compare kids year to year. The ones I have this year are incomparable to any I have had before. We have to do the best we can with what walks through the door. Who are we to judge that one is better than the other? We are all individuals with our own individual strengths. I attended a workshop back in the years when they would still pay for a teacher to attend training. It was offered by an independent company, I can't remember the name, but the class was called "How to reach the rough to teach." It was excellent [training] and very beneficial. Anything I have ever tried [instructionally] from the course, has worked for me. Elizabeth, an avid reader, believes "conferencing with kids is so important." She contends independent time and small group instruction is an effective reading instructional strategy. She stated:

The way that teachers approach reading [instruction] is also very important. You have to have a passion for what you teach. Don't keep a kid from recess because they did not finish their AR book. We will turn children against reading. I am not probably the very best teacher, but I am passionate about books. I read the books that my students like so I can make a book recommendation. I have a book by Donalyn Miller that we hope to use for a book study. She is called the 'Book Whisperer'. It is such a great book to get you excited about teaching reading. Children need different types of text. Everything does not need to be complicated. They need picture books, simple texts, fun reads, and complex texts. They need a variety to help them determine the genre that interests them. I love teaching reading. I worry about losing boys as readers. We have to get them hooked on series. Percy Jackson, [and] Harry Potter, are the type of books that get boys interested.

Elizabeth's beliefs are confirmed by Taylor, Pearson, Clark and Walpole (2000) in their investigation of school and classroom factors related to primary grade reading achievement in schools with economically disadvantaged students. This study used schools classified as Title I schools, which means each school has a minimum of 403 economically disadvantaged students (2015). All but one of the surveyed schools in this study had an ED rate over 80%. Survey findings indicate small group instruction (61.03%), time spent on independent reading (61.83%), high levels of engaged behavior (61.53%), and strong home communication (61.23%) as instructional strategies that positively influence student reading instruction.

Most inhibiting factors noted in the collected data have been mentioned in previous research, however peer distraction (Brock, 2007) was a survey response not remarked upon in previous research. This is a growing issue in schools. The number of students with short attention spans who are easily drawn off task has increased in schools. The 2007 National Health Interview Survey indicated 53% of children ages 4-17 have at some point been diagnosed with ADHD (Brock, 2007; Hansen, 2009). This could be an environmental factor given that children are highly stimulated from birth; however, it could also mean the computer generation student requires more engaging instruction to remain on task.

Home/School Disconnect

The home school disconnect theme examined the break in communication and partnership between school and home. Home is the first learning environment for children (Wagner, 2010). The home school disconnect was mentioned by participants from every school location in the study. Survey results indicated family/home/parent involvement (30%) as a positive and as an inhibiting perception in a child's process of learning to read. The influence of parents on students learning to read was studied by Wagner (2010) and Durkin (1997) who identified family interaction, reading level of parents, and the amount of time parents read to their children as major determinants of a child's reading ability. Durkin's (1966) research consisted of two studies, one in New York and one in California. Her studies focused on children who learn to read early. The only noted differences in her samples were the educational level of parents. Socioeconomic status nor parents' education levels were predictive of a child's learning to

read. She found the largest determining factor to be parental influence. An important aspect of her research is socioeconomic factors did not affect students' ability to read.

All of the schools in this study are Title I funded. Title I status means a school has an economically disadvantaged population of at least 403 (2015). Many of the schools in this study had rates in excess of the 403 required for Title I status. The real factor noted by all interviewee participants is not the socioeconomic status of a student, but parent apathy. Interviewees' perceptions were also supportive of the perceived hindrance of lack of parental support or involvement. Samantha stated, "Parent apathy." Elizabeth felt students have "no support at home." Hannah said, "Parent apathy." Madeline also commented, "More parental support is needed."

Samantha recognized this disconnect relates to the lack of value or importance placed on education in the home environment. She said, "Students do not do homework and parents will sign the zeroes for homework, but nothing ever changes. Parents are not concerned." She feels it is hard to instill an importance for education in her students when it is not reinforced at home. "It sets a precedent for the students, if it doesn't matter to mom and dad it is not going to matter to the students." Students do not see the value in completing their education. Elizabeth also feels the home and a lack of support is a large factor, "At home [sic]! They are not being exposed to books or read to at home. They are given a device or put in front of the television. This computer generation just does not take the time to talk with their children." Hannah also shared similar feelings, "I am not one to typically pass the buck, however, education and reading is not important or valuable to the parents of the students we serve." Madeline also believes "more parental

support is needed.” When trying to address the needs of special education students she can never get parents to come in for meetings or conferences

Background Knowledge

Pressley (2007) maintained each person has a knowledge base. Individuals use their knowledge base to understand and connect words they are trying to read. It is a documented and researched fact that children of poverty have less exposure and a much decreased vocabulary when compared to non-poverty students (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2012). A student’s knowledge base equates with life experiences. A lack of experiences or exposure to literacy was an area mentioned numerous times as both a hindrance and an inhibiting perception in learning to read on the survey.

Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2007) noted a level of understanding was necessary for students to build upon their knowledge. However, students often come to the classroom with preconceived notions of how the world works. Students may not be able to build upon the preexisting concepts, especially if they are inaccurate or lacking in depth. This confused knowledge base may be a hindrance to a struggling student.

Survey findings show background knowledge is perceived as a positive perception at 123. Establishing base knowledge is a way to allow students to retrieve and apply knowledge. Notable commentaries from survey respondents counting exposure as a positive perception are as follows: “exposure to print;” “early exposure because students who are raised in a literature rich environment and are exposed early will be much better readers;” “an environment of early exposure;” “building background knowledge.” Notable comments as a negative perception (34%) include: “no prior knowledge or background

experience;” “no exposure prior to starting school;” “not being exposed;” “[lack of] background knowledge limits student understanding.” Interviewee Samantha also states, “A lot of kids that are struggling with reading [when they come to fifth grade] will get bogged down. They will push it aside. We have to recognize [lack of background knowledge] when they are becoming overwhelmed.”

When discussing hindrances with the interviewees, one of the most noted perceptions was depth of expectations. This phrase could be defined in several ways. One interviewee discussed it from the point of having high expectations for every student. Students need to understand their teachers believe they can accomplish the tasks.

Another interviewee discussed depth of expectations from a variant point of view contending too much is expected from students at an earlier age. Research confirms many students have not developed mentally to a level to understand the complex and abstract ideas required with common core (Carlsson Paige, McLaughlin & Almon, 2015; Strauss, 2015).

Interviewee Samantha stated in her interview that she tried to provide each student with attention. She strongly believes struggling students need to know the teacher cares and is there for them; “Value their successes.” A previous study by Ranz (2007) found the opposite indicating in the substantive category the higher the achievement of the student, the more attention the student received from the teacher. Ranz (2007) studied the relationship between teacher perceptions and the teacher’s behavior toward the students.

Professional Collaboration

Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes (1997), Stanford University professors and editors of *Teaching as the Learning Profession*, identified shared problem-solving as a crucial component to supporting schoolwide change. When teachers are given professional learning opportunities to collaborate and study their pedagogy, they become “experts sharing their own pedagogical inventions with peers, subject to questioning, critique, and revision,” says Sykes (1997). Sykes goes on to say this type of collaboration encourages teachers to be reflective of their personal practice and creates an environment conducive to what he termed the ‘scholarship of teaching’ (1997). This allows teachers to think of themselves as intellectuals engaged in the serious search for improved learning for themselves and students. These efforts allow their own teaching experience to serve as the springboard for new learning and sharing with their peers.

Professional collaboration is a topic that was discussed with interviewees, but was not a direct question on the survey. There are survey responses to other questions relating to professional collaboration. Interviewees defined collaboration as the manner in which they work together with other grade levels and team teachers to plan and develop lesson plans and other resources. Collaboration is a powerful area to consider. Many of the concerns noted in this study could be addressed through greater collaboration. A noted area of positive perception influences in the survey was a teacher’s attitude. Also, teacher mindset is mentioned in inhibiting factors. Other topics from the survey where professional collaboration could assist were time and resources.

Many of the teachers reported feelings of being overwhelmed by themselves, other teachers, and students. Brooke (2014) noted teacher perceptions indicate that

figuring out how to serve students with specific needs was often overwhelming. When a classroom has multiple students with specific needs, meeting or supporting all students individually is a large task.

All four interviewees were asked about collaboration with peers. Interviewee Madeline, who serves as a special needs co-teacher, provided perceptions of being overwhelmed during her interview,

We [Madeline and the content teachers] plan together, they plan the majority of the reading and other subjects and I adapt for my special education students. We have been working a lot on constructed response questions. She [reading teacher] is working with the regular education students on writing essays, and I am working with the SPED students on just writing a solid paragraph with correct punctuation. My SPED students are so far behind the regular 5th grade students. It is often hard to collaborate on planning. What we [Sped students] are doing is so different [or behind].

Conversely, Hannah was very positive in her comments about collaboration, I collaborate with my peers constantly. We have discussions about eligibilities and accommodations regarding special education students. In addition, I work closely with two regular education teachers to design and implement lessons for all students in our classrooms. We continually discuss things we can do to better help our students. We also collaborate with parents and other stakeholders. It is important for everyone to be on the same page. Things are constantly changing and evolving in our classrooms. Therefore, like lesson planning, much of our collaboration is also done on the fly.

Hannah's experience with collaboration shows how working together can alleviate some of the feelings of helplessness or being overwhelmed.

Elizabeth works in a location where teachers do not collaborate often, "We have eight fifth grade teachers. I teach gifted and SPED. There are two of us teaching language. We talk about lessons, but we do not plan together. I know that they [the principal/administration] would like for us to work and align our lessons more." Samantha also collaborates with the other fifth grade teacher, but not with others in her school, "Yes, the other fifth grade teacher who teaches Language Arts and Reading and I collaborate often. We always try to stay together."

Institutional Factors

Institutional factors can be defined as the norms, rules, and routines guiding the establishment of social behavior in an organization (Scott, 2005). The norms, rules, and routines often provide complications or problems teachers consider are out of their control. These problems must be handled at an administrative level. These perceived complications or problems produce a frame of mind of being overwhelmed or presenting insurmountable issues.

Ness (2009) conducted a study on the frequency of reading comprehension at the high school level. One significant finding was the stress of completing or covering all the content standards experienced by teachers. This concern was voiced by all four interviewees. The focus of the new Georgia Milestones Assessment in grades three through eight is a stressful issue for teachers. All teachers currently know is the new standardized test is based on the Georgia Standards of Excellence or Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS). Teachers are stressed trying to insure they

adequately teach all instructional standards for each content area. Supporting commentary by interviewees includes: Elizabeth; “Yes, Testing does drive my instruction, but it does need to be useful. Everything we are using is not necessarily helpful.” Madeline stated, “This year, definitely [I am stressed].”

Plut and Jacobs (2007) examined teacher attitudes and aggregate school performance in R2 schools. Three areas were found significant in their research: community support, discipline issues, and sufficient services for special needs populations. Interviewee Madeline agreed she has strong perceptions about discipline issues, “Discipline is an issue. If they cannot behave, they cannot learn.” Discipline factors did not appear in the survey results. Discipline was only specifically mentioned in the interviews. Community support, administrative support, nor resources for special needs students were mentioned in the interviews or surveys. This seems an oversight by interviewees given the fact all four interviewed teachers are special needs certified teachers. This may be because so many teacher perception factors are influencing instruction daily even with an important concept, it is lost in the vast array of perceptions demanding attention.

Plut and Jacobs (2007) provide an alternate idea on factors having no influence on student performance. Their study found curriculum to not be a significant factor. The opposite was true in survey data (2013). In this study curriculum also produced strong feelings in the interviews. Interviewee Hannah perceived curriculum standards and supporting curriculum were a major inhibiting factor for students.

I’d say the state and the curriculum. There is a lot of holes and gaps [in the curriculum]. It does not transition well from grade to grade. We need to work to

adjust and smooth those transitions to eliminate gaps [in curriculum]EThe gap between kindergarten and first grade is vast and first to second is lackingE I think there will continue to be gaps until we address this issueE

In the survey responses, three perceived hindrances were lack of time 6153 7, resources 613 7, and social promotionEgaps 61R3 7EThese perceptions have not been discussed in previous researchEFrom reading the survey comments, time as stated is referring to a lack of classroom instructional timeEResources can be described as teaching materials and curriculum suppliesEThis is somewhat surprising considering all the free teaching resources available on the internetEIt implies a teacher may want items provided yet, not have to put items together to meet or teach the standardE

The concept of social promotion was surprising because reading instruction usually takes place in the early grades, kindergarten through secondEThere is very little social promotion at these grade levelsESocial promotion refers to moving a student to the next grade level even when they have not mastered the necessary standards for promotion 6Hauser, 20007EThe primary age years are generally when remediation and interventions are implemented with great fidelity to assist skill deficient students' rise to acceptable levels or determine students may have learning disorders or impairmentsEThe earlier deficiencies are detected, the better they can be addressed and accommodatedEThere is also a great deal of research on the harm in holding students back even twiceEThe odds of a student graduating decrease severely with each year a student is withheld 6West, 20127E

Also noteworthy as an institutional factor is the recent economic downturn which has severely affected schools since 2009EWhen the economic downturn occurred many systems put off adopting curriculum materials and purchasing suppliesEMany teachers

were given furlough days and a few teachers even lost their positions as nonessential positions were eliminated (Suggs, 2017). These actions took place in part because the State legislatures cut funding to local systems. Local systems had to raise millage rates. State law in Georgia has a set limit of a 203 millage rate that school systems can collect. Many systems were at their maximum millage and still not able to balance school system budgets. Systems were granted class size waivers by the state which allowed classrooms to be as many as 10 students per room over the state recommended maximum (Suggs, 2017). It is logical to concede repeated cuts and larger class sizes would have a detrimental effect on student achievement. Further, there may be a detrimental effect on teacher morale and effectiveness.

Limitations

It is important to note my interaction as principal with many of the reading teacher participants could have led the teachers to raise particular issues and to ignore others. Additionally, the data and themes presented in this study only represent one side of the reading instructional landscape. I did not have formal interviews with other stakeholders such as students, other subject teachers, and school administrators. Because of the lack of formal interviews, I was not in a position to triangulate what the reading teachers said about themselves with what other stakeholders say about them.

In regard to the study's methodological limitations, one might argue the sample size is small. The sample size of this study represents acceptable levels for a normal Basic Interpretive x ualitative study which is not meant to be generalizable to a large audience (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). The survey and interview participants are reflective of a specific district in a southern region.

The study is also limited based on the assumption participants responded honestly to the questions. The study may be limited by researcher bias which may have occurred unintentionally. The sample did not contain a significant number of male respondents. Therefore, the male teacher perspective was limited. The total number in the sample size was small.

Survey respondents were allowed anonymity in their answers. This provided an opportunity to speak honestly about perceptions influencing their teaching and instruction. As the researcher, I tried to objectively evaluate constructed responses of survey and interview participants. Working in similar settings as the respondents provided the background knowledge necessary to accurately interpret findings. Each step of the analysis process has been documented and reviewed. Member checking was employed with interview transcripts. Another educational professional was brought in to review procedures, data, and coding. Male respondent numbers were limited. However, the ratio of male to female teachers in an elementary setting is small. The survey did have one male respondent, thus allowing for male input.

Implications

While reading teachers continue to receive professional development to improve their performance, many children are still reading below grade level. There is still much more information and data needed on teacher perceptions to understand the teacher's perspective. Teachers are the individuals who work daily with students to help them achieve. Their perceptions are important factors in the teaching and learning cycle. Based on the study findings, the following should be considered. Policymakers, legislators, and local and state school administrators should consider the teacher's perspective on issues

before making major decisions. Much of the stress in the teaching profession comes from state and local mandates being placed upon teachers without input from the field. When policy makers make decisions without understanding the teaching and learning cycle, the advancement of students is not the outcome.

Perhaps, schools and districts should develop advisory committees in content areas to include teacher input. A shared leadership style or democratic leadership promotes and fosters this concept. Green, 2002. Green (2002) contends student satisfaction and teacher satisfaction are linked. The two concepts work in a circular motion. Student achievement is a product of this circular interaction. (2000). The teacher should talk with students and allow them to be reflective. They can discuss what they like and do not like about instructional practices. Reflective thinking focuses on the process of making judgement on what has happened. (University of Hawaii, 2015). This process is also closely linked with critical thinking. (University of Hawaii, 2015).

The new Georgia teacher evaluation process encourages teachers to allow students to take a role in planning goals and outcomes for their learning. Teachers try to develop ways to include parents in the learning process. The more involved the parents are in the teaching and learning cycle, the greater the student achievement. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Professional development in the content area should be provided to insure teachers have the means and knowledge to lead students in the most effective, productive, and research-based instructional strategies. The desire of teachers to use scripted programs insinuates a lack of confidence on how to reach students. Providing

professional development on content knowledge and applying knowledge can assist teachers in feeling more confident in their practice (Gulamhussein, 2017)

Recommendations

After a detailed analysis of the amassed data, the following recommendations may provide stronger or more in depth results. Replicate the study with a focus on interviews and add classroom observations. Replicate the study using mixed methods to provide statistical significance of the survey data. Further, a focus on teaching to student needs and using the standards as an instructional guide instead of using scripted programs as an instructional guide may be necessary. Perhaps researchers could urge school and district leadership to support and provide more opportunities for teachers to collaborate and discuss issues. A serious review of schedules, school resources, policy mandates and system priorities should be conducted to consider institutional factors.

Conclusion

Throughout this study a number of vital findings emerged deductively from the data that could assist reading teachers at the elementary school level in South Georgia public school districts. The study identified five major themes: reading instructional characteristics, home-school disconnect, lack of background knowledge, professional collaboration, and institutional issues. These themes were examined through the teaching and learning cycle conceptual framework (Lenses 7). This concept allowed the study to be examined conceptually. The conceptual frameworks may help reading teachers develop diverse teaching styles to meet the diverse learning needs of all students.

For aspiring elementary reading teachers, no program or instructional strategy exist that will address all needs of all learners. Trending research on the varied needs of

students has focused on differentiated instructional methods. Differentiated instruction focuses on meeting students where they are by being aware of various learning styles, interests, and abilities found within a classroom (Willoughby, 2005). Teachers can then plan instruction to meet this variety of needs. Recent works on differentiation have been published by Tomlinson (1999), Tomlinson and Sousa (2010) and Wormeli (2008). All strongly advocate for multiple approaches to presenting new information to students.

This study confirms most findings from prior studies as discussed earlier in this chapter. Transferability is a generalization term referring to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Patton, 2002). Many of the findings in this study are transferable to other comparable school systems in the Southern region of Georgia.

There are study implications relating closely with the economic downturn of the past ten years. It is a safe assumption to agree many school systems across the state and nation have been in similar economic situations over the past ten years. These economic situations had the potential to negatively impact student learning with the cuts of classroom teachers, instructional resources, technology, shorter school calendars and cuts to afterschool assistance programs.

The findings of this study suggest a 'fittingness' (Patton, 2002) or transferability in the idea of struggling readers. Struggling readers are not limited to one location, but are found in all locales. Students continue to struggle with learning to read even with accommodations, remediation, and interventions to assist them. Personal observations of numerous teachers confirm teachers are diligent in their daily efforts to assist students in

accomplishing their learning goals. Teachers take their students' successes and failures personally.

The perception of mindset or approach to teaching is also transferable. Expectations are high for students and teachers. Recently adopted state evaluation procedures tie teacher approval ratings to student success. The stressfulness of teaching is obvious. Teachers are expected to achieve more with less. However, there will always be dedicated teaching professionals who are passionate enough about their students and subjects taught to continue to pursue the ultimate goal of every student reading.

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of teacher perceptions on reading instruction. The perceptions of teachers examined in the survey and interview data suggest teacher perceptions do influence reading instruction in a vast number of areas. The way teachers perceive student learning problems, student discipline issues, parent involvement, instructional methods, curriculum resources, teacher evaluation process, and state standards all play integral roles in the student experience at school. Just as no one approach to reading instruction is 'magic,' there is no one single factor or perception that is 'magic.' Teaching requires a balanced approach. Teachers must align instruction to student needs. There is not a 'one and done' option. While teaching is not an easy profession, teachers arise every day to meet a new and different level of challenges. As a society we continue to put more responsibility on teachers to not only teach, but act as parents, nurses, mentors, care givers, and providers. As legislators become more involved in the education process, expectations and responsibilities for teachers' continue to increase. The continued growth of these challenges may encourage aspiring college students to decide teaching is not a career choice they wish to pursue.

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APPENDIX A V

Survey

AE Teacher information

- 1E Male Female Length of Teaching Service V years
- 2E Elementary School VELP ELE SWL NWL
- NE Grade Level currently teaching V Is this class ability grouped e Yes No
- 4E Do you teach reading e Yes No If so, number of years e
- 5E If not currently, have you taught reading in the past e Yes No

BE Specific Reading Information

- RE Which instructional reading program do you prefer e Why e
- SE What aspects of reading instruction most positively influence student reading ability e
- 8E What is the greatest hindrance to students being able to read in your experience e
Are solutions available to address the named hindrance e
- 9E Describe any inhibiting factors that influence reading instruction e
Explain V
- 10E Would you be willing to participate in an in-depth interview e If so, please provide contact information e

APPENDIX B V

Interview x uestions

- 1E Tell me about yourself
- 6E Expand on demographic information from the survey
- 7 Rx 4 6 Age, Marital Status, Race, Children
- 2E Expand on your professional education preparation
- ERx 4 6 Degrees
- NE How much time do you spend preparing for reading instruction
- Rx 1, Rx 2, Rx N
- 4E Do you collaborate with your peers in lesson preparation
- Rx 1, Rx 2, Rx N
- 5E Expand survey commentary for questions R,S, and 8E
- Rx 1, Rx 2, Rx N
- 6RE What is your preferred instructional reading program Why
- 6SE What aspects of reading instruction most positively effects student reading ability in your opinion
- 68E What do you perceive to be the greatest hindrance to students being able to read
- RE Do you sense your perceptions influence your teaching performance
- Rx 2
- SE Are your perceptions compelled, in any manner, by your scores on teaching evaluation
- se

Appendix CV
Citi Certification

CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Human Research Curriculum Completion Report Printed on 3/2/2011

Learner: Sherri Moorman (username: sherrimoorman)
Institution: Valdosta State University
Contact Information: 270 Thomas Chapel Road
 Adrian, Georgia 31002 USA
 Department: Ed Leadership
 Phone: 478-272-1201
 Email: slmoorman@valdosta.edu

All Researchers: This course is suitable for Investigators and staff conducting SOCIAL / HUMANISTIC / BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH with human subjects. The VA module must be completed if you plan to work with subjects at a VA facility.

Stage 1. Basic Course Passed on 03/02/11 (Ref # 5703655)

Required Modules	Date Completed	Score
Introduction	02/28/11	no quiz
Students in Research - SBR	02/28/11	7/10 (70%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBR	02/28/11	4/4 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBR	03/01/11	4/5 (80%)
The Regulations and The Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR	03/01/11	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk in Social and Behavioral Sciences - SBR	03/01/11	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBR	03/02/11	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBR	03/02/11	4/5 (80%)
Valdosta State University	03/02/11	no quiz

For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D.
 Professor, University of Miami
 Director Office of Research Education
 CITI Course Coordinator

Return

APPENDIX DV
Letter Requesting Permission



Sherri L. Moorman
Doctoral Student in Educational
Leadership at Valdosta State
University
270 Thomas Chapel Road
Adrian, Georgia 31002
478-279-5491 or 478-272-1096
sherrimoorman@lcboe.net

September 16, 2014

Mr. Rob Johnson
Superintendent of Schools
Laurens County, Georgia
467 Firetower Road
Dublin, Georgia 31021

Re: Permission for research project

Mr. Johnson,

I am seeking your permission to carry out a study to explore the influence of elementary teacher perceptions on reading instruction. This study seeks to expand existing knowledge of how elementary teachers' perceptions of reading instruction are predictive factors that can negatively or positively influence a student's early learning reading instructional experience.

The research will consist of an eleven question survey that will be emailed to teachers at the four elementary schools. Further investigation may take place through interviews. Interviews will not take place during the school day and only involve those teachers willing to participate.

The study will be reviewed by the Internal Review Board at Valdosta State University prior to beginning any research. I appreciate your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Sherri L. Moorman

APPENDIX EV
Permission Response

From: Rob Johnson
Sent: Wednesday, September 17, 2014 1:53 PM
To: Sherri Moorman
Subject: Perceptions of reading survey

I approve your gathering information relative to your dissertation topic with our elementary schools. Please let the principals and teachers know that it has been approved and we encourage their support.

Let me know if I can help further.

Thanks

Rob Johnson, Superintendent

Laurens County Schools
467 Firetower Road
Dublin, GA 31021
478-272-4767

*"Rigor, Relevance, Relationships
Every teacher, Every student, Every Day"*

NOTICE: This e-mail message and all attachments may contain legally privileged and confidential information intended solely for the use of the addressee. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any reading, dissemination, distribution, copying, or other use of this message or its attachments is strictly prohibited. If you have received this message in error, please notify the sender immediately by telephone (478) 272-4767 or by electronic mail (robjohnson@lcboe.net) and delete this message and all copies and backups.

APPENDIX F V

Request to use Survey Guide VResponse from University of Wisconsin

From: Sherri L Moorman
Sent: Saturday, September 6, 2014 2:31 PM
To: stevenso@ssc.wisc.edu
Subject: permission to use and site survey guide

Good afternoon,

My name is Sherri Moorman. I am a doctoral student at Valdosta State University. My professor, Dr. Rudo Tsemunhu, has requested that I obtain your permission to use your survey guide, Survey Fundamentals: A Guide to Designing and Implementing Surveys. I designed the survey for my dissertation project and used the aforementioned survey guide to develop and test my survey. I have sited your guide properly in APA format in my dissertation proposal.

I would like to insure that I have obtained the necessary permission before presenting and defending my research proposal to my committee. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Sherri Moorman

Response:

From: Nora Cate Schaeffer <schaeffe@ssc.wisc.edu>
Date: September 7, 2014 at 11:41:53 AM CDT
To: John Stevenson <stevenso@ssc.wisc.edu>
Cc: Jen Dykema <dykema@ssc.wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: permission to use and site survey guide

Hello! John is traveling and forwarded your message to me to reply. It would be fine if you cited the document. I hope that you found the information useful.

Best, Nora Cate

APPENDIX GV
Informed Consent

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY
Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled “The Influence of Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions of Reading Instruction.” This research project is being conducted by Sherri Loyd Moorman, a student in *Educational Leadership* at Valdosta State University. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this project and your possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. The University asks that you give your signed agreement if you wish to participate in this research project.

Purpose of the Research: This study involves research. The purpose of the study is to explore the influence of attitudes and perceptions of elementary teachers on reading instruction.

Procedures:

You will be asked to complete a survey including questions related to the following: basic demographic information; reading instructional practices; and reading instructional preferences. You will be directed to a link to complete the survey online. The survey consists of 11 questions and is presented in a question-by-question format. Only completed surveys will be accepted. Therefore, you will be able to answer “N/A” to items that do not apply to you or that you choose not to answer. You will have a two week window to complete the survey and will receive an email reminder after one week. Please take a few moments of your valuable time to complete this survey. Responses will be used only in combination with others. All responses are anonymous and will not be tied to an IP address.

The final survey question asks if you will agree to participate in an interview pertaining to reading instructional practices and preferences. Respondents who answer yes may receive an invitation to speak with the researcher in a face-to-face interview setting. Semi-structured questions will be asked during the interview. Subject matter ranges from degree/experience level to perceptions of reading instruction. The researcher agrees to accommodate interviewees with his/her preference as to time and place of interview. Interviews will last approximately one hour. Interview participants will be assigned a pseudonym and responses to interview questions will remain unidentifiable.

The researcher is conducting this study in fulfilling requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Valdosta State University. Serving as a principal in an elementary setting, and given the freedom to choose the subject matter, the researcher desires to gather pertinent information helpful in improving reading instructional practices.

Possible Risks or Discomfort:

Possible risks as a result of participating in this research are minimal. You can complete the online survey at the location of your choosing, and responses will remain anonymous. If applicable, interviews will be scheduled and conducted at the location and time of the interviewees choosing. By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

Potential Benefits:

Although you [may/will] not benefit directly from this research, your participation will help the researcher gain additional understanding of the influence of teacher attitudes and perceptions towards reading instruction. Knowledge gained may contribute to addressing the inhibiting factors of realizing true fruition of reading instructional programs. Further, results of this research may lead to the development of reading instructional strategies that are far more beneficial to students.

Costs and Compensation:

There are no costs to you and there is no compensation (no money, gifts, or services) for your participation in this research project.

Assurance of Confidentiality: Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information.

Survey responses will be used only in combination with others. All responses are anonymous and will not be tied to an IP address.

Interviews will be conducted at a time and location of the participant's choice. The researcher will assign pseudonyms to all participants to provide anonymity. An assigned number on an index card will link survey and interview data to assist in organization. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. After transcription, member checking will be employed to allow participants to read, clarify, or remove any statements. All data collected during the research study will be maintained by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet. The researcher will be the only person manipulating the research data. Confirmation of coding will be reviewed by another person; however, the pseudonyms will be used in this phase. Upon completion of the study, collected data will be shredded by a professional shredding service.

Voluntary Participation: Your decision to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree now to participate and change your mind later, you are free to leave the study. Your decision not to participate at all or to stop participating at any time in the future will not have any effect on any rights you have or any services you are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University.

APPENDIX HV

Email Request to Participate

Hello,

My name is Sherri Moorman. In fulfillment of requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Valdosta State University, I am required to complete research. Serving as a principal in an elementary setting, I desire to gather pertinent information helpful in improving reading instructional practices.

At the end of this email, you will be asked to complete a survey including questions related to the following: basic demographic information, reading instructional practices, and reading instructional preferences. You will be directed to a link to complete the survey online. The survey consists of 11 questions and is presented in a question-by-question format. Only completed surveys will be accepted. Therefore, you will be able to answer "N/A" to items that do not apply to you or that you choose not to answer. You will have a two week window to complete the survey and will receive an email reminder after one week. Please take a few moments of your valuable time to complete this survey. Responses will be used only in combination with others. All responses are anonymous and will not be tied to an IP address.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation,
Sherri Moorman

APPENDIX IV

Institutional Review Board Exemption



*Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research
Participants*

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-03154-2015

INVESTIGATOR: Sherri Moorman

PROJECT TITLE: The Influence of Teacher Attitudes and Perceptions of Reading Instruction

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board oversight under Exemption Category(ies) :2. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:

Although not a requirement for exemption, the following suggestions are offered by the IRB Administrator to enhance the protection of participants and/or strengthen the research proposal:

NONE

- If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.
-

Elizabeth W. Olphie **1/29/15**

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator Date

*Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.*
