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Reading Achievement: A Study of Perceptions of First-Grade Teachers and the Relationship Between Attendance and Reading Achievement

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by

Mykie C. Nash

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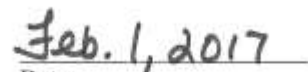
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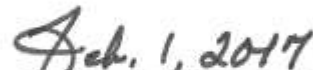
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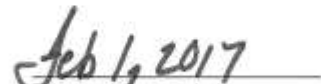
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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Mykie Cher Nash

Signature: _Mykie Nash_   Date: 2-1-17

Abstract

This mixed-methods study included an in-depth look at the perceptions of first-grade teachers in southwest Missouri to gain insight into the knowledge, understanding, and perceptions of teachers when considering reading achievement and how it relates to Reading Recovery, student engagement, professional development, and socioeconomic status. A second piece to the study included a quantitative examination of the correlation between reading achievement and attendance. Focus groups were formed and an 11-question interview was conducted to gather insight into the perceptions of first-grade teachers across five different counties. Additionally, reading data and attendance from 249 students in those schools were used to determine if a correlation exists between reading achievement and student attendance. After completion of all focus groups, it was evident many commonalities exist among first-grade teachers across multiple districts. Most teachers find value in Reading Recovery, understand the importance of student engagement, see the disadvantages of those students who arrive from lower socioeconomic status families, and value professional development. Reading and attendance data revealed students with attendance greater than 94% have improved reading achievement over those with attendance below 94%. The results of this study can provide insight for administrators and district leaders when considering appropriate professional development in the area of reading achievement.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One: Introduction

Roald Dahl said, "So please, oh PLEASE, we beg, we pray, go throw your TV set away. And in its place you can install, a lovely bookshelf on the wall" (as cited in Reading Rockets, 2016b, para. 4). An abundance of research exists surrounding reading achievement, reading progress, and reading interventions (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b). Much of the research refers to the implications of reading difficulties in early elementary and the impact on students in later years of schooling (Connor, Alberto, Compton, & O'Connor, 2014). In an Institute of Educational Sciences report, Connor et al. (2014) declared, "Reading difficulties present serious and potentially lifelong challenges. Children who do not read well are more likely to be retained a grade in school, drop out of high school, become teen parents, or enter the juvenile justice system" (p. viii). According to Connor et al. (2014), research has allowed educators to extend their knowledge on how to identify and assist students with reading disabilities or those that may be at risk to develop a reading problem.

This chapter includes background information on student achievement and the correlation with low socioeconomic status (SES), student attendance, and participation in Reading Recovery programs. To better comprehend the terms, the definitions of acronyms, abbreviations, and other related vocabulary are found in Chapter One. As with most any study, limitations existed and are discussed in this chapter.

Background of the Study

Early literacy interventions, such as Reading Recovery, play an essential role in increasing reading achievement and reading fluency (Jesson & Limbrick, 2014). According to the Reading Recovery Council of North America (2016a), the goal of

Reading Recovery is to decrease the number of struggling readers in first grade. As defined by the Reading Recovery Council of North America (2016b), Reading Recovery is a short-term intervention that supports classroom instruction for the lowest-achieving children in first grade. Children meet individually with a specially trained teacher for 30 minutes daily for 12 to 20 weeks (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b).

In contrast to the researchers who showed positive outcomes and high achievement for first-grade readers who receive reading intervention through the Reading Recovery program, other researchers have indicated Reading Recovery to be ineffective (Tunmer, Chapman, Greaney, Prochnow, & Arrow, 2013). Data from Reading Recovery annual monitoring reports and other sources suggest Reading Recovery has had little or no impact on reducing New Zealand's relatively large literacy achievement gap (Tunmer et al., 2013). This current study was designed to elicit the perceptions of first-grade teachers when considering the effectiveness of Reading Recovery programs in select southwest Missouri schools. Background research regarding reading interventions and the importance of early literacy are motivating factors for exploring the correlation between reading success and Reading Recovery as an intervention.

Hernandez (2012) stated, "Children whose families live in poverty often lack resources for decent housing, food, clothing, and books, and they often do not have access to high quality child care and early education or to health care" (p. 7). Studies have shown students from lower socioeconomic status perform much lower in terms of reading achievement than do their peers (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013).

According to Fernald et al. (2013), children from lower-income families enter kindergarten with less-adequate language and cognitive skills.

In an article published in the *Journal of Community Health*, Syed, Gerber, and Sharp (2013) wrote, "Transportation barriers are an important barrier to healthcare access, particularly for those with lower incomes or the under/uninsured" (p. 1). The inability to access health care can play a role in school attendance if the family is unable to get access due to barriers with income or medical coverage (Rothstein, 2011). Gorski (2013) stated students from lower-income families have limited access to computers and technology, and the resulting embarrassment and shame actually plays a role in diminishing their chance to close the achievement gap. Finally, research has shown 44% of Missouri's children are living in what are considered low-income households, which reiterates the importance of continued research on the impact of poverty on reading achievement (National Center for Children in Poverty [NCCP], 2016).

Studies on how attendance relates to student achievement have shown a strong correlation between high attendance and an increase in academic performance (Gottfried, 2009). According to Lehr, Sinclair, and Christensen (as cited in Gottfried, 2009), being absent from school is detrimental to learning and can heighten the risk of lower academic achievement in later years. Students with strong attendance score higher on achievement tests than their peers with poor attendance, according to Lambin (as cited in Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

First-grade reading achievement, as determined by the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), can depend heavily on factors beyond the control of students

(Berliner, 2009; Payne, 2005). In this mixed methods study, the perceptions of multiple first-grade teachers in elementary schools with varying demographics across southwest Missouri were assessed. In addition, the correlation between reading achievement and attendance was examined.

To gather the views of first-grade teachers a focus group was conducted in order to identify perceptions, examine differences, and evaluate commonalities among first-grade teachers. In addition, this mixed-methods research included observations of quantitative data to determine a possible correlation between attendance and reading achievement. Reading levels, as determined by the DRA, were compared between first-grade students with strong attendance and those with lower attendance rates. Proportional Attendance Rates, as defined by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) (2015), were used as a threshold to determine attendance. According to the MODESE (2015), the expectation is that 90% of students attend school 90% of the time. Attendance rates were considered based upon building-wide calculations to determine the effects of and/or correlation between strong attendance and reading levels as determined by scores from the DRA.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions by interviewing teachers and asking questions that require the reflection of experiences while teaching reading in first-grade. According to Butin (2009), "An interpretivist perspective thus does not attempt to adjudicate between competing truth claims in order to determine the one best answer; rather, interpretivism suggests that all one can do is accurately and thoroughly document the perspective being investigated" (p. 60).

Furthermore, Ritchie (2003) stated that a focus group is an appropriate method of research to provide opportunity for reflection and allow participants the opportunity share and have discussion. In this study, research questions and focus group questions were designed to prompt teachers to reflect upon their own teaching practices and how those practices and perceptions impact reading instruction. The decision to use questions that prompt reflection on teaching practices was guided by an early researcher, Immanuel Kant, who believed that knowledge is based on an understanding as gained from reflection about experiences (Taylor & Medina, 2013).

According to Taylor and Medina (2013), when related to educational research, the interpretivist theory requires teachers to be reflective and ask questions about both the students and their teaching. Therefore, the questions used for the focus group were specifically designed to ask teachers to identify the needs of their students and reflect on teaching practices when considering reading achievement. Additionally, the research framework to gather research using focus groups is supported by Finch and Lewis (2003). Finch and Lewis stated that a focus group can be designed to gather information from a small group of participants, and attempts should be made to include as many of the participants as possible (2003). For this study, the questions were written to gather responses from teachers from varying backgrounds and different school districts.

According to Taylor and Medina (2013), "A deeper understanding involves a broader focus on the social, political, historic and economic forces shaping the pedagogies, curriculum policies and schooling system in which teachers are immersed" (p. 5). Students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, those with all levels of

attendance, and those students who partake in Reading Recovery as a reading intervention were included. As part of the research process, the investigator was essentially a part of the story. The interpretivist theory provides the framework for the researcher to be a participant in the story as Butin (2009) explained in his work, "An interpretivist researcher is, for better or worse, already part of the story about the truth because she is the one examining it and describing it" (p. 60). In this research, the interpretivist theory served as the guiding principle during the development of the research questions and the analysis of the data. By using the theory of interpretivism to interpret and analyze the results, the key outcome was to tell the story of first-grade reading achievement through exploration and description (Butin, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds are at increased risk for reading problems (Hagans & Good, 2013). The intent of the researcher was to investigate the perceptions of first-grade teachers when considering reading achievement as it relates to Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status, student engagement, and professional development. Joiner (2012) stated, "Further research delving into students' socioeconomic status would also benefit the school system when determining reading intervention programs" (p. 122). Furthermore, Chism (2016) determined:

> Specifically, the researcher would like to see more up-to-date research on student reading achievement, K-2 grade levels, and teacher perception of the professional development experience. The importance of such studies would provide evidence on the importance of teacher beliefs, attitudes and perceptions, and student achievement in reading. (p. 100)

These recommendations for future research were utilized in the development of the research questions that drove this study.

Students from lower-socioeconomic status families struggle with academic achievement and attendance (Morrissey, Hutchison, & Winsler, 2014). Low attendance may be a critical factor in the relationship between lower student achievement and lower socioeconomic status (Morrissey et al., 2014). Understanding this relationship between student achievement and socioeconomic status is important for educators to address the needs of students (Stull, 2013). The perceptions of teachers of students who face those challenges can play an important role in identifying professional development needs.

Reading Recovery, an intervention for reading in first grade, is one of the most widely used intervention programs in the world (Jesson & Limbrick, 2014). When considering reading achievement, student engagement must be considered. Students who are not engaged in learning find other ways to challenge and stimulate the brain (Lemov, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

In order to gain insight to the perceptions of teachers about reading achievement, focus groups were held where participating teachers were engaged in discussion about reading achievement. A quantitative piece to the study included a closer look at attendance and its possible impact on reading achievement. Understanding the perceptions of first-grade teachers concerning reading achievement can expose trends, concerns, and possible misinformation for school and district-level leaders. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of first-grade

teachers to better understand motivations, prejudices, and feelings about reading achievement when considering Reading Recovery, student engagement, professional development, and socioeconomic status. The perceptions of first-grade teachers were analyzed, studied, and compared to answer the first four research questions. In addition, the final quantitative research question required a comparison of attendance data and reading scores from the DRA from the 2015-2016 school year for first-grade students within the districts that participated in the study. These data were analyzed to determine if a correlation exists between reading achievement and attendance.

Research questions and hypotheses. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to Reading Recovery and reading achievement?

2. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to socioeconomic status and reading achievement?

3. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to student engagement and reading achievement?

4. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to professional development and reading achievement?

5. What is the correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance?

$H5_0$: There is no correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance.

$H5_a$: There is a correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance.

Significance of Study

This study of the perceptions of first-grade teachers with relation to reading achievement can have an impact on area school districts in southwest Missouri. Understanding the perceptions of first-grade teachers can help advise school district administrators when making determinations and decisions regarding professional development, reading curriculum, and student achievement. It is also important to investigate predeterminations teachers have with regard to performance expectations. Understanding the correlation between reading achievement and attendance has an impact on local districts as educators continue to focus on attendance goals. In summary, the conclusions of this study can have substantial impact on school districts when making decisions regarding reading programs and how to properly prepare teachers to conduct engaging lessons.

Definitions of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

Development Reading Assessment (DRA). The DRA®, Second Edition, PLUS (DRA2+) "is a formative reading assessment in which teachers are able to systemically observe, record, and evaluate changes in student reading performance" (Pearson Education, Inc., 2016, para. 1).

Elkonin boxes. Elkonin boxes build phonological awareness skills by allowing students to segment words into individual sounds, or phonemes (Reading Rockets, 2016a). To use Elkonin boxes, a child listens to a word and moves a token into a box for each sound or phoneme (Reading Rockets, 2016a). In some cases, different-colored

tokens may be used for consonants and vowels or just for each phoneme in the word (Reading Rockets, 2016a).

Expressive language. Expressive language skills include learning the forms of language, such as verb forms, plural endings, and how to use pronouns, as well as the content of language, which leads to an event being related clearly and appropriately (Northwestern School of Communication, 2016). It also includes the function of language, which can vary based upon listeners (Northwestern School of Communication, 2016).

Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP 5). The Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP 5) is a system of accountability used in Missouri that holds districts accountable for student achievement (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2012).

Multimedia instruction. Multimedia instruction is designed to include visual presentations through a variety of media types including online tutorials in order to convey an instructional message (IGI-Global, 2016).

Phonics. Phonics is a method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by learning the phonetic value of letters, letter groups, and especially syllables (Phonics, 2016).

Phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and to understand spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds (University of Oregon, 2016).

Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery is a short-term intervention for first graders having extreme difficulty with early reading and writing (Reading Recovery

Council of North America, 2016b). Specially trained teachers work individually with students in daily 30-minute lessons lasting 12 to 20 weeks (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b).

Receptive language. Receptive language skills develop from infancy (Northwestern School of Communication, 2016). Receptive language skills, the ability to take in language and understand, include being able to follow directions, understand a story, and understand figurative language (Northwestern School of Communication, 2016).

Running record. A running record is a formative assessment completed individually to provide the teacher with a graphic of the errors and omissions a reader makes while reading (Teacher Vision, 2016). The running record method was developed by Marie Clay, the creator of Reading Recovery, and provides the teacher with information such as accuracy rate, error rate, and self-correction rate (Teacher Vision, 2016).

Limitations and Assumptions

The following limitations were identified in this study:

Sample demographics. The sample size for this study was a limitation. While every attempt was made to reach out to as many school districts as possible, the sample size was limited to five school districts. This study was based on a small sample of first-grade teachers and students in schools from five counties across southwest Missouri and was limited to those districts that use the DRA to determine reading levels and that offer Reading Recovery as a reading intervention. Ensuring schools chosen used the DRA as a measure of reading achievement created the opportunity to review

data across districts in the most equitable manner possible. This investigation included data from focus groups of first-grade teachers from five schools, the DRA scores of first graders from the 2015-2016 school year, and attendance data from those participating schools to answer the fifth research question.

Instrument. To fully investigate the perceptions of first-grade teachers with regard to reading achievement, the participants were asked to partake in a focus group.

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The focus group questions were not professionally developed, and while piloted with two teachers, could have flaws and inadvertently cause bias toward particular answers.

2. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.

3. The primary investigator was previously a first-grade teacher, and any bias was minimized by oversight of the dissertation chair.

Summary

Chapter One included the history and some background information with regard to the topic. The framework, interpretivism, was introduced and explained. Also included in Chapter One were the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions and hypotheses. Finally, Chapter One included a discussion of the limitations of the study.

A literature review in Chapter Two includes historical background on the topic, an explanation of the theoretical framework, and further details with regard to reading assessments, the DRA Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status and reading achievement, student engagement, professional development, and absenteeism and

reading achievement. Chapter Three includes the research design and methodology and the ethical considerations for the study. Additionally, Chapter Three includes a discussion of the sample and instruments used for data collection. Data analysis is introduced in Chapter Three.

A complete review of the data is included in Chapter Four with the responses to focus group questions discussed per question, by school district, and also organized by years of teaching experience. The data from the attendance and DRA scores are presented. In Chapter Five, the key findings are discussed from the research as well as conclusions, the implications of the findings, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Chapter Two includes an extension and more in-depth discussion of the interpretivist view used to guide this research. In addition, Chapter Two covers a review of literature on the topics of reading assessments, the DRA, Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status, student engagement, attendance, and professional development.

Following a review of the numerous reading assessments available, the DRA was used in this study to compare reading achievement. The DRA is utilized as a reading assessment across southwest Missouri and provides leverage for assessing the effectiveness of Reading Recovery instruction and the impacts of student attendance and socioeconomic status on reading achievement (Beaver, 2006). The Reading Recovery program, created by Marie Clay, was a major focus for this research (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b). The objective was to determine the overall reading success of first graders by comparing scores on the DRA to the perceptions of first-grade teachers with regard to reading achievement. The research on Reading Recovery is extensive, and Chapter Two includes a solid literature review of that research.

In addition to the comprehensive literature on reading assessments, the DRA, student engagement, professional development, and Reading Recovery, Chapter Two includes a review of literature on student attendance and achievement. The research shows a strong correlation between regular student attendance and student achievement, as well as a correlation between socioeconomic status and attendance (Connor et al., 2014; Emerson et al., 2015; Fives et al., 2014; Payne, 2013). A literature review of school attendance and student achievement can also be found in this chapter.

Theoretical Framework

An interpretivist framework was used to investigate the perceptions of first-grade teachers with regard to reading achievement to extrapolate underlying beliefs from teachers currently in practice of teaching. First-grade teachers were interviewed in five focus groups. In an effort to obtain the most thorough understanding of perceptions, teachers were asked 11 questions to gain insight about reading achievement from the perspective of the teacher. It was the intention of the researcher to gain perceptions of teachers from varying-sized school districts and from a wide array of years of experience. Additionally, it was the objective to obtain participation from teachers within school districts with varied student demographics including different levels of socioeconomic status. As Butin (2009) referenced in his work, an interpretivist researcher does not seek to find the single truth, but documents the truth from multiple perspectives.

This study was designed to determine if the perceptions of first-grade teachers show a bias with regard to student achievement when considering socioeconomic status. Students living in poverty face considerable challenges when it comes to academic achievement (Herbers et al., 2012). According to Layton (2015), U.S. schools have reached a new level of enrollment from low-income families. In this study, connections were made between the perceptions of first-grade teachers with regard to socioeconomic status and reading achievement compared to actual DRA scores and socioeconomic status.

Investigating DRA scores and working to determine a correlation with attendance allowed the researcher to answer the final research question and helped to

identify if a correlation exists between attendance and reading achievement.

Developmental Reading Assessment reading levels for first-grade students in schools

across southwest Missouri were collected and compared to attendance rates. Scores on

the DRA were synthesized with attendance rates of studied first-grade students across

five counties. An attempt was made to determine if a correlation exists between DRA

scores and the attendance of first-grade students during the 2015-2016 school year.

High rates of absenteeism in first grade have been linked to reading difficulties

(Adams, 2016). In an attempt to substantiate the correlation between strong attendance

and high reading achievement, DRA scores were the focus as attendance trends were

evaluated and analyzed. The framework for this segment of the research was to

investigate attendance from the perspective of educators and students.

In those schools that utilize Reading Recovery as a reading intervention strategy,

attempts were made to identify the perceptions of first-grade teachers about the

program. Research has shown Reading Recovery plays a positive role in reading

achievement (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b). When Reading

Recovery is used as an intervention for the lowest-achieving first-grade students,

positive advances can be made toward reading on grade level (Reading Recovery

Council of North America, 2016b). The goal of this research was to investigate the

perceptions of teachers in first grade who have experience with Reading Recovery by

investigating the responses to interview questions as completed in focus groups. An

additional focus for this study was to understand the perceptions of teachers when

considering student engagement, professional development, and socioeconomic status.

The framework to answer the research questions led the investigator to gather multiple

perceptions.

The interpretivist framework acted as a guide for this research. Findings were

gathered, reported, and documented in order to answer the research questions. This

study was designed to obtain perceptions from teachers of various levels of experience

and from different school districts to gather multiple perspectives. The perceptions of

first-grade teachers were divided in three distinctive categories. The perceptions were

presented as grouped by question, by district, and by teacher experience. As Butin

(2009) explained, an interpretivist researcher seeks to document and report the truth as

it is investigated

Reading Assessments

Identifying struggling readers as early as possible can help prevent difficulties in

other subjects for elementary students (Goodwin, 2012). According to Goodwin

(2012), getting students back on track is possible with early detection. The

Developmental Reading Assessment, a tool to measure reading levels and identify

struggling readers, was utilized for this study to compare reading levels. The

Developmental Reading Assessment is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

The running record is another formative assessment used as a reading

assessment (Tunmer et al., 2013). The running record is an assessment of oral reading

while tracking errors, omissions, self-corrections, and fluency of the reading (Tunmer et

al., 2013). The running record consists of easy-to-use coding to capture what the

student says while reading aloud to the Reading Recovery teacher (Fried, 2013).

According to Fried (2013), the running record should have an impact on the decisions

teachers make about reading instruction and should provide evidence of problem solving during reading (Fried, 2013). The running record acts as support for the DRA, as the running record is a tool that can be used weekly to measure progress at a certain reading level determined by the DRA (Dorn, Forbes, Poparad, & Schubert, 2015).

Comparable to the DRA, the Lexile Framework for Reading, when used as an assessment of reading achievement, identifies the student's range of appropriate reading level (MetaMetrics, 2016). The Lexile Framework for Reading, also called the Lexile Measures, is a reading level given to students based on data gathered from a benchmark test (MetaMetrics, 2016). There are multiple benchmark tests that can assign an appropriate Lexile Measures reading level including the Star Assessments, AimsWeb, the Measures of Academic Progress, and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (MetaMetrics, 2016).

Another similar reading assessment, the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark system, is much like the Developmental Reading Assessment in that it acts as both a formative and summative assessment to reveal information about readers and to determine an appropriate reading level (Heinemann, 2016). The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark assigns students a reading level with a letter, A-Z, whereas the DRA and the Lexile Measures assign students a reading level using a numerical system (Dorn et al., 2015; Heinemann, 2016; MetaMetrics, 2016).

Other reading assessments, like the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), are designed as formative measures to give teachers the ability to frequently monitor the reading progress of young readers (University of Oregon, 2016). The DIBELS is a tool to identify struggling students who may need additional reading

interventions (University of Oregon, 2016). Unlike the DRA and the Lexile Measures, which assign a reading level, the DIBELS acts as a tool for tracking reading progress (Dorn et al., 2015; MetaMetrics, 2016; University of Oregon, 2016).

Additionally, the Accelerated Reader program can be a tool for progress monitoring, as it is an online reading assessment to test comprehension and track progress (Garcia & Philip, 2013). Payne (2005) appreciated the Accelerated Reader for its inclination not to alleviate students from poverty, because the test takes into account what students have read, and students are not penalized for what their parents do not know or have not taught the students. According to Payne (2005), the Accelerated Reading program is a supplemental program designed to encourage students to read more. Taking all factors into consideration after reviewing the multiple methods for reading assessment, this researcher tracked Developmental Reading Assessment results to compare reading levels of first-grade students.

Developmental Reading Assessment

The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), as defined in Chapter One, is an assessment of reading comprehension and oral fluency (Seals, 2013). According to Beaver (2006), the DRA was originally developed in the late 1980s and into the mid-1990s. Since the original production, updates have been made to the assessments and the book selection, and the text types were most recently field tested in 2005 (Beaver, 2006). Beaver (2006) wrote, "The DRA2 provides teachers with information that helps them determine each student's independent reading level and identify what the student needs to learn next" (p. 5). The DRA can be administered annually or semi-annually to give teachers information about the reading-level progress of their students over two or

more points in time (Beaver, 2006). Once the DRA has been given, the teacher can utilize that information to determine an appropriate reading level to apply in reading instruction (Beaver, 2006).

Fictional and informational texts ranging from Levels A (pre-emergent readers) to 40, observation guides, tracking sheets, and assessment forms for scoring are the components of the DRA (Beaver, 2006). The DRA is designed to give teachers real-time information and immediate data and feedback about students' reading skills after listening to the students read from selections of texts (Beaver, 2006). According to Beaver (2006), "Assessments are conducted during one-on-one reading conferences as children read specially selected assessment texts" (p. 4). Teachers use the tools in the DRA kit to assess students, make determinations about comprehension and fluency, and then make decisions about reading levels based on the information obtained from the assessment (Beaver, 2006). Assessment should be used as a tool for teachers to determine the next steps to improve learning; when utilizing the DRA, teachers can make instructional decisions based on those scores (Marzano, Norford, Paynter, Pickering, & Gaddy, 2001).

Reading Recovery

As defined earlier in Chapter One, Reading Recovery is an intervention designed for struggling readers in first grade (Dorn et al., 2015). Reading Recovery instruction is delivered in a one-to-one setting for struggling first graders (Miller, 2014). Clay (2014) stated, "A well-run program could lead to fewer students being classified for special education provisions outside mainstream eduction" (p. 242). As written on the Reading Recovery website (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016a),

"The goal of Reading Recovery is to dramatically reduce the number of first-grade students who have extreme difficulty learning to read and write and to reduce the cost of these learners to educational systems" (para. 1). Reading Recovery was founded by Dr. Marie Clay, and its use in the United States began in 1984 (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b). In the 1960s, when Clay began her dissertation work, her research question were based on identifying reading behaviors of struggling students during their first year of school (first grade) (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b).

Reading Recovery made its first appearance in the United States in Ohio in 1986 as an ongoing research project where training of Reading Recovery teachers began (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2014). It was during this time national training centers formed at the university level where teacher leaders were trained to begin implementation within elementary schools (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2014). By the mid-1990s, the Reading Recovery Council of North America (2014) was formed and a Board of Directors were selected in order to support and enhance Reading Recovery in the United States.

The Reading Recovery program relies on continual evaluation (Sharratt, Coutts, Hogarth, & Fullan, 2013). Sharratt et al. (2013) wrote, "Reading Recovery in North America has three reasons to be proud: 25-plus years of active history; insistence on evidence of success; and real, actual success with child after child" (p. 53). Reading Recovery has seen success over the years by identifying struggling children early (during first grade) and offering targeted lessons with specific components by specifically trained teachers (Sharratt et al., 2013).

A Reading Recovery lesson is designed to last about 30 minutes and is delivered by specifically trained teachers who are certified to teach Reading Recovery (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b). According to Clay, as referenced by Miller (2014), Reading Recovery lessons are made up of mulitple components: a running record, phonics, writing, reading a new book at the child's instructional level, and assembling a cut-up sentence produced by the student (Miller, 2014). Clay (2014) expressed there is a standard skeleton for the Reading Recovery lesson, but trained teachers design the lessons according to the needs of each student (Clay, 2014).

According to Buckingham, Wheldall, and Beaman-Wheldall (2013), children have the ability to gain reading skills at an early age and at a fast pace. Buckingham et al. (2013) continued to state the five important components for reading instruction are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Utchell, Schmitt, McCallum, McGoey, and Piselli (2015) asserted there are basic literacy skills needed for successful reading in first grade (phonological awareness, phonological processing, receptive and expressive language, and general print knowledge), and 70% of students who lack these skills show greater reading problems in the fourth grade. Ely, Pullen, Kennedy, and Williams (2015) concurred with the idea vocabulary is an important component to the Reading Recovery lesson when they wrote, "Vocabulary instruction should be a priority within early childhood instruction, and it should continue throughout K-12 education to help students develop adequate vocabulary needed for reading comprehension and associated tasks" (p. 59). The Reading Recovery lesson, a very structured one-on-one lesson, includes many of these components (Miller, 2014).

The running record is designed to give teachers information about a student's ability to read the current level of text and to help teachers check the progress of readers at different intervals of time (Fried, 2013). Phonics, as a component of the Reading Recovery lesson, plays an important role when it comes to children becoming more aware of the sounds in words (Lose, 2014). The phonics portion of the Reading Recovery lesson is designed to help students hear the different sounds in words (Lose, 2014). Once students are able to hear and record the sounds in words, they can move to a portion of the lesson where they record the sounds in Elkonin boxes, one box for every sound (Lose, 2014). This process allows students to develop independence when trying to solve tricky words without the presence of the Reading Recovery teacher (Lose, 2014). The downfall for teaching phonics in a setting outside of Reading Recovery is that many teachers lack the skills to teach phonics effectively; hence, the advantage of Reading Recovery training is obvious (Buckingham et al., 2013).

In addition to the phonics portion of the Reading Recovery lesson, students work on writing (Miller, 2014). Williams (2013) stated, "Reading Recovery professionals have long recognized reading and writing as a reciprocal process and all Reading Recovery lessons include daily instruction in composing and writing" (p. 15). Understanding and hearing the slightest differences in sounds and words is an important skill many students are able to acquire through classroom instruction (Lose, 2014). However, Reading Recovery students have more difficulty with that process, and the writing portion of the Reading Recovery lesson allows Reading Recovery teachers to give individualized support to students while they learn to distinguish among sounds in words (Lose, 2014). Ideally, this instruction in reading helps students learn to use these

skills when writing and gives students the tools to monitor and cross-check when both reading and writing, again solidifying reading and writing are reciprocal (Lose, 2014).

In addition to the running record, phonics, and writing components of the Reading Recovery lesson, students cut apart a self-constructed sentence and use the words to build sentences as practice for one-to-one correspondence and word recognition (Kaye & Lose, 2014). According to Kaye and Lose (2014), students benefit from this activity because they are contructing a familiar message and are given an opportunity to connect spoken words to written words. These activities give the student multiple opportunities to problem solve and allow the teacher to make instructional decisions based on the needs of the individual child (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b).

Providing feedback to move students forward is something Tomlinson (2016) reiterated. According to Tomlinson (2016), responding to student work in a way that moves each student forward is important for development. When using the information gained from observing a student put a constructed message in order, teachers can determine the ability of students to self-check and to build confidence with knowledge about words (Kaye & Lose, 2014).

The goal of Reading Recovery is for students to learn the skills to be successful readers and to gain independence in order to be successful readers back in the classroom (Ballantyne, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences, the What Works Clearinghouse identified three different studies of Reading Recovery to evaluate its effectiveness (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b). In all cases, Reading Recovery successfully achieved its intent to

bring first-grade students to the level of their peers and demonstrated positive effects on

reading achievement (Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2016b).

According to the Reading Recovery Council of North America (2016b):

While it is still too early to say whether Reading Recovery is inspiring systemic

organizational changes, two things are clear. First, Reading Recovery is

positively affecting student literacy outcomes, and second, Reading Recovery

teachers are sharing their new knowledge, strategies, and information with other

teachers in their schools. (p. 1)

A recent study by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education at the University of

Pennsylvania and the Center for Research on Education and Social Policy at the

University of Delaware followed struggling readers after participating in Reading

Recovery and found the growth rate for those students was 131% of the national growth

rate for first graders (Heitin, 2016). According to Heitin (2016), the effect size for

Reading Recovery intervention was 4.6 times larger than average as compared to other

interventions. In contrast, other experts argued the most effective reading instruction

happens in whole-group instruction when students are not grouped by ability level and

when they are engaged in learning almost all of the time (Schmoker, 2011).

Socioeconomic Status and Reading Achievement

According to Layton (2015), based on 2013 data, a vast majority of students in

the United States come to school from low-income families. The socioeconomic status

of a family plays a major role in the determination of chosen neighborhood and usually

determines the school the child attends (Sirin, 2005). According to Gorski (2013),

"Poor students are assigned disproportionately to the most inadequately funded schools

with the largest class sizes and the lowest paid teachers" (p. 1). There are two federal initiatives in place to address the concern of disadvantaged students' access to the most effective teachers: Race to the Top and the Teacher Incentive Fund (Glazerman & Max, 2014). According to the Institute of Education Sciences (2014), "The average disparity in teaching effectiveness was equivalent to about four weeks of learning for reading and two weeks for math" (p. 2). This has major implications for education, as Payne (2013) explained a student's zip code (area of residence in relation to socioeconomic status) has a direct and indirect impact on student achievement.

The relationship between socioeconomic status and reading achievement can be compounded by the lack of vocabulary exposure for students who come from lower socioeconomic families (Fives et al., 2014). According to Fives et al. (2014), children from lower socioeconomic families have poorer vocabulary than their more advantaged peers (Fives et al., 2014). Ridge, Weisberg, Ilgaz, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2015) agreed and stated conversations between parents and students in lower socioeconomic families tend to be of fewer words. Finally, Payne (2005) declared language acquisition as early as birth plays a large role in brain development and the student's ability to learn and grow in later years.

Disparities in language acquistion can be a predictive measure with regard to future academic success (Fernald et al., 2013). In a study completed by Fernald et al. (2013), it was found socioeconomic status played a significant role in vocabulary and language outcomes. Fernald et al. (2013) indicated, "Another recent study found that 65% of low SES preschoolers in Head Start programs had clinically significant language delays" (p. 235). The implications of lower socioeconomic status and lower

reading achievement reaches world-wide, as students of lower socioeconomic status are over-represented among the lowest-achieving readers (Buckingham et al., 2013).

Some studies have shown the difference in achievement between higher and lower socioeconomic status families diminishes as school age increases (Sirin, 2005). To further demonstrate the importance of reading interventions for lower socioeconomic students, Hernandez (2012) affirmed children not reading on level by third grade are more likely than their higher socioeconomic peers to drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2012). According to Gorski (2013), the United States is the only industrialized nation in the world that does not offer universal preschool. Gorski (2013) reported even if preschool facilities are available to lower-income families, it is nearly impossible for those families to afford such early childhood education. Additionally, Payne (2005) reported according to a study by the Virginia Department of Education in 1993, there are four key responses shown to be effective when working with at-risk students: preschool programs, supplemental reading programs, reduced class sizes, and schoolwide prevention and support (Payne, 2005).

Hodgkinson, as referenced by Payne (2005), asserted low student achivement is correlated with a lack of resources. Payne (2013) stated students from lower socioeconomic families are faced with negative impacts on brain development when raised in poor neighborhoods. Payne (2013) wrote, "Violence, drugs, and gangs are part of the reality in high-poverty neighborhood. Domestic violence is particularly damaging to learning" (p. 2). Freeman, as referenced by Gorski (2013), suggested communities in lower-income neighborhoods should be working together to provide some of the services poor neighborhoods are lacking.

The impacts on learning when students are exposed to such living environments are long-lasting and play a significant role in relation to decreased reading test scores (Payne, 2013). Students from lower soceoconomic status families are less likely to get support from home and are less likely to engage in activities outside of school, thus leading to a high probability of dropping out of school and not attending college (Layton, 2015). According to Gorski (2013), as reported by the Children's Defense Fund in 2008, children from lower-income families are far less likely to have been read to at home. Gorski (2013) also reported students from lower-income families are slower than students from more affluent families to identify the alphabet and to spell their names.

Payne (2005) defined poverty as "the extent in which an individual does without resources" (p. 7). Resources were described by Payne (2005) in categories including emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, and relationships/role models. Other factors for determining socioeconomic status can include parental income and parent level of education, as income and education are considered highly correlational (Sirin, 2005). While not ignoring the importance of Payne's (2005) work, this researcher considered free or reduced-price meals as a measure of socioeconomic status when gathering the perceptions of first-grade teachers with regard to reading achievement and socioeconomic status. Free or reduced-price meals are based on household income as reported by parents to the school district using a calculation set forth by the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (2015). The guidelines are used by schools that participate in the National School Lunch program, and those figures were used to distinguish between higher and lower

socioeconomic status families (United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 2015).

Student Engagement

High student engagement can have a positive impact on student achievement (Chang & Chien, 2015; Davis & Kmetz, 2015; Sabin, 2015). Wilcken and Roseth (2015) wrote, "Engaged students are those who tend to work hard, complete assignments, find academic tasks to be useful, and in general are motivated to learn" (p. 178). According to Wilcken and Roseth (2015), student engagement is defined as a manifestation of a student's desire to learn and is a combination of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement. Lemov (2015) conferred and listed student engagement as one of the five principles in classroom culture. According to Lemov (2015), effective teachers always find ways to keep students engaged by giving students activities that offer important and challenging work.

Other researchers have defined student engagement as the degree of engagement during a formal education setting incuding the time and effort spent on learning tasks (Chang & Chien, 2015). Further, Davis and Kmetz (2015) gave student engagement a definition that includes three dimensions within a learning environment: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. According to Davis and Kmetz (2015), behavioral engagement is directly related to student behavior; cognitive engagement involves the student's psychological engagement; and emotional engagement refers to the student's feelings with others in the learning environment. According to Ward (2016), there is a difference between students being engaged and students being entertained. Ward (2016) offered 10 strategies to increase student engagement: curiosity, choice,

creativity, construction, collaboration, comaraderie, controversy, critique, commentary, and critical thinking.

Teachers can positively impact student engagement through lessons with increased student participation (Sabin, 2015). DeWitt (2016) declared discussion is one way to determine if student participation is authentic. DeWitt (2016) articulated, "True learning means that there are times when the teacher and students are learning at the same time. That takes authentic engagement" (para. 14). According to Sabin (2015), "In grades as low as Kindergarten, researchers have shown that the pedagogical methods of teachers have a direct influence on the levels of student engagement in the classroom" (p. 4). Other researchers declared when reading instruction is considered, teachers can increase student engagement by allowing students to express interest in particular subject areas prior to reading (Fulmer, D'Mello, Strain, & Graesser, 2015).

Ballantyne (2014) referenced the amount of time spent learning about students and their skills as a necessary element to reading remediation and stated the first 10 lessons in a Reading Recovery period are spent observing the student in order to be a more effective teacher. According to Dotterer and Lowe, as referenced by Sabin (2015), there is significant research that shows teachers play a direct role in student engagement. DeWitt (2016) stated a balance should be achieved between compliance and engagement for teachers to be more effective in the classroom.

In addition, teachers can improve student engagement by creating a learning environment that generates a sense of belonging for students (Wilcken & Roseth, 2015). In relation, Sabin (2015) referenced the importance of teacher-student relationships with regard to student engagement and stated increased teacher support has a positive impact

not only on student engagment but can positively impact student achievement. It is important for students to understand the purpose for reading as a way to motivate them to continue to read (Fisher & Frey, 2016). According to Fisher and Frey (2016), students need to understand readers read for many purposes, and one of those purposes is enjoyment.

In addition to the important role student engagement plays in student achievement, it is just as important for teachers to remain engaged in their own learning. (Hoerr, 2016). Hoerr (2016) suggested one way to improve student engagement through teacher interaction is to ask teachers to reflect on their own learning preferences. Allowing teachers the autonomy to make decisions about how students best learn and stay engaged can help increase student engagement in the classroom (Hoerr, 2016). Finally, according to Wilcken and Roseth (2015), students who feel a sense of relatedness with their teacher and classroom are more likely to put forth effort and thus show increased student achievement.

Professional Development

Professional development can be described as various types of education-related activities aimed to improve teaching and student learning (Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2015). Professional development has been regarded as a measure to improve the quality of instruction and thus increase student achievement (Ely et al., 2015). Additionally, teachers are required to attend professional development training in most states as part of their continuing education (Barrett, Cowen, Toma, & Troske, 2015). According to Barrett et al. (2015), "The underlying or implicit belief is that participation improves the quality of the teacher and will lead to improved student achievement" (p. 3). Gorski

(2013) agreed and stated student learning improves when teachers have improved teacher efficacy, a particularly important factor when teaching students from poverty.

According to Patton et al. (2015), "For teachers, professional development is both an obligation and an opportunity, serving as a forum for change and for confirmation of current practice" (p. 1). Patton et al. (2015) went on to state professional development has become a priority for those teachers looking to show gains in student achievement. Shaha, Glassett, and Copas (2015) agreed and stated professional development, along with teacher observations, are methods administrators use to ensure increased student achievement. Other studies have contradicted this research, including a review of nine studies that resulted in the researchers being unable to draw such conclusions about professional development and student achievement (Ely et al., 2015).

Regardless of the outcome as it relates to student achievement, much research exists on the various types of professional development (Barrett et al., 2015; Ely et al., 2015; Patton et al., 2015; Shaha et al., 2015). With the growing opportunity to engage in internet-based professional development, more and more teachers are choosing this low-cost option over traditional conferences (Shaha et al., 2015). In addition, the availability of professional development on social media sites has resulted in an increased interest by teachers and administrators alike (Brenneman, 2015). Patton et al. (2015) corroborated this sentiment, "Engagement in a professional community that extends beyond classrooms and school buildings has been identified as a powerful form of teacher learning" (p. 5).

Multimedia instruction, or videotaping instruction for the purpose of reflection or mentoring, is another approach to professional development designed to improve research-based teaching practices (Ely et al., 2015). According to Ely et al. (2015), the use of video reflection allows teachers the opportunity to recognize effective teaching practices and to identify those that need change. Regardless of the method of delivery, according to Sharratt et al. (2013), professional development for teachers needs to maximize the teacher's ability for critical thinking. Ely et al. (2015) conferred and stated quality professional development is vital to influence student learning.

In contrast, Shaha et al. (2015) stated the delivery of professional development in many schools as one-day workshops is too often not relevant, not related to curriculum, and therefore, ineffective. In a test conducted in 25 states, it was reported for teachers who participated in professional development in an online platform on-demand, improved student achievement was evident (Shaha et al., 2015). Other researchers have demonstrated the importance of teacher professional development as it relates to integrating technology into curriculum and instruction (Liu, Tsai, & Huang, 2015). In addition, Liu et al. (2015) stated technology-integrated professional development is particularly important for pre-service teachers, as they often lack the tools to integrate technology in the classroom.

Absenteeism and Reading Achievement

Improving student attendance is a common goal among school districts (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found, "School funding is often at least partially dependent on the number of students who regularly attend. Fewer pupils mean fewer resources for educational programs" (p. 308). As part of the Missouri School

Improvement Plan (MSIP 5), the state expectation is that 90% of students are in

attendance 90% of the time (MODESE, 2015). According to the MSIP 5 directions as

provided on the MODESE (2015) website, "Attendance is calculated by dividing the

hours of attendance by the total hours enrolled, then multiplying by 100 rounded to the

tenth" (p. 49). Attendance in Missouri is part of the Annual Performance Report the

MODESE uses to determine accreditation of public schools (MODESE, 2015). For the

purpose of this study, attendance was compared and evaluated against reading

achievement scores to determine if a correlation exists between consistent school

attendance and reading scores on the DRA.

     Consistent school attendance is important for student achievement (Adams,

2016; Emerson et al., 2015; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Gottfried, 2009). As Emerson et

al. (2015) reported, 50% of children with a high rate of absenteeism require some other

type of support system to remain at a level with their peers. Other researchers have

supported the theory attendance rates have an impact on student achievement (Adams,

2016; Emerson et al., 2015; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Gottfried, 2009). Students who

miss 10% of the school year are at greater risk for negative outcomes (Sprick, Alabiso,

& Yore, 2015). As quoted in Blad (2016), U.S. Secretary of Education, John B. King

stated:

> Frequent absences from school can be devestating to a child's education.
>
> Missing school leads to low academic achivement and triggers drop outs.
>
> Millions of young people are missing opportunities in postsecondary education,
>
> good careers and a chance to experience the American dream. (para. 6)

According to Adams (2016), students with poor school attendance have greater struggles with reading by third grade, and those same students who have reading difficulty in third grade are more likely to drop out of school before graduation.

Evidence suggests absenteeism is a problem in elementary schools (Gottfried, 2009). Gottfried (2009) asserted, "There is initial evidence that chronic absenteeism persists in U.S. schools, that it exists even among our youngest students, and that there are a range of negative individual-level ramifications of this behavior" (p. 2). According to Blad (2016), more than six million students, about 13%, miss at least 15 days of school per year. Further, Emerson et al. (2015) went on to state not only do academics suffer, but students with high rates of absenteeism also suffer with difficult transitions back to class due to increased learned helplessness.

Sprick et al. (2015) presented, "For students to be successful in school, they need to be in school. Any time students are not present, they risk falling behind" (p. 52). Students with high rates of absenteeism miss instruction and are likely to require some sort of remediation from the techer upon their return (Gottfried, 2009). Some researchers have considered the impact of absences not only on the individual student, but on the entire classroom (Gottfried, 2009). Gottfried (2009) reported the absences of just one or two students can have a negative impact on achievement for every student in the class. According to Gottfried (2009), when a student is absent from school, instruction suffers for the other students while the teacher works to remediate those students who were absent.

Socioeconomic status can also play a role in school attendance (Freeman et al., 2016). In a study completed to determine the correlation between positive behavior

support systems and academic achivement and attendance, it was reported students with free or reduced-price meals had significantly lower attendance rates than those of their higher socioeconomic status peers (Freeman et al., 2016). Adams (2016) conducted research in California regarding attendance and found children from lower socioeconomic status families face more obsticles with regard to getting to school, including a lack of timely and accessible dental and health care which can lead to further absences. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) stated schools with more students receiving free or reduced-price meals experience lower overall attendance. This notion was reiterated by Gorski (2013). Gorski (2013) suggested an initiative to increase health screenings and health services at school due to the lack of preventative care often apparent in lower-income families.

Guidelines set forth by the Missouri Department of Family Services play a role in the way schools manage attendance for students (Missouri Division of Family Services, 2009). Section 7, Chapter 32 of the Child Welfare Manual states parents are responsible for providing appropriate education and must promote school attendance for students between the ages of seven and 17 (Missouri Division of Family Services, 2009). The Child Welfare Manual goes on to state educational neglect is not the same as truancy, and students who have completed 16 credits toward high school graduation are exempt (Missouri Division of Family Services, 2009).

Administrators can have a positive impact on student attendance by implementing just a few changes in their schools (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). According to Layton (2015), researchers tested multiple messages with parents to determine the message that would have greatest impact on school attendance. Layton

(2015) learned when teachers give specific messages to students about the importance of attendance to avoid missing important lessons, parents are more likely to send their kids.

Schools can also have a positive impact on student attendance by reaching out to parents and working with parents to address the problem (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). In the event of chronic absences due to illness, it may be the school nurse who can reach out to parents to communicate the importance of consistent school attendance (Emerson et al., 2015). Layton (2015) asserted parents do not always understand the importance of regular attendance, regardless of income level, and it is important for communication to happen between school administrators and parents.

Summary

In summary, Chapter Two included a discussion about the interpretivist theory and how it relates to this research. An extensive review of literature on topics including reading assessments, the DRA, Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status and student achievement, student engagement, professional development, and attendance and student achievement were discussed. Chapter Three includes the purpose of the study, the methods for the research, the design of the study, and an in-depth look at the instruments and data collection.

Chapter Four contains the results of the research including detailed reporting of the focus groups by question and by school district. Additionally, findings from the attendance and reading level study on first-grade students are included. Chapter Five includes an analysis of the responses from the focus groups including comparisons of

responses among schools and answers to the five research questions. Additionally,

Chapter Five includes implications for practice and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Perceptions of first-grade teachers with regard to reading achievement as it relates to other variables such as socioeconomic status, attendance, Reading Recovery, student engagement, and professional development were studied in this research. In addition, a quantitative piece was included. The data analysis of attendance and how it relates to reading achievement was considered by reviewing attendance data and reading scores as determined by the Developmental Reading Assessment.

In this chapter, a review of the problem and purpose of the study includes the research questions and the importance of the study. The design of the research, a brief description of the methods and plan of study, and the ethical considerations that guided the manner in which the study was performed are discussed. The population and sample size are introduced and discussed, and the instrumentation is presented. Data collection is introduced in Chapter Three and includes the steps used to gather participants and appropriate reading and attendance data. Finally, the steps followed for data analysis are discussed.

Problem and Purpose Overview

The need for a thorough understanding of the perceptions of first-grade teachers with regard to reading achievement guided this study. Understanding the perceptions of teachers as they relate to reading achievement and socioeconomic status, student attendance, Reading Recovery, student engagement, and professional development can have an impact on decisions made by local districts with regard to further professional development, reading curriculum, and interventions (Regional Educational Laboratory, 2009). Understanding the perceptions of first-grade teachers about student attendance

can guide district-level leaders in obtaining classroom teacher support with district-wide attendance initiatives. The objective of this research was to identify perceptions, ascertain trends in perceptions, and contemplate how these elements play a role in the reading achievement of first-grade students in southwest Missouri.

Research questions and hypotheses. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to Reading Recovery and reading achievement?

2. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to socioeconomic status and reading achievement?

3. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to student engagement and reading achievement?

4. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to professional development and reading achievement?

5. What is the correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance?

$H5_0$: There is no correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance.

$H5_a$: There is a correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance.

Research Design

This research was designed as a mixed-methods study including quantitative research with regard to attendance and achievement for first-grade students and qualitative data from focus groups to obtain and understand the perceptions of first-grade teachers in southwest Missouri. To better understand the perceptions of first-grade teachers, it was imperative to use detailed interview questions during the focus

groups to investigate perceptions and feelings toward reading achievement when considering socioeconomic status, student engagement, Reading Recovery, attendance, and professional development. In order to get a better understanding of attendance and its impact on reading achievement, it was necessary to add a quantitative piece to the study. Attendance data were analyzed and compared to the responses and perceptions of first-grade teachers in order to note similarities and differences and to determine the impact of attendance on reading achievement of first-grade students.

Ethical Considerations

Upon approval granted by the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), careful consideration was given to secure all documents and research related to the study. Teachers and schools were assigned codes to assure anonymity and to protect the identities of all participants. Discussion of results remained confidential and only took place between the primary investigator and the supervisor of this research. Transcripts from the focus group discussions, attendance data, and DRA data were kept electronically and securely stored on a computer protected by a password. Documents remained secure, and careful attention was paid to keep those documents safe. Audio files of recorded focus group sessions were securely stored on a password-protected phone and will be destroyed upon completion of the research once the approved timeframe to destroy materials has passed.

In consideration of the small sample size, participants were given notification that precautionary steps will be taken protect the privacy of the participants. As part of this effort, identities were not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected remained in the possession of the

investigator in a safe location.   To avoid any conflict of interest, data collection from

the researcher's current district of employment was avoided, and additionally, data

collection from the district within which relatives attend school was not completed.

Each participant received an informed consent form (see Appendix B), as well as copies

of the questions to guide the focus groups (see Appendix C) in advance of the focus

group meetings, and was given the opportunity to review, edit, or expunge any

information deemed necessary from the transcription following the completion of each

focus group.

Population and Sample

The population for this study included all first-grade teachers in schools across

southwest Missouri who utilized the DRA to assess reading achievement and offer

Reading Recovery as a reading intervention. To gather an ample number of responses to

fully understand the perceptions of first-grade teachers in southwest Missouri, five

focus groups were formed during the fall semester of 2016. Creswell, as quoted by Elo

et al. (2014), stated when considering qualitative research, decisions about who will

participate and how they will participate must be made when using purposive sampling.

Purposive sampling was used for this study by selecting schools that fit specific criteria

(Palinkas et al., 2015).

A convenience sample was used to determine which first-grade teachers were to

be interviewed in the focus groups. According to Bluman (2015), a convenience

sample can be defined as a sample used based on the convenience to the research. To

identify teachers for this sample, the first-grade teachers were asked to participate in a

voluntary, one-time focus group. If teachers were unavailable for the focus group or

declined to partake in the focus group, that school was not used for the study in an effort

to protect the study's validity. Upon selection of the teachers, focus groups were

scheduled based on the availability of the participants and interviewer. The sample size

was 17 first-grade teachers who engaged in five focus groups. First-grade teachers

participated in focus groups to discuss reading achievement and their perceptions.

Teachers were asked to voluntarily engage in focus groups; participation was not

required or expected. If the primary investigator was unable to gather participants from

a particular school, that school was not utilized.

Inferential statistics can be defined as generalizing data from a sample in order

to respond to or make determinations about relationships of different variables and to

draw conclusions. (Bluman, 2015). Attendance data were collected from the school

administrator or another designee, and DRA scores from the 2015-2016 school year

were collected in order to respond to the final research question.

Instrumentation

To understand the perceptions of first-grade teachers, five focus groups were

conducted with first-grade teachers in southwest Missouri. Butin (2009) affirmed

interviews are a prevalent manner to acquire data in the social sciences. Each of the

four research questions were represented by open-ended questions for the focus group

interview. To gain as much information as possible, and to gain a better understanding

of the perceptions of participating teachers, at least one question was written to address

each research question.   In an effort to promote meaningful conversation, each question

was designed as an open-ended question.   It was the goal of the of the focus group

interview to guide a discussion, with multiple participating teachers, to gather as many

responses as possible. In addition, a final question was added to the focus group to allow participants to offer additional comments about reading achievement as it relates to Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status, professional development, and student engagement.

To test the effectiveness of the interview questions to guide the focus group discussion, a trial focus group was conducted with first-grade teachers. The questions were chosen based on the research questions of this study and the desire to obtain and understand perceptions of reading achievement and how it relates to Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status, student engagement, and professional development.

Data Collection

The first step to begin this study was to obtain permission from the principals of the participating schools (see Appendix D). Secondly, upon approval from the principals to use data and to hold focus groups with first-grade teachers, a schedule was set to carry out the focus group discussions and to collect DRA scores from the appropriate school contacts.

Prior to beginning each focus group, informed consent forms were issued to participants. Signed informed consent forms were collected and retained for future reference, and verbal consent was obtained at the beginning of the meeting. During the focus groups, an introductory statement was included to confirm consent and to acknowledge the conversation was recorded. Following the discussion with first-grade teachers, a taped copy of the conversation was used to type transcripts as accurately as possible, and then the transcripts were sent to the participating teachers for approval. The participants were given a short deadline for approval, and if no response was given,

it was assumed the participants accepted the transcripts as typed. Next, DRA scores of first-grade students were collected from the schools for the 2015-2016 school year.

Upon completion of the focus groups and gathering attendance and DRA data, all data were analyzed and reviewed to answer the five research questions. As mentioned previously, all data were protected during the study and were used strictly for this research in order to answer the research questions. In an effort to completely understand the perceptions of first-grade teachers concerning reading achievement and to determine a correlation between attendance and DRA, a thorough review of all data took place upon the conclusion of data collection. Once all data were reviewed and organized, the analysis began.

Data Analysis

The focus group transcripts were reviewed to determine the perceptions of first-grade teachers with regard to reading achievement, socioeconomic status, student engagement, and professional development. Butin (2009) stated it is important to follow scholarly protocol when conducting and analyzing interviews. Butin (2009) went on to state carefully selected interview questions play a vital role in obtaining meaningful responses.

First, the transcript responses were organized by question to compare the responses by question and across multiple school districts. Organizing the responses by question allowed the researcher to note similarities and differences across all districts. Secondly, the transcripts were organized by school district to provide an examination of the responses among and within each school district. This provided an opportunity to

view the responses while acknowledging the diverse student demographics from each district.

Finally, the responses from the focus groups were organized by teacher experience. About half of the teachers who contributed in the focus groups had one to 10 years teaching experience, and the other half were teachers with 11 or more years of teaching experience. By dividing the responses by years of experience, some light could be shed on responses given by less experienced teachers as compared to more experienced teachers.

Next, DRA scores of first-grade students were collected from the schools for the 2015-2016 school year. Finally, the data from DRA scores and attendance for first-grade students from the 2015-2016 school year were analyzed and compared for trends, themes, and correlation between variables.

Upon completion of the focus groups and gathering attendance and DRA data, all data were analyzed and reviewed to answer the five research questions. As mentioned previously, all data were protected during the study and were used strictly for this research in order to answer the research questions. In an effort to completely understand the perceptions of first-grade teachers concerning reading achievement and to determine a correlation between attendance and DRA, a thorough review of all data took place upon the conclusion of data collection. Once all data were reviewed and organized, the analysis began.

After collecting the DRA reading scores and attendance rates, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (PPMC) was used to determine if a correlation exists between attendance and reading achievement. According to Bluman (2015), one

example of a test used to determine a correlation between two variables is a PPMC.

Upon completion of the PPMC, scatterplots were designed and a line of best fit drawn

to determine if a correlation existed (Bluman, 2015).

Summary

In Chapter Three, the statement of the problem and purpose of the study were

reiterated. In addition to the problem statement, the research design was discussed and

the steps for the research plan were stated to provide a picture of the process of the

study to better understand to focus of the research. The steps for data analysis were

discussed. Chapter Three also included a list of the ethical considerations, details about

the instrumentation, and the steps for data analysis to compare focus group responses

and reading and attendance data for first-grade students.

Chapter Four includes a complete analysis of data after all focus groups were

complete and all data collected. Data analysis included a review of the transcripts of

focus groups to examine the perceptions of first-grade teachers when considering

reading achievement, socioeconomic status, student engagement, and professional

development. In Chapter Four, the perceptions of first-grade teachers are presented by

question, by school district, and by teacher experience. In addition, Chapter Four

includes a thorough investigation of DRA scores and how those scores relate to the

attendance of first-grade students in the participating schools from the 2015-2016

school year. Chapter Five includes a detailed analysis of the findings and the

conclusions for each of the five research questions. Chapter Five also includes a

discussion about implications for practice and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of first-grade teachers regarding reading achievement when considering its relation to socioeconomic status, student engagement, professional development, and Reading Recovery. To better understand the perceptions of first-grade teachers, focus groups were held with five different teams of first-grade teachers. The teachers, all from southwest Missouri schools, taught in districts where the DRA is used for determining reading levels and where Reading Recovery is used as a reading intervention for struggling first graders. The questions for the focus groups were designed in order to answer these four driving questions for the research:

1. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to Reading Recovery and reading achievement?

2. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to socioeconomic status and reading achievement?

3. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to student engagement and reading achievement?

4. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to professional development and reading achievement?

Questions for the focus group were designed to elicit responses from teachers to gain insight into their perceptions and to provide information to determine if teachers across multiple schools have similar feelings regarding reading achievement. Specifically, teachers were asked to reflect on the possible ways low socioeconomic status impacts learning in their classrooms and to identify specific deficits that may

exist within that student population. In addition, teachers were asked to describe steps

to ensure student engagement and to share specific tools used to increase student

engagement during reading to positively impact reading achievement. Also, the focus

groups were designed to determine how professional development impacts reading

instruction and to make a determination if teachers in these five schools feel they have

sufficient professional development to play a role in increasing reading achievement.

Reading Recovery was discussed in the focus groups, and questions were

designed in an attempt to obtain information about specific instructional practices that

take place in the Reading Recovery classroom. Focus group questions were designed to

determine if instructional practices from Reading Recovery transfer to the students'

regular education classrooms. All of these questions were answered by multiple

teachers, and many commonalities were found to exist.

The focus groups were completed with teachers from schools in southwest

Missouri in five separate counties. To retain anonymity, each school was given a letter,

and each teacher within that school was given a number. Table 1 depicts each school

district and the number of participating teachers from each district.

Table 1

Participants by School District and Number of Teachers in Each District

Participating Districts	Number of Teachers from District
School A	3
School B	3
School C	3
School D	4
School E	4

Although teacher experience ranged from first-year teachers to veteran teachers, the responses remained consistent across all experience levels with just a few noted differences. It should be noted that those teachers with more experience were more likely to respond to the questions and therefore provided more input into the focus group discussions. The teachers with less experience often required prompting from the more experienced teachers, and thus fewer responses were recorded from those teachers with less than ten years of experience. The participation level across levels of experience was nearly divided in half when considering teachers in the profession one to 10 years and 11 or more years (see Figure 1).

■ 1-10 Yrs. Exp   ■ 11 + Yrs. Exp
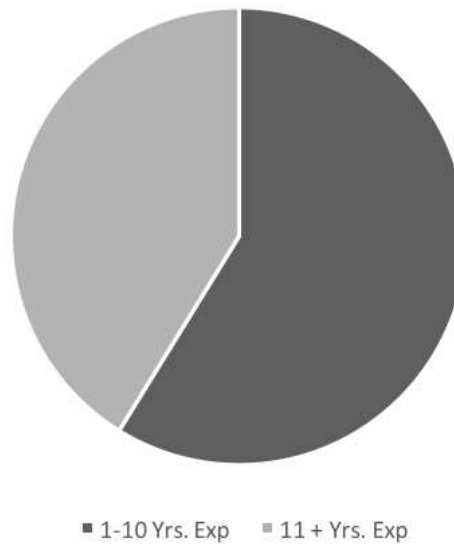
Figure 1. Years of experience for teachers in focus groups divided into two categories:

one to 10 years of teaching experience and 11 or more years of teaching experience.

To further understand the impact attendance can have on reading achievement, a

quantitative component of the study was used to determine if a correlation exists

between attendance and reading achievement. Attendance data were reviewed for 249

first-grade students, and trends were noted at various attendance points. Subsequently,

statistical tests were performed and the following research question was answered:

5. What is the correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance?

H5₀: There is no correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance.

H5ₐ: There is a correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance.

Focus Groups

Five focus groups were completed with teachers in five different school districts across southwest Missouri. The focus group interview included 11 questions to better understand the perceptions of teachers about reading achievement when considering Reading Recovery, student engagement, professional development, and socioeconomic status. Responses were gathered from all participants for at least one question. Not all teachers responded to every question. To protect the identities of the teachers, each teacher was assigned a number. For example, the first teacher was referred to as T1, the second as T2, and this pattern continued for all 17 teachers interviewed. A review of the responses is presented in three different ways. First, the responses are grouped by question to show the differences and similarities across districts. Secondly, the responses are shown by district to highlight key points made by each school's teachers. Finally, the responses are grouped by teacher experience in order to check for commonalities or differences between new and experienced teachers.

Focus group question one. How does Reading Recovery impact reading achievement in your classroom?

The responses from the teachers revealed many commonalities. About half of the teachers referred to the extra support Reading Recovery offers students, and half of that group specifically referenced the term "double dipping" when referring to the extra support. Six teachers commented on the importance of the extra support Reading Recovery gives students and cited that support as a reason for improved student achievement. According to Dorn et al. (2015), when referencing studies on the impact of small-group instruction on reading achievement, "These studies found that Reading

Recovery and small-group programs are complementary interventions that recognize the diverse needs of struggling readers and provide varying degrees of intensity" (p. 10).

In response to interview question one, Teacher 1, with six years of experience, stated, "Reading Recovery has a huge impact on our classroom because it provides very intentional one-on-one time in addition to the attention in small groups that we already give to kids." Echoing that sentiment, T4, with 13 years of experience, noted she sees improved confidence in her readers who go to Reading Recovery and attributes enhanced reading achievement to that increased confidence. She stated:

> What I see is that extra support. In Reading Recovery, they can teach them in different ways that would also apply where I see them in reading groups. I see that support and that confidence build with them and that's how I see it impacting reading achievement.

Within just two weeks of Reading Recovery participation, T14 referred to improvement and referenced the benefit of extra support that begins as early as school starts. With 13 years of classroom experience, T10 expressed her satisfaction with the support given:

> Reading Recovery affects achievement in a way that when I can't reach a child or reach everyone for that amount of time that they [Reading Recovery] are giving them one-on-one time, it allows me to reach that lowest group or the next-to-lowest group and allows me to know that the lowest group is being met at their level. I can give additional support after that, but it's not just me being solely responsible for that instruction.

Teachers 7, 8, and 9 all used the word "extra" when they referred to the impact on

reading achievement. While referencing extra attention and extra practice T7

commented:

> I see it gives them extra attention or extra practice that we are not able to give to
>
> them as whole group in the classroom. Its extra intervention we aren't able to
>
> get them in the whole group and more one-on-one than we can give in whole
>
> group.

While T8 commented on the extra reading group, T9 mentioned extra support. In

summary, it can be said all three of those teachers find value in the additional time

students are able to spend with Reading Recovery teachers. The time in Reading

Recovery can be a significant amount of daily instruction, as Dorn et al. (2015) stated

Reading Recovery students engage in daily 30-minute one-on-one lessons. Both T2 and

T6 agreed; T2 commented on the foundational skills Reading Recovery teachers can

help support, and T6 stated students from Reading Recovery tend to use more strategies

in reading groups.

      Focus group question two. How does Reading Recovery instruction transfer to

the classroom with your first-grade students?

      In an attempt to determine the level of confidence with teachers when

considering transferability of skills, the second question aimed at gathering evidence of

Reading Recovery strategies and skills being used in the classroom. When considering

the needs of the student, T13 was the only teacher to mention the individual needs of

students and adjusting instruction to meet those needs. Additionally, T13 mentioned

working with the Reading Recovery teacher to determine which strategies work best for

her kids and then practicing those same skills in the classroom. Cassidy, Ortlieb, and Grote-Garcia (2016) stated a staple to Reading Recovery instruction is the focus on the individual student and meeting needs through personal approaches. As referenced in Dorn et al. (2015), an analyses of remedial reading programs showed when classroom instruction and remedial reading instruction are closely connected, student achievement is increased.

Improved confidence and use of specific reading strategies are the key findings from T16, who stated instruction from Reading Recovery transfers well to her classroom. According to T16:

Reading Recovery transfers to my classroom by allowing them to use the skills that the Title 1 teacher is teaching them. They feel more confident once again. They feel more capable of doing what the other students are doing that are not in Title 1. For example, I had a student not able to sound out words, or able to even write words down, or even retell a story to me, and by the time they got out of Title 1 they were able to do all three things. So, it [Reading Recovery] has transferred very well into the classroom.

In agreement, T1 stated:

I would say that a lot of the instruction for those Reading Recovery kids happens in Reading Recovery and with me, in the classroom, I view it as a practice time to be able to use and practice those skills.

Teacher 3 has seen evidence in her students and expressed it is because of one-on-one instruction students have success at using skills in her classroom. According to T3:

I think a lot of times they are able to focus one-on-one on the strategies and the

foundations of skills of reading. I notice more transfer when I am reading with

those kids. I can see them using the skills they are learning with the Reading

Recovery teacher when they are with me.

Professional development in the district is a benefit for Teacher 5, who stated:

Our building had some professional development last year where our Reading

Recovery teachers were the ones that led the professional development day.

They did a fabulous job of really going through what techniques and strategies

they use with their students. We got visuals, handouts, and sample lesson videos

that gave us a common language that we can use that they are using with their

groups. The professional development was a huge support for us.

Researchers have corroborated the importance of the Reading Recovery teacher

providing professional development to classroom teachers (Sharratt et al., 2013).

According to Sharratt et al. (2013), the Reading Recovery training provided to

classroom teachers gives them skills to apply to all students in the classroom for all

subjects, and therefore Reading Recovery impacts all students in the classroom.

Both T8 and T9 noted it is consistency in book selection that plays a role in the

transferability between Reading Recovery and the classroom. The importance of

transferability across multiple platforms was confirmed by Fisher and Frey (2016) in a

recent article. Fisher and Frey (2016) indicated transfer of learning is a vital component

for students to be lifelong learners. The most compelling statement about the transfer of

strategies came from T10. The school district within which T10 teaches has narrowed

every strategy, all language, and all tools to be standard across all classrooms and

between classes and Reading Recovery. Teacher 10 reiterated by commenting on the importance of consistent training and reinforcing the same set of rules and strategies with all readers.

Focus group question three. How is reading achievement impacted when Reading Recovery students are pulled from the classroom and potentially miss instruction?

Of the eight responses to question three during the focus groups, all eight teachers responded unanimously. Reading Recovery students are not pulled from the classroom during whole group instruction. More specifically, T4 reported:

> We try to schedule around those core subjects. Our WIN time is RTI time and supports students' needs. The teachers [Reading Recovery] work around Daily 5, they miss Daily 5 but not the reading group with me. We stay away from math.

In all cases, students are removed from class for Reading Recovery during independent reading time or reading center rotations. With regard to timing, T9 was very clear, "I think it helps reading achievement, but they do not miss our whole group instruction. They are pulled during small group instruction and during independent reading time. They do not miss whole group instruction." Teacher 2 agreed:

> I would say our reading teachers are very intentional about the time they take them. The majority of them are pulled while we are doing Daily 5, or we try to plan our small group instruction around when they are out of the classroom. Hypothetically, they are missing the social interaction but not the instruction.

Both T4 and T6 specifically mentioned a particular time during their day designed for intervention and reported their Reading Recovery students are taken from the class during that intervention time to ensure instruction is not missed.

Both T4 and T13 referenced collaboration with the reading teacher to get optimal scheduling. According to T13:

We meet with our Reading Recovery teachers and figure out the best time for them to be pulled out. The time we shoot for is during guided reading, so when we meet with guided reading they are being pulled out. We also meet with those kids, but they are not missing any instruction.

Additionally, T14 commented on the helpfulness of the Reading Recovery teacher when scheduling pull-out times for students. Specifically, T14 stated:

I structured my reading groups and math time around the Reading Recovery time so they did not miss any other core instruction needed to be successful in other subjects. Our Reading Recovery teacher was very helpful to make sure that happened.

A common theme among all districts was the ease with which Reading Recovery teachers work with classroom teachers to schedule lessons in a manner least intrusive for students.

Focus group question four. How does socioeconomic status affect reading achievement in your classroom?

The teachers interviewed for this study agreed socioeconomic status plays a role in reading achievement, although the reasons why and the level at which socioeconomic status impacts differed among teaching staff. For example, T3, T6, T7, and T8

specifically referenced parental support as a reason for the possible correlation between socioeconomic status and lower reading achievement. Three of those four teachers commented parents work late hours or nights and weekends and this could be the reason for lack of support from parents. Teacher 6 stated:

> I think that sometimes you do have a correlation between low socioeconomic status and support at home. It might be because of single working moms who don't have the time. What I have encountered that it is more difficult for them to do their reading at home or at night. That's one of the biggest challenges, maybe not also having books at home, we see that, too.

Teacher 7 agreed by stating:

> A lot of lower income students have parents that are working evenings and weekends, and they are not home when the student is home. They have either a grandparent or a sitter that is doing bedtime routine, and they aren't getting the extra support or spending time reading them.

To reiterate, T8 stated:

> With my students, it affects how many books they have at home. A lot of them tell me they don't have books to read at home, and it affects how reading is valued at home. You can tell whose parents value reading and who read with them or to them every day. It definitely affects how much time they spend reading outside of school.

Three other teachers also reported the biggest impact comes when parents are not available to read with students at home. As T3 reported:

Over the years what I have noticed is that lower income students typically are

your lower readers. I think it's that the parents might be working a lot and they

don't have time, they aren't working with the kids as much, they might not have

gone to preschool. My other students have more advantage with their family

situation. I've noticed a correlation, granted I have some more advantaged kids

that are in Reading Recovery, but typically that's what I see.

Statistics from the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) (2016) shed some

light on this perception by the interviewed teachers. The NCCP (2016) showed 54% of

low-income children reside with a single parent. While T11 did not specifically

mention parental working hours, T11 did say, "I feel they could be so much further in

reading, or be on grade level, if they could be reading at home."

Teacher 17 agreed and noted even with all the interventions offered in school,

including Reading Recovery, if students do not have help at home, their reading

achievement continues to suffer. Specifically, T17 stated:

We talked yesterday that if they're lower, if their socioeconomic status is lower

that their exposure to reading is not as high, and it won't be as high as the kids

that get read to every night. Even though we do all this and we have Reading

Recovery, if they don't have help at home, then their reading achievement still

suffers. And, it's still behind those that get read to everyday at home and their

vocabulary is not as broad as a child that reads at home or gets read to or

exposed to a broader vocabulary.

While most of the teachers were in agreement socioeconomic status plays a role in

reading achievement, T4 declared the biggest difference comes in the form of

homework completion and not reading achievement. While T4 was in agreement, T4 stated, "This year, that does not apply to my students."

Recent researchers indicated the achievement gap between lower-income students and their more advantaged peers is starting to dissipate (Sparks, 2016). Sparks (2016) noted, "The children starting their first days of kindergarten may arrive better prepared than prior generations – and students in poverty will arrive at less of a disadvantage compared with their wealthier peers (p. 8). According to T4, there has been more correlation between lower socioeconomic status and lower achievement in previous years than in the current school year.

Focus group question five. Considering your students of lower socioeconomic status, what do you perceive are their biggest limitations to reading achievement as compared to their peers?

Teachers in four of the five schools mentioned lack of vocabulary as a limitation for students from lower socioeconomic status families. One example statement came from T9, "I think one of the biggest limitations is they don't have the parents reading with them. They don't have concept of print and vocabulary isn't as advanced as those who have parents who are supporting reading at home." In agreement, T1 confirmed:

> It seems our students from lower socioeconomic status have less familiarity or less exposure due to whatever their circumstance that their vocabulary is more limited. I've noticed a pattern between our Reading Recovery students and our speech students that don't have that language development in comparison to their peers. I've seen that correlation.

This observation by the participating teachers can be confirmed by Ridge et al. (2015), "Conversations between parents and children from low-SES backgrounds appear to be less frequent in comparison to conversations between parents and children from higher SES backgrounds, as well as less interactive" (p. 128). In addition to the similarities in comments with regard to lack of language exposure, many teachers feel students are lacking the opportunity to read and write at home.

Another commonality among the five schools was the reference to the lack of access to resources as a possible impediment to student achievement. Teacher 5 referenced the lack of books that meet the needs of students and the lack of hearing a fluent reader as limitations. Teacher 4 commented on the lack of access to reading materials and reiterated this is not the case with all her lower socioeconomic status families, but there has been a correlation in the past. Another teacher agreed, and while T12 did not specifically mention access to appropriately leveled books, the lack of hearing adults read at home was referenced and considered to be a limitation.

Gorski (2013) agreed and stated students from lower-income families are more likely to have parents who work longer hours and are less likely to have help with daily chores, which in turn makes parents less likely to have time to spend reading with kids. In addition, T2 and T9 conferred and went further to mention the possible lack of parental support due to either lack of time or interest by the parent. Gorski (2013) reported one common association with wealth is time, and lower-income families have difficulty finding extra time based on the amount of time required to maintain the household.

Teacher 10 added the difference between students from lower socioeconomic status families can be seen as soon as students walk in the door. According to T10, the difference begins with the ability to properly hang coats on a hook, then the ability to organize themselves in a circle ready to learn. Teacher 8 stated access to tools such as paper and pencils to practice writing can also have an impact on reading achievement for students from lower income families. Finally, T1 spoke of a possible correlation between Reading Recovery students and those being served by an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for language services. Further research would need to be conducted to determine if a correlation exists between language exposure in lower socioeconomic families and how it relates to Reading Recovery enrollment.

Focus group question six. How does student engagement during your reading instruction impact reading achievement?

Perceptions about student engagement during guided reading brought varied responses from the focus group participants. While all the teachers agreed strong engagement is essential to reading achievement, the path they choose to increase engagement was diverse. Both T4 and T5 commented on the importance of selecting texts of interest to the specific reader. Specifically, T5 stated:

> Thinking of small groups, if I have their attention and they are engaged, I'm going to get the best attention and effort. I try to think of my groups and find the text that is the best choice and best fit. I have one group of all boys; they want to read books about cars and dinosaurs. I still need to be mindful of balance between fiction and nonfiction, but I need to be mindful of what books I choose.

Providing texts of interest to the reader may be a strong strategy for increased engagement. As Marzano (2013) asserted, "Even if teachers make classroom activities interesting, students won't be deeply engaged unless they think the content is important to their lives" (p. 81). Teacher 9 stated, "I think it makes a big difference in reading achievement if they are motivated and engaged. If they are not, they are not going to be interested in or care about goals or trying to reach goals."

The importance of engagement was mirrored by Hoerr (2016), "Engagement doesn't happen by chance. It happens when talented teachers help students understand the importance of what they're learning and why it's relevant to them" (p. 86). One teacher, T5, referenced the use of books relevant to the reader, and Hoerr (2016) agreed students are engaged when work sparks interest. Teacher 16 stated alternative seating has played a role in increased engagement by allowing students to have range of motion during guided reading lessons and thus providing more opportunity for increased participation. On another note regarding engagement, T2 referenced Whole Brain Teaching, "I do similar things with Whole Brain Teaching. Teaching them to have conversations where that transfers to small group instruction. That teaches them to have conversations, and they are more engaged in the lesson." The interviewed teachers discussed steps to improve engagement in response to question seven.

Focus group question seven. What steps do you take to increase student engagement during reading instruction?

Setting goals, finding students' interests, and building relationships were all typical responses from the focus groups when asked to list strategies to increase student engagement. Jackson and Zmuda (2014) agreed:

If you want real engagement rather than mere compliance, provide clarity about the goals of the learning. Offer the right context so students can make their learning relevant to their lives and to the worlds they live in. Create a classroom culture that signals that you're genuinely invested in their learning and that they have the space and room to experiment, make mistakes, and learn from their mistakes. (para. 54)

Teacher 13, in her sixth year, referenced the importance of building relationships with students as a strategy to increase student engagement. According to T13, "Finding what kids are interested in and what topics they want to learn about and read about, and I found that building relationships with your kids makes a big impact, too." Teacher 6 expressed the idea of working with the teacher in a smaller group plays an active role in improving engagement during guided reading instruction. According to T6:

Just being in a small group really increases their engagement. They love being with the teachers with just a few other students. I don't feel like it's an issue with engagement during guided reading. If it's a text from the day before, they are excited to read it. I feel like guided reading lends itself to high student achievement.

A teacher with 14 years' experience, T3, referenced intentional stopping points during read aloud to increase the opportunity for students to remain engaged during reading instruction. According to T3, "I stop throughout the story so they can discuss it and we discuss it as a whole."

Teacher 14, the second-most tenured teacher with 21 years of experience, noted teachers can have the biggest impact on student engagement by providing students with

books of interest and ensuring the books are on reading level to keep the readers

focused during guided reading instruction. A first-year teacher, T8, referenced goal

setting as a strategy for increased student engagement. Specifically, T8 said students

earn a coupon for free pizza once they reach a new reading level, and T8 also rewards

students with stickers on a daily basis to increase student engagement. Recent

researchers disagreed with giving coupons as a reward for reading. Duke (2016) stated

offering rewards not directly tied to more reading can actually undermine the

motivation for reading. Conversely, Jackson and Zmuda (2014) stated the four keys to

increased student engagement include clarity, context, culture, and challenge. Only one

teacher mentioned Accelerated Reader (AR) as an engagement strategy. That teacher,

T9, stated, "We have Accelerated Reader on their computers for students that want to

do that, and our library rewards them for different points for doing that."

      Focus group question eight. How does professional development impact your

ability to teach reading?

      The landscape of professional development looked similar across the five

counties and within the schools with participants in this study. While most teachers

referenced professional development specific to reading instruction, the path through

which the professional development was obtained looked somewhat different. For

example, T3 said the instructional coach within the district provides professional

development, while T17 referenced two different reading conferences. Teacher 17

mentioned two different workshops where well-known literacy instruction trainers

offered training (Linda Dorn and Debbie Diller). According to T17, "We went to a

Linda Dorn workshop over the summer that really laid out the framework for our

guided reading and small groups and the models that we are supposed to go by to increase students' reading level."

> According to T3:
>
> Our instructional coach here does some professional development with us. I know last year she did some guided reading professional development days with us. We also use the Jan Richardson book so they are always helping us so we continue to learn and help those kids.

With 11 years of experience, T2 reported being back in the classroom teaching first grade after being a Reading Recovery-trained teacher and using many of the techniques that are trademarks of Reading Recovery with students in her guided reading groups. Teacher 2 stated:

> I've had a year of Reading Recovery training because where I taught before all teachers were trained in Reading Recovery. I think teaching first grade again after seven years, it's nice to see there is still that same routine and same structure. I try to use that with my lower groups and use some of those strategies that I know from Reading Recovery.

Based on this statement, it is clear the professional development T2 received played a role in reading lessons in the classroom.

A six-year veteran in the classroom, T1 found the most value in professional development received from the building's instructional coach. According to T1, "She is always willing to find resources for us and based on what we view as our need. We can approach her about anything, and she is great at helping us get information." In the

same district as T1, T3 was in agreement with the benefit of professional development from the building's instructional coach and stated:

> Our instructional coach here does some professional development with us. I know last year she did some guided reading professional development days with us. We also use the Jan Richardson book, so they [instructional coaches] are always helping us so we continue to learn and help those kids.

Teacher 3 specified the use of a book, *The Next Step in Guided Reading* by Jan Richardson, as a tool for self-guided professional development. In another district, T5, with 13 years in the classroom, also referenced the book by Jan Richardson as a tool for professional development. From the largest school district of those in the sample, T10 made the most compelling statement regarding professional development when she said:

> When we go to professional development and take time out of our day, it is relevant, applies to our kids, and we have a direct say in how we implement. It's always something we can take back to the classroom to implement.

A first-year teacher, T7, stated every time professional development is offered resources to help students are gained. According to T7:

> Any time I get professional development I gain resources. Every child is motivated differently, and the more resources you have the better you are able to be able to teach to kids and teach reading. That's the thing with reading, you have to figure out how to keep them motivated. One day they like stickers and they next day they don't.

In conclusion, T7 stated, "Any professional development is helpful."

Focus group question nine. If applicable, how does professional development impact reading achievement in your classroom?

Just as the preferred delivery of professional development varied among teachers and schools, the strategies that impact reading achievement across those schools has some variance. Teacher 6 referenced the book mentioned before, *The Next Step in Guided Reading,* by Jan Richardson, as having an impact on reading achievement, because the resources in the book have afforded the ability to reach lower-level readers. In that same building, T4 stated the specificity offered by the Jan Richardson book has helped with student achievement when considering guided reading. More specifically, T4 indicated:

> With anything in teaching, if you are stagnant and not still learning, your teaching will be stagnant as well. Any professional development that will give you new ideas and stretching you to try new things will impact teaching of any subject.

With six years of teaching experience, T9 said professional development in reading, specifically small group reading instruction, provides opportunities to gain ideas to increase motivation and teaches dialogue to use during small group reading sessions.

As mentioned in the responses for research question nine, T10 discussed deliberate training in guided reading. According to T10:

> With regard to guided reading, we have a way that we have been taught to do a day one and day two model. With that model, it gives them a chance to work on words, work on writing, and different strategies. Professional development has

taught us how to group our students and how to figure out what to teach next. It

has all been taught in detail, all the way to the way we plan our next lesson.

DeFord (2013) agreed with T10 and stated one important role for teachers using

Reading Recovery instruction is to closely observe what students can and almost can do

in order to provide the best path to move the student forward. Assistance with

implementation is the key, according to T14. Teacher 14 asserted the literacy coach

plays an integral role in ensuring skills learned from professional development are

implemented in the classroom. Finally, T4 summarized professional development and

its impact on reading achievement as an important part of being a teacher. According to

T4, professional development keeps teachers from becoming stagnant and stretches

teachers to try new things.

Focus group question 10. Do you feel you have sufficient professional

development with regard to reading instruction? Why or why not?

Each teacher interviewed responded positively to question 10. An

overwhelming "yes" resounded in the responses, and teachers were quick to elaborate.

Teacher 12 spoke to the importance of follow-up provided after professional

development. A third-year teacher, T12, stated, "They have offered to come into my

classroom and make sure we are putting in place what we learn and make sure our kids

are successful." Likewise, T12 added, "It helps to know that I have back-up all year."

In the same school district, one of the larger districts, T11, a first-year teacher, stated

she has sufficient professional development and added going on field trips to other

classrooms to watch lessons has been helpful. Teacher 11 referenced appreciation for

the district to seek feedback from teachers following professional development.

Teacher 9 confirmed multiple opportunities for professional development are offered and in addition to the professional development offered, the Reading Recovery teacher acts as a resource for classroom teachers. Specifically, T9 stated:

Our Reading Recovery teacher is very experienced and taught first grade for 20-plus years, so if we every have questions, she will help you be more effective with guided reading groups. I think our district offers tons of opportunities to better themselves regarding reading instruction.

While most teachers affirmed sufficient professional development in reading is available, T4 stated in years past the development was focused solely on reading instruction and due to a new math curriculum, the current focus is on math. Specifically, T4 added:

Every year our principals have to choose a focus because we have a set amount of time and we can't focus on everything. We've had several years where the focus has been reading instruction and shared reading. This year it has changed to math, but I also feel like that was needed.

A first-year teacher, T8 said professional development is offered on reading instruction, and teachers can never have too much. Teacher 8 added teachers are allowed to visit other classrooms throughout the year to see other teachers. According to T8:

Our district has required professional development days, and they always have someone once a year come in for professional development for small group reading, and we always get a chance once or twice a year to go around the building and see other teachers.

Teacher 14 responded teachers are currently getting sufficient professional development in reading, and hands-on training happens throughout the school year.

Focus group question 11. Is there anything else you would like to add with regard to reading achievement and how it relates to Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status, student engagement, or professional development?

In response to question 11, T14 added the teachers believe in Reading Recovery and wish more Reading Recovery teachers could be added for the lower performing students. Additionally, T14 went on to say Reading Recovery has led to tremendous progress for those students who have participated.

Focus Group Responses by School District

To more carefully examine the responses from the focus groups, the responses were divided by school district. As noted in Table 2, four of the schools had similar student demographics when considering the number of students who qualified for free or reduced-priced meals. One school district could be considered the outlier with the lowest percentage of students that qualified for a free or reduced-priced meal at just 36%. Considering the responses from that school district as compared to the responses from the districts with higher rates of students who qualified for free or reduced-priced meals could highlight, if any, possible differences in perceptions. Data from the MODESE (2016b) showed the free or reduced-price meal percentage for each district (see Table 2).

Table 2

Free or Reduced-Price Meal Percentage

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School District	Free or Reduced-Price Meal Percentage
School District A	51.9%
School District B	61.9%
School District C	65.6%
School District D	36%
School District E	74.1%

Note. This information was obtained from the MODESE (2016b).

Four teachers participated in the focus group from School District D, the district

with a 36% population of students who qualified for free or reduced-priced meals.

When considering the responses from this focus group about socioeconomic status and

reading achievement, the teachers referenced classroom behavior differences and lack

of parental support. The responses from this focus group were not as detailed as those

from the other districts, and the discussion around that particular question was short-

lived.

The questions that drew the greatest number of comments from the teachers in

School District D were the perceptions of professional development as it relates to

reading achievement. The teachers in this district expressed strongly the importance of

professional development, and each teacher commented about the positive role

professional development plays in the classroom as well as the district's initiative to provide effective professional development. Teacher 10, from School District D, stated, "I've been in the district for several years, and we have a new teacher to the district, but I feel confident that she's getting the same training I got several years ago when I started." This same teacher also referenced the relevance of the professional development provided by the district and commented on the ability to implement ideas as the need fits. Teacher 11 had positive comments regarding professional development offered in the district and stated, "Many times they ask us for feedback from professional development, wondering what was helpful and what was not." The perceptions of the first-grade teachers at School District D, while closely aligned to the perceptions of the teachers from the other school districts, presented a strong, positive message about professional development.

School District B, with the next-highest number of students who qualified for free or reduced-priced meals, had three teachers participate in the focus group. Those three teachers had some similar responses to School District D when asked about reading achievement and how it relates to Reading Recovery, student engagement, professional development, and socioeconomic status. While the teachers in this district were able to discuss some of the disadvantages of students from lower-income families, the message from School District B teachers was that those students come to school with a lack of language development and limited experience hearing fluent readers at home. When considering student engagement, School District B teachers felt more confident in the ability to maintain engagement during guided reading, and one teacher stated guided reading naturally lends itself to increased engagement.

The strongest commonality among the teachers from School District B came in the responses relating to professional development. The teachers from School District B found value in professional development, just as the teachers from School District D; however, each one mentioned the book, *The Next Step in Guided Reading,* by Jan Richardson as a valuable tool for learning about guided reading instruction. According to T5, "As a grade level, we chose to go through the Jan Richardson book on guided reading. We wanted to know what we can do for our high flyers and our struggling readers, and it gives us new techniques to use daily." Confirmed by T6:

> The Jan Richardson book study really helped me with my lower readers. Last year I had a reader that was beginning kindergarten level, and that was something I hadn't encountered. That book helped me bring the lesson down to her level, helping her with phonemic awareness and concepts about print.

Finally, confirming the uniform message regarding the use of the book study for professional development, T4 stated, "I feel that book, *The Next Step in Guided Reading*, is so specific to each reader. There are so many ideas you can plug into any group, and that has been the best professional development as far as reading." The message was evident from teachers in School District B that the most impactful professional development for them came from a book study performed as a grade level.

Three teachers from School District A, with the next-highest percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-priced meals (64.2%), participated in the focus group. The responses from School District A were somewhat varied among teachers. While all three teachers agreed one of the challenges faced by students from lower-income families is lack of parental support, one teacher noted a commonality

between students in Reading Recovery and those students serviced through an IEP for

speech and language therapy. Further research into this observation revealed School

District A has a disproportionately higher rate of students served by an IEP when

compared to the other four schools (MODESE, 2016b). Table 3 depicts the student

enrollment, the IEP incidence rate, and the approximate percentage of the student

population being served by an IEP.

Table 3

Student Population and Percentage of Students Served with IEPs

_____

School District	Enrollment	Incidence Rate	% Served by IEP
A	343	74	21%
B	603	83	13%
C	328	48	14%
D	447	51	11%
E	400	53	13%

_____

Note. This information was obtained from the MODESE (2016b).

The higher rate of students served with an IEP could have an impact on

perceptions about reading achievement as it relates to Reading Recovery, student

engagement, socioeconomic status, and professional development. The perceptions of

the teachers within School District A, where more students are served in special

education, may indicate support for struggling students is in the forefront. When asked

about the benefits of Reading Recovery, two teachers mentioned one-on-one instruction and the third teacher referenced the importance of strategy-building with the Reading Recovery teacher. School District A was the second-smallest school that participated in the focus groups and has 51% of its students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, the second-lowest of all schools.

Teachers from School District C, the smallest elementary school represented in this study with a 65.6% free or reduced-price meal participation rate, had three teachers respond to the focus group interview questions. Teachers from School District C were the only teachers to mention two other reading programs when responding to questions about reading achievement. One such program mentioned was Accelerated Reader. According to T9, "We have AR [Accelerated Reader] available on their computers for students, and our library rewards them for different amounts of points for doing that." Accelerated Reader is considered a supplemental reading program, and according to Payne (2005), supplemental reading programs are effective for helping at-risk students. Payne (2005) defined Accelerated Reader as a reading program that uses a computer to provide a test for students after they have read a book.

Reading Horizons was the second reading program mentioned during the focus group in School District C. According to Reading Horizons (2016), Reading Horizons is a packaged reading program that focuses on specific steps students need to read. Reading Horizons includes a framework that utilizes interactive software and scripted lessons for teachers to teach students comprehension, phonics, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and spelling (Reading Horizons, 2016). According to T9:

Reading Horizons is a reading curriculum that covers mostly phonics and how to decode and spell words. It also covers topics that have to do with language arts such as grammar, nouns, verbs, and commas, but the basics of it are phonics.

Similarly, T8 stated, "Our Reading Recovery teacher uses Reading Horizons, which is the same we use. They are reinforcing the same things, and we are reinforcing what they are learning. They are getting additional support with that program." The responses from these three teachers show the confidence they have in the Reading Horizons program being used alongside Reading Recovery in School District C.

Finally, when examining responses by school district, the school with the highest rate of students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals was School District E, where 74% of the 400 students qualified for free or reduced-priced meals. Four teachers from this district participated in the focus group. Surprisingly, the responses of the teachers in this school district were not as explicit when responding to questions surrounding socioeconomic status and reading achievement. When asked about reading achievement as it relates to socioeconomic status, T14 stated, "We basically feel like if they're not being exposed to all of the things the other students are being exposed to, then it definitely impacts their learning." Considering the number of students in this school who qualified for free or reduced-price meals, stronger responses regarding the limitations for those students were expected.

This group of teachers from School District E mostly commented on appreciation of and respect for Reading Recovery. To reiterate, when asked for additional comments or questions after the focus group was completed, T14 stated:

We have talked about how much we believe in Reading Recovery. We sure

wish we could have enough to do more for the lower students that could take

them as far as most of them [students in Reading Recovery] have grown over the

two years we have done it. It has shown tremendous progress for our students.

It is important to note the final question was a prompt for teachers to add any other

comments regarding reading achievement and did not specifically prompt for any

response relating to Reading Recovery. This confirms the strong support for Reading

Recovery in School District E.

Focus Group Responses by Years of Teacher Experience

Additional analysis of responses from the focus groups was conducted by

comparing the responses of teachers as groups by experience. Teacher responses were

divided into two groups to determine if patterns or commonalities exist: teachers with

one to 10 years of teaching experience and teachers with 11 or more years of

experience. When considering the demographics of the teachers who participated in the

focus groups, the discovery was made that in every school district, the average teacher

experience for the first-grade team was less than the average experience for the

building. Data on average years of experience for the teachers were obtained from the

MODESE (2016a) and were compared to the years of experience of teachers who

engaged in the focus groups. Figure 2 depicts the average for the corresponding

building and first-grade team. As mentioned previously, School District C was the only

district to mention a reading intervention program or curriculum outside of Reading

Recovery.
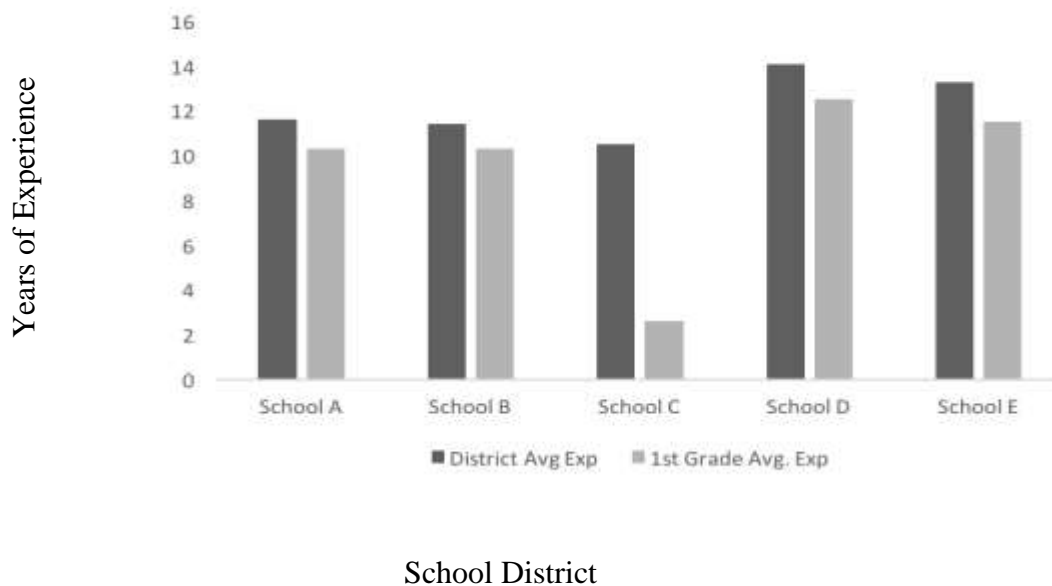
Figure 2. Experience by district compared to first-grade team. Average years of experience for each school district as compared to the average for the first-grade teachers who participated in the focus groups.

In the case of School District C, the average years of experience for the first-grade team were significantly lower than the district average. School District C had an average of 10.5 years' experience, while the first-grade team had an average of 2.6 years' experience. More and more teachers in U.S. public schools are first- or second-year teachers (Sawchuk & Rebora, 2016). Sawchuk and Rebora (2016) stated about 12% of all school teachers are in either the first year or second year of teaching. Two of the three teachers from School District C were first-year teachers, and the third teacher was in her sixth year of teaching. Most of the teachers in the focus groups had an average teaching experience from 10 to 14 years except School District C. School

District C had the biggest discrepancy between the average of the participants and the average of the district. Considering the responses from the focus group for School District C, it should be noted the experience of those teachers was less than the other school districts.

When considering Reading Recovery, Teachers 7 and 8, both first-year teachers, referenced the extra support by the Reading Recovery teacher. These responses could indicate the significance those teachers find in gaining extra support from other educators to help provide the best possible instruction for students. The perceptions of the first-year teachers concerning professional development were insightful. Two of the first-year teachers interviewed, T11 and T8, from two different districts, referenced visiting other classrooms as a valuable practice in professional development. This exemplifies teacher-to-teacher professional development. According to Patton et al. (2015), it is important for teachers to take responsibility for their own professional development. Teacher 11 stated, "A lot of times we go on field trips to other classrooms and watch actual lessons and that has been helpful to give me things to bring back to my own classroom." Reflecting on the responses as divided by teacher experience, it should be noted the more experienced teachers referenced the book, *The Next Step in Guided Reading,* as professional development.

The differences among the responses show a possible connection between first-year teachers lacking confidence to obtain self-guided professional development as compared to more experienced teachers. There was no noted difference between the newer teachers and the more experienced teachers when analyzing responses about socioeconomic status. In contrast, there was a lack of responses from newer teachers

when asked about student engagement during reading instruction. Of the 10 teachers with teaching experience between one and 10 years, only two responded or commented on the question about student engagement and its impact on reading achievement. When considering relationships, T13 spoke about the importance of building a relationship with students in order to learn about interests and topics to provide interesting reading. Teacher 6 commented on student engagement and stated guided reading lends itself to increased student engagement.

The perceptions from the more experienced teachers show some similarities. Overall, the group of teachers with more than 11 years' teaching experience responded to more questions as compared to those teachers with fewer years of experience. There were only seven teachers in the experienced category, yet their responses from the focus groups yielded more discussion. The veteran teachers responded more frequently to the questions and were more likely to share or add additional comments during the focus groups. The responses from the more veteran teachers included more detail, and two of the teachers in the group referenced instructional strategies and classroom management tools not mentioned by any of the less experienced teachers.

One such strategy mentioned was Whole Brain Teaching. Teacher 2 referenced Whole Brain Teaching as a strategy to improve engagement. According to VanHosen (2015), Whole Brain Teaching works on the premise increased student engagement and kinesthetic learning can boost student achievement. The idea behind Whole Brain Teaching is that students are more engaged and less likely to engage in behaviors that interrupt teaching and learning (VanHosen, 2015). This teacher, from School District A, was the only teacher to mention Whole Brain Teaching.

The second strategy mentioned by the more veteran teachers was alternative seating. Teacher 16 stated, "This year we got some alternative seating going on in our classroom and that's helped." Allowing extra movement throughout the day can have a positive impact on learning (Wilson & Conyers, 2014). In addition, extra physical activity can decrease classroom management issues and increase on-task behavior (Wilson & Conyers, 2014). While Whole Brain Teaching and alternative seating were marked differences, the responses from the more veteran teachers were similar and consistent when compared to those of the less experienced teachers.

**Attendance and Reading Achievement**

Attendance rates and DRA reading scores, for 249 first-grade students were analyzed and reviewed to answer the final research question:

5. What is the correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance?

$H5_0$: There is no correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance.

$H5_a$: There is a correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance.

First, to determine if a relationship exists between attendance percentage and DRA level, a scatterplot was created and a line of best fit drawn (see Figure 3). According to Bluman (2015), "The scatter plot is a visual way to describe the nature between the independent and dependent variables" (p. 532).
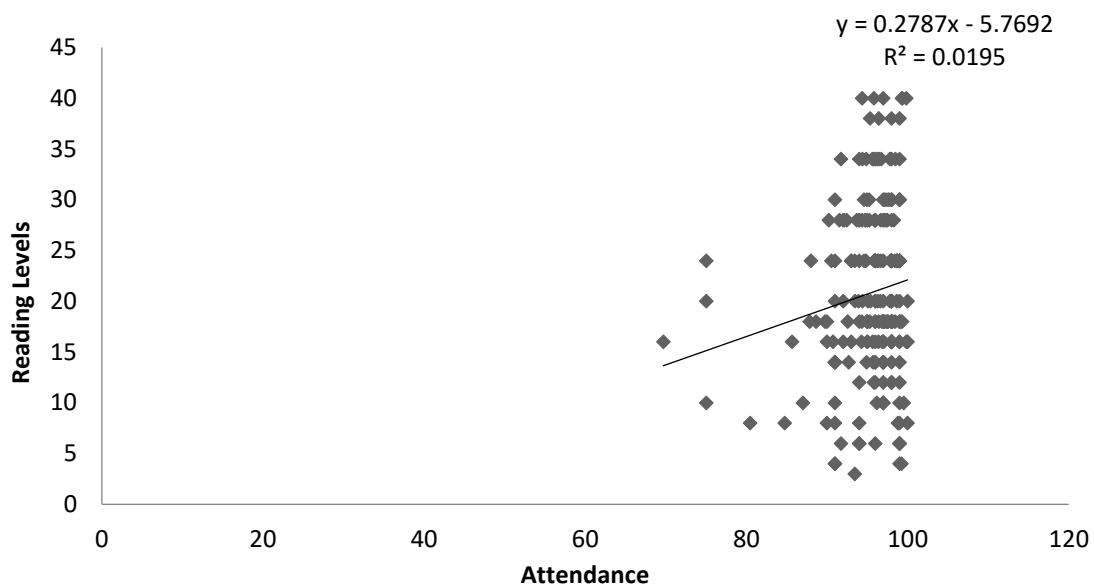
*Figure 3.* Scatterplot of attendance and DRA reading levels for 249 students from southwest Missouri schools.

Figure 4 demonstrates reading levels and attendance when attendance is viewed by the following groups:

- Below 90%

- One point intervals between 90.99% and 98.99%

- Above 99%

To better understand the possible connection between attendance and reading levels, Figure 4 shows reading levels at those intervals.
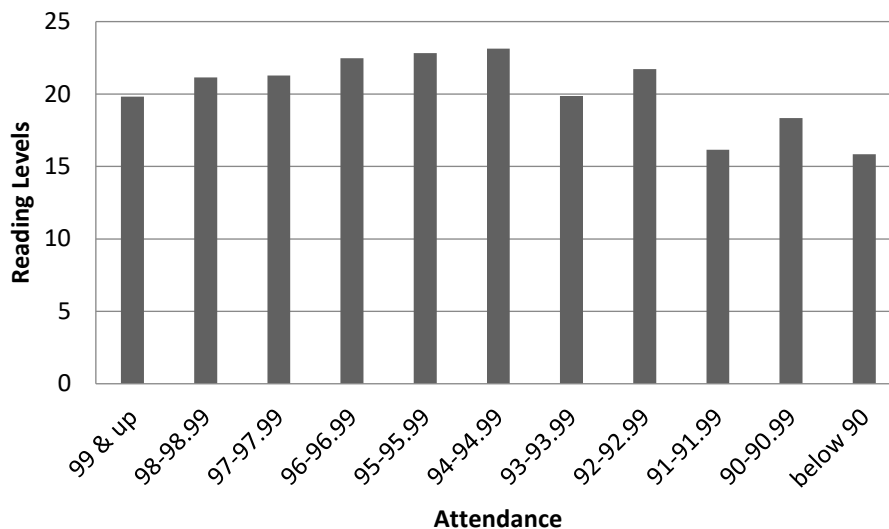
Figure 4. DRA reading levels and attendance shown when attendance is divided into groups: below 90%, intervals between 90% and 98.99%, and above 99% for 249 students in southwest Missouri.

A vast majority of the attendance data were gathered tightly between the 90% and 100% range; therefore, it was most advantageous to the research to use the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (PPMC) to better understand the possible correlation between reading levels and attendance. Bluman (2015) stated the PPMC is a valid test to determine possible linear relationship between two variables. According to Bluman (2015), the range of the correlation coefficient is from -1 to +1, and if a positive linear relationship exists, the coefficient will be close to +1. In this study, the correlation coefficient was found to be 0.1409 which showed a positive linear relationship between attendance and reading levels. Using this correlation coefficient,

reading levels could be predicted at varied levels of attendance by using the equation

$y = 0.281x - 5.96$. Table 4 shows the predicted reading levels for students with

attendance between 90% and 99%.

Table 4

Attendance and Predicted Reading Levels

Attendance	Predicted Reading Level
99%	21.9
98%	21.6
97%	21.2
96%	21.0
95%	20.7
94%	20.5
93%	20.2
92%	19.9
91%	19.6
90%	19.3

Note. This table shows the attendance level and predicted reading level using the

equation $y = 0.281x - 5.96$.

Using predictive data for anticipated reading levels based on attendance could be helpful to educators when making decisions regarding teacher placement, adjusting district lines that may cause an elementary school change, or anticipating the reading level for a newly enrolled student with available attendance data.

Summary

Chapter Four detailed the responses from focus groups with first-grade teachers in southwest Missouri. The perceptions of teachers when considering socioeconomic status, student engagement, Reading Recovery, and professional development were discussed by individual question as well as divided by school district and by teacher experience. A closer look at reading achievement, as determined by the DRA, when compared to attendance rates was presented and showed a positive correlation. When considering the positive linear relationship, it was shown reading levels could potentially be predicted when attendance rates are known.

Chapter Five includes a detailed review of the perceptions of first-grade teachers from the focus groups. Findings of the data are presented and conclusions are discussed after evaluating the responses from the focus groups by dividing the responses per question as well as per district and by teacher experience. The attendance and DRA scores from 249 first-graders are analyzed and conclusions discussed. In addition, Chapter Five includes implications for practice and topics to be considered for further research.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The perceptions of first-grade teachers when considering reading achievement, as it relates to socioeconomic status, can inform building and district leadership about the level of understanding when educating students from lower socioeconomic status families. The number of students living in poverty and entering public schools reached an alarming level in 2013, according to Suitts (2016). Suitts (2016) stated, "2013 was a watershed moment in the United States: For the first time in recent history, a majority of children attending our K-12 public schools come from low-income families" (p. 36). According to Payne (2005), "The key to achievement for students from poverty is creating relationships with them. Because poverty is about relationships as well as entertainment, the most significant motivator for these students is relationships" (p. 109). Teachers cannot underestimate the power in building relationships with students from poverty (Payne, 2005).

Administrators can glean information when perceptions of first-grade teachers about student engagement are understood. The importance of student engagement should not be underestimated, as Hoerr (2016) stated teachers must see the importance of student engagement and have the tools to be successful at creating high levels of student engagement. When giving teachers the resources and tools to create engaging learning environments, perceptions regarding professional development must be considered to meet the needs of teachers. According to Papay and Kraft (2016), the most effective professional development is training targeted at specific skills, is intensive, is individualized, and takes place over an extended period.

Attendance in school and student achievement have been shown to be linked based on recent studies (Adams, 2016; Emerson et al., 2015; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Gottfried, 2009). In this study, attendance for first-grade students was reviewed by the researcher, and a possible correlation between attendance and reading achievement was considered. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to examine the perceptions of first-grade teachers when considering reading achievement and its relation to Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status, student engagement, and professional development. The second piece to this study was to determine if a correlation exists between reading achievement and attendance.

Chapter Five includes a review of the findings of the study by summarizing the responses from the focus groups to expose patterns, differences, and other discoveries. A complete examination of the quantitative data is discussed to determine the possibility of a correlation between attendance and reading achievement of first graders. Chapter Five concludes with the implications for practice and suggestions for future research.

Findings

Research question one. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to Reading Recovery and reading achievement?

The participants of the focus groups had positive remarks when speaking of Reading Recovery and its impact on reading achievement in the classroom. Six teachers referenced the importance of the extra support Reading Recovery provides students. In all districts, teachers stated students are strategically pulled for Reading Recovery instruction so students are getting individualized intervention in addition to

regularly scheduled small group guided reading lessons. When looking at the

overarching message from the interviewed teachers, common words appeared in the

responses (see Table 5).

Table 5

Key Words in Response to Question One
_____

Teacher	Key Word Response

_____

Teacher	Key Word Response
T1	extra support
T2	focus on foundational skills
T4	extra support
T5	extra support
T6	more strategies
T7	extra practice
T8	extra group time
T9	extra support
T10	one-on-one time
T14	improved confidence in reading

_____

As noted in Table 3, a common theme was the perception extra support for

participating students is provided by Reading Recovery. While a couple of outliers

were revealed in those responses, the overall impression was extra support plays a positive role in impacting student achievement in the classroom.

Research question two. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to socioeconomic status and reading achievement?

Based on the responses given during focus groups, first-grade teachers reported an association between reading achievement and socioeconomic status. Teachers noted a difference in available resources at home; the lack of resources included on-level texts, writing utensils, and paper. Additionally, teachers noted students from lower socioeconomic families tend to come from homes where parents are either unavailable in the evenings to read with students, or lack the time and resources to help students read or to offer opportunities for students to listen to reading.

Teachers commented on the lack of language development of students who reside in lower-income families. In one case, a teacher stated a difference in routine behavior exists between those from more privileged families and those from disadvantaged families. This teacher claimed even the most routine behaviors are more difficult to shape when working with students from lower socioeconomic status families. One teacher from the focus group stated she typically sees a deficit in achievement with students from lower-income families, but this year has proved to be different. That statement was an outlier from the other responses when considering the perceptions of the teachers. The number of students entering school at poverty level has continued to increase (Suitts, 2016), and understanding the perceptions of first-grade teachers can help administrators prepare teachers serving those students.

Research question three. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to student engagement and reading achievement?

Participating teachers in southwest Missouri responded to questions relating to engagement and stated engagement is essential. Teachers cited multiple strategies used during reading instruction to keep students engaged and ready to learn. Teachers referenced goal setting, the use of on-level texts, books of interest to students, and working in small groups as strategies for increased engagement. One teacher mentioned guided reading as a strategy in and of itself, because guided reading takes place in small groups and allows for increased engagement. Gorski (2013) agreed and referenced multiple studies that have shown smaller class sizes lead to greater student engagement and allow teachers to teach in a more engaging manner.

Additionally, participants referenced relationship building as a strategy to increase engagement. According to Payne (2005), "Teachers and administrators have always known that relationships, often referred to as 'politics,' make a great deal of difference – sometimes all of the difference – in what could or could not happen in a building" (p. 110). In summary, according to the teachers who engaged in the focus groups, student engagement is vital to reading achievement.

Research question four. What are the perceptions of first-grade teachers in regard to professional development and reading achievement?

Teachers in all participating districts perceived the level of professional development as sufficient enough to positively impact reading achievement in the classroom. The delivery and format of professional development varied among school districts. An overwhelming majority of the teachers interviewed mentioned a literacy

coach or Reading Recovery teacher in the building as a support system available to teachers.

A popular resource noted by a few teachers is a book titled, *The Next Step in Guided Reading,* by Jan Richardson. More than one teacher mentioned the book as a guide for ongoing professional development and stated the book has played a role in guiding teachers with building guided reading lessons, helping struggling students, and placing students in appropriate reading groups. In schools that did not mention a literacy coach, the Reading Recovery teacher plays a significant role in offering support and professional development for reading instruction. Every teacher responded positively when asked about the level of professional development, and many were open to professional development that offers strategies to increase reading achievement.

Research question five. What is the correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance?

$H5_0$: There is no correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance.

$H5_a$: There is a correlation between DRA level in first grade and attendance.

Attendance and DRA reading levels were examined from 249 students across five different counties in southwest Missouri. A majority of the data were gathered tightly between the 90% and 100% attendance rates. Using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient test, a positive linear relationship between DRA reading levels and attendance existed (Bluman, 2015). Using a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient allowed for the equation $y = 0.281x-5.96$ and afforded the opportunity to use attendance data as a way to predict possible reading levels for first-grade students.

Conclusions

  Perceptions of first-grade teachers. The first-grade teachers interviewed for this study had consistent perceptions across all areas of interest. While a few differences existed in the details, the responses remained uniform and echoed other focus groups. All the first-grade teachers interviewed found value in Reading Recovery and indicated an increase in student achievement from those students who partake in Reading Recovery. This corroborates research that Reading Recovery has a history of producing quality results with first-grade students over the last two decades (Sharratt et al., 2013). Teachers also described transfer in skills from the Reading Recovery teacher into the classroom and noted those students have greater success once participation has begun in Reading Recovery instruction. Teachers who participated in the focus groups overwhelmingly perceived the extra support with individual instruction as a significant advantage confirming research that the Reading Recovery lesson is a one-on-one lesson (Miller, 2014).

  When considering student engagement, teachers perceived student engagement as necessary to see gains in reading achievement. While the strategies varied among teachers, all teachers responded positively about the need for high engagement during reading instruction. Teachers mentioned multiple ways to increase student engagement during reading including the following: choosing on-level texts for students, working in small groups, finding texts that are of interest to the student, and finally, building relationships. According to teachers, having an understanding of what motivates each student is an excellent pathway to increase student engagement and thus improve student achievement. These perceptions confirm the research that shows strong student

engagement can have a positive impact on reading achievement (Chang & Chien, 2015; David & Kmetz, 2015; Sabin, 2015). Many teachers found the biggest impact on student engagement to be the use of on-level texts and offering books of interest to students during reading instruction. This strategy is supported by research that states teachers can improve engagement by offering students to express their personal interests in reading (Fulmer et al., 2015). The participants in the focus groups shared various perceptions when considering students of lower socioeconomic status. Teachers expressed those students have the ability to learn to read but come from homes with fewer resources than those of more affluent families. Teachers indicated the lack of books to read at home and lack of parental support as two of the biggest challenges that face students from lower socioeconomic status families. Finally, a vast majority of the teachers commented on the lack of vocabulary exposure as a disadvantage for those students from lower socioeconomic status families which confirm research concerning vocabulary exposure (Fives et al., 2014). According to Fives et al. (2014), lower reading achievement and its relation to socioeconomic status are compounded by the lack of vocabulary exposure.

Professional development for reading achievement comes in many forms for the teachers interviewed. Several teachers across multiple districts referenced a book as a guide to help with reading instruction and guided reading groups. Nearly all teachers mentioned a literacy coach or trained Reading Recovery teacher as a source of professional development and guidance. Every teacher interviewed perceived the amount of professional development offered as sufficient to positively impact reading achievement. Teachers indicated they perceive professional development as a vital

element to reading achievement and desire as much professional development as can be obtained. This confirms the research that states that teachers find professional development as a priority in order to improve student achievement (Patton et al., 2015).

When considering the responses from teachers divided by school district, the biggest stand-out was the response concerning the number of students being served by Reading Recovery as well as through an IEP for speech. After further investigation, it was found the district referenced had a significantly higher number of students that qualified for special education than any of the other four school districts. When reviewing the responses from the focus groups as divided by teacher experience, it was evident first-year teachers place a strong value on in-person professional development and the extra support offered by Reading Recovery. The teachers with 11 or more years of experience were more likely to respond to all questions and offered greater details and additional comments.

DRA and attendance. The data collected from 249 students across five different southwest Missouri counties indicate a positive correlation between DRA level and attendance in first grade. When considering attendance, while the values were tightly aligned between 90% and 100%, it was determined that in addition to a positive correlation, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient could be used to make possible predictions of reading levels for first grade students if attendance is known.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was found to be 0.1409. The equation $y = .218x - 5.96$ was used to determine a linear regression line in order to predict reading levels if attendance is known. Based on this information, although the

correlation was weak, there was sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis and support the alternative hypothesis.

Implications for Practice

The perceptions of the first-grade teachers interviewed suggest a commonality among teachers in southwest Missouri when considering reading achievement and its relation to Reading Recovery, student engagement, socioeconomic status, and professional development. Having a grasp of the perceptions of practicing teachers can help districts and school administrators make decisions surrounding professional development, curriculum, and instruction. With an understanding of the current practices in place and the perceptions of teachers, administrators can begin to plan training that is relevant and relatable for teachers to improve student achievement.

Participants of this study uniformly agreed on the importance of the Reading Recovery intervention program. Administrators can begin to see the value teachers find in Reading Recovery by recognizing the feelings and perceptions of teachers based on the focus group responses and discussion. When considering the responses to focus group questions about student engagement, teachers were clear about the importance of keeping students engaged during reading instruction. While strategies differed among teachers, teachers find value in increasing student engagement and therefore administrators can be confident teachers desire training and techniques to increase and maintain student engagement. Based on the discussion about professional development, building-level and district-level leaders can be confident teachers seek and value professional development and see the importance of learning instructional strategies to continue to better the level of instruction.

The perceptions of teachers concerning students from lower socioeconomic status were consistent with the lack of resources for those students. Administrators who have an understanding of those deficits can have a better understanding of how to provide for all students in the building who are less advantaged. Finally, administrators can use this information to help with hiring decisions during the interview process. Applicants who have an understanding of these factors, or who demonstrate similar perceptions, may be a good fit for the climate and students alike.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study of perceptions of first-grade teachers was limited to one grade level, and therefore, a more in-depth study could identify more thorough trends about the perceptions of teachers and attendance and its correlation to reading scores as determined by the Developmental Reading Assessment. A study of multiple grade levels and perceptions of teachers concerning Reading Recovery would be beneficial to help determine the long-term effects of Reading Recovery. Additionally, this study did not include perceptions of special education teachers in first grade. It would be advantageous to the research of this topic to include special education teachers who teach primarily first-grade students who are served by Reading Recovery. Those perceptions could be quite different, and a study that compares the perceptions of classroom teachers to those of special education teachers could awaken misconceptions, misunderstandings, or inconsistencies in Reading Recovery and how it relates to students being served in special education.

Further research to discuss the importance of the role of the school administrator could bring to light the impact of the principal when considering reading achievement.

Understanding the administrator's role and learning about the influence the

administrator can have on student achievement can assist district leaders in identifying

necessary qualities for a strong building leader. In addition, knowing the possible

impact administrators can have may help district-level leaders identify the most

effective building principal qualities to seek when choosing a building leader. Finally,

having clear guidelines as they relate to the impact the building administrator has on

reading achievement can help set goals to hold the administrator accountable for

coaching for optimal reading achievement.

A focus group participant, from a school district with a significantly higher rate

of students being serviced by IEPs, referenced a possible correlation between students

served by Reading Recovery and students who get speech therapy. This particular

comment warranted further investigation for this study, and thus the difference in the

percentage of students in special education came to light. Further research should be

done to determine if that correlation exists across other school districts and what impact

that possible correlation can have on reading achievement and the perceptions of

classroom teachers. If that correlation does exist, research could be done to determine

the strength of that correlation. Furthermore, research to determine the possible cause

of that correlation could shed light on proper interventions and instructional practices to

address the needs of those identified students.

Finally, a more in-depth study of Reading Recovery and how it relates to

students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) could provide insight into the

effectiveness of the program as it relates to the ELL population.   Additionally, a study

to include the perceptions of teachers that teach Reading Recovery to the ELL

population could provide useful information for school districts. A study of other reading interventions used in the ELL population as compared to Reading Recovery could be conducted to provide administrators with evidence to inform instructional practices.

Summary

This mixed-methods study was designed to elicit the perceptions of first-grade teachers to provide insight to others about reading achievement when considering Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status, student engagement, and professional development. Also, as part of this mixed-methods study, a quantitative portion was performed to determine if a correlation exists between reading achievement and attendance in first-grade students.

Chapter One contained a background of the topic, the theoretical framework, and statement of the problem. Also included in Chapter One was the purpose of the study and the research questions. Key terms were defined for the reader in Chapter One, as well as limitations and the instrument used for the study.

Chapter Two began with an additional discussion of the theoretical framework and an extensive review of the literature on reading assessments, the Developmental Reading Assessment, Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status and reading achievement, student engagement, and professional development. Absenteeism and attendance were discussed to provide background information to prepare for the final research question to determine if a correlation exists between reading achievement and attendance.

Chapter Three included the methodology for the study as well as the problem and purpose overview. The research questions were restated as well as the research design, limitations, and ethical considerations. The population and sample were discussed in Chapter Three in addition to the instrumentation, the steps for the data collection process, and the data analysis.

Chapter Four presented the collected data for the focus groups organized by focus group question, by school district, and by teacher years in service. Chapter Four also included the detailed data collected for student attendance for first-graders during the 2015-2016 school year and scores from the Developmental Reading Assessment for the corresponding year to address the quantitative piece of this mixed-methods study.

Finally, Chapter Five presented the conclusions from the data by addressing each research question as grouped by the question, by the school district, and by years of teacher experience. The findings from the reading and attendance data were examined and evaluated to answer the fifth research question. Implications for practice were discussed, and recommendations for further research were suggested.

Appendix A

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY   ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE: June 20, 2016

TO: Mykie Nash
FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [915165-1] Perceptions of First-Grade Teachers When Considering Reading
                               Achievement and Its Relation to Socioeconomic Status, Attendance, Student
                               Engagement, Professional Development, and Reading Recovery
IRB REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: June 20, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE: June 20, 2017
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University
Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. PLEASE, SEE SUGGESTIONS. This
approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been
minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

SUGGESTIONS: Please, clarify. Research question 2 in Lay Summary: Is it about teacher or
student socioeconomic status? Most likely the student, but it should be made clear.
Will each focus group be of 15-30 teachers, or will there be 15-30 teachers across 5-10 focus groups?

Rather than offering no benefit, perhaps the study may add to the body of literature in the area of the
study.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and
insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must
continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal
regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to
initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the
appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should
also be followed.

Appendix B

<u>INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES</u>

Perceptions of First-Grade Teachers When Considering Reading Achievement and Its Relation to Socioeconomic Status, Attendance, Student Engagement, Professional Development, and Reading Recovery.

Principal Investigator __Mykie Nash_____
Telephone: ████████████████████████████████████

Participant _____ Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mykie C. Nash under the guidance of Dr. Shelly Fransen. The purpose of this research is to study the perceptions of first-grade teachers with regard to reading achievement, socioeconomic status, attendance, student engagement, professional development, and Reading Recovery.

2. a) Your participation will involve:
    ➢ Participating in a one-time focus group of first-grade teachers to discuss your perceptions on the topic of reading achievement
    ➢ Review of the transcripts from the interview
    ➢ Collection of data for your first-grade students to include grade-level data that show a percentage of students below level, on level, or above level at the end of the 2015-2016 school year
    ➢ This will be one-time participation, unless a return call is needed for clarification

    b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be less than one hour. Approximately 20-30 individuals will be involved in this research.

3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about reading achievement may help society.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this

study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Mykie Nash, at ███████████ or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Shelly Fransen, at ███████████. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Provost, at ███████████████████ or ██████████████.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date   Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date   Investigator Printed Name

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

1. How does Reading Recovery impact reading achievement in your classroom?

2. How does Reading Recovery instruction transfer to the classroom with your first-grade students?

3. How is reading achievement impacted when Reading Recovery students are pulled from the classroom and potentially miss instruction?

4. How does socioeconomic status affect reading achievement in your classroom?

5. Considering your students of lower socioeconomic status, what do you perceive are their biggest limitations to reading achievement as compared to their peers?

6. How does student engagement during your reading instruction impact reading achievement?

7. What steps do you take to increase student engagement during reading instruction?

8. How does professional development impact your ability to teach reading?

9. If applicable, how does professional development impact reading achievement in your classroom?

10. Do you feel you have sufficient professional development with regard to reading instruction? Why or why not?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add with regard to reading achievement and how it relates to Reading Recovery, socioeconomic status, student engagement, or professional development?

Appendix D

Date
Name
District/Title

Re: Permission to hold a short focus group with your first-grade teachers, obtain and use reading achievement data (DRA scores), and access attendance records on the MODESE for first-grade students in your building.

Dear _____,

I am writing to request permission to obtain attendance and DRA scores for your first-grade students. I am currently enrolled at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, MO, and am in the process of writing my dissertation for a doctoral degree in Educational Administration. The study is titled, *Perceptions of First-Grade Teachers When Considering Reading Achievement and Its Relation to Socioeconomic Status, Attendance, Student Engagement, Professional Development, and Reading Recovery*.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of first-grade teachers. With your permission, a one-time focus group will be held to discuss reading achievement and teachers' perceptions. Also, an investigation of DRA scores and attendance records of first-grade students from multiple schools in southwest Missouri will be reviewed.

If approval were given, I would ask that you provide me with time to meet with your first-grade teachers at a time that will not disrupt their school responsibilities. Perhaps a common plan time or after school might work for your teachers. Participation in the study is completely voluntary, and the teachers will be given a copy of the interview questions in advance and will be asked to sign an agreement of participation prior to the focus group. Upon completion of the focus group, the teachers will be sent a copy of the transcript for their approval. All transcripts and audio recordings of the focus group will be kept confidential and stored on my password-protected computer. In addition, I would ask for general, grade-level DRA data for first-grade students from the 2015-2016 school year. A percentage of first-grade students who were below level, on level, or above level will be sufficient. I will not be requesting individual DRA scores.

Approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participation at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ You may also contact Dr. Shelly Fransen at 417-▮▮▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You should retain a copy of this letter and your written consent for future reference.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mykie Nash, Doctoral Candidate

Appendix E

Permission Letter

I, _____, grant permission for Mykie Nash to hold a focus group of first-grade-teachers and to obtain and use attendance data and general, grade-level DRA scores of first-grade students in my building. By signing this permission form, I understand the following safeguards are in place to protect the participants:

1. I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

2. The identity of the participants and students will remain confidential and anonymous in the dissertation or any future publications of this study.

I have read the information above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. Permission, as explained, is granted.

_____

Signature and Date

Appendix F

Dear Participant:

As part of this research, DRA scores for first-grade students from the 2015-2016 school year will be evaluated. Please list the DRA reading level for each first-grade student.

Should you have questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at ███ ██████ or via email at ██████████████████████ Should you have concerns regarding the process of this study, or other questions about this research, please contact my supervising faculty member, Dr. Shelly Fransen, at ███████████

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Mykie Nash

Lindenwood Doctoral Student

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Vita

Mykie Nash is a second-career educator who earned her undergraduate degree in elementary education with an e-MINTS emphasis from Missouri State University. Mykie was a non-traditional student, married mom of two, when she began her undergraduate work and accepted her first teaching job at age 38. Mykie completed her master's degree in educational administration from Lindenwood University. After teaching first grade for three years, Mykie attained her first administrative position as an assistant elementary principal. During this administrative role, she continued her studies in educational leadership and hopes to procure a building-level administrator job that can ultimately lead her to district-level leadership in some capacity.