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Effects of Early Childhood Education on Reading Preparedness in Third Grade of Elementary School

Kimberly A. Williams
Lindenwood University

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by

Kimberly A. Williams

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment
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Jodi Elder
Dr. Jodi E. Elder, Dissertation Chair — 12/6/2017 Date

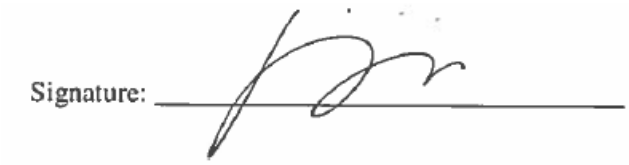
Randy Caffey
Dr. Randy Caffey, Committee Member — 12/6/2017 Date

Merlyn Johnson
Dr. Merlyn Johnson, Committee Member — 12/6/2017 Date

Declaration of Originality

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

Full Legal Name: Kimberly Ann Williams

Signature:  Date: Dec. 10, '17

Abstract

Reading has been found to not only build student motivation but to increase community involvement in education (Hudson & Williams, 2015). Children who grow into lifelong readers were less likely to be incarcerated, became more successful members of society, and created greater futures for themselves and their families (Obama, 2013). With exposure to early childhood education opportunities, children found a greater propensity to attain foundational reading skills; therefore, positive habits for education lead to thriving outcomes in the future (DeHaan & Leuven, 2016). This study analyzed variations in preschool programs in order to detect curricular, facility, and instructor distinctions (DeHaan & Leuven, 2016). Educators, parents, and community members were predominantly favorable of financing and supporting early childhood education (DeHaan & Leuven, 2016). Globally, early childhood education is continually trying to maintain a more prevalent stature in society (DeHaan & Leuven, 2016). Early childhood education can seemingly take an indirect step backwards in school districts due to to other educational necessities (DeHaan & Leuven, 2016). In this study, the researcher analyzed early childhood education opportunities and the impact on students' reading comprehension in third grade.

Acknowledgements

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If you would have asked me ten years ago where I would be today, I would have walked away in disbelief with the response. God works in mysterious ways. I am grateful for each person that has blessed my life. I hope to continue working hard, pursuing my dreams, and enjoying life.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The conceptualization of schools has altered since the beginning of time (Wright, 2010). Ties to religious, political, and benefactor circumstances largely affected expansion and convictions associated with education (Nutbrown & Clough, 2014). Social and moral mindsets also drove the sentiment for betterment of the foundational education system as a whole (Nutbrown & Clough, 2014). Curricular advancements associated with such experts as Pestalozzi, Froebel, McMillan, Montessori, and countless others, has made preschool education has become a global force for young children worldwide (Nutbrown & Clough, 2014). For the United States, preschool education did not prevail as a true reality until the 20th century (Nutbrown & Clough, 2014). Along with other developed societies, an education system had been intact for several decades, but the idea of a stable infrastructure for preschool education blossomed in 1929 with the establishment of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Wright, 2010).

Educational leaders have identified a need for early childhood education, but even as recent as 2008, very few preschool programs sought accreditation in the United States (Wright, 2010). Global competitiveness has fueled the recent initiative to increase focus on preschool education (Li, Fox, & Grieshaber, 2017). Li et al. (2017) wrote the greater focus a society places on early childhood education, the healthier the society. In order to create a more fiscally responsible outcome regarding early childhood education, educational leaders have sought to ensure more measures are taken to create academically-based preschools with professional educators and staff (Li et al., 2017). Since the 1990s, American legislators have placed increased evaluation and certification

standards, as well more opportunities for leadership roles in the field of early childhood education (Wright, 2010). According to Liu and Channell (2015), children have proven to be one of the greatest assets, and, as previously mentioned, they truly secure a nation's well-being and future. As former U.S. President Barack Obama (2013) said:

> Study after study shows that the sooner a child begins learning, the better he or she does down the road. But today, fewer than 3 in 10 four-year-olds are enrolled in a high-quality preschool program. Most middle-class parents can't afford a few hundred bucks a week for a private preschool. And for poor kids who need help the most, this lack of access to preschool education can shadow them for the rest of their lives. (p. 9)

Background of Problem

Continuous research has proven preschool education is imperative to the future success of students (Hirozaku, Weiland, & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). An analysis of 84 different preschools determined, on average, children gained one-third of a year of additional learning across language, reading, and mathematical skills (Hirozaku et al., 2016). Much contention has been raised about the funding of preschool education in the United States, as well as which students qualified for preschool education (Chen, Chen, & Sun, 2010). Some would argue socio-economic status should play a predominant role, trumping other factors (Chen et al., 2010). Still, others have argued predominance should be placed on children with disabilities (Hirozaku et al., 2016). Due to variances in preschool education programs worldwide, it is crucial to consider multiple factors and problematic issues facing preschool education (Cookson, 2009). Additionally, other factors are concerning, such as qualified teaching professionals, adequate facilities,

appropriate curricular guidelines, and cultural and societal needs (Odom & Diamond, 1998).

Conceptual Framework

According to Maxwell (2013), when looking into preschool education, discrepancies should be taken into consideration when examining varying factors that allowed some children to have more opportunities versus others. By allowing extraneous factors to play such an impactful role in preschool education, detrimental consequences may manifest as a result (McCullough, 2011). Children who should be receiving preschool education services may receive little services, or often times, no services at all. Excluding these children from fundamental foundational events, has dramatically affected reading preparedness and ability (McCullough, 2011). Theoretically, preschool education has been an ever-evolving product since centuries ago; consequently, now is the time for monumental progress to occur (Maxwell, 2013). The primary purpose to continue effective early childhood education efforts is to provide a continuum of foundational skills from childhood to adulthood (Turja, Endepohls-Ulpe, & Chatoney, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose behind the study was to provide an overview of early childhood experiences and the effect on reading throughout the first few years of elementary education. When examining certain types of reading curriculum, background experiences, and familial situations, a closer look into fundamental reading issues can pinpoint where the context of current reading standings can implicit further learning and theoretical gains for future development needed in this area (Turja et al., 2009). Recently, like many other

educators across the country, administrators in one Missouri school district sought to establish a preschool program for a larger population than the district was originally servicing within the community (A. Zalis, personal communication, June 15, 2016). In the past two years, after a period of seeking input from constituents and holding decision-making meetings, school officials determined qualifying factors for enrollment would be expanded in order to reach a broader spectrum of students in need of early childhood education for academic readiness in kindergarten (Aikens, Klein, Tarullo, & West, 2013).

To increase parent involvement, key stakeholders, such as the school district's superintendent, early childhood program director, all other administrators in the district, school board members, and community members decided to band together to move forward in this endeavor (Aikens et al., 2013). In order to also establish a strong foundation of communication, all participants planned for the early childhood program to be implemented in the next two years (A. Zalis, personal communication, June 15, 2016).

According to the district, it has been a particular mission to ensure all children receive an intellectual, emotional, and social support system (A. Zalis, personal communication, June 15, 2016). Rivera (2008) wrote a strong support system helps to ideally decrease future reading problems, academic concerns, and ultimately, drop-out rates (Rivera, 2008). As mentioned by Rivera (2008), research supportive data confirmed children who attended an academically-appropriate preschool program were less likely to drop out of high school, rather than their counterparts. Ultimately, implementation and execution of quality early childhood education enhance a student's reading comprehension abilities later in elementary years (Rivera, 2008).

Rationale for the Study

A significant deviation between children reading on grade level versus those reading below grade level exists based upon their early childhood educational experiences (Sandberg & Grant, 2017). Sandberg and Grant (2017) wrote this was due to a lack of preparedness or children attending appropriate preschool programs (Sandberg & Grant, 2017). The Standardized Test for the Assessment for Reading (STAR) was used in this study to depict the discrepancies between children who attended academically-adequate preschool programs versus those who did not. The STAR assessment tool was found to be a consistent way to depict discrepancies due to unfluctuating formatting (Renaissance, 2017). The STAR assessment also was an appropriate choice as teachers can use the STAR as many times as deemed necessary to monitor students' reading comprehension (Renaissance, 2017). Therefore, it was a concise and accurate measuring tool for reading data and analysis (Renaissance, 2017). The researcher primarily wanted to dissect the apparent main foundational needs and to determine if this had any causal relation to student's attendance to an early childhood program or not.

Again in this study, the researcher chose to focus on early childhood education involvement and the quality of early childhood education, as well the quality of reading preparedness, offered to the children. Regarding early childhood education, ample pieces of research pertaining to preschool programs, daycare, and multiple other areas of interest existed prior to this study, but the researcher primarily wished to see the impact of early childhood education and the lasting impacted reading abilities when children reached third grade (Sandberg & Grant, 2017). The perspectives provided reflected views of parents who wished to express opinions on the study focus.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The following guided this study:

1. Do students who were provided early childhood education read more proficiently in third grade of elementary school than students who did not receive early childhood education?

H1: The alternative hypothesis stated—The association between early childhood education and reading achievement. Students will have stronger reading abilities.
a) enrollment in preschool b) non-enrollment in preschool c) assessment scores

H0: The null hypothesis stated—There is no association between early childhood education and reading achievement. Students will have equal abilities in reading.
a) enrollment in preschool b) non-enrollment in preschool c) assessment scores.

Limitations of the Study

Problems that may arise within a research design included the following: effectiveness of the program from preschool to grade three, curricular competency aligned with state and national standards, at-risk issues of children, and geographic areas within the state of Missouri. Campbell and Ramey (2014) wrote, if the effectiveness of the preschool program is not in place, children are under-developed and lack of functional ability during later academic years. If a preschool program offered an effective environment, overall results are deemed more positive (Campbell & Ramey, 2014). Sometimes these factors have been more idealistic in nature than fathomable to believe (Campbell & Ramey, 2014). According to Payne (2010), after studying the work of Piaget, beginning learners must believe a caretaker, or preschool affiliate, cared for them in order for significant learning to occur. Ideally, with curricular competency in place,

children should become more autonomous in their individual learning processes and obtain strong foundations for basic skills. Additionally, at-risk children often have made residential option befitting, based on extraneous issues that may not be able to be surpassed (Moore, Redd, Burkhauser, Mbwana, & Collins, 2009). Occasionally, state funding or other issues made it more feasible for at-risk children to attend preschool (Moore et al., 2009); however, on average, children from welfare households were only exposed to approximately 13 million words in their youth (Payne, 2010). Children from working-class wealthy households were exposed to approximately 26-45 million words in their youth (Payne, 2010). Payne (2010) wrote learning involves both physiological and environmental influences. When children have not had a great deal of exposure to foundational skills for learning, their long-term academic success can, therefore, be limited (Moore et al., 2009).

Also, when one particular racial and/or cultural group was prominent in a particular area, preschool may have been more imperative than in other areas (Fitzpatrick, McKinnon, Blair, & Willoughby, 2014). Ultimately, with all this said, this confirmed the strong need for stellar faculty performance, curricular guidelines, and polished environmental settings (Fitzpatrick et al., 2014). In this study, the researcher sought to analyze preschool effectiveness and its relationship with reading achievement and assessment achievement.

Researcher Bias

The researcher may have biases or issues due to the sampling size of the study being conducted in a smaller district, rather than a larger school district. Biases are based on skewed beliefs or opinions about certain subject matter affiliated with the study, such

as the results pertaining to the size of participants involved in the study (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, researcher bias can be a flaw in the design of the study or a systematic error in analysis (Maxwell, 2013). Also, the opinions pertaining to early childhood education from individuals living in smaller districts may be distinctly different from those who resided in larger school districts. These discrepancies may have been due to population sizes, curricular needs, expectations, and overall experiences within the learning environments. Biases may also be due to the researcher being an educator in one of the buildings in the school district involved in the study. The role of the researcher is a third grade educator. Another factor that may have contributed to biases was due to not all individuals being offered the opportunity to take the survey in conjunction with the study completed the survey. The survey was considered optional for all parents of third grade students in the district. Additionally, some surveys were completed incorrectly, invalidating the information provided to the researcher. Ultimately, those who completed the survey correctly were represented in the findings of this study.

Even though this study had its share of limitations and bias, the research obtained still provided as an opportunity to analyze early childhood education in further detail and add to the ongoing research changing the world of early childhood education. The hope was to guide practices and program design for early childhood education efforts in the future.

Definition of Terms

The following was an explanation of common terms and definitions throughout this study:

Academically-based preschools. Academically-based preschools pertained to the period in a child's life (ages three to four) that ordinarily preceded attendance at elementary school; instruction is led by qualified instructors, and curricular guidelines were intact for meeting state and national mandated expectations (Campbell & Ramey, 2014).

Curricular guidelines. Curricular guidelines were used in this study to refer to organized information based on appropriate grade level content delineated to instructors for students to reach academic goals (Campbell & Ramey, 2014).

Early childhood education. Early childhood education related to young children (ages three to four) who received preparation in social, mental, physical, and academic areas for a school environment (Nutbrown & Clough, 2014).

Free/Reduced Lunch Program. The Free/Reduced Lunch Program provided federal assistance for those who qualified in order to pay for low-cost or free lunches to children each day at school (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017).

Qualified instructor. An individual with the appropriate educational background and credentials deemed specialized for early childhood education (also known as preschool education, also known as pre-k) (Campbell & Ramey, 2014).

Reading comprehension. Reading comprehension was defined as an individual's ability to read a piece of text and gain meaning from what was read. Reading comprehension requires a number of different skills in order to be successful (Sanford,

2015). These skills included: a) word recognition, b) fluency, c) lexical knowledge, and d) pre-existing knowledge (Sanford, 2015). All of these skills must be cooperating accurately for an individual to absorb the meaning of the text (Sanford, 2015).

Remediation. Remediation was defined as the act or process of remedying students' struggles in learning new concepts (i.e., learning disability) (Fitzpatrick et al., 2014).

Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR). The STAR was defined as an assessment measuring student reading, understanding, and growth. Each time it is administered, STAR consists of the same multiple-choice structure. Questions progressively advance in difficulty as each one is answered correctly. (Renaissance Learning, 2015).

Student achievement. Student achievement was the act of performing or achieving at the level expected on Missouri or nationwide common standards assessments (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009).

Conclusion

Early childhood education was researched for the study. Common terms were defined, and the purpose of study was explained. In Chapter Two, the researcher will explore more information regarding the history of public education in the United States, as well as the foundation of preschool education in more detail. The chapter also will include more background information pertaining to literacy, students' reading achievement, as well as other information related to standards and expectations, which the researcher reviewed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Over many decades, early childhood education has evolved, progressed, and broken barriers (Turja et al., 2009). In Chapter Two, students' reading achievement rates and overall assessment scores were explored to better depict how the structure and methodology of early childhood education could be beneficial to lifelong learners (Turja et al., 2009). Also, the researcher examined the foundation and maturation of early childhood education (i.e., preschool programs), and studied the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR), a common tool to determine student progress and growth (Renaissance, 2017). In this literature review, the researcher offered multiple facets of information revolving around the world of early childhood education. First, the history and foundation of preschool education were presented to lead one to understand the following section pertaining to child development. Assessment research and assessment tools were subsequently broken down to inherently show the importance of preschool evolution and evolvement.

History and Foundation of Early Childhood Education

Citizens of Ancient Greece spawned a civilization of civility and education which is still prominent in the 21st century (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). The Greeks thrived due to having a society devoted to its citizens (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). In order for citizens to propel the society forward, the Greeks created a culture where education was deemed quintessential to domination (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). The idea of childhood was reconceptualized during the Renaissance (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). The Renaissance was a time period of great innovation and knowledge-empowerment

(Classen, 2011). Modern thinking regarding childhood shaped a far broader point of view (Classen, 2011). The Renaissance was quite seemingly contradictory in comparison to the time of the Middle Ages, where children were often revered as small adults (Classen, 2011). Not until 19th century Germany were contemporary idealisms pertaining to children and education considered even reasonable (DeHaan & Leuven, 2016). Children under the age of five were seen as petulant and immature for an educational environment (DeHaan & Leuven, 2016). Germany's public education was one of the first societies to conceptualize the idea of preschool education (DeHaan & Leuven, 2016). This type of education was intended for children ages five and younger (DeHaan & Leuven, 2016). Before this conceptualization of early childhood education, children were not sent to school until the approximate age of seven years old (Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2005).

Primarily brought up in the home by women, usually the child's mother or a nanny caregiver, it was looked upon as quite proper to wait to educate young children (Balswick et al., 2005). At the beginning of a child's life, before stepping foot into a school-like environment, a child would first need to learn social mannerisms and moral discipline (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). Like the Greeks, Spartans also deemed education as necessary (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). Spartans' belief systems were ahead of their time, associating strongly with the idea children should be exposed to social mannerisms and moral discipline (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013). It would only be a matter of time until all of these components would comprise developmental stages of what early childhood now looks like today (Balswick et al., 2005).

In the past, due to cultural thinking and societal status, boys were educated much more prevalently (Goldstein, 2014). Much of the time, boys were educated very similarly

to a Boy Scouts structure (Goldstein, 2014). Family instincts and natural instincts were instilled in a totalitarian environment (Burman, 2008). This environment would be deemed similar to a modern classroom environment from today (Burman, 2008). Games and exercises were common with underlying tones of devotion for discipline and learning (Goldstein, 2014). Girls, on the other hand, were educated in ancient times to perform motherly duties for family, as well as society (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2013).

No one individual can ignore the change in thinking due to the evolution of early childhood education and the implementation of preschool programs within the United States (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). One of the earliest transformative individuals in early childhood education was Froebel, who has been attributed as one of the foremost contributors to research in early childhood education (Morgan, 2011). According to Morgan (2011), Froebel expressed in order for children to learn through experiences, children must learn an awareness of themselves and the world around them. Also, children need to establish play items deemed appropriate for interaction and socialization (Curtis, 2014). Froebel's early educationalist approach still influences modern play practices and socialization practices in preschool today (Curtis, 2014).

Montessori was also another individual in early childhood education who transformed the basic principles of teaching young children (Nutbrown & Clough, 2014). Montessori specialized in work with socially and mentally handicapped children (Nutbrown & Clough, 2014). Montessori, who was very observant, created a unique philosophy and methodology (Gordon & Browne, 2014). For example, because of limitations in resources, a cabinet containing certain materials was always kept locked (Gordon & Browne, 2014). One day, the cabinet was unlocked, and the children took it

upon themselves to obtain the materials and carefully use the objects on the floor within the learning environment (Gordon & Browne, 2014). Afterwards, the cabinet transformed into open-shelving (Gordon & Browne, 2014). Seating, soon thereafter, became much more accommodating for work and play low to the ground or on the ground (Gordon & Browne, 2014). Montessori concluded very child was unique due to the individual, societal environment, and every child developed according to natural potential (as cited in Curtis, 2014). Upon the first notion of Montessori's theories within the United States, Montessori's methods were not accepted very willingly; therefore, Montessori followers did not gain prevalence until years later (Curtis, 2014). Now, the Montessori Method has been commonly practiced in preschool programs throughout the United States and nationwide (Curtis, 2014).

Steiner, an Austrian philosopher, scientist, and artist, whose lectures for the German people have been attributed in creating Waldorf Schools, also brought forward thinking to the world of early childhood education (Gordon & Browne, 2014). Steiner believed the whole of a child should be accounted for, as did Froebel and Montessori; additionally, different parts of development and learning work in unison rather than disjointedly (Curtis, 2014). Steiner also believed children interacted with was definitive in theoretic future success (Gordon & Browne, 2014).

Another researcher, McMillan, conceptualized the notion children should be offered a school environment where a broad spectrum of opportunities could be offered, instead of a direct path to the labor industry (Curtis, 2014). McMillan and countless other educational researchers opened doors for teachers in early childhood who may have appeared as unprecedented in their knowledge during their times in history (Wright,

2010). Wright (2010) added, currently the idea of global education has been in the forefront, and its benefits have enhanced economies and societies around the country like never before. Some said the most basic of societal ideals, including the wisdom of Confucius and other theorists, would have been allowed to move into the next century with the notion for greater progress than ever (Wright, 2010).

The Purpose of Past Programs

Early childhood education has been divided into two different categories -- home-based programs and center-based programs (Essa, 2014). In more recent years, the largest number of students who attended early childhood education programs were enrolled in center-based programs (Essa, 2014). Those children who attended an early childhood program that was home-based program usually interacted with caregivers or family members (Essa, 2014). Family child care programs were popular because of the flexible arrangement and home-based environment (Essa, 2014). In most states, approximately six children have been cared for at one time in a family child care program (Essa, 2014). Usually, the children ranged in age from infant to occasionally adolescence, making the span of developmental and learning abilities vast (Essa, 2014). For primary age students, this environment was a hindrance because very little developmentally beneficial opportunities could realistically be offered due to the environment (Essa, 2014); therefore, these children usually performed at a lower rate upon reaching kindergarten compared to peers who attended a center-based program (Elango, Garcia, Heckman, & Hojman, 2015).

Center-based programs have been usually larger in size, and, because of this factor, grouped children into age-appropriate environments (Essa, 2014). Variations of

center-based programs have depended on the state and the area (Essa, 2014). A popularized, well-known program around the nation has been Head Start (Elango et al., 2015). Center-based care has grown exponentially over several decades, preparing more children than ever before (Essa, 2014). When children were grouped by age, most likely in a center-based setting, age could start from birth to around age eight (Essa, 2014). One of the most dramatic alterations in early childhood education was the addition of more infant and toddler programs (Essa, 2014). Across the nation, facilities turned portions of the environment into a contained infancy to toddler area (Essa, 2014). Many of these programs were established to assist impoverished families as a way to intervene from probable life cycle concerns (Zaslow, Halle, Martin, Cabrera, Calkins, Pitzer, & Margie, 2006). The most common programs centered around preschoolers, or age three (Essa, 2014). Some facilities enrolled children right out of diapers, others waited until age two but commonly agreed three was found appropriate for most to begin attending a preschool program (Zaslow et al., 2006). Again, several definitions for early childhood education exist (Waller & Davis, 2014). When children reach primary age, or what is considered up to age eight, children attended kindergarten (Waller & Davis, 2014). Kindergarten was centered on learning strategies, based around teaching strategies focused on a particular curriculum set in place by the school district (Waller & Davis, 2014). Many districts utilized an integrated approach, where social, emotional, physical, creative, and other human learning aspects were incorporated (Essa, 2014). This strayed away from simply a cognitive approach, where children were limited in varying outlets of learning, experiences, and opportunities (Essa, 2014). For example, cognitive techniques

may simply have approached subject matters such as reading, math, science, and social studies in a sterile, direct-instruction approach (Essa, 2014).

As children became students immersed in a world of learning and experiences, before and after school programs began to serve a purpose (Essa, 2014). In today's hectic society, parents often work hours before or after students attend school (Waller & Davis, 2014). Therefore, before and after school programs offered recreational activities, as well as learning activities for children (Waller & Davis, 2014). These programs would mainly service primary children due to the structure of school systems in the United States (Payne, 2010). Other children, who did not have before or after school activities would often take advantage of self-care, in which independence and maturity took a forefront (Essa, 2014). Studies suggested self-care children may be tempted to lead a life of malicious behavior or violence, based on several of these self-care children being located in urban areas of the United States (Payne, 2010). Educator involvement, parental involvement, and program involvement have all played a significant role in student success (Essa, 2014). Publicly supported programs have been deemed as beneficial as other programs (Essa, 2014). The key is for all stakeholders to have the children in mind as the main priority (Waller & Davis, 2014). Due to variances in group size, teacher qualifications, curricular expectations, and other factors, quality should be constantly sought for and maintained (Waller & Davis, 2014). Programs also had a profound effect on children with special educational needs (Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2000). Children entered kindergarten undetected for a learning disability until the time kindergarten screening took place (Sandall et al., 2000). Through state and nationwide mandates, early childhood special education has progressed and flourished over many decades (Sandall et

al., 2000). Instead of teachers waiting to diagnose and support these children, today more has been accomplished in school districts around the United States to provide parents and caregivers with information regarding early screening efforts, guidance, and support (Sandall et al., 2000). If screened and diagnosed at an early age, children performed equal to or greater than grade level peers later in academic years (Sandall et al., 2000). With diagnosis, children have been issued individualized Educational Plan (IEP) that followed them and allowed educators to modify and to accommodate instruction and the overall learning environment to fit specific learners' needs (Blackwell & Rosetti, 2014). As the student progressed throughout each grade level, the IEP was altered to model what that student could achieve (Blackwell & Rosetti, 2014). The benefits of having the IEP from a starting point, such as early childhood special education, could be related to better outcomes (Sandall et al., 2000). Approximately six million IEPs were created for children around the United States within recent history (Blackwell & Rosetti, 2014). It can be costly for school districts and can cause school districts to be forced to reallocate funds in order to service all students who qualify for special education (Blackwell & Rosetti, 2014).

Since the reauthorization of the Individuals with Educational Disabilities Act IIDEA) in conjunction with President George W. Bush's approval in 2004, IDEA preserved the basic rights and structures for those in need (California Department of Education, 2017). The most significant provision that affected the law was mandated in 2005 (California Department of Education, 2017). An expectation for well-qualified special education instructors became a major priority (California Department of Education, 2017).

Rural Education versus Urban Education

Variances exist in rural and urban educational environments across the country (McCracken & Barcinas, 1991). Location has a profound effect on educational aspirations and opportunities (Li & Ranieri, 2010). Sometimes children from rural school districts are at a loss for cultural experiences (Li & Ranieri, 2010). Whereas, children from urban areas, especially those children who were overwhelmingly in need, may not have had access to supplies or digital tools (Li & Ranieri, 2010). Educators experienced greater losses of interest in occupations in urban areas, where acts of violence, students misbehaving, and fewer professional development opportunities were available (Abel & Sewell, 2010). Li and Ranieri (2010) continued, due to all of these factors, children started foundational success behind where nationwide standards were expected.

One study, in particular, focused on major beliefs sustained by both rural and urban school districts and how this affected the student community (McCracken & Barcinas, 1991). Even at the time this study was conducted, points of interest and concerns have been maintained even today (Li & Ranieri, 2010). In rural school districts, community, family, commitment, and people stood out as the magnified interests or items that mattered to those involved with the school districts (McCracken & Barcinas, 1991). In urban school districts, interests or concerns consisted of conducive climates of learning, teamwork, finances, and social issues (McCracken & Barcinas, 1991). In addition, when pertaining to collegiate aspirations, many rural families found it more important for students to attend college versus urban families (McCracken & Barcinas, 1991). Many urban families mentioned financial detriments being the largest concern when correlating to collegiate goals (Li & Ranieri, 2010). Ultimately, parental

involvement has played the main role in determining the importance of college aspirations or not (McCracken & Barcinas, 1991).

When discussing educational systems around the globe, Li and Ranieri (2010) explained many dimensions emerged. In China, many citizens felt as if there was a strong divide between opportunities for children to advance in the world of technology if those children came from working-class families versus what was considered wealthy families (Li & Ranieri, 2010). Academically, many Chinese expressed feelings as if children were at an overall academic hindrance if technological opportunities were withheld from these children in question (Li & Ranieri, 2010). In Australia, instructors expressed they felt as if there were strong components among the social environment within the school and whether the school was located in a rural or urban area (Reay & Vincent, 2014). According to Reay and Vincent (2014), the ever-changing social ideals in this world will continue to shape the world of education as we know it endlessly. Social classes have not identified us, and neither has location, of educational opportunities (Reay & Vincent, 2014). Students must shape individual futures through self-efficacy and quality educational support (Li & Ranieri, 2010). More so, juxtaposition has existed that has created limitations for gender, race, and other dimensions of identity that cause individuals to feel stereotyped and disadvantaged to continue progressing with educational opportunities (Reay & Vincent, 2014).

Not one factor has made individuals feel excluded or isolated from educational opportunities (Reay & Vincent, 2014). Reay & Vincent (2014) continued self-efficacy and socialization played larger roles than other factors. For example, administrators in urban districts presented more negative effects for students, especially on an academic

basis, due to higher stress factors placed on the educators (Abel & Sewell, 2010). Again, financial detriments weighed heavily on urban school districts (Abel & Sewell, 2010). Administrators in rural school districts found budgetary restrictions made it difficult to offer privileges for all (Li & Ranieri, 2010). Habits and predispositions left an imprint as early as children in preschool programs (Reay & Vincent, 2014). For future students to have had successful outcomes, support systems needed to be available, no matter the location (Reay & Vincent, 2014).

The Benefits of Socialization through Early Childhood Education

Issues with social interactions between classmates plagued children from all classes of life on a constant basis for centuries (Payne, 2010). According to Essa (2014), the public had conscious urgency placed around early childhood education and its impact on children's socialization. Social problems heightened at a rapid pace in today's society, and young children became collateral damage (Payne, 2010). Essa (2014) wrote socialization was a fundamental part of child development. Socialization provided children with developmentally appropriate tools to enhance abilities to cope later on in life (Essa, 2014). Socialization also provides children an opportunity to learn how to interact with peers and problem-solve (Essa, 2014).

The insurmountable benefits of early childhood education are undeniable (Essa, 2014). Without appropriate socialization techniques taught in quality programs, children were a hindrance to cause issues later in life (Essa, 2014). Whereas, socialization techniques can teach children how to communicate thoughts and emotions in a controlled successful manner (Essa, 2014). Of course, successful socialization takes coaching and monitoring from trained, high-quality educators (Essa, 2014). It is also important that

within successful programs, teacher growth opportunities and accountability practices are taken into consideration as well (Essa, 2014).

Child Development

According to Berk (2013), child development was the period of time when social, emotional, and cognitive growth begins. Berk (2013) concluded many varying ideas on how development as human beings occurs throughout our childhood (Kontopodis, Wulf, & Fichtner, 2011). Freud defined and studied the psychosexual stage theory of development (Dance-Schissel, 2016). Freud theorized children moved through specific stages of development due to unconscionable sexual drives (Dance-Schissel, 2016). Freud's stage theory ended at adulthood (Dance-Schissel, 2016). Erikson developed a stage theory of development as well (Dance-Schissel, 2016). Erikson's theory differed from Freud's theory due to a focus on social relationships as the driving force for development and developmental tasks, rather than a sexual drive (Berk, 2013). For example, human interaction was the key when speaking of Erikson's theory (Berk, 2013). Vygotsky's Theory of Development also placed emphasis on social relationships and the importance in conjunction with development (Kontopodis et al., 2011). Vygotsky viewed children as apprentices, with parent mentorships as children acquired developmental skills throughout their lifetimes (Kontopodis et al., 2011).

The first period of development in human beings' existences was called infancy (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). Infancy was considered to start at birth and end at age two (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). It was the time in life where the greatest amount of growth took place (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). The brain was at its most heightened capacity for cognitive development (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). It was astounding to witness how

helpless one can be at the beginning of infancy and how dramatically skills in communication and reasoning are attained and increased (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). Specific milestones during this time include rolling over, sitting up, crawling, and walking (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). Fine motor skills took longer to acquire during this time. Generally, this is why babies are incapable of writing and/or drawing at this time of life (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). Social milestones, which are imperative theories of several early childhood researchers, usually occurred during this period of time (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). Infants usually had a sense of self-awareness; prior to 12 months, usually, self-awareness was only captured between the mother and the child (Sigelman & Rider, 2015).

Early childhood was the focal point of this study. Often, it has been thought there was a time in which human beings learned the alphabet and numbers (Beckett & Taylor, 2016). Dance-Schissel (2016) explained early childhood development lasts from age two to six. These years are the crux of child development (Dance-Schissel, 2016). Physically, a person's center of gravity shifts from the breastbone during infancy to the belly button (Dance-Schissel, 2016). Physical growth slows, especially in comparison to infancy (Dance-Schissel, 2016). However, a dramatic increase in fine and gross motor skills occur during that time period (Sigelman & Rider, 2015). Running, jumping, climbing, and balancing were strikingly enhanced (Beckett & Taylor, 2016). Cognitively and creatively, letters and even detailed drawings became a possibility during early childhood (Beckett & Taylor, 2016). Again, cognitive processing speed has been found to increase to the point where thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving were mastered (Beckett & Taylor, 2016). Social development advances as children learn to work with others and

master more of our native language (Beckett & Taylor, 2016). During early childhood, socialization through play was based on availability versus selectivity (Dance-Schissel, 2016); this type of socialization changes in middle childhood

During middle childhood and adulthood, further cognitive development has occurred at even more rapid paces (Morgan, 2011). At this point in life, information was obtained at exponential pace (Morgan, 2011). Information was compartmentalized and disseminated into refined files, ready for the taking (Morgan, 2011). Morgan (201) added fine and gross motor skills progressed as height progressed; usually, a growth spurt occurred during middle childhood. In late adulthood, cognitive abilities reverted back to childlike states similar to early childhood and/or middle childhood (Morgan, 2011).

After understanding the phases of human development, it is also important to understand extreme disparities were noted between children who have been worked with versus those who were not worked with (Beckett & Taylor, 2015). For example, Beckett & Taylor (2015) found it was easy for 4- or 5-year-olds who had worked with educators to easily demonstrate certain cognitive abilities, such as alphabetical and numerical knowledge and recognition, as well as grasp new information. The largest notion was children, especially those developing in early childhood, must come to terms with is making sense of the world (Beckett & Taylor, 2015). As cited in Beckett and Taylor (2015), Piaget reiterated what other researchers also believed, which was children are constantly trying to learn from mistakes and even though a child's way of thinking may be found profoundly different from an adult's, children are still constantly forming ideas and notions.

No Child Left Behind

The premise behind No Child Left Behind was to ensure all students were held to high expectations, through rigorous learning and high expectations (U.S. Department of Education 2004). “Teaching children to read is the most important thing our schools can do,” quoted the administration of President George W. Bush’s on January 9, 2002; soon thereafter, No Child Left Behind was implemented as law (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The No Child Left Behind legislation was based on four principles, which included a) accountability for results, b) local control and flexibility, c) expanded parental choice, and d) effective and successful programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Due to increased expectations tied with No Child Left Behind, accountability research became significant in the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). School, nationwide, were expected to provide students fair, equitable opportunities (U.S. Department of Education, 2004); schools educators also were expected to deliver high-quality education, so students obtained proficiency on state academic achievement assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). As time progressed, school report cards or Annual Yearly Progress reports became more prevalent (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Accountability requirements through No Child Left Behind extended back to the Texas accountability system, adopted in 1990, in order to enforce accountability through state assessments (Nelson, McGhee, Meno, & Slater, 2007). Texas school districts were given a grade according to students’ success on assessments in correlation to their graduation rates (Nelson et al., 2007). Changes were made in 1999, and the Texas school districts’ revised system became more specific to address academic concerns with

subgroups (Nelson et al., 2007). Due to the fact President Bush was the governor before becoming president of the United States, many believed in his strong convictions for No Child Left Behind due to previous success academically (Nelson et al., 2007).

According to Bouck (2009), No Child Left Behind also offered greater opportunities for children with special education needs. Reauthorization allowed No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disabilities Act to (IDEA) strongly focus on curricular guidelines and outcomes, educator quality and preparedness, conducive environments most beneficial for learning desired goals, and progress monitoring tools for students in the classroom with special needs (Bouck, 2009). Bouck (2009) concluded, the best cohesion between No Child Left Behind (NCLB)and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) provided students with special needs chances to engage appropriately, to learn daily and life skills to make life more feasible in an independent manner, and to offer these students chances from beginning to the postsecondary level where enhancement of skills and an opportunity for growth was available (Bouck, 2009).

Common Core State Standards

In the spring of 2009, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief of State School Officers (CCSSO) began to work on the Common Core State Standard initiative (Ravitch, 2016). Common Core State Standards would be state-led in order to make efforts to improve curricular guidelines for English language arts and mathematics (Ravitch, 2016). These standards would differ from other standards in several ways (Ravitch, 2016). For example, there would be aspirations for clearly defined expectations for higher education goals, greater rigor to varying content areas, and fewer concepts to focus, as well as the stronger emphasis placed on those concepts chosen to be

focused on and preparations for more competitive global and economy and society skillsets (Skinner & Feder, 2014). According to Skinner and Feder (2014), strong debate over federal involvement plagued Common Core State Standards from the beginning. Again, these standards were implemented to differ due to greater state involvement in the initialization and follow-through of the national standards (Skinner & Feder, 2014). This presented arduous amounts of combative-like behavior from state officials with opinions differing from the philosophical foundation of Common Core State Standards (Skinner & Feder, 2014). Incentives were utilized to enhance school officials' involvement in Common Core State Standards. However, controversy continued to plague the overarching goals behind these standards (Skinner & Feder, 2014).

Including the impact of the CCS, even as education has changed drastically over the past few decades, some questioned if the once diverse world of education is now on the edge of extinction (Ravitch, 2016). The diversity of the values of curricula was instructions and assessments have now taken a backseat to an era linked to a common set of standards and common curriculum (Brooks & Dietz, 2013). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have redefined how teachers teach and assess students' academic progress. In addition, the variety of assessments presented, as well as evaluative methods put into place, were redefined by Common Core State Standards (Ravitch, 2016). Some say this new, progressive way of thinking directed the globe for unprecedented societal ambition and success (Brooks & Dietz, 2013). According to Brooks and Dietz (2013), Common Core needed more professional conversations pertaining to teaching and learning. A crux of this continuing conversation has remained the same, teaching professionals were at the heart of student learning (Brooks & Dietz, 2013).

According to Kern (2014), the educational pendulum has been swinging differently daily. Almost every state that has adopted Common Core State Standards has either abandoned the standards or modified the standards in some fashion (Kern, 2014). As mentioned previously, educators have encouraged policymakers and others to analyze what works best for students in the modern-day classroom (Kern, 2014). Instead of conditioning students to fit the mold of the traditional education system, more than ever, there is a need to prepare individuals for career and college readiness (Kern, 2014). Robbins and Baurlein (2013) argued emphasis on being a well-educated citizen has broadened, expectations for career and college readiness have required a precise vision, including support from parents and state legislators. Additionally, compensatory opportunities, such as Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind waivers, have induced greater controversy and scrutiny against public education (Ravitch, 2016). As federal influence escalated, questions pertaining to control and state philosophy versus federal philosophy became more conflicted (Ravitch, 2016).

With new considerations for the rigor of curricula being presented nationwide, the primary questions have been who should decide what rigorous means and how should rigorous standards be executed (Robbins & Bauerlein, 2013). One could contradict that Common Core State Standards provided for practical thinking and problem-solving abilities in the hands of students on a leveled foundation across the nation (Robbins & Bauerlein, 2013). The real issue at hand was delivery, making it a necessity for key stakeholders to ensure the quality of education provided for all students was done in a utilitarian manner (Robbins & Bauerlein, 2013). Substantial efforts by politicians have led this topic to maintain key points of interest, as well as by educators (Ravitch, 2016).

As opinions sway the pendulum pertaining to CCSS back and forth, the overarching goal has been to create modernized, problem-solving citizens in an ever-changing and critically competitive global society (Ravitch, 2016).

Title I Schools

Reading instruction has always been a topic of interest at any education level in school settings (Douglas, 2016). Around the third grade, children begin to obtain the reading skills to learn, which determines academic and career choices later in life (Douglas, 2016). Around this same time period, students also begin taking standardized tests, unveiling significant achievement gaps among various subgroups (Douglas, 2016). Efforts in funding, staffing, and education are imperative during this time (Douglas, 2016); however, gaps still have existed, and unfortunately, it has appeared to be growing increasingly more significant. For example, students are often compartmentalized based on whether considered proficient or not on state standardized tests according to Douglas (2016). This has been dependent on where cut-offs appeared, making it difficult to measure students' growth toward proficiency (Douglas, 2016). Recently, officials in several states have looked into growth models, where teachers' effectiveness was based upon growth toward an acceptable marker such as proficiency in benchmarks (Douglas, 2016). Growth models have been calculated using the students' academic progress from the current school year (Douglas, 2016). School administrators have received summative scores based on the successes of student performances and evaluations of teachers instructional performance (Douglas, 2016). These changes have impacted how administrators, teachers, parents, and students viewed rigor and testing procedures

(Douglas, 2016). According to Douglas (2016), these changes have also limited a districts' abilities to service students' needs more rapidly than in the past.

Within the past decade, educators in North Carolina have implemented the Excellent Public Schools Act, enacted in order to provide better kindergarten to third grade literacy opportunities for students in the state's public education system (North Carolina General Assembly, 2012). The overarching goal very similar to Title I was to allow elementary students to receive services in order to comprehend, to integrate, and to apply complex texts while reading (North Carolina General Assembly, 2012). This program's goal also was to allow students to later apply these skills to secondary education and postsecondary career opportunities (North Carolina General Assembly, 2012).

While trying to teach these skills, educators have utilized Dynamic Indicators for Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (Cummings, Park, & Bauer Schaper, 2013). A screening mechanism several school districts relied on in addition to other supplementary testing measures, in order to correctly identify abilities and needs of students (Cummings et al., 2013). The DIBELS program has heavily focused on the early stages of students in the educational system due to the program's concentration on phoneme segmentation and fluency (Cummings et al., 2013). Many educators in the North Carolina Public Schools utilized DIBELS due to its compatibility with the Excellent Public Schools Act (Douglas, 2016). Additionally, the DIBELS program complied with nationwide expectations, allowing programs such as Title I, a more cohesive framework, to provide supportive interventions for participating students (Douglas, 2016).

The DIBELS program was found to be an effective framework for student interventions (Douglas, 2016). More efforts to assessments, structure, and diplomacy allowed for greater results from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) (Dorsey, 2009). In 2009, President Obama enacted the ARRA into law (Dorsey, 2015). One major component of the law allowed for schools to improve capacity in order to improve student outcomes (Dorsey, 2015). The Race to the Top Program, in association with ARRA, created a competitive approach to improving student outcomes throughout the nation (Dorsey, 2015). The State of North Carolina included the first schools to receive grant funding, along with the District of Columbia (Dorsey, 2015). The school district administrators were required to change models for student learning in order to provide more impactful results and meet the needs of 21st century learners (Dorsey, 2015). The North Carolina legislators also enacted a Read to Achieve Law, which would ensure all students were at or above grade level by the end of the school year (Dorsey, 2015). North Carolina officials provided diagnostic, formative, and summative procedures for assessment in order to continue to help with reading achievement and close the gap for children throughout the state (Dorsey, 2015). In 2009, there was a paradigm shift in expectations for districts, administrators, teachers, parents, and more importantly the students (Dorsey, 2015).

Certainly, most students showed improvement in reading skills after intervention programs (Douglas, 2016). According to Douglas (2016), the bigger issue was many educators were not succinctly measure growth in similar ways. More importantly, due to these disconnects in measuring in the same fashion, students were, in turn, identified differently and support monitoring was depicted differently as well (Douglas, 2016).

Cummings et al. (2013) elaborated this was especially concerning for transient families where students attend multiple school districts over a period of many years (Cummings et al., 2013). As teachers encountered these students in need of support, it was imperative to continuously work on closing the gaps through more compliant measuring tools (Douglas, 2016). Ultimately, a variety of different measurement resources would be ideal (Douglas, 2016). This allowed for administrators and teachers to disseminate how to better support students in need without the repetitive factors of so many gaps that continually occurred as students grew older (Douglas, 2016). It made no sense to assist students, monitor students, assess students, and then repeat the following year when students were eventually exposed to high-stakes testing and results were not conclusive with results shown from intervention services provided to students (Douglas, 2016). A further suggestion was greater funding allocated for literacy coaches within school districts helped educate and reinforce techniques most beneficial to learning environments (Douglas, 2016). According to Douglas (2016), many of the schools involved in the study found a significant need for literacy coaches or intervention personnel, and, much of the time, policymakers did not recognize the funding need was as serious in this area as noted by school district administrators. At this time, policies regarding reading and reading interventions changed rapidly across the nation and no definitive conclusion was made (Douglas, 2016). Douglas (2016) added there need to be an incorporation of forward thinking as rigor and standards heightened in the upcoming years (Douglas, 2016).

Importance of Third Grade Curriculum

As mentioned, Common Core standards heightened curricular expectations for students nationwide (Brooks & Dietz, 2013). The third grade was a fundamental grade level with regards to future milestones and necessary for implementation of basic foundational reading skills (Robinson, 2016). Students should ideally be at grade level at any age (Robinson, 2016); however, it is imperative when they reach third grade because reading transitions from learning how-to read into reading to learn (Robinson, 2016). If basic skills are not prevalent, students can find themselves being left behind quite quickly (Robinson, 2016). Once this lag exists, this can foreshadow an ongoing deficit that will never cease to exist (Robinson, 2016). Often this leaves kids so frustrated and overwhelmed, school becomes taxing and bothersome, instead of opportunistic and fulfilling (Robinson, 2016). According to Robinson (2016), 83% of low-income students tested below proficient in reading at the beginning of fourth grade school year. Additionally, 55% of moderate- and high- income students tested below proficient as well (Robinson, 2016). In addition to these astounding statistics, United States officials have reported two-thirds of children testing below proficiency in reading (Robinson, 2016). Today, educational leaders in several states have made efforts to address this dilemma (Robinson, 2016). Currently, Florida has been the only state requiring mandatory retention if a student was not reading on grade level by the end of the academic year (Robinson, 2016). Since there have been so many negative enormities revolving on students' reading levels, educators have found behavior, and social problems persisted, not to mention the unlikeliness of these students not graduating from high school (Robinson, 2016). As mentioned previously, this ongoing challenge can be

debilitating despite the school's location, making the importance of a strong foundation crucial (Robinson, 2016).

Relationship between Third Grade and Incarceration Rates

Another reason the third grade is a significant grade level involves what research says about students' academic performance related to incarceration rates (Lesnick, Goerge & Gwynne, 2010). Learning how to read is a significant skill in modern society (Lesnick, Goerge, & Gwynne, 2010). Lesnick et al. (2010) found it not only allows for foundational skills to be acquired, but it also allows for future academic and career success. The most critical moment in a children's reading futures has been found to be in third grade (Lesnick et al., 2010). When children transition from third grade to fourth grade, children are no longer learning how to read but reading in order to learn (Lesnick et al., 2010). This pivotal moment may be the time where students begin ongoing frustrations in school if comprehension is not present (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Comprehension is essential to the learning process after third grade (Lesnick et al., 2010). In fact, researchers found approximately 75% of ninth graders who struggled with reading as third graders were more likely to struggle in later grade levels (Lesnick et al., 2010). In addition, many of these same students, who also had poor word identification skills as third graders, still struggled with word identification by the end of eighth grade (Lesnick et al., 2010).

The impact of early reading problems can continue (Robinson, 2016). Falling behind has been known to cause residual effects later in life (Robinson, 2016). Adults with lower literacy and education rates were more likely to be unemployed and to earn an income considered at the poverty level later in life (Robinson, 2016). Furthermore, it was

much more likely for adults without high school educations or postsecondary educations to be incarcerated than of individuals with higher levels of education (Lesnick et al., 2010). Lesnick et al. (2010) added, literacy rates not only affected children's educational environments, but also affected them socially, behaviorally, and economically throughout their lifetimes (Lesnick et al., 2010).

Longitudinal studies have shown poor readers from kindergarten to adulthood who did not obtain mastery levels of understanding pertaining to basic reading skills also had poor self-concept, self-esteem, and lowered motivation to read (Armbruster et al., 2001). Later in elementary, middle, and high school, these same students, otherwise presumed as bright, lacked in gaining progress and growth in other areas, such as math, science, and social studies, due to a foundational lacking in reading skills (Armbruster et al., 2001). These children were unable to read leveled texts, impeding overall attainment in any of these various subject areas (Armbruster et al., 2001). Later, for these students, college and other post-secondary paths appeared unattainable (Armbruster et al., 2001). Therefore, causing further drops in self-esteem, self-concept, and self-motivation (Armbruster et al., 2001). Normally, these students demonstrated negative behavioral outlets that become more apparent as these students get older, many do not graduate or pursue general equivalency opportunities (Armbruster et al., 2001).

Early interventions, such as Title I Reading programs, have made profound differences in the lives of struggling readers (Armbruster et al., 2001). Struggling readers who receive early interventions and support profoundly increased knowledge, skills, and abilities by 85 to 90% (Armbruster et al., 2001). If interventions were delayed, approximately 75% of these students continued to struggle throughout school, as well as

later in life, according to Armbruster et al. (2001). Usually, the most crucial intervention programs begin in kindergarten when children were more developmentally eager to learn reading skills and applied these strategies to the regular classroom settings (Armbruster et al., 2001). It has been noted to be crucial to work with third graders, even though some in later elementary years were more reluctant than younger learners. If curriculum fidelity was intact, these children made gains appropriate for regular classroom settings as well (Armbruster et al., 2001).

With high-stakes testing and more pressure than ever before on educators around the nation, it has become more important than ever to ensure children received educations appropriate for the 21st Century (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Teachers also have shown to make significant differences in the intervention process for learners, especially young learners (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). According to the Center for Public Education (2005), "The effect of teaching on student learning is greater than student ethnicity or family income, school attended by student, or class size" (p. 1). Learning to read has made never-ending impacts on students' quality of life (Center for Public Education, 2005). Consequently, the importance of quality teachers cannot be negated (Center for Public Education, 2005). As stated by Fredrick Douglas, "Once you learn to read you will be forever free" (Frederick Douglas Organization, 2015, para 1).

Politicians and journalists often have blamed incarceration rates on low literacy rates in third grade (Lesnick et al., 2010). The Literacy Mid-South organization members (2016) added the prediction of a greater need for prison beds within the next few years if changes are not made. The concern for incarceration in conjunction with education has been heightening specifically in rural and suburban areas (Kim, Losen & Hewitt, 2012).

Numerous juvenile inmates who entered the juvenile court system have been considered to have low literate rates (Kim et al., 2012). Juvenile incarceration has likely caused these same individuals to drop out of high school due to time constraints in order to graduate on time, lowered self-esteems pertaining to achieving a high diploma, or other stigmas (Kim et al., 2012). Consequently, those individuals who chose to quit school were approximately four times more likely to be incarcerated later in their lifetimes (Kim et al., 2012). Also, more than half of high school dropouts were likely to commit a crime at some point in comparison to individuals with four-year college educations (Kim et al., 2012). Mississippi has more incarcerated individuals than any other state within the United States (Literacy Mid-South, 2016).

Most of these inmates read, on average, at a sixth grade reading level and half of the inmates never completed a high school education (Li et al., 2017). Many of the inmates reported feeling inferior to other students within their learning environments (Li et al., 2017). Even though reading ability has not been found to have a direct connection between incarceration, it was undeniable to ignore the alarming statistics pinpointing the association between behavior and foundation reading skills (Kim et al., 2012). According to the National Adult Literacy Survey, 70% of these inmates were not capable of reading at even a fourth grade reading level, meaning the inmates lacked the ability to successfully enter the workforce or hold a job where the individuals were able to follow through on everyday tasks, and expectations most take for granted on a daily basis (Literacy Mid-South, 2016).

For students in the classroom, difficulty in reading can be problematic (Li et al., 2017). There are triggers every educator should be aware of when dealing with at-risk

students (Kim et al., 2012). For instance, most students who are not reading on grade level will lose interest in many or all aspects of school by middle school (Kim et al., 2012). Loss of interest can also result after a child has been retained; however, that may be an indirect cause and not directly resulting in the child's loss of interest (Li et al., 2017). The most important goal educators need to strive for is grade level reading achievement by the end of third grade (Literacy Mid-South, 2016). Almost all third graders who struggle eventually lead to loss in proficiency in other areas of the school (Literacy Mid-South, 2016). Lack of reading ability can also hinder a third grader's ability to perform on high-stakes testing (Literacy Mid-South, 2016).

In recent years, the Tennessee Department of Corrections (TDOC) authorities attempted to make fundamental changes in the viewpoints of inmates' educational opportunities (Literacy Mid-South, 2016). The TDOC began to offer inmates comprehensive educational services, vocational training, and access to libraries to encourage inmates to remedy the stigma that may have driven these individuals down a path of least resistance (Literacy Mid-South, 2016). The high school equivalency program offered inmates to finally obtain high school diploma status has provided more inmates the opportunities for employment after release (Literacy Mid-South, 2016). By 2013, 618 high school equivalency certificates were awarded to inmates of TDOC (Literacy Mid-South, 2016). Some inmates even took an opportunity to attain college status and eventually earned associate's degrees (Literacy Mid-South, 2016). Vocational opportunities offered included a vast variety of career paths (Literacy Mid-South, 2016). Inmates pursued a variety of courses related to auto mechanic training to cosmetology (Literacy Mid-South, 2016).

Along with prisoners in Tennessee, other prisoners have been taking advantage of educational opportunities behind prison bars (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). Prisoners attending a maximum security prison in New York have attained associate's degrees at an exponential pace (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). According to Skorton and Altschuler (2013), nearly half of all inmates were serving approximately eight years or less. However, many inmates have found that in approximately three years or less, reincarceration was more likely than not (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). This was the unfortunate reality for inmates who more than likely struggled in childhood in schools and then into adulthood (Kim et al., 2012). What was even more unfortunate, Georgetown University researchers estimated almost half of the jobs created for the workforce required a post-secondary education (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). These estimates were alarming, and the stakes were high; in Missouri, prisoners have been half as likely to be reincarcerated with full-time jobs versus counterparts who were deemed unemployed (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). By cutting down on reincarceration rates, the nation would save more than 2 billion dollars in funding for prisons (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). The study related to Missouri prisoners also found re-incarceration was less likely when inmates obtained education within the prison; therefore, enabling more opportunities for full-time job prospects after being released from prison (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). Statistically, if an inmate took the opportunity to receive educational opportunities, that individual was far less likely to make the same mistakes (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). Almost half of those who did not take the opportunity for education enhancement found the path back to crimes of equal to or worse than before (Lesnick et al., 2010).

Between 1972 and 1995, inmates who were not sentenced to life or to the death penalty could benefit from Pell Grants, which encouraged educational opportunities for inmates within the prison environment (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). However, when more efforts were made to toughen programs and benefits offered to incarcerated individuals, opportunities were limited for inmates or ceased to exist, altogether (Kim et al., 2012). By 2005, only a few prisons, nationwide, offered postsecondary educational programs for inmates (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). In fact, only two programs in New York were affiliated with Cornell (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). Cayuga Community College soon became involved and waived tuition and fees for inmates (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). Funding for books and supplies were provided through the higher education affiliates (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). The programs even offered the chance to earn an associate's degree (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). Many of the instructors, teaching assistants, and administrators involved with the program were purely present on a voluntary basis; the only people who received any monetary benefit were a handful of graduate assistants paid with a small stipend (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). Organizations, such as the Sunshine Lady Foundation, provided building space, and/or necessary funding, and helped make these ongoing opportunities for inmates looking for lifetime changes (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). Skorton and Altschuler (2013) explained it is striking to hear from the graduates at commencement ceremonies since so many have triumphed over their past of poor choices and mistakes.

Even though much of the focus thus far has been on inmates who have been seemingly rehabilitated and likely to enter the workforce in the future for hopes of a better path and successes to come, lifelong inmates have benefited equally from

educational opportunities within these prison environments (Smith, 2017). According to Smith (2017), prison inmates were not as different from the average high school student as many might have believed. One particular inmate found regular attendance, in which punctuality was the expectation, if anything, offered a chance to feel more normality (Smith, 2017). The benefits after that were exponential based on the intrinsic motivational factors and support systems offered within the schooling environments (Smith, 2017). Many of these inmates appeared to have no hope for the future, but this wasn't necessarily the case (Smith, 2017). A number of prisons encouraged education, especially in the lifelong sense, because of the ability to bring humility and intellectual reasoning to the prisoners (Smith, 2017). Prisoners may have missed opportunities as young learners to grasp concepts, such as reading (Smith, 2017). The notion these prisoners realized the deserving qualities that came from rich educational opportunities sometimes exceeded anyone's expectations (Smith, 2017).

There was a mourning period where many of these prisoners felt as if human dignity had been stripped away because of poor choices made within a glimmer of a lifetime (Smith, 2017). It was even easier to make these individuals forgettable or ostracized as outcasts unfit for a place within society (Smith, 2017). Smith (2017) added, again, humility has so profound when a person was able to feel as if mistakes made were unforsaken. Prisons' educational opportunities often have been key to enhancing lifelong learning for a modernized society hoping to progressively move forward in turning the tables on the idea of achieving goals beyond expectations, especially for those incarcerated and awaiting freedom (Smith, 2017).

Relationship between Reading and Free/Reduced Lunch Students

Schools have been defined as places of learning, socialization, health, and nourishment (Evans, 2015). The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) was established to maintain health and nutritional information nationwide for all students (Evans, 2015). In 1946, after several individuals were denied entry into the World War II draft due to malnutrition, this program was seen as part of the solution (Evans, 2015). Reportedly, 33% of individuals were turned away due to a lack of nutritional health at the time of the war (Evans, 2015). Participation in the program was based on family income (Evans, 2015). Today, the programs have affected nearly ten million children (Evans, 2015).

As of 2009, 94% of all public and private institutions participated in the NSLP program (Evans, 2015). Approximately 85% of the institutions that participated in NSLP were from public educational settings (Evans, 2015). Due to the widespread nature of the Free and Reduced Lunch Program, several researchers found an opportunity to look into the benefits the program had on students' academic achievements (Evans, 2015). According to Leos-Urbel, Schwartz, Weinstein, and Corcoran (2013), initial conclusions were drawn that no significant achievement was made from children being offered opportunities for free breakfast. This pertained to a study conducted among New York public schools' students during the early 2000s (Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). The researchers in the study focused on children from low-income households, where reluctance or the inability to obtain healthy food choices were assumed apparent (Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). Additionally, the researchers wanted to find out if unfavorable options might have been the issue for children not partaking in certain programs for lower cost or free options to eat at school (Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). Ultimately, it was a positive change for greater

participation in choosing healthier, more nutritional options while attending school (Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). There was no conclusive evidence found to depict changes in opportunities given to students made a significant impact on students' academic improvement and/or growth (Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). The researchers in the study suggested the expansion of opportunities for students decreased the stigma associated with participating in free and reduced lunch programs (Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). The researchers added they believed more needed to be done nationwide to combat logistical issues around free and reduced programs in order to reach more needy children and families nationwide (Leos-Urbel et al., 2013).

One attempt was made in 2010 by President Barack Obama, who signed the legislation, Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). On one hand, this provision narrowly increased costs for groups of students targeted for specific purposes (Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). Yet, acts, such as the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, also offered the possibility of lowering administrative and transaction costs, offering greater potential for participation (Leos-Urbel et al., 2013). Again, continuous efforts were made to assist children from impoverished families who found healthy food choices too expensive (Evans, 2015).

Contradictory, another study found vital components associated with the free and reduced program pertaining to cognitive ability in reading, as well as math (Evans, 2015). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (2000) explained a key factor in undernourishment begins with a lack of breakfast. Without this important morning meal, brain cognition was not at the highest level of functioning ability (Wilson, Parrell, Wohlers, & Shirley, 2006). In fact, students who did not consume a healthy breakfast were more likely to

consume poor nutritionally-valued meals throughout the day versus others who made healthier choices from the beginning of the day (Wilson et al., 2006). Research has consistently proven children who consumed regularly healthy diets were more likely to perform better within the classroom (U.S Department of Agriculture, 2017). This was also fundamentally imperative for the beginning years of a child's life (Wilson et al., 2006). Specifically, brain cognition and nutrition were tied in showing gains in verbal fluency, basic math skills, attentiveness, creativity, mental and physical endurance, and overall abilities as a growing and progressive learner (Evans, 2015).

Researchers in longitudinal studies have been found to be the most successful in portraying results behind nutrition and students' academic success (Evans, 2015). The researchers from this study chose to delve into attention and episodic memory in relation to food (Evans, 2015). In addition, the researchers sought to explain the connection between nutrition and wave activity within the brain (Evans, 2015). Children who had consumed a healthy breakfast exerted far less mental energy in comparison to those children who ate poorly, or little to nothing at all (U.S Department of Agriculture, 2017). According to Evans (2015), when pertaining to nutrition and cognition, a longitudinal approach must be taken to find consistency within the findings.

Repeatedly, findings depicted mental competency was at greater peaks when nutritional satiety was intact (Adolphus, Lawton, & Dye, 2013). When provided nutritious meals, the brain was able to perform higher-level thinking computations, and a child's verbal fluency functioned at a greater rate (Adolphus et al., 2013). Positive effects ranged from children at the preschool level all the way to high school (Adolphus et al., 2013). The same reigned true for students' nutritional breakfast and lunch consumption

(Evans, 2015). Evans (2015) added it was no surprise when children habitually consumed regular healthy meals on a consistent basis, they were more prone to perform better on assessments and sustain better reading and math skills. Even though further studies need to be conducted in this field of research to better confirm the ongoing outcomes of nutrition in conjunction with academic success, a firm foundation supported healthy nutrition had positive learning outcomes (Evans, 2015).

Greater Focus on Literacy

In a theoretical framework, reading engagement entailed a number of different perspectives based on a variety of dispositions, cognitive strategies, and conceptual understandings, as well as social discourse (Guthrie, 2004). A reader who possessed these characteristics was more than likely the reader who would be more frequently engaged and who achieved more cognitively as a reader (Guthrie, 2004). Engaged readers spent 500% more time reading than an unengaged reader (Guthrie, 2004). This, in turn, equated to an unengaged reader needing 200 to 500% more engagement to increase educational attainment from reading (Guthrie, 2004).

Within a classroom setting, educators often have discerned between engaged readers versus unengaged readers (Guthrie, 2004). Teachers have intuitively distinguished between these two types of readers (Close, 2016). However, researchers have been trying to do more to assist in efforts to alleviate the achievement gap through efforts to understand the unengaged reader better (Guthrie, 2004). Engaged readers usually demonstrated stronger desires to utilize strategies inherently ingrained within these socially inquisitive beings (Close, 2016). These inherent attributes also governed how students attained knowledge in the future (Guthrie, 2004). On the contrast,

unengaged readers often retracted from opportunities to use strategies that made reading a delight when engaged and enthralled on the topic at hand (Guthrie, 2004). The unengaged reader lacked in understanding later on due to a lacking in foundational skills from the beginning stages of the reading process (Guthrie, 2004). Ultimately, the largest factor for underachievement was the lack of ability in conjunction with comprehension while reading a text (Guthrie, 2004). Unengaged readers frequently struggled with recall of important conceptual information due to the inability to understand conceptually or to utilize strategies while reading (Guthrie, 2004). Usually, unengaged readers were satisfied with conclusions presented by an instructor when asked to disseminate a finished story (Guthrie, 2004).

Close (2016) also explained it was crucial for attention to unengaged readers to become prominent within the learning environments in order for further educational attainment in later years to be successful and worthwhile. A common theme arose as researchers took a deeper look into reading and engagement (Guthrie, 2004). As simple as a notion, active enthusiasm needed to be apparent for any learning to occur within the educational setting (Guthrie, 2004). When students were energized to read, it was far more likely the students read longer for learning purposes, as well as for pleasure (Guthrie, 2004).

A few valuable factors must be taken into consideration when evaluating where dramatic shortfalls fall when pertaining to reading abilities, or lacking, at an early age (Guthrie, Wigfield, Barbosa, Perencevich, Taboada, Davis, Scafiddi, & Tonks, 2004). First, the instructor should ensure there was an understanding of the conceptual frameworks of the text in order for any comprehension or summarization to take place

(Guthrie et al., 2004). Second, engagement strongly depended on the nature of the text (Guthrie et al., 2004). If the text was short or long, depending on whether or not the text had illustrations, was an enticement or a deterrent for readers (Guthrie et al., 2004). If the text illustrations were purposeful for the lesson, it was far more intriguing and beneficial to the learner than a text that appeared strange in structure and content (Guthrie et al., 2004). In an ideal world, instructors would streamline instruction to meet the needs of every reader and individualize interventions to increase engagement and overall understanding (Guthrie et al., 2004). Realistically, it is crucial for research to help pinpoint opportunities to reach early readers, hoping to increase intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy in the process (Guthrie et al., 2004). Goal setting, progress monitoring, and instructor support can foster and sustain healthy reading (Guthrie et al., 2004).

According to Cunningham and Stanovich (2001), reading resonated with cognitive consequences throughout a person's lifetime. Reading has provided much greater task-filled meaning, in addition to what was being lifted from the page at the time of initial exposure to the text (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). As mentioned frequently, a lack of reading foundation caused residual effects later, and these effects could be reciprocal in manner (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). Much of the time, if individuals struggled to progress cognitively in reading abilities, children and others with familial ties usually experienced the same or similar issues throughout their lives as well (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). These readers experienced a much greater inability to breakdown spelling or sound coding, which later impeded exposure to texts (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). These effects have been found to exacerbate when academic achievement became detrimentally changed by reading materials that were repeatedly too

difficult for readers to understand and/or to answer questions in conjunction with the text (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). The combination of all of these factors led to less engagement in tasks that involved any reading at all (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). The disparity was in the reality many of these particular individuals utilized coping skills that may or may not assist in an educational setting (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). Ideally, in the school environments, reading volume had to be a pertinent factor in every academic day (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). Students exposed to reading at an early age, by qualified and supportive individuals, such as parents and teachers, are far more likely to obtain a love for reading and exponentially advance in reading (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). These children are also far more likely to experience higher patterns of achievement all around (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). For avid reading to become a solid habit in a child, or even an adult, a firm establishment of comprehension must be in place (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). Word recognition and decoding were also very important in instilling lifelong reading skills (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001). According to Cunningham and Stanovich (2001), even if a person was lacking, every person was capable of eventual comprehension and the act of reading more compensate for modest levels of cognitive ability (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001).

Extension of Literacy Importance

Literacy has been found to be important when pertaining to achievement and assessment scores (McCullough, 2011). In the United States, approximately 30 million adults over the age of 16 were found unable to read better than an elementary school child (Literacy Mid-South, 2017). Astoundingly, one must have the ability to read and write in order to function in the modern world on a daily basis (McCullough, 2011).

School settings attempted to intervene, monitor, and assess students on a frequent basis, however, achievement and success were realistically more limited for many Americans than previously thought (McCullough, 2011). Literacy was one of the only ways a society can eradicate poverty, decrease mortality rates in infants, address gender inequality, and create sustainable development (McCullough, 2011). Without reading and writing abilities, abilities for math, science, accessibility to technological resources and understanding, and the ability to solve problems were virtually unattainable (Li et al., 2017). In turn, causing issues when finding jobs, a career path, and establishing and maintaining a meaningful future (Literacy Mid-South, 2017).

Today, readers within school systems nationwide were not reading at a proficient level (Literacy Mid-South, 2017). In Tennessee, 70% of eighth graders read below grade level (Literacy Mid-South, 2017). On a nationwide scale, two-thirds of all eighth graders read below grade level, and 50% of high school seniors were not reading on grade level (Literacy Mid-South, 2017). These issues prevailed into adulthood, and these students became future parents unable to read food labels, read bedtime stories, or fill out appropriate paperwork (Literacy Mid-South, 2017). What was unfortunate, many of these individuals did not seek any type of support or remediation after leaving the educational setting (Literacy Mid-South, 2017). In fact, several people who had issues with literacy did not realize the issue was as apparent until faced with problems pertaining to job loss, health care, assisting children with schoolwork or school-based needs, or other types of hardship (Literacy Mid-South, 2017).

Lower levels of literacy have cost the United States over $225 billion dollars or more each year in loss of productivity, crime, and taxes (Literacy Mid-South, 2017). It

was very difficult for the millions of Americans who were deemed unable to read well to accept this fact (Literacy Mid-South, 2017). Only two out of three of the 77 million affected correct any deficits in reading in a lifetime (Literacy Mid-South, 2017). It is vital literacy become a greater priority to develop more active and informed community members, lower crime throughout the nation, educate the youth in this country more successfully, enhance the workforce in order to create modernized jobs making the United States a competitive asset globally, to advocate against abuse and for human rights, and to maintain health and wellness and lower healthcare costs (Literacy Mid-South, 2017).

Emphasis on Parental Involvement

Parental involvement also has been strongly linked to academic success and overall success for children (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016). Often times, researchers have not delved into the extended effects of parent involvement (Benner et al., 2016). According to Benner et al. (2016), three fundamental factors need to be accounted for in order for successful involvement to take place. The first factor was home and school involvement (Benner et al., 2016). The second factor was educational expectations; children only rise to the expectations felt as necessary (Benner et al., 2016). If the expectations were low, children usually repeated cyclic effects often connected with impoverished factors (Benner et al., 2016). The third factor was academic advice (Benner et al., 2016). Children who were not exposed to a support system, where educational efforts were considered important, often did not make efforts to strive for achievement (Benner et al., 2016). School involvement was most beneficial for students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Benner et al., 2016). When parents are placed in situations

where negative experiences need to be transformed into teaching points in order to provide successful remedies for children involved, this can be difficult or nonexistent (Benner et al., 2016). Many of these parents expelled more knowledge through actions, which translated into poor choices for the entire family, often leading children involved down the same paths (Benner et al., 2016). When school administrators made the effort to incorporate greater parent involvement, the socialization between parents and children strengthened significantly (Benner et al., 2016). Realistically, higher achieving parents, who had attained secondary education and beyond, were more likely to demonstrate successful socialization skills and provided support for students (Benner et al., 2016). Again, the best solution appeared to be a strong school support system for all children (Benner et al., 2016). Interventions and support from educators, mentors, and other positive role models can make an impactful difference in changing a life forever (Benner et al., 2016).

Criterion-based assessments/Norm-referenced approach

In the 21st Century, test scores have become prevalent for teachers, as well as parents (Close, 2016). Educators have frequently used test scores to measure what has been learned and what steps needed to be taken to benefit instruction (Close, 2016). Other times, test scores can measure growth, for instance, growth in reading ability during particular intervals (Close, 2016). For test scores to be utilized on a consistent basis, they must be considered reliable and valid (Close, 2016). If the standards and norms are not well-defined, interpretations can become skewed and individualized based on a variety of needs (Close, 2016). More specifically, when looking at a criterion assessments interpretation, the percentage of tasks performed correctly can then determine

performance level (Close, 2016). From there, a determination of knowledge and skills versus the criterion-relation can be disseminated further and a decision on whether that individual is considered mastery or not can be made (Close, 2016).

If a norm-referenced approach was in place, a national comparison of student performance with student performance nationwide would be deemed pertinent (Close, 2016). The other students from the nation would be considered the norm group (Close, 2016). Norm groups can have a number of factors (i.e., special education, bilingual, age); commonly, students are compared to others across the nation (Close, 2016).

Neither is better than the other; criterion and norm approaches serve different purposes, while simultaneously determining how to press forward with instruction (Close, 2016). Sometimes, it is essential to utilize as much information regarding both. It is wise to keep in mind the norm approach will not tell one what a student has learned in terms of mastery; yet, criterion-based does not allow one to look across students when comparing mastery in a certain criterion (Close, 2016).

Reading Assessment

No test can measure every reading skill (Farrall, 2012). A comprehensive reading assessment will measure several different components, including decoding and receptive skills (Farrall, 2012). An assessment mainly focused on decoding skills will incorporate the alphabet, word identification, word attack, spelling, fluency, and passage comprehension (Farrall, 2012). An assessment mainly focused on receptive skills will incorporate listening, comprehension, and vocabulary (Farrall, 2012). A listening comprehension test will assess how well the child can understand language (Farrall, 2012). Often, when children struggle with a comprehension assessment, this may depict

signs of a phonological processing impairment (Farrall, 2012). Every comprehension assessment should include a phonological/phonemic awareness component, as well as a phonological memory and rapid naming component (Farrall, 2012).

When assessing reading ability, it is imperative to use an assessment focusing on a set of specific skills (Farrall, 2012). Various types of achievement tests are utilized due to multiple-subjects being present (Farrall, 2012). The Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) is a type of assessment used frequently because of its ability to provide a reliable and validated description of a child's comprehensive ability in reading (Monpas-Huber, 2015). More importantly, STAR can assist instructors in order to identify if a child is struggling with areas of reading and possibly if further testing needs to be completed to determine a learning disability (Farrall, 2012).

STAR Assessment

Benchmark assessments can be used as a formative and summative assessment to measure students' reading abilities and expected growth and progress for the future (Brown & Coughlin, 2007). Assessments used, such as the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR), can be administered multiple times throughout the course of a school year, and can be used to make a direct comparison against Common Core Standards expectations and state examination standards (Brown & Coughlin, 2007). According to Brown and Coughlin (2007), there is absolutely no criterion for one district to choose one particular assessment versus another assessment. Some district officials have chosen locally driven resources, whereas, others have chosen nationwide assessment resource tools (Brown & Coughlin, 2007). Heightened usage for nationwide assessments may be in place due to the fact more research may have been conducted on that particular

assessment tool, providing greater validity (Brown & Coughlin, 2007). It has been suggested STAR can effectively create a continuum very similar to state examinations, depicting student reading ability and readiness for state examination administration. Perhaps this increased the popularity of STAR and other assessments like STAR throughout the United States (Brown & Coughlin, 2007). STAR was also shown to consistently sustain validity for multiple grade levels, showing stronger connections in mathematics. Due to adaptability, STAR has become a common foundational piece regarding assessment in the largely populated mid-Atlantic region of the United States (Brown & Coughlin, 2007).

According to Monpas-Huber (2015), it is an impactful challenge to validate and confirm reliability with varying assessments. Monpas-Huber (2015) investigated correlations between STAR and Smarter Balance Assessments (SBA) in an effort to authenticate achievements made in reading and math, and to also reassure efforts made to utilize assessments tools such as STAR and SBA. Monpas-Huber (2015) discovered the strong correlation between STAR and SBA confirms evidence of validation and reliability in utilizing these assessments and depicting true achievement. Therefore, as the nation continues to assess, studies such as this can leave educators knowing classroom data collected can have a strong connection to standardized test scores (Monpas-Huber, 2015).

In spring 1999, STAR reliability was first estimated using three different methods when the test was initially normed (U.S. Department of Education: National Center on Response to Intervention, 2009). Based on a sampling of 30,000 students in 269 schools, more than 2,400 usable scores were obtained during this time period (U.S. Department of

Education: National Center on Response to Intervention, 2009). Compared to other assessments, STAR did exceedingly well from the beginning (U.S. Department of Education: National Center on Response to Intervention, 2009). Continuous data has been obtained since 1999, resulting in a larger body of validated evidentiary support for STAR (U.S. Department of Education: National Center on Response to Intervention, 2009).

Preschool Program Evolution and Public Opinion

Head Start, an early childhood education program intended for disadvantaged children, was intended for children who attend the program to obtain skills equivalent to their peers (Wright, 2010). As essential as this program may appear to many, it only began in 1965 (Wright, 2010). The program was initialized as a part of President Johnson's War on Poverty campaign (Currie, 2001). The Head Start Program now services several thousand children around the United States in predominantly part-day programs (Bloom & Weiland, 2015). Head Start services three to four-year-old students, especially those in foster care, in order to help normalize their circumstances and enhance foundational readiness for a constant school setting (Bloom & Weiland, 2015). Head Start has been found to be profoundly beneficial for African-American and Hispanic children, children from single-parent households, and again, children in the foster care system (Bloom & Weiland, 2015). Children from these circumstances mentioned prior are considered to be disadvantaged children; disadvantaged children exposed to quality early childhood education, such as Head Start, can make gains in language, literacy, and math. Head Start children have also been found to be age-appropriate regarding letter-word recognition (Bloom & Weiland, 2015). Children enrolled in programs such as Head

Start, or a similar comparison to Head Start, have also been found to have greater gains in emotional, social, and other developmental skills (Aikens et al., 2013). Children have been found to have lower aggression and hyperactivity rates when enrolled in programs such as Head Start (Aikens et al., 2013). As adults, children who have attended a preschool program like Head Start have a higher likelihood of graduating from high school, attending a college or university, and receiving a post-secondary degree, license, or certification (Bauer & Schanzenbach, 2016). Overall, Head Start, and exposure to programs that offer quality early childhood education, like Head Start, reported more positive outcomes from a parenting and educational perspective (Bauer & Schanzenbach, 2016).

According to Condron (2007), apparent stratifications attributed to a number of inequalities associated with education and opportunities for families from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, inequalities such as race, socioeconomic status, and family life attributed to an under-representation of children obtaining appropriate skills for a school environment (Condron, 2007). One can only estimate what the size of a child's vocabulary is upon entry of school (Dickinson, Griffith, Golinkoff, & Hirsch-Pasek, 2012). On average, a child's vocabulary at the entry of school is around 5,000 words (Dickinson et al., 2012). Therefore, if children have not been learning consistently before the age of one, by the time the children reach the age of five, this can impede a child's ability to learn and structure a framework of understanding in a socially-appropriate manner (Dickinson et al., 2012).

There are six principles children should have been exposed to before entering a school environment (Dickinson et al., 2012). Principle one, children should hear words

often because language input can create better academic output in the future (Dickinson et al., 2012). Principle two, children must hear words they have interest in to create accurate language mapping, mapping of vocabulary, and communicative ability (Dickinson et al., 2012). Principle three, children need a strong support system in order to develop in an appropriate manner (Dickinson et al., 2012). Principle five, vocabulary and grammar are learned in connection with one another to ensure proper lexicon, grammar, and phonological tools for ultimate understanding (Dickinson et al., 2012). Principle six, children need to have positivity; positivity created in a home creates an un-restrictive environment where the most beneficial learning can occur (Dickinson et al., 2012).

The United States has one of the largest poverty rates among all industrialized nations worldwide (Darling-Hammond, 2010). It also has provided fewer social supports for the welfare of children in school settings on a global spectrum as well (Allington, 2006). The United States has experienced more nationwide impoverished conditions than when President Johnson attempted the first fight against poverty in the 1970s (Karoly & Bigelow, 2005). American children do not have a safety net in terms of funding, health and housing subsidies, and cash benefits (Karoly & Bigelow, 2005). Due to these disparities, approximately 38 million families live in impoverished circumstances. Living with hunger has increased by 50% since 1985 (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Families must now choose between affording healthcare services versus food for their families (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Schools now find themselves responsible for family healthcare needs, providing adequate food for children and other family members, dealing with constant mobility due to frequent evictions and other varying incidents, and dealing with social, emotional, mental, and physical issues that arise from an overlay of problems consistently

plaguing families in need (Allington, 2006). Additionally, schools find large gaps when children enter school with a lack of readiness (Allington, 2006).

Poverty affects school readiness for children. However, school readiness can be altered and affected dramatically by a child attending preschool, parental behaviors, parental educational background, and other influences (Isaacs, 2012). The likelihood of a child being ready for school is nine percentage points higher for those who attended preschool, versus ten percentage points lower for those children who had mothers who may have caused detriment to their unborn fetus (Isaacs, 2012). Children who had lower interaction rates with their parents, and support from their parents, also scored ten percentage points lower in preparedness for school (Odden, 2009). These findings suggested a diverse set of issues, as well as interventions; thus, a constant finding depicts a need for preschool in association with school readiness (Odden, 2009).

Teacher Preparedness in Early Childhood Education

In recent years, attention has been heightened pertaining to the quality of early childhood education and teacher preparedness (Patterson, Dunston, & Daniels, 2017). Quality early childhood experiences can be beneficial for all children, but they can be especially implemental for children from impoverished and minority backgrounds (Patterson et al., 2017). Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) has played an effective role in instilling strategies for working with families from various background types (Patterson et al., 2017). In the past, HBCUs have broadened their knowledge base through missions of social engagement and justice; they are aligned effortlessly with service learning (Patterson et al., 2017). This unique pedagogy has provided an opportunity to strengthen teacher preparedness (Patterson et al., 2017). Even

though there is mixed-research regarding what determining factors directly relate to the largest gain in student achievement in conjunction with early childhood education programs, highly-qualified teachers appear to provide the most successful outcomes for children of low-income households and children from various races and ethnic backgrounds (Patterson et al., 2017).

Negative Effects of Early Childhood Education

Popularity of early childhood education has not excused the fact participation is far from universal (Barnett, 2008). Each state has implemented its own individual set of policies for early childhood education. Policies and options vary greatly across private child care, Head Start, preschool programs, as well as state pre-k (Barnett, 2008). Much of the time, since policymakers have more notions than funding, key questions can be imposed on the value of early childhood education (Barnett, 2008). Since the 1960s, when only approximately 10% of the population attended preschool, changes in early childhood education increased dramatically (Barnett, 2008). Due to these rapid, immense changes, children were also offered an assortment of program designs and operations (Barnett, 2008). For example, in the state of California, overall children were offered a great number of opportunities, but the quality of opportunities across the board was relatively low (Barnett, 2008). As mentioned prior, policymakers have so many more notions than funding, consistency in which to allocate funding can be quite difficult (Barnett, 2008). Again, this ultimately affects the quality in which a program is designed and operated (Barnett, 2008).

Dozens of studies have been conducted regarding early childhood education (Barnett, 2008). Family day care has been shown to depict little cognitive gains or gains

in socialization (Barnett, 2008). Preschool programs, where the quality of the program was low, showed lasting effects in lower socialization abilities, as well as cognitive abilities (Barnett, 2008). The most successful preschool programs must contain a regular assessment system, where progress is noted, or adjustments can be made as deemed necessary (Barnett, 2008). Again, with such wide variations, policymaker establishments have to denote which programs have proven to model effectiveness and quality (Barnett, 2008). Children from impoverished backgrounds are often a focus regarding early childhood education needs; however, it has been shown all children can benefit from high-quality early childhood education (Barnett, 2008). Therefore, children from other socioeconomic status groups must be consistently homogenized in conjunction with impoverished backgrounds in order for the educational playground to be fair and just (Barnett, 2008).

With that noted, children from impoverished backgrounds have been found to not be able to sustain lasting effects of early childhood education if not frequently attending the program (Barnett, 2008). Statistically, these children are found to have increased percentages regarding acts of violence and crime (Barnett, 2008). These children also have lower social and emotional capabilities in the long run (Barnett, 2008). Additionally, if teacher preparedness and quality are not intact, no program has been found to be highly successful (Barnett, 2008). Teachers need ongoing coaching and supervision in order for improvement to be made in children's learning and progress (Barnett, 2008).

The Heightened Expectations Surrounding Early Childhood Education

Today, many preschool and kindergarten teachers are at a heightened level of pressure due to new expectations for early childhood education (Gray, 2015). The increase of academic skills and increased number of assessments to determine progress have added stress for children, as well as these educators (Gray, 2015). Gray (2015) wrote early academic training can create immediate results from ages one through three years of age. However, often, gains ceased or even reversed later on in children's academic careers (Gray, 2015). Additionally, increased pressure in early childhood environments caused irreversible damage to social and emotional development (Gray, 2015).

For example, in the 1970s, the German government funded a large-scale preschool program for children (Gray, 2015). Children from a play-based preschool were compared to these children from the preschool program over a period of time (Gray, 2015). After a duration of time passed, children from the academic program that focused on direct-instruction performed worse than children who attended a predominately play-based program (Gray, 2015). Even though gains were initially significant, retention did not stay with the children from the academic direct-instruction program (Gray, 2015). In particular, these children were found to have deficits in math and reading, as well as socially and emotionally (Gray, 2015). The German government decided to change the arrangement of their government-funded program (Gray, 2015).

Similar studies were conducted in the United States (Gray, 2015). This study focused on African American children from impoverished families attending preschool programs with different focuses (Gray, 2015). Again, the same outcomes occurred as in

the German study (Gray, 2015). Children who attended this academic direct-instruction program performed poorly later on in their academic careers (Gray, 2015). It was not noted how their social or emotional development was affected as neither were included as part of the studies (Gray, 2015).

Another such study conducted in the United States found more than twice as many students were involved in acts of misconduct while enrolled in an academically direct-instruction program versus a more traditional play-based preschool program (Gray, 2015). This longitudinal study followed students until the students became young adults (Gray, 2015). By age 23, more students enrolled in the academically direct-instruction based program had committed a felony or had been involved in a criminal incident where a weapon was used (Gray, 2015). One possible explanation for these dramatic effects later on in life may have been the lasting negative effects from a lack of socialization development or lack of emotional development and support (Gray, 2015). In classrooms where play was encouraged, and children were able to work with one another to communicate goals and learn from mistakes, this may have led to enhanced coping abilities later as children matured and grew developmentally (Gray, 2015). Whereas, in academically direct-instruction situations, the children were constantly encouraged to focus on the task at hand and consistently reached goals (Gray, 2015). This lead to an environment where friction and malicious behavior took the forefront, causing negative consequences for these children as maturation and growth occurred (Gray, 2015).

Parents also played a meaningful role in children's lives, especially during the first few years of life (Gray, 2015). In the last study mentioned, home visits also played a role in monitoring the success of children's progress (Gray, 2015). For children enrolled

in play-based preschool, it was found regular home visits occurred (Gray, 2015). Parents were expected to sustain a more constant effort in assisting educators visiting the home, as well as ensuring the children involved were on the right path to success (Gray, 2015). Also, participants developed parenting styles could be validated while still including the parents' values and beliefs (Gray, 2015).

Not Ready for Kindergarten

Many children begin the first day of kindergarten not developmentally ready to read (Carlsson-Paige, Bywater McLaughlin, & Wolfsheimer Almon, 2015). Common Core State Standards require children entering kindergarten to be developmentally ready to read (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). These Common Core State Standards mandated expectations direct instruction, leading to inappropriate classroom practices (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). Common Core requirements also implied children would overcome situations of poverty to learn and grow on an equal foundation with other peers (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). In the 1980s, the first shift in kindergarten education began (Estes, 2015). As programs were mandated and implemented through the federal government, such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, kindergarten expectations have escalated to what now can be described as first grade curriculum (Estes, 2015). The snowball effect which was Common Core has now surpassed to become a storm of destruction when determining appropriate learning expectations for kindergarten students (Estes, 2015). As mentioned before, academically focused instruction, instead of play-based instruction, can be found detrimental because of the lack of exposure to necessary skills, as well as socialization and potential emotional skills (Estes, 2015). On top of this, children, in turn, have had educational experiences not in

tune with cultural or learning needs for young children without previous experiences (Estes, 2015). Children who loved play-based preschool found it difficult to cope with the environment of kindergarten, impeding learning and growth (Estes, 2015). Students are expected to learn 90 standards with Common Core, and students are expected to be able to read emergent readers at an independent level (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015).

A study conducted by a professor of psychology in Switzerland found there was no solid evidence to support teaching children how to read in kindergarten helped them significantly later on in their academic careers (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). The study also concluded children who were taught to read in first grade read at approximately the same reading levels as the children who were taught earlier (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). The professor suggested so much time was focused on reading instruction it allowed for very little time to be utilized for anything else (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). Estes (2015) explained the importance of respecting children's developmental timelines because when students were rushed or expected to perform more than developmentally capable, long-term gains were shown to not be apparent (Estes, 2015). In fact, this can cause further issues for students from impoverished backgrounds because the achievement gap becomes further and further from what is expected regarding student performance (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). According to Darling-Hammond (2010), impactful issues, such as abuse and attempts to keep families intact, were ignored and unrealistic expectations of educational policies caused the achievement gap to become greater.

Conclusion

In the United States, no more than 30 million adults have exited schools without the basis of foundational literacy skills needed to be successful in their individual lives

(National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). In order to adequately prepare students for academic requirements, challenges, and opportunities, educators needed to provide acquiring basic foundations of skills (Palmer, n.d.). These skills have remained the same, even throughout varying stages of human development (Weih, 2013); the stages included repetitious reading, vocabulary establishment and expansion, and self-awareness of individual needs (Weih, 2013). Due to changing expectations and increased mandated demands placed on school districts, teachers, students, and, overall, academically, it is imperative to address the need to practical implementation of early childhood education to be put into place. The third section will illustrate the research design.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

In this study, the researcher examined the effects of reading achievement among students who received early childhood education through a preschool program versus those that who did not attend early childhood. In this section, a presentation of the research design and approach, the context of the study, selection and ethical protection of

the individuals who participated in the study, and data collections and analysis will be discussed.

Problem and Purpose Overview

Continuous research has proven the fact early childhood education has made a profound impact on young children (Hirozaku et al., 2016). An analysis of multiple preschool programs determined, on average, children gained one-third of additional learning across language, reading, and mathematical skills (Darza, 2011). Children also were found less violent and more participatory citizens of the community when actively involved in the educational system (Darza, 2011). As of 2015, a Missouri school district passed a bond measure to establish a preschool program within the school district. Further examination of early childhood education was necessary to confirm the continuation of preschool programs (Darza, 2011).

Research Design and Approach

The research design for this study was a quantitative approach. Creswell (2014) explained quantitative data collection has a strict focus on select variables and outcomes. This type of data collection has been found to be more statistical and provided measurable observations provided from participants (Creswell, 2014). One method on

which quantitative data can be collected is the format of a survey (Creswell, 2014). A survey of parents of students at the three elementary schools in the state of Missouri allowed greater insight whether students had attended preschool or not. All parents were from one of the three elementary school located in one district. The voluntary survey also collected demographic information from the participants in the study (Creswell, 2014). In survey research, the investigator selects a sample of respondents and administers a questionnaire or conducts interviews to collect information on variables of interest (Creswell, 2014). McMillan and Schumaker wrote the data from surveys that was gathered and used to describe characteristics of a certain population and delineate reasons for 58 particular practices (McMillan & Schumaker, 1997).

Research Question and Hypothesis

The following guided this study:

1. Do students who were provided early childhood education read more proficiently in third grade of elementary school than students who did not receive early childhood education?

H1: The alternative hypothesis stated—The association between early childhood education and reading achievement. Students will have stronger reading abilities. a) enrollment in preschool b) non-enrollment in preschool c) assessment scores

H0: The null hypothesis stated—There is no association between early childhood education and reading achievement. Students will have equal abilities in reading. a) enrollment in preschool b) non-enrollment in preschool c) assessment scores.

In order to support the research question in this study, the researcher examined the sample of data provided. Specific attention was given to involvement in early childhood education and STAR scores from 2016-2017 school year. Other variables were taken into account by the researcher. Parents of students enrolled in third grade during the school year were asked to incorporate ratings and reasons in order to discern their perceptions of early childhood education and if it enhanced reading achievement.

Setting, Population, and Sample

Approximately 340 third grade students attended the three elementary schools during the 2016-17 school year involved in the study. Voluntary participants included 120 parents of students. The selection criterion consisted of third grade parents of students attending that particular school during the 2016-2017 academic year.

Elementary Schools A, B, and C each have one Title I reading teacher. A Title I reading teacher assists students in compensatory ways in order to help children identified as needing remediation become more successful and ideally read on grade level (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). An influx of Title I needs came about with the mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Beckett & Taylor, 2016). All three schools were settled in a rural environment, similar to other school districts within the Central Missouri area (Mo DESE, 2016). The schools within the district were connected to a state university and several community colleges within the district. Some of the children were tied with the university in some fashion, as parents were students, faculty, or staff,. These schools were selected based on proximity to research and researcher's access to data. Since administrators in the school district planned on beginning early childhood education in the near future, each elementary

school administrator was involved in providing perspectives on how to plan and to implement the program. Each school had a unique breakdown of student demographics.

The Free/Reduced Lunch Program was a federally assisted meal program that offered low-cost or free lunches to children each day (U.S Department of Agriculture, 2017). The program was originally established by President Harry S. Truman in 1946 under the National School Lunch Act (U.S Department of Agriculture, 2017). In the participating elementary schools, more than half (See Table 2) of the student population enrolled was considered qualified and enrolled in the Free/Reduced Lunch program.

The participants from each elementary school responsible for obtaining research for the study provided the researcher with data pertaining to preschool enrollment. The characteristics of the sample included: a) age b) race/ethnicity c) education level d) single-parent v. married e) attendance in preschool program f) and rating of program and rating of reading pre

paredness.

Instrumentation and Materials

The instrumentations used were the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR), a reading comprehension assessment, and a survey created by the researcher. The STAR assessment was administered at individual computers, where students were asked a series of multiple choice questions and the student selected answers for each question (Renaissance Learning, 2017). Students have one minute to answer each question, in order to determine the student's reading foundation retention ability (Renaissance Learning, 2017). After students completed the STAR assessments, teachers and administrators accessed students' STAR scores and determined

interventions and supports based on the assessment results. The STAR assessment was administered every quarter throughout the school year. The researcher focused on the culminations of all STAR assessments administered for the school year to observe gains in student growth or loss or sustainment of growth. For the primary purpose of this study, the researcher focused on gains in reading achievement.

The survey form was provided to the three schools involved in the study (See Appendix A). An online version of the survey was available on Google Forms. The survey provided participants with a multiple-choice option, along with a rating system, and also provided an opportunity for reasoning (or comments from participants, if the participants saw fit).

STAR Assessment. The Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) has been found to create quite viable data pertaining to reading achievement (Algozzine, Wang, & Boukhtiarov, 2011). The test allowed for adequate knowledge recognition and in a timely fashion (Algozzine et al., 2011). An analysis of STAR, by psychometricians, concluded that after administration of the test over approximately a week's time depicted consistency in scores (Renaissance Learning, 2010). According to the National Center on Response to Intervention (NCRTI) (2017), a reliability of .60 and higher was a positive result; so .80 was very good. According to the Renaissance Learning (2010), the STAR has a test-reliability of .90, which exceeded test reliability standards.

Along with being reliable, a test must also be considered valid NCRTI (2017). The Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) has been in constant efforts with schools in order to compare STAR results with state assessment scores

NCRTI (2017). Assessments included were the following: a) California Achievement Test, b) DIBELS, c) FCAT, d) Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and e) Stanford Achievement Test. Analysis has proven a strong correlation with these tests and the exceedingly high score received by the NCRTI (Renaissance Learning, 2010).

Data Collection

After receiving approval from Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher collected data from the three elementary school librarians pertaining to STAR scores students' archived. The collected scores were of numeric value. The researcher printed a hard copy for the researcher's records and also password protected numeric scores electronically provided by librarians to ensure data storage for many years to come if needed. The researcher entered the STAR scores on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, checking for accuracy as the researcher accumulated the data from the three elementary school librarians. The researcher analyzed the STAR scores to determine gains versus losses in reading growth during third grade. The researcher also differentiated between preschool attendants versus non-preschool attendants.

Additionally, the researcher obtained demographic information pertaining to voluntary responses on the early childhood education parent survey (see Appendix A) as provided by participants. Information collected from the survey helped to gain knowledge and insight behind experiences of the parent participants in study, surveys can often be the best way to obtain feedback. Thayer-Hart, Dykema, Elver, Schaeffer, & Stevenson (2010) explained they were a great method to collect input from your audience of population (Thayer-Hart et al., 2010). Thayer-Hart et al. (2010) explained the target audience would assist in exploring whether early childhood education matters when

students reached third grade and educators would assess reading abilities using the STAR assessment results. Respondents from the surveys offered a plethora of perspectives based on individual experiences, family experiences, and educational experiences as well (Thayer-Hart et al., 2010).

Once the surveys were sent home with all third grade students in the three participating elementary schools, they were given a two-week time period to complete the survey. Simultaneously, the researcher obtained STAR data from the librarians from each of the three elementary schools. In order to assist administrators from each school involved, the researcher maintained email contact throughout the two week period for best results. Follow-up information was provided in order to inform all participants of study outcomes.

Data Analysis

The third grade students' STAR assessment scores represented the proficiency of students reading ability, in comparison to the grade level in their schools. The researcher analyzed the students' beginning year STAR score with the end-of-year STAR scores. Next, the researcher notated the students' prior preschool attendance. Additionally, other factors were considered, such as the data collected in parent surveys (See Appendix A) information (including preschool experience, reading preparedness, and demographic household information). By utilizing a survey, it was the most appropriate way to plan and program the reception of data (Thayer-Hart et al., 2010). A dissemination of the scores and parent survey information were categorized to obtain more information about descriptive details pertaining to each question. The researcher sought to determine if there was an association between previous experiences connecting to early childhood

education and reading abilities of the opportunities of third grade students. According to Thayer-Hart et al. (2010), when offered the opportunities to categorize thoughts and feelings, the data was more desirable for the study. The researcher then utilized data findings to calculate reading abilities from strongest to weakest. The researcher was also able to use the STAR data to determine which students in the participating schools performed at the strongest level in reading.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Each school administrator who agreed to participate aided by conducting the research during this study followed strict protocol procedures. The school administrator responsible for allotment of permission was contacted and permission was granted for the data collection of this study. At no time was there a description of the school/school district used, names of students included in the findings; nor, were teachers or administrators identified at any time. By maintaining confidentiality, protection was provided for teachers, students' parents, administrators involved in the study. The researcher requested permission of each of participating schools within the school district (See Appendix B). At no time were participants pressured to participate in the study. Along with the survey, each participant was given the right to cease participation at any time during the study (See Appendix D). Also, correspondence that requested permission for students' performance on the reading portion of STAR was obtained from the three district librarians (See Appendix C).

Role of Researcher

In educational research, it is important to acknowledge the role of the researcher throughout the study (Thayer-Hart et al., 2010). The researcher has been an educator for

nine years at elementary grade levels. The researcher was interested in the correlation between early childhood education, through preschool programs, and reading achievement later on. Prior to beginning the study, the researcher was especially interested in understanding how circumstantial situations, such as poverty, background experiences, knowledge, and educational experiences, played a role in generational effects of students' low reading abilities and at-risk needs. The researcher attended numerous conferences and training sessions pertaining to early childhood education, in addition to, reading achievement and assessments. The researcher also made observations within the classroom to assist with research analysis. The researcher conducted this study as a fledgling researcher.

Conclusion

This section concluded the premise behind the study, research questions and hypothesis, and population and sample. The collection and analyzation of data was related to the researcher. In chapter four, the researcher will share the STAR data collected from the parents who agreed to participate in the study. The students' demographic data in relation to their STAR outcomes also will be explored in chapter four.

Chapter Four: Findings

The continuous goal is to educate a greater number of preschool aged children and continuously improve reading preparedness as children travel through the educational system (Bakken, Brown, & Downing, 2017). This study focused on students enrolled in third grade during the 2016-2017 academic year and whether or not the students' previous preschool educational experiences impacted their reading abilities in later elementary school years. In this study, the researcher examined students who did not receive preschool educations and how this, in turn, affected their future reading abilities. In this section, the findings are presented.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The following guided this study:

1. Do students who were provided early childhood education read more proficiently in third grade of elementary school than students who did not receive early childhood education?

H1: The alternative hypothesis stated—The association between early childhood education and reading achievement. Students will have stronger reading abilities.
a) enrollment in preschool b) non-enrollment in preschool c) assessment scores

H0: The null hypothesis stated—There is no association between early childhood education and reading achievement. Students will have equal abilities in reading.
a) enrollment in preschool b) non-enrollment in preschool c) assessment scores.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Upon approval (# 1060876) from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (See Appendix C and D), the researcher requested the archived Standardized Tests for the

Assessment of Reading (STAR) scores from the 2016-2017 academic year from the participating elementary schools' librarians. The researcher also distributed the parent surveys pertaining to early childhood education to the three administrators of the elementary schools to distribute to the classroom teachers who then sent surveys home with students (see Appendix A). Upon distribution, one survey was sent home with each third grade student, which resulted in 120 surveys distributed to each of the two of the elementary schools involved in the study and 100 surveys distributed to the third elementary school. All of these surveys were hard copies that included notes to the researcher to complete the survey on-line. These numbers correlated to the total number of enrolled third graders each school had in attendance at the time of the survey distribution. Paper copies of the survey were hand delivered to the three elementary schools, and parents were also provided the link to the on-line survey, if they preferred to respond in the web-based method. Parents were asked to respond to the survey within two weeks.

After the two-week period, the researcher collected the surveys from the three schools that students returned on behalf of their parents. The three elementary schools and their corresponding surveys were labeled A, B, and C in conjunction with their alphabetical standings within the school district. Each parent who chose to participate also had signed consent forms, agreeing to fully participate in the study, which allowed the researcher to display appropriate results (see Table 11). Scores obtained from STAR displayed three scores. Each student's beginning and end-of-year scores were shown, as well as their progress made or lost during the academic year of the study. At no time were students' names or their attending school's information included in order to

maintain participants' identities and to sustain complete confidentiality during the data collection process. The third graders' STAR scores were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, along with demographic data provided on surveys by parents. Participants in the study were given the instrument to add comments behind ratings and comment when necessary.

Data Analysis

Survey Respondent Information. Once the two-week period was over, the researcher collected the surveys from the three schools, which resulted in 28.3% returned surveys out of 120 from Elementary School A, 51.7% returned surveys out of 120 from Elementary School B, and 34% returned surveys out of 100 from Elementary School C. The total participation rate was 38.2% of the parents who had third grade students in the school district (*n*=340) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Survey Respondents from Elementary Schools in School District

Name of School	Third Grade Parent Surveys	Participants
Elementary School A	120	34
Elementary School B	120	62
Elementary School C	100	34

Note. Data provided in the study.

Free/Reduced Lunch Population. Elementary School A had 567 students enrolled during the 2016-2017 school year. Of those students, 55.8% of kindergarten through fourth grade students qualified for the Free/Reduced Lunch Program. Elementary School B had 551 students enrolled during the 2016-2017 school year, and of those students, 63.9% qualified for the Free/Reduced Lunch Program. Elementary School C had 512 students enrolled during the 2016-2017 school year, with 51.6% of students qualifying for the Free/Reduced Lunch Program (see Table 2).

Table 2

Free/Reduced Lunch Population in Participating Schools

Name of School	Total Enrollment for 2016	Free/Reduced Lunch
Elementary School A	567	55.8%
Elementary School B	551	63.9%
Elementary School C	512	51.6%

Note. Data provided by Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Mo DESE) (2017).

School A demographics. The entire population of 34 respondents at Elementary School A identified as White. Of the respondents, 8.8% (*n*=11) were between 26 to 30 years old. Of the respondents, 32.4% (*n*=11) were within 31 to 35. Predominately, the largest age range for parents was between the ages of 36 to 40 years old. Respondents reported that 35.3% (*n*=12) were within this particular range. Of the respondents, 17.6% (*n*=6) were 40 and over and 5.9% (*n*=2) considered themselves as 'other.' Respondents reported that 5.9% (*n*=2) had obtained a Doctorate Degree, 32.4% (*n*=11) had obtained a Bachelor's Degree, 20.6% (*n*=7) a Master's Degree, and 23.5% (*n*=8) had some college

experience. Some college also accounted for an Associate's Degree. Remaining respondents reported that 8.8% (*n*=3) had obtained a high school diploma, 2.9% (*n*=1) did not graduate high school, and if the respondent was not sure about their standings, they marked 'other' (See Table 3).

Table 3

Elementary School A Demographic information of Parents

Race/Ethnicity	Age	Education Background Information
100% White	8.8% (26-30)	2.9% Did not graduate
	32.4% (31-35)	8.8% High School
	35.3% (36-40)	23.5% Some College
	17.6% (40+)	32.4% Bachelor's Degree
	5.9% Other	20.6% Master's Degree
		5.9% Doctorate Degree
		5.9% Other

Note. Data provided in the study.
Note. 'Other' can be constituted as Specialist's Degree or completion of a specialized program.

School B demographics. At Elementary School B, 85.4% (*n*=53) respondents considered themselves White, 1.6% (*n*=1) considered themselves Black, 4.8% (*n*=3) considered themselves Asian, 1.6% (*n*=1) considered themselves as Indian/Native American, and 6.5% (*n*=4) considered as 'other'. Of the respondents, 19.4% (*n*=12) were ages 26 to 30. Of the respondents, 25.8% (*n*=16) were 31 to 35. Predominately, the largest age range for parents was between 36 to 40 years old; 27.4% (*n*=17) respondents

placed themselves in this category. Respondents in the 40 and over age range totaled 24.2% (*n*=15) and 3.2% (*n*=2) considered themselves 'other.' This school had the largest number of Doctorates obtained; 16.1% (*n*=10) parents had obtained a Doctoral Degree. Also, 21% (*n*=13) reported they had a Master's Degree. The highest number of parents had their Bachelor's Degree. Out of 62 participants, 27.4% (*n*=17), reported they had obtained a Bachelor's Degree. Respondents from Elementary School B reported that 24.2% (*n*=15) had some college experience. Some college was also accounted for an Associate's Degree. Of the respondents, 6.5% (*n*=4) reported they had a high school diploma, 3.2% (*n*=2) did not graduate from high school, and 1.6% *(n*=1) individuals reported 'other' (see Table 4).

Table 4

Elementary School B Demographic Information of Parents

Race/Ethnicity	Age	Education Background Information
85.4% White	19.4% (26-30)	3.2% Did not graduate
1.6% Black	25.8% (31-35)	6.5% High School
4.8% Asian	27.4% (36-40)	24.2% Some College
1.6% Indian/Native	24.2% (40+)	27.4% Bachelor's Degree
6.5% Other	3.2% Other	21.0% Master's Degree
		16.1% Doctorate Degree
		1.6% Other

Note. Data provided in the study.
Note. 'Other' can be constituted as Specialist's Degree or completion of a specialized program.

School C demographics. At Elementary School C, 88.2% (*n*=30) respondents considered themselves White, 2.9% (*n*=1) considered themselves Asian, 5.9% (*n*=2) Hispanic, and 2.9% (*n*=1) 'other.' This school accounted for the oldest average age demographics for parents in the study. Of the respondents, 23.3% (*n*=11) reported 40 and over. Only 2.9% (*n*=1) of the parents

were categorized in the 26 to 30 range. Ages 31 to 35, as well as 36 to 40, were tied as the second largest age range for parent participants. Both contained 23.5 % (*n*=8) of respondents in that particular category. Elementary School C has the largest attainment of college without a four-year degree. Out of 34 respondents, 41.2 % (*n*=14) reported they had obtained some college. Again, some college was also accounted for in conjunction with an Associate's Degree. This school noted the greatest number of college attendees. Respondents reported 5.9% (*n*=2) had a Doctoral Degree 20.6% (*n*=7) obtained a Master's Degree or Bachelor's Degree, and 2.9% (*n*=1) considered themselves as 'other' (see Table 5).

Table 5

Elementary School C Demographic Information of Parents

Race/Ethnicity	Age	Education Background Information
88.2% White	2.9% (26-30)	0% Did not graduate
2.9% Asian	23.5% (31-35)	8.8% High School
5.9% Hispanic	23.5% (36-40)	41.2% Some College
2.9% Other	32.4% (40+)	20.6% Bachelor's Degree
	0% Other	20.6% Master's Degree
		5.9% Doctorate Degree
		2.9% Other

Note. Data provided in the study
Note. 'Other' can be constituted as Specialist's Degree or completion of a specialized program.

Household information. Of the respondents from Elementary School A, 70.6% (*n*=24) of the parents reported a married household. From Elementary School B, 75.8% (*n*=47) reported a married household. From Elementary School C, 67.6% (*n*=23) reported a married household. Of the respondents from Elementary School A, 35.3% (*n*=12) reported a single-parent household. From Elementary School B, 22.6% (*n*=14) reported a single-parent household. From Elementary School C, 32.4% (*n*=11) reported a single-parent household (See Table 6).

Table 6

Household Information

School	Married	Single
School A	70.6%	35.3%
School B	75.8%	22.6%
School C	67.6%	32.4%

Note. Data provided in the study.

Early childhood information. Of the respondents from Elementary School A, 88.2% (*n*= 30) were involved in early childhood programs of some type. From Elementary School B, 79% (*n*= 49) were involved, and from Elementary School C, 85.3% (*n*= 29) of the students were involved. Of the respondents from Elementary School A, 11.8% (*n*=4) were not involved in an early childhood program. From Elementary School B, 21% (*n*=7) were not involved, and from Elementary School C, 11.8% (*n*=4) were not involved (See Table 7)

Table 7

Involvement in Early Childhood Education Programs

School	Pre-K	No Pre-K Experience
School A	88.2%	11.8%
School B	79%	21%
School C	85.3%	11.8%

Note. Data provided in the study.
Note. 1 parent of the respondent population at Elementary School C was uncertain about early childhood involvement due to personal factors.

Early childhood satisfaction. Out of the participants from Elementary School A, 47.1% (*n*=16) respondents reported they were highly satisfied with their children's early childhood education programs. From Elementary School B, 48.4% (*n*=18), and from Elementary School C, 52.9% (*n*=18) respondents reported that satisfaction in an early childhood education program was highly satisfactory. Elementary School B had 4.8% (*n*=3) of respondents who were not satisfied with their children's early childhood education programs. The other schools did not have any respondents reporting dissatisfied (See Table 8).

Table 8

Early Childhood Program Satisfaction

School	1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
School A	0%	8.8%	8.8%	35.3%	47.1%
School B	4.8%	0%	12.9%	32.2%	48.4%
School C	0%	0%	17.6%	23.5%	52.9%

Note. Data provided in the study.
Note. Use of Likert Scale ratings.
Note. Rating of 1 is the lowest satisfaction rate; rating of 5 is the highest satisfaction rate.
Note. Respondents from School B reported 1.6% of the population as other due to uncertainty about the question; Respondents from School C reported 5.9% of the population as other due to past personal factors or uncertainty of the question.

Preparation for reading. Out of the participants from Elementary School A, 41.2%% (*n*=14) respondents reported they were highly satisfied with their children's early childhood education program pertaining to reading preparedness. From Elementary School B, 33.9% (*n*=21), and from Elementary School C, 38.2% (*n*=13) respondents reported that perceptions of early childhood education programs reading preparedness were highly satisfactory. Elementary School A had 2.9% (*n*=1) of respondents that felt their child was not prepared to read. Elementary School B had 4.8% (*n*=3) and Elementary School C did not have any respondents who were completely unsatisfied (See Table 9).

Table 9

Early Childhood Program Preparation for Reading

School	1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
School A	2.9%	8.8%	23.5%	20.6%	41.2%
School B	4.8%	1.6%	25.8%	29.0%	33.9%
School C	0%	8.8%	23.5%	20.6%	38.2%

Note. Data provided in the study.
Note. Use of Likert Scale ratings.
Note. Rating of 1 is the lowest satisfaction rate; rating of 5 is the highest satisfaction rate.
Note. respondents from School B reported 4.8% of the population as other due to parental techniques noted or uncertainty of the question; Respondents from School C reported 8.8% of the population as other due to past personal factors, diagnoses factors, and uncertainty of the question.

School A STAR data. Of the 34 respondents from School A, 11.8% (*n*=4) third graders had not attended a preschool program. The STAR loss results for the students from School A, who had not attended a preschool program, were 50% (*n*=2). Of the 34 respondents from School A, 88.2% (*n*=30) of third grade students had attended a preschool program. The STAR loss results for the students from School A who had attended a preschool program were 23% (*n*=7).

School B STAR data. Of the 62 respondents from School B, 19.4% (*n*=12) of third graders had not attended a preschool program. The STAR loss results for the students from School B, who had not attended preschool programs, were 8% (*n*=1). Of the 62 respondents from School B, 80.6% (*n*=50) of third grade students had attended a preschool program. The STAR loss results for the students from School B who had attended a preschool program were 12% (*n*=6).

School C STAR data. Of the 34 respondents from School C, 11.8% (*n*=4) of third graders had not attended a preschool program. The STAR loss results for the students from School C, who had not attended preschool program, were 0% (*n*=0). Of the 34 respondents from School C, 88.2% (*n*=30) of third grade students had attended a preschool program. The STAR loss results for the students from School C who had attended a preschool program were 40% (*n*=12) (See Tables 10 and 11).

Table 10

Preschool Non-Attendee STAR Information

Elementary School	Total Preschool Non-Attendees	STAR Loss
School A	4	50%
School B	12	8%
School C	4	0%

Note. One child's STAR data is not shown from School B due to relocation.

Table 11

Preschool Attendee STAR Information

Elementary School	Total Preschool Attendees	STAR Loss
School A	30	23%
School B	50	12%
School C	30	40%

Note. One child's STAR data is not shown from School B due to relocation.

Summary

After analysis of the data, the researcher found commonalities among the three schools involved in the study. Although each school is unique in demographic information and climate, patterns in data and responses were strikingly similar in many ways. The researcher's primary focus was to analyze if early childhood education made a significant difference in a child's reading ability. Overall, parent involvement and communication between the educational and the home environment played a role. Reading on a frequent and consistent basis allowed students to show the greatest progress later on in the child's academic career. In the next chapter, the researcher incorporated the findings from this study and looked into study's from the past regarding the same subject matter. More information was also provided regarding recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

The findings of this study are discussed in this section with conclusions and recommendations for educators. The researcher collected and analyzed 120 surveys from parents, along with the collection of STAR assessment data from the third grade students' 2016-2017 school year. The three elementary schools involved in the study were located in a rural environment connected to a school district in central Missouri. Parent survey responses and STAR reading comprehension data provided enlightenment in connection to early childhood education and preparedness for reading abilities and success in an academic setting, as well as parents' perceptions of the impact of early childhood.

Purpose of the Study

Early childhood education has been a focal point in education for a number of years (Bakken et al., 2017). It has been a mainstream belief that early childhood education stimulated cognitive abilities to enhance academic benefits later on in students' lives (Bakken et al., 2017). The researcher of this study sought to study the effects of early childhood education on reading preparedness in later elementary grades—more specifically, third grade. The researcher examined demographic information, such as the ages of parent(s), educational backgrounds of parent(s), students' household information, and the children's early childhood experiences. The researcher also examined the parents' perceptions of their children's early childhood experiences, including if they had attended preschool, as well as how the parent rated the preparation of their children for reading. Another purpose for the study was to correlate survey data with how these children performed on district-wide reading assessments administered when the children

were third grade students. Analysis of responses in connection to analysis of STAR assessment scores gave the researcher perspective to findings that surfaced during the study.

Findings of the Study

In Chapter Four, the researcher shared the data collected in the study. The guiding research question was:

1. Do students who were provided early childhood education read more proficiently in third grade of elementary school than students who did not receive early childhood education?

The data indicated that children who experienced early childhood education were provided with an atmosphere where parents felt overall satisfaction regarding their children being given an opportunity for early onset education. Additionally, many of the parents from the three schools who participated in the study felt the children involved in early childhood education programs were adequately prepared for reading in the future. See Tables 8 and 9 in chapter four for further data information related to this topic. One parent indicated in the survey that his/her child was intrinsically motivated to learn to read and enjoyed various opportunities to explore books, despite early childhood experiences. Another parent stated that he/she felt that learning delays that may have been overshadowed or overseen in early childhood education were the cause for hindrances later in a child's academic career. These were responses that did not account for the collective group of parents partaking in the study but shared views on the importance of early childhood education. The researcher noted that varying opinions

regarding reading preparedness made the results in Table 9 in chapter four skewed from overall results.

Limitations and Assumptions

Many precautionary steps were taken during this study to minimize limitations and assumptions. The researcher noted a few circumstances that may have impacted the study's results. Noted were the following:

1. This study was limited to parents of third grade students attending one of the three schools
2. in the participating school district during the 2016-2017 school year; therefore, only those who chose to participate to respond were accounted for in the results.
3. The study was limited to the choice of participants due to the school district being in a rural environment in Missouri. Additionally, only three elementary schools are located within the district; therefore, only three schools were involved.
4. The assumptions and biases of the researcher needed to have been taken into account due to the researcher being a teacher at one of the three elementary schools involved in the study.
5. The study was limited to the assumption that all respondents involved were factual and accurate in their depictions of the information provided to the researcher regarding their children's early childhood education.
6. The study was limited to the perceptions of early childhood education and did not provide an opportunity for respondents to express thoughts or opinions

pertaining to other educational factors or educational topics that may have impacted the students' reading comprehension.

Conclusions/Discussions

The results from the survey depicted a picture of satisfaction of parents in connection with early childhood education. Parents who responded expressed they were pleased with reading preparedness in their children's early childhood programs; however, results depicted students performed below grade level, despite their attendance in early childhood programs or other preschool opportunities. Data from students attending Elementary School A demonstrated that 50% (*n*=4) of the students who did not attend a preschool program did not perform on their third grade level of reading when assessed on the STAR assessment. Data from students attending Elementary School B depicted 8% (*n*=1) of the students who did not attend preschool programs did not perform on grade level when assessed on the STAR assessment. Data from students attending Elementary School C depicted zero losses in their third grade level reading abilities when assessed on STAR assessment.

Parent respondents from Elementary A depicted that 23% (*n*=7) of the students who attended early childhood education or preschool programs were found not to be able to perform on their third grade level when assessed on the STAR assessment. Students from Elementary School B depicted a smaller percentage; 12% (*n*=6) of students who attended early childhood education or preschool programs were not able to read on a third grade reading level when tested on the STAR assessment. Elementary School C had the greatest loss. At Elementary School C, 40% (*n*=12) of students who attended early childhood education or preschool programs were not able to perform on grade level when

reading ability was assessed. Conclusions can be drawn that early childhood education did make a significant impact, yet, there was a further need for discussion or research to possibly explore other factors that may have been discounted. These factors have been highlighted and accounted in relation to students' success in reading in later elementary years. For instance, intrinsic motivation, parental involvement, teacher quality, curriculum, and/or school curricular guidelines may have played stronger roles than previously believed.

Implications for Change in Early Childhood Education

Researchers, educators, and forerunners, nationwide and within rural areas, may find these results interesting and enlightening (Hudson & Williams, 2015). An abundance of people in the world of education are tied to early childhood education in some fashion (Hudson & Williams, 2015). Many parents tied to the school district provided their perceptions of their overall satisfaction with their children's early childhood educational experiences within the rural school area. An initial implication needs to be greater parental involvement, making parents more empowered to speak out about what early childhood programs are achieving successfully, in order to enhance greater academic ability and success in the future.

Another implication may have also been the quality of the particular programs in which parents choose to enroll their sons and/or daughters. An additional implication was preschool programs should be, or if at all, held to the same accountability standards in place for kindergarten through grade 12 (Hudson & Williams, 2015). Often, early childhood education funding gets cut due to extraneous circumstances or a focus in a different direction other than early childhood education (Bakken, Brown, & Downing,

2017). When children are offered equal guidelines pertaining to learning, the greatest effectiveness can occur inside the classroom for long-term purposes (Bakken, Brown, & Downing, 2017).

An additional implication may have been that teacher preparation and overall teacher quality in the classroom, or the lack thereof, impeded students' overall success. High-quality teacher preparation programs have offered knowledge, insight, and opportunities to reach a wider range of students. Teacher quality profoundly affects instruction (Hudson & Williams, 2015). This study was conducted in a rural area; however, opportunities for teacher preparation coursework at the local colleges and universities can broaden educators' perspectives and create guidelines for better instruction, greater differentiation for learning needs, and guide teachers in conjunction with the ever-changing world of early childhood education (Hudson & Williams, 2015). More professional development for teachers in early childhood classrooms may have provided more effective instructional practices and continued understanding for what needed to occur within the classrooms for optimal student learning before children entered kindergarten (Estes, 2015).

A number of early childhood program opportunities have existed within rural areas for several years (Li & Ranieri, 2010). Until very recently, there had not been districtwide early childhood educational opportunities offered for residents within the school district. Another implication may have been a need to address background information of a program so individuals felt a greater sense of involvement in their children's early educational experiences (Hudson & Williams, 2015). Districts with significant early childhood population are found to have greater successes after listening

to community members and following through with a coherent plan of action for all (Hudson & Williams, 2015).

Recommendations for Future Research

To help young children is the reason why many educators join the field of education (Hudson & Williams, 2008). Educators, administrators, and other professionals, who also often fulfill the role as caretakers, provide a strong support system when necessary (Hudson & Williams, 2008). Early childhood evolvement has made it possible for early childhood education to make strides toward the future. It is not impetuous to remark how inferior early childhood education can be portrayed compared to counterparts in other areas of education (Barnett, 2008). Today, with increasing expectations in all areas of education, it would be fair to further examine early childhood education in association with varying standardized test scores. Nationwide, Common Core State Standards and guidelines have dissipated to the point where statewide and localized areas wish to have control versus a nationwide universal system (Hudson & Williams, 2015). However, comparing the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) with the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) might provide greater insight as to what students need at the early educational level to prepare for academic rigor in the future (Kern, 2014).

Another opportunity for future research may be to look into how more parental involvement opportunities increase greater involvement in early childhood programs. Even in the 21st century, it has become more difficult to communicate with parents and find children, of whom are the most at need, to participate in early childhood programs (Skarda, 2014). Early childhood education can profoundly affect social, emotional, and

physical aspects of a child's life forever, in turn, leading to more chances for a positive learning outcome for the long-term future (Skarda, 2014). A qualitative study of parents' feelings regarding early childhood education and associated programs may provide perspective into how change for the future can be more aligned with 21st century parental needs and expectations.

Another future research possibility may be to look into the continuously changing world of technology in regards to early childhood education. As mobile technologies globally are becoming the societal norm, it is imperative for students to be versed in technological education from an early age (Skarda, 2014). If toddlers have a basic technological skill-base, this may enhance opportunities for learning beyond what was ever expected to occur (Skarda, 2014). It would be most interesting and enlightening to take a further look into how technology is affecting early childhood education in a longitudinal form.

Lastly, with ongoing focal interest on childhood obesity in the United States and how is it changing the educational outlook for many children, a study regarding early childhood education and the implementation of physical fitness would provide relevant information pertaining to preschool structure, activities offered for young children, and how to better train faculty and staff in order to create a better learning environment. It would be wise to look into how technology could be playing a possibility in our increasingly stationary society and how physical fitness may be pushed to the wayside to promote more structured activities that are affiliated with expectations of standardized testing for early childhood students.

Summary

The researcher was fascinated how the structure of early childhood education can make such a profound difference in the life of a child. However, it appears as if more needs to be done regarding cohesive curriculum at the early childhood level, as well as increasing expectations for teacher quality and accountability. Early childhood education is rapidly growing throughout the nation, as well as globally (Skarda, 2014). Today's child is also expected to perform at a higher level of rigor and be well-versed in a technological sense. The pressures may impede social, emotional, and physical well-being, making it even more imperative to push for greater research and support in this area. This study was limited in scope, but enriched with data to provide more insight into the academic basis associated with early childhood education. As mentioned, additional research studies can produce greater perceptions and knowledge. It is the hope of the researcher that the data and information were considered valuable to the school district involved in the study.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Early Childhood Education Parent Survey

Early Childhood Education – Parent Survey

Kimberly Williams

*Required

1. Email address*_____

2. Parent age:*

Mark only one oval.

- *18-25*
- *26-30*
- *31-35*
- *36-40*
- *40+*
- *Other:* _____

3. Parent race/ethnicity:*

Mark only one oval.

- *18-25*
- *26-30*
- *31-35*
- *36-40*
- *40+*
- *Other:* _____

4. Parent average education level:*

Mark only one oval.

- Did not graduate
- GED
- High school
- Some college
- Bachelor degree
- Master degree
- Doctorate
- *Other:* _____

5. Are you a single parent household?*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- *Other:* _____

6. Did your son/daughter currently in third grade attend preschool?*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- *Other:* _____

7. If yes, what preschool or childcare provider did your son/daughter attend?*

8. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest), how would you rate your son/daughter's early childhood education?

Mark only one oval.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

9. On a scale of 1-5, how did your child's early childhood education prepare him/her in reading?

Mark only one oval.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Appendix B: Rolla Public Schools IRB Approval

Aaron Zalis

To: Kimberly Hall

Cc: Craig Hounsom; Kelly Hinshaw

Monday, April 17, 2017 8:18 AM

- You forwarded this message on 04/17/2017 8:57 AM.

Hi Kim,

Please proceed with your research project.

All the best,

Aaron Zalis

Dr. Aaron Zalis
Superintendent
Rolla 31 School District
500A Forum Drive

Corey Ray

To: Kimberly Hall

Tuesday, April 25, 2017 8:

- Flag for follow up. Start by Tuesday, April 25, 2017. Due by Tuesday, April 25, 2017.
- You forwarded this message on 04/26/2017 7:47 AM.

Good morning, Kimberly;

I apologize. I thought I responded to your first email. You are welcome to survey my staff.

Corey

Dr. Corey Ray, Ed.D.
Principal
Col. John B. Wyman Elementary
Rolla Public Schools
(573)458-0190

Matt Fridley

To: Kimberly Hall

Cc: Lora Hounsom

Attachments: (2) Download all attachments

RE: Research Process for Diss...; Paper Copy of Survey.pdf (38 KB) [Open as Web Page]

Tuesday, April 25, 2017 8:24 AM

- Flag for follow up. Start by Tuesday, April 25, 2017. Due by Tuesday, April 25, 2017.
- You forwarded this message on 04/26/2017 7:46 AM.

Good Morning:

I apologize for the delayed response, but we will certainly work with you on this project. I am forwarding your email to Lora Hounsom to coordinate this project. Lora is our 3rd grade facilitator and she would be the person you would need to coordinate the distribution to our 3rd grade students. Please feel free to share the results of your work and good luck!

Matt Fridley

Marangelly Harris

To: Kimberly Hall

Cc: Elder, Jodi E. [jelder1@lindenwood.edu]

Friday, April 21, 2017 1:22 PM

- Flag for follow up. Start by Friday, April 21, 2017. Due by Friday, April 21, 2017.
- You forwarded this message on 04/21/2017 1:34 PM.

Permission granted ☺. Good luck!

Marangelly Harris, Principal
Harry S. Truman Elementary, RPS
(573) 458-0180
Believing in yourself is the first secret to success!

Appendix C: Rolla Public Schools IRB Approval

Frances Cox

To: Kimberly Hall

Thursday, April 27, 2017 8:29 A

-Kim

From: Frances Cox
Sent: Wednesday, April 26, 2017 8:29 AM
To: Kimberly Hall <KHall@rolla.k12.mo.us>
Subject: RE: Research Process for Dissertation - Lindenwood University (Kim Hall)

So sorry. It's been super busy! I will send that to you soon.Thanks

Frances Cox
Library Media Specialist
Wyman Elementary

Jennifer Heberlie

To: Kimberly Hall

Friday, April 28, 2017 10:44 AM

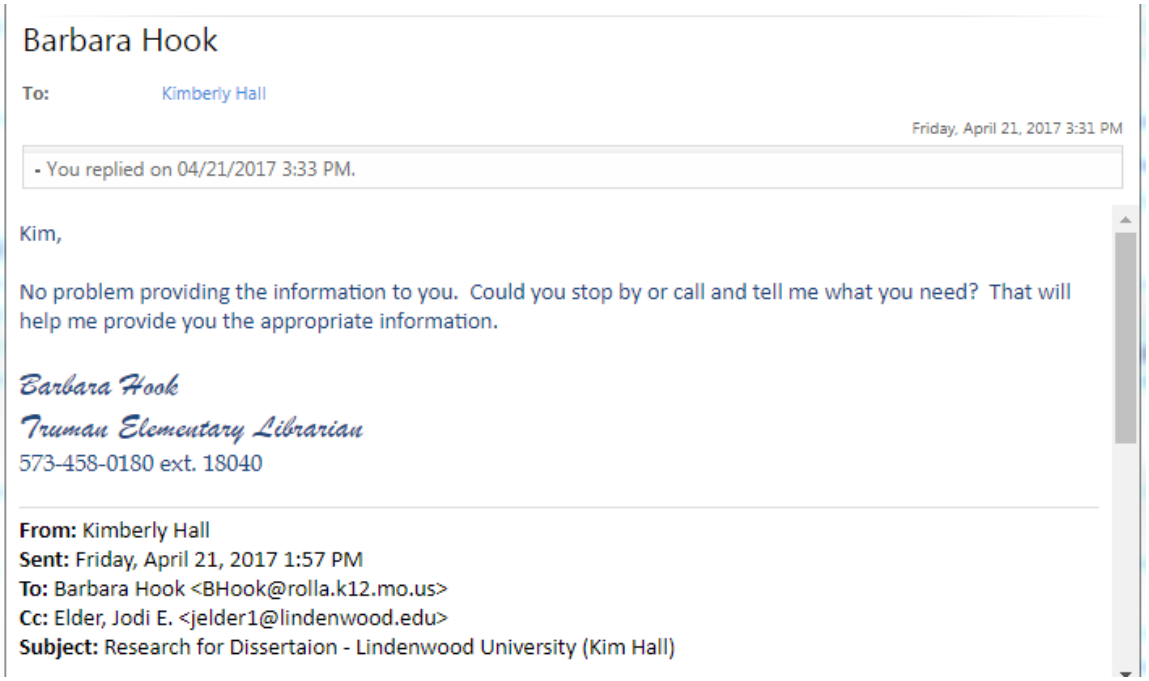
- You replied on 04/28/2017 10:46 AM.

Kim,

I'm so sorry for the delay. It has been a crazy week! I put the reports in the mail today.

Jennifer Heberlie ☺
Librarian – Mark Twain Elementary

Destiny – Search for Mark Twain Library Books
Library Information Google Doc – Lots of important library information here.
AR Google Binder – All the AR information for 2016-1017
Library Google Site – Fun videos and links



Barbara Hook

To: Kimberly Hall

Friday, April 21, 2017 3:31 PM

- You replied on 04/21/2017 3:33 PM.

Kim,

No problem providing the information to you. Could you stop by or call and tell me what you need? That will help me provide you the appropriate information.

Barbara Hook
Truman Elementary Librarian
573-458-0180 ext. 18040

From: Kimberly Hall
Sent: Friday, April 21, 2017 1:57 PM
To: Barbara Hook <BHook@rolla.k12.mo.us>
Cc: Elder, Jodi E. <jelder1@lindenwood.edu>
Subject: Research for Dissertaion - Lindenwood University (Kim Hall)

Appendix D: Lindenwood IRB Participant Informational Letter/Consent Form

LINDENWOOD

April 3, 2017

Dear Participant:

My name is Kimberly Hall-Williams, and I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University. For my final project, I am examining early childhood education and its impact on elementary students' academic progress. Because you are a parent of a third grade student, I am inviting you to participate in this study by completing the attached survey.

The following questionnaire will require approximately 15 minutes of your time to complete. There is no compensation for responding, nor any known risk. In order to ensure that all information remains confidential, copies of the project will be provided to my Lindenwood University supervising faculty.

If you choose to participate in this project, please answer all questions as honestly as possible and return the completed questionnaire promptly back to your child's teacher. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected will provide useful information regarding early childhood education. If you would like a summary copy of this study please complete and detach the Request for Information Form and return it to me in a separate envelope. Completion and return of the questionnaire will indicate your willingness to participate in this study.

If you require additional information or have questions, please contact me at the number listed below. If you are not satisfied with the manner in which this study is being conducted, you may report (anonymously if you choose) any complaints to the Lindenwood University Doctoral Program Director at the Waynesville Extension at JElder1@lindenwood.edu.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Hall-Williams
Phone: (573) 578-7736
Email: khall@rolla.k12.mo.us

LINDENWOOD

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Effects of Early Child Education on Reading Preparedness in Public Education

Principal Investigator: Kimberly Hall
Telephone: (573) 578-7736 E-mail: khall@rolla.k12.mo.us

Participant's Name: _____ Child's Name: _____
(Student's name is necessary to correlate with students' academic performance.)
Contact information:

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kimberly Hall under the guidance of Dr. Jodi Elder, Lindenwood University dissertation chair and advisor. The purpose of this research is to understand the significance of early childhood education and its impact on student learning.

2. a) Your participation will involve completion of a brief survey asking about your child's enrollment in early childhood education, if applicable.

   b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 15 minutes. Approximately 120 people 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 early childhood education and 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, Kimberly Hall – (573) 578-7736, or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Jodi Elder – (573) 201-3868. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Interim Provost at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or (636) 949-4912.

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