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What is a book: best practices for literacy specialists to engage K-5 students in reading

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WHAT IS A BOOK: BEST PRACTICES FOR LITERACY SPECIALISTS TO ENGAGE K-5

STUDENTS IN READING

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Global Leadership and Change

by

Cydnee Clarke Patterson

November, 2023

Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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DEDICATION

This journey has been everything but predictable. However, I am grateful for my grandmother's prayers. This dissertation is dedicated to my granny, Ladell Patterson. My grandmother's love will transcend through this life and the afterlife for years to come. There are indeed no words that could express my gratitude. Ladell and I spent many days at the kitchen table doing homework, watching *Young and The Restless,* gardening, and reading the Bible. During my middle school years, I often cried because I was the only kid bringing all of my books home daily. Yes, I was the kid with the big rolling backpack. Little did I know she was cultivating the lifelong learner inside of me. My grandmother also dropped me off and picked me up from Lamar University during my undergraduate career. She was my Uber before Uber. Our relationship was more than a "grandmother-granddaughter" relationship. We were besties. We often spent hours talking and laughing like friends. My grandmother often said, "Get all you can while you can." My ultimate goal was to have you with me in Malibu overlooking the waves as they hood your granddaughter. Unfortunately, God had other plans. Although we started this journey together physically, I will carry you with me forever in spirit. Well, Bestie, your favorite homegirl did it! I LOVE YOU GIRL! THANK YOU!

His Lord said unto him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Matthew 25:23

In Memory of Ladell Patterson
April 2, 1928 - October 27, 2021

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Psalm 37:25

To my parents, Darrell (Tracy) Patterson and Dr. Adrienne Berry Guillory, thank you for your love and support that has carried and sustained me. You have empowered me to walk into rooms with my head held high and be authentic in all spaces. When kids have parents that believe in them, they feel invincible. The Bible says, Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). I may have caused you to question your parenting skills, but look at us now, Dr. Daughter.

To my siblings, Donald, Tison (Jacques), Darrell, and Dominique, thank you for holding my hand, wiping my tears, encouraging, motivating, making me laugh, and allowing me to be your favorite sibling. Each of you has played an intricate part in my journey thus far, and we have much further to go. I love each of you.

To my cousins, Kevin H. Berry and Dawn (Joe) Norman. Wow! Thank you for being an example of BLACK EXCELLENCE. You motivate more than you could ever imagine. Thank you for coming on this long, bumpy ride with me. To my friends (Corey, LaDarius, Ashley (Dareas), Coridon, Lindsey, Steve, and Vida Group Chat) who held me when I was too weak to stand alone, thank you! I'm sure at this time, each of you could write your own dissertations.

To my former students (Charlton-Pollard Elementary, Anderson Academy, KIPP: Vida, and Beaumont United High School), let this be a testament to what you can do with hard work, patience, and dedication. Remember, regardless of your zip code and what society may say about you, YOU CAN! Lastly, thank my dissertation committee and colleagues (Dr. Michael, Dr. Nina, and Dr. Ty) for sharing your knowledge and being a beacon of hope throughout this journey.

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ABSTRACT

Student success is closely related to student engagement and literacy instruction, which can positively or negatively impact a student. It has been documented that children motivated to read have a strong sense of reading efficacy and academic competence (Wigfield et al., 2015). This research study addressed the skills needed by literacy specialists to engage students in reading. This study sought to determine the best practices used by literacy specialists identified as highly effective in engaging K-5 students in reading. While issues and challenges of literacy education have made it to the forefront for many educational agencies, there are still gaps between what is identified as successful ways to increase student engagement. Scholars and practitioners agree that student engagement in reading positively impacts their academic success and how they contribute to society. Appreciative Inquiry, best practices, and constructivism were used to inform this research. Each theory was used to contextualize the findings of this study and engage stakeholders. For this study, the phenomenological method guided a structural model. It aided in outlining the best practices needed to engage students in reading according to theory and expert panelists.

Keywords: Student engagement, literacy, literacy instruction, children, reading, literacy specialists, K-5 students, literacy education, reading education, reading engagement, phenomenology, appreciative inquiry.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Reading is a fundamental component of making advances in life. Bob Wise (2009) reported that literacy is the basis of student achievement for any student in any grade. Furthermore, reading is used across many disciplines, including math, science, and English language arts. One component of primary and secondary educational systems is to graduate K-12 students and ensure they have the competencies and skills to face challenges following high school. High school graduation rates are a crucial indicator of whether the nation's public school system is performing as it should. Specifically, the role of school administrators and educators is to enroll, inspire, and educate youth to live productive lives. Moreover, graduation rates are critical indicators that determine the knowledge capacity of a citizenry and its ability to bolster its economy.

In that vein, this study aimed to identify best practices implemented by literacy specialists, who have been identified as highly effective in equipping teachers with the skills necessary to improve reading engagement among K–5 learners. Moreover, understanding the impact of pedagogical components employed by literacy specialists on learners' reading outcomes and interests was explored. Learning to comprehend text is a significant objective of reading engagement for K-5 learners (Kasper et al., 2018). Reading education has two fundamental characteristics: reading outcomes, which include comprehending the meaning of text, and vocabulary knowledge. The other characteristics include the willingness and motivation to read (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). For instance, highly skilled learners have a grasp on both vocabulary and comprehending text and its meaning. Although highly skilled learners may read well, it may be challenging to be effective when there is no interest in the literature (Guthrie & McRae, 2012).

Moreover, variant teacher pedagogies impact children's development and learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2010). According to Kasper et al. (2018), critical teaching practices that best promote children's reading interest, engagement, and instructional methods are debatable. With the demand to improve reading outcomes, exploring best practices for literacy specialists engaging K-5 students in reading is warranted.

Unfortunately, many students need access to sufficient reading education due to inadequate funding and preparation, which leads to literacy gaps. Since the beginning of time, literacy gaps have been an issue in the U.S. and are defined as the incapacity to disseminate, analyze, and use legal and ethical information. In extant literature, it has been identified that literacy gaps persist regarding absolute dimensions related to age, education, social origin, and gender. For example, younger generations tend to have more significant gaps based on social origin and gender, yet they outperform their seniors in literacy skills. The ability to write and read with printed text was defined as a critical prerequisite for literacy development. Literacy includes reading and writing; nonetheless, researchers consistently focus on reading with less emphasis on writing. Roser and Ortiz-Ospina (2013) shared that literacy is crucial for measuring the population's education. However, a persistent gap remains among groups of lower socio-economic levels despite developments in literacy later in the 20th century.

Historically, Blacks have and continue to score lower than Whites on some measures of literacy (St. Amour, 2020). However, it can be difficult for Black students to access higher education at four-year colleges and universities. Further to the point, at some institutions of higher learning, equity and access have become increasingly worse for students of color, specifically Black students. Furthermore, in recent years, calls for diversity and inclusion and decisions to eliminate statues with racist legacies continue to ring hollow. According to St.

Amour (2020), literacy and opportunity gaps exist when comparing non-White and non-Asian American students with their White or Asian-American peers. They can also be found when comparing different socioeconomic statuses. Primarily, these gaps correlate to poverty well before a Black child is born.

According to the Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2020), women and children in underserved communities are impacted the most. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the disparities in our educational system. According to World Bank data, only 12% of the world's population from secondary school age and beyond was literate in 1820 (World Economic Forum, 2022). In 1901, it barely exceeded 21%. During 1945 and 1955, there was an increase in world literacy, reaching more than 42% in 1960 and over 65% in 1983. However, the literacy rate is 87% out of 10 people worldwide. Given the statistics presented by the World Economic Forum (2022), leaders must create effective pathways for students to thrive beyond COVID-19 (National Education Association [NEA], 2021). Legislators, scholars, literacy specialists, and educational leaders' commitment to justice and fairness compel an increase in educational opportunities. Such opportunities must be available to all students and families in our public schools. Providing educators, literacy specialists, paraprofessionals, and other staff with tools, time, and trust is imperative to continue students' growth and success in academic, social, and emotional areas. Besides engaging content, learning must incorporate engaging and challenging activities, like collaborative projects and debates based on evidence. In short, the learning environment allows learners to develop scalable skills and gain culturally relevant instruction.

According to current trends, the lack of quality reading experiences among the younger generations will significantly impact their ability to thrive in their future lives and careers, for which literacy skills are essential (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020). Like

Pakistani classrooms, the traditional methodology for teaching reading skills has yet to produce skilled readers who are confident in and outside the classroom (Asrar et al., 2018). One must understand that this is a multidimensional process to implement a program that provides quality reading education. Hence, teaching effective reading strategies and engaging students is at the forefront of the reading process.

Additionally, opportunity gaps present unique challenges that have socio-economic ramifications for marginalized communities. After-school learning programs and extracurricular activities can serve as conduits for learning opportunities regarding children and youth (McNamara et al., 2020). However, due to opportunity gaps and potential racial and socioeconomic disparities, learners in underserved communities may face issues centered on access. For example, literacy specialists and other staff at schools serving learners from low socioeconomic families, on average, attained less education due to their financial status. Therefore, racial and socioeconomic opportunity gaps may exist within school-related and non-school areas. Thus, opportunity gaps have implications for educational equity and the positive development of learners participating in this context. Mitigating learning opportunity gaps increases access and pathways to ignite reading engagement. Ideally, the process occurs seamlessly and continuously. Therefore, higher education garnered by literacy specialists can impact students' opportunities and reading engagement (Kasper et al., 2018).

Engaging students in reading comprehension facilitates the achievement of reading goals and objectives (Wigfield et al., 2015). Furthermore, when engaging in the comprehension of text, learners must be interested in reading (Guthrie & McRae, 2012). Thus, reading interest motivates learners to read for pleasure, which is an essential component of text comprehension (Kasper et

al., 2018). Reading engagement is positively related to text comprehension since students who read more understand more of what they read (Tang et al., 2017; Wigfield et al., 2015).

These challenges call to action the need for new legislation and policy changes to increase educational funding and provide literacy specialists with resources, training, and development. To achieve this study's objectives, examining the impact of literacy specialists' best practices and strategies on reading engagement was critical. According to the study's sample, the following results should reveal the best practices used by literacy specialists to engage K-5 students in reading. The historical overview of challenges faced by literacy specialists and other educational practitioners regarding the reading engagement of learners is further discussed in the next section.

Background/Historical Context

Literacy specialists and other educational practitioners use varying practices and strategies, but each impact is different (Kasper et al., 2018). Reading engagement seems most effective for students to develop their comprehension and vocabulary. Strategies like this will likely impact K-5 learners' reading outcomes and engagement. In addition, there is evidence that opportunity gaps can inhibit reading interests (Lerkkanen et al., 2012). For instance, Verstegen (2015) pondered whether public education was equitable and enabled all learners to realize their full potential. Historically, equity in public school funding has been a critical issue facing Black communities. Although these issues have been addressed by U.S. courts and through legislation, significant opportunity gaps persist among school districts and are linked to local wealth. As such, the implications of opportunity gaps and key legislation centered on student access and equity are discussed in the following section.

Children of marginalized groups have been victims of an unjust educational system for decades. As early as 1876, during the Jim Crow era, the Supreme Court granted separate but equal mandates. This court case allowed Blacks to gain access to education, yet they were not given quality resources to achieve measurable success against their White counterparts. It can be noted that the Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* changed its ideology around how language and literacy are understood in schools and how they can and should be taught (Verstegen, 2015). Several of these court cases created programs such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Every Child Student Succeeds (ECSS), and the Reading First Program. These legislations recognized that foundational literacy skills are essential for elementary school students to acquire. The following initiatives amplified the historical efforts of legislators created to improve US youth's educational experiences.

No Child Left Behind

President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2002 (Dee & Jacob, 2011). Consequently, the federal government began holding states accountable for student learning to receive funding. Heise (2017) reported that NCLB intended to close gaps between middle-income and higher-income students. Dee and Jacob (2011) discussed in their work that states were required to give standardized tests annually to gauge students' academic performance on state standards. Furthermore, schools had to make adequate yearly progress to receive continued funding. Also, teachers had to have undergraduate degrees, knowledge of content with competency, and a state teaching certificate (Adler-Greene, 2019).

Every Child Student Succeeds. President Obama signed a revision to NCLB, or ECSS, into law (Adler-Greene, 2019). This law kept the state accountable, but other criteria would be

added to the accountability protocols. Nevertheless, states were still required to report student assessment results regularly.

Reading First Program

This program is a federally funded program that allows up to 20% of the budget to be allocated for professional development, planning, administration, and reporting (National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2008). Additionally, these funds could be used to provide other resources within target ranges rather than strictly formulaically. For example, there are several choices that states can make within their respective categories, which could include curricula and materials for teaching reading (phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and phonemic awareness) and early diagnosis, intervention, and prevention of reading difficulties through regular screening.

Title 1 Funds

The funds were created to provide government funding for students and schools in low-income areas. Several statutory formulas are currently in place to allocate funds to education based on poverty estimates, state education costs, and cost-per-student estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau. The essential grant program funds local education agencies (LEAs), with more than 2% of the school-aged population in their LEA and at least 10 included in this formula. A LEA may qualify for a concentration grant if it has more than 6,500 formula children or more than 15% of the number of students in an LEA's total school-age population. As part of the Education Finance Incentive Grant program, states are allotted grants based on factors designed to measure their effort to contribute financially to education. When receiving Title 1 funds, districts must provide similar educational services to high-poverty schools as they do to low-poverty schools (Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA), as amended by Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), provides financial aid to schools and LEAs whose students are primarily from low-income families (Adler-Greene, 2019). These funds are critical, in part, for literacy specialists, reading teachers, and reading coaches who work in low-income communities. A statutory formula, based primarily on poverty estimates and state education costs, determines federal funds for the Department of Education.

Components of Reading

Learners integrate text information with their knowledge during reading to construct a mental representation of what they read (Meneghetti et al., 2006). Examining how varying cognitive processes contribute to text comprehension, including short- and long-term memory, is essential in reading comprehension models. The reader needs to store and manipulate information while processing a text. Thus, text representations are often constructed using prior knowledge (van den Broek, 1994).

Despite differences in reading comprehension performance, literacy specialists could benefit from developing tools that allow a blended measure of reading comprehension. Activating background knowledge, making inferences, and monitoring the internal consistency of the text are among the six skills Palincsar and Brown (1984) identified as essential to comprehension (Meneghetti et al., 2006). These skills can influence a good reading comprehension performance from a theoretical perspective. During professional development, a literacy specialist typically presents a simple view of reading (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Duke and Cartwright (2021) argued that the simple view is an effective communication tool for conveying the understanding that linguistics and decoding are crucial to reading. There has been

an improvement in understanding regarding reading in the nearly 40 years following the proposal of the theory. Three of these breakthroughs are illustrated based on Duke and Cartwright's study.

- Many factors contribute to reading difficulties, not just decoding and listening comprehension.

- When viewed in the simple view, decoding ability often overlaps with listening comprehension ability.

- Besides active, self-regulating processes, reading involves many other factors in a simple view of reading.

By expanding the simple view, an individual can convey essential interventions to present-day and future literary specialists by aligning instructional approaches with advances. Therefore, the active view of reading presents an alternative to the dominant model presented to specialist practitioners in literary studies (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Self-regulation, including motivation, engagement, and strategies, affect a person's reading ability. Continued professional development employs literacy specialists to make new developments in implementing reading best practices. The constant revision of reading protocols is necessary. There is positivity in embracing science and progress over nostalgia versus ideologies.

Efficiency in accessing linguistic information (semantic, orthographic, and phonological) is essential in learning to read (Cole et al., 2014). Moreover, when students underperform or omit rigorous coursework from their academic offerings, they are more likely to leave secondary school or be unprepared for college or advanced coursework (Adelman, 2006; Schiller et al., 2010). As such, early issues in the transition between secondary school and higher education can compound into adulthood disparities (Yeager et al., 2019).

A social-psychological intervention can enhance academic performance across the learning trajectory by changing students' perceptions of themselves (Walton & Wilson, 2018). This practice encourages learners to take advantage of educational opportunities in school and beyond. The mindset of intelligence intervention specifically addresses students' beliefs about the nature of intelligence so that they view intellectual abilities as academic abilities that can be developed when they devote their time to learning (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). Furthermore, the National Study of Learning Mindsets found that a low-cost, short-term intervention delivered in less than an hour produced equivalent results on grades as longer-term and more expensive interventions (Yeager et al., 2019).

Strategy and evidence-based practices for engaging students have become more popular (Asrar et al., 2018). The literacy specialist knows that students must read fluently and comprehend various texts to be successful readers (Calo et al., 2015). Asrar et al. (2018) implied that understanding multiple instructional methods and reading components was a prerequisite to fostering a classroom of readers.

Reading Fluency

Fluency is one of the most essential components of reading education. Fluency is the ability to read at a fast and appropriate pace, accurately, automatically, and with proper prosody. By mastering fluency, students can spend less time on decoding and begin to focus on making meaningful connections with the text (Calo et al., 2015).

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension requires several linguistic and cognitive processes, including fluency, memory, inferences, vocabulary, and schema (Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Perfetti et al., 2005).

Dimensions of Student Reading Motivation

According to Wigfield et al. (2015), there are 11 dimensions of children's reading motivations. It is assumed that reading teachers familiar with the following dimensions can make research-based decisions to engage diverse readers.

- Reading Efficacy: Does the student believe they can succeed at reading?

- Reading Challenge: Does the student gain satisfaction from mastering or assimilating complex ideas?

- Reading Curiosity: Does the student want to learn about a particular topic of interest?

- Reading Topics Aesthetically: Does the student enjoy the experience of different kinds of informational texts?

- Recognition for Reading: Does the student have gratification in receiving tangible forms of recognition for mastery in reading?

- Competition in Reading: Does the student desire to outperform others in reading?

- Reading Work Avoidance: Does the student prefer to avoid challenging reading activities?

Literacy specialists aim to move students who read for extrinsic rewards to increase their interest and commitment to learning. Furthermore, teachers should not control every aspect of reading instruction as students should facilitate some of their own reading experiences. Students who lack control over their learning become passive spectators to the teacher's plan. Thus, students fail to have a sense of ownership of the instruction and literature and have no interest in reading the text (Guthrie & McRae, 2012). Self-efficacy also plays a significant role in the student's confidence in reading. For instance, students do not read because they believe they

cannot read. Humiliation is more prevalent when students experience difficulty reading; this could also make them avoidant.

Identity Development Through Reading

Identity development is essential in reading engagement (Verhoeven et al., 2019). Literacy specialists should be concerned with developing educational practices while shaping the skills of teachers who deliver diverse books and other reading materials to learners. Kaplan and Flum (2010) suggested that a stable identity increases student autonomy, resilience, and reflection in pursuing life decisions. However, it has been debated that developing a clear identity has become increasingly challenging due to individualization, migration, and emancipation (Beck et al., 1994). Nonetheless, the learning environment is where children spend much time and a meaningful context where identity development can flourish (Kaplan & Flum, 2010).

However, due to a diverse research field, it is challenging to establish how schools and literacy specialists can foster learners' identity development (Verhoeven et al., 2019). Therefore, in this study, knowledge gaps in reading will be explored to understand better the role of literacy specialists in supporting teachers who engage students in reading. Therefore, the literature review aims to present an overview of what insights the existing literature provides into the role of literacy specialists in identity development.

Exposure to reading materials and diverse books that mirror the life experiences of learners with marginalized identities impacts how they view self-value and the validity of others who do and do not resemble them (Cahill et al., 2021). Across all aspects of reading engagement protocols, greater attention should be given to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Considering this

study, an exploration of diverse books and other reading materials will be examined to identify the extent to which such resources expose children to various reading pathways.

Statement of the Problem

Student engagement and literacy instruction are essential factors in student success, which can affect a student positively or negatively. Nonetheless, it has been documented that children who are positively motivated to read have a strong sense of reading efficacy and academic competence (Wigfield et al., 2015). This study addressed the skills reading teachers and coaches need to engage students in reading.

A study of highly effective literacy specialists is designed to understand how they engage K-5 learners in reading by examining their best practices. According to Cambria and Guthrie (2010), there are three components to engaging students in reading: interest, confidence, and dedication. For many teachers, this is a challenge. In addition, it is essential to note that literacy specialists must understand the many types of motivation to increase engagement (Wigfield et al., 2015). The two types of motivation are intrinsic motivation, which is based on personal interest, and extrinsic motivation, which is based on compliance and acknowledgment of peers, teachers, or parents.

While issues and trends of literacy education have made it to the forefront for many education agencies, there still needs to be more clarity and gaps between successful ways to increase student engagement. By building relationships and teaching culturally relevant content, engagement reduces negative behavior and produces positive outcomes in the classroom (Fredricks et al., 2019). Scholars and practitioners agree that student engagement in reading positively impacts their academic success and how they contribute to society. Educational

success depends on the ability of reading coaches and teachers to build a strong foundation and foster a love for reading (Wise, 2009).

Purpose Statement

According to a recent report by Cambria and Guthrie (2010), reading education correlates directly with student engagement and academic achievement. Consequently, educational practices should be enhanced to meet the needs of diverse students. Believing in oneself is highly ranked for achievement and engagement compared to other motivators. As such, this study was designed to explore the best practices of reading coaches and reading teachers better to understand engagement with books among students of underserved communities. In particular, this study identified key factors and strategies needed to engage children in reading and determined to what extent, if at all, can the critical factors of engaging children in reading be used to develop a theoretical framework.

Research Questions

During this study, the following research questions (RQs) were addressed.

- RQ1: What are the best strategies and practices used by literacy specialists to teach reading to K-5 children?

- RQ2: What challenges do literacy specialists face in implementing their best practices in teaching K-5 children?

- RQ3: How do literacy specialists define, track, and measure student engagement among K-5 students?

- RQ4: What recommendations do literacy specialists in K-5 education have for others in the field?

Theoretical Frameworks

       The frameworks used in this research were Appreciative Inquiry (AI) best practices and constructivism, which determined the best practice for literacy specialists to engage K-5 students in reading. Each theory was used to contextualize the findings of this study, which was meant to engage and help stakeholders. The literature review explored the most impactful theories associated with best practices, student engagement, and reading instruction. The AI theory was developed by David Cooperrider in 1986 to determine how to create an organization. There are five principles used to link theoretical developments across disciplines to follow.

- Constructivist Principle.

- Principle of Simultaneity.

- Poetic Principle.

- Anticipatory Principle.

- Positive Principle (Moore, 2022).

The constructivist principle is the focus of the five principles because it allows stories from the past, present, and future to influence how people behave (Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2012). Cooperrider (1986) constructed a model to identify positive engagement of self or an organization, using past and future to drive results.

- Discovery: identifies what has worked. This phase also highlights what gives and organizes life and its past successes (Moore, 2022).

- Dream: What could be? The dream phase looks toward the organization's future (Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2012).

- Design: What the ideal should be. The design element allows participants to create new organizational processes based on the findings (Lewis & Van Tiem, 2004).

- Destiny: What does it take to make it happen? This is where the organization determines where it is and where it wants to go (Acosta & Douthwaite, 2005).

Overall, AI was used to promote positive outcomes and improve performance. Educators will be able to identify gaps between students and the desired outcome. Accordingly, AI allows the organization to see itself at optimum performance by fixing what is wrong (Lewis & Van Tiem, 2004).

Significance of the Study

A study by The Literacy Lab (n.d.) shows learners from low-socioeconomic disadvantaged areas have a fourfold lower chance of entering Kindergarten with reading and language skills than students from higher-income families. It is estimated that there are 10 million children in the world who have difficulty learning to read. According to the study, 15% of high school students drop out, and only 2% graduate from four-year colleges. It has also been found that juveniles and young adults with criminal records are more likely to experience reading difficulties. A similar proportion of youth with a history of substance abuse has reading difficulties. Unfortunately, the national dropout rate impacts minorities living in low-income communities. There is a high probability that children will stay behind if they start back. Moreover, the data implies that literacy education correlates to one's quality of life and improves society. In this study, literacy specialists could gain more profound knowledge about education and analyze best practices related to engaging students in reading to maximize their chances of success.

Significance for Principals

A significant component in curriculum and instruction implementation is based on the principal's ability to provide teachers with adequate resources. Teachers need quality

professional development from experts within state agencies and curriculum companies. Furthermore, principals must invest in learning and encourage teachers to use research-based strategies. According to Tsivgiouras et al. (2017), the notion is that through training opportunities, school leaders obtain skills to identify ways to improve learner performance. This study's findings could aid in a principal's ability to enhance teachers' instructional practices and increase student engagement in reading.

Significance for Teachers

Hossain and Robinson (2012) found that literacy education is viewed differently among individuals in America. As suggested by Mazer and Hunt (2008), students' perceptions of their teachers affect motivation, classroom climate, engagement, and academic performance. Hence, the need to ensure school districts invest in teacher training emphasizes culturally inclusive teaching strategies. It is also necessary to provide teachers with training from curriculum specialists. One negative impact is that many teachers lack evidence-based coaching to support their students best. Significant data shows that student engagement directly correlates to socioeconomic status and resource access. This study provided teachers with knowledge about teaching students in underserved populations and increased engagement in reading books. As a result, students will be motivated to read more, confidence will be boosted, and academic achievement will improve across all disciplines. Additionally, Moser and Morrison (1998) highlighted that students' favorite books to read were mainly books the teacher shared with them and read them.

Significance for Students

Providing teachers with best practices to engage students in reading; those specifically living in high poverty rates are improving their overall quality of life and decreasing the dropout

rate. Those who believe they are competent readers outperform those who do not hold these beliefs, according to Moser and Morrison (1998). This study explored best practices for teachers and increased student morale, self-esteem, and self-efficacy related to one's ability.

Significance for Society

A student's academic performance can directly impact their appearance in society. Many researchers have found that students fully immersed in learning are more likely to receive a high school diploma (Rumberger, 2020). We aim to improve one's quality of life by decreasing the dropout rate and addressing literacy gaps by critically analyzing best practices for engaging students' books.

Assumptions of the Study

The initial assumptions are that participants will honestly disclose their experiences and share their best practices to contribute to the study's findings. Participants will also represent exemplary reading coaches in elementary schools who provide best practices for engaging students in reading books. Furthermore, the researcher's questions are designed to understand and disseminate best practices by participants without inherent bias. In the data analysis, the opinions of the researcher and biases were not considered (Creswell, 2018).

The initial assumption was that participants would be truthful in disclosing their experiences to contribute to the study's findings. Participants are expected to cooperate, accommodate each other, and answer all questions honestly and openly. Moreover, each participant was assumed to depict their lived experiences accurately. It is a non-biased study, and the questions are designed to understand and disseminate best practices by participants. The researcher will not use personal experiences and biases during the data analysis (Creswell, 2018).

Furthermore, it can be assumed that qualitative research provides a lens through which each participant can share challenges and insights.

These assumptions refer to the unit of analysis and characterizations of the data of this study, to name a few. This study's essential questions pertain to constructivist theory and its applicability regarding literacy specialists and their roles in engaging K-5 learners in reading (Illeris, 2018). Finally, violating these assumptions can lead to invalid results related to the sample size and other considerations.

Limitations of the Study

The study may have some limitations in that the research is based on self-reported data by the participants; therefore, it reflects subjective assumptions of the participants about their practices. Another limitation is that participants of this study are limited to literacy specialists who reside in Texas and California Title 1 schools at the elementary school level, despite many more successful literacy specialists nationwide who employ exemplary techniques in their daily practices. Lastly, participants are spread around the country, and the researcher only has the time to travel and meet them all in person; consequently, the interviews will be done through online meetings and the dissemination of electronic questionnaires.

Definition of Terms

The definitions offer a baseline interpretation for terms used throughout this study. The terms listed below are frequently used in research regarding student engagement, reading education, and academic success. The following definitions will explain the intended meaning of professional terms that are used in this study:

- *Achievement:* This varies based on one's perspective. Achievement is subjective and could be based on intrinsic or extrinsic rewards (Spence & Helmreich, 1983).

- *Best Practices:* In this study, best practices are defined as those activities that elementary teachers utilize in their educational settings and meet the following qualifications: (a) they are educational strategies, (b) they have proven to improve academic and social growth among heterogeneous groups of students, (c) they have enhanced students' academic motivation, (d) they are not subject-specific and can be used in any elementary subject area, (e) they are not much expensive in terms of required materials and executive staff (Gadke, 2001).

- *Common Core Standards (CCS)*: These standards have been adopted by 46 states as a resource to aid teachers in lesson preparation to ensure students master grade-level content.

- *Diversity:* to include those from various geographical areas, racial backgrounds, gender, sexual orientation, or religion (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011).

- *Extrinsic Motivation* is based on outside factors known as external rewards (Reiss, 2012).

- *Fiction Books:* Books that are not real and are created through one's imagination (Hoover Public Library, n.d.).

- *Inclusivity* includes leaving nothing or anyone out (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011).

- *Intrinsic Motivation* occurs when things bring one internal satisfaction (Reiss, 2012).

- *Literacy Gaps*: This occurs due to one's inability to grasp and contextualize new information according to grade-level standards (Coulter, 2021).

- *Non-fiction books*: books based on factual occurrences (Hoover Public Library, n.d.).

- *Reading Comprehension*: one's ability to read literature and contextualize material (Gunning, 2018).

- *Reading Fluency*: is measured by one's ability to master automaticity. This includes but is not limited to accuracy and expression (Gunning, 2018). Fluency is a vital component of reading comprehension (Texas Education Agency, 2022)

- *Student Engagement*: Enthusiasm and excitement correspond to new learning (The Glossary of Education Reform, n.d.).

- *Socioeconomic Disadvantaged*: An interaction between social and economic factors.

- *Student-Regulatory Strategies*: Strategies that facilitate academic achievement during the learning process. For example, a student employs regulatory strategies when students make intrinsic-based decisions (Ablard & Lipschultz, 1998).

- *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS):* TEKS have been adopted by the Board of Education as guiding principles that map out what content students should know by grade level (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

- *Title I Schools*: Local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with many low-income students receive financial assistance from the State Education Department. Low-income students must meet challenging classroom requirements to meet the state's academic standards. The federal government allocates funding based on state education costs and poverty estimates from the census.

The following is the operational definition of the terms used in this study.

- *Elementary Teacher*: In this study, the elementary teacher will generally refer to any credentialed educator who serves at a public elementary school in an urban school district in the United States.

- *Reading/Literacy Specialist*: A reading/literacy specialist with reading content mastery prepares and implements literacy protocols and best practices to address the needs of struggling readers.

- *Reading coach:* A reading coach is a content expert often called a literacy coach. They come with a wealth of knowledge and often develop forums and professional development experiences to share information with others.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 presented the rationale for studying the reading engagement of K-5 learners. Educators serving as literacy specialists in Title 1 schools are examined for their strategies to facilitate literacy instruction. The extent of the literature review by the research principles resulted in student engagement, reading instruction, and teacher training that impacted low socioeconomic disadvantaged students. Chapter 2 highlighted literary contributions around reading education, student achievement, and teacher training. As such, this study sought to identify how reading engagement strategies have evolved and what gaps in research require further exploration. Additionally, Chapter 2 included scholarly findings on the development of literacy gaps, student engagement, academic performance, and theoretical models that explain the progression and significance of engaging students in reading.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Background

School systems across the globe are under immense pressure to raise student achievement and improve reading and literacy rates (Puzio et al., 2020). Socioeconomic status and access to quality instruction have been identified as two leading causes of disparities in literacy rates among minorities (Hanushek et al., 2022). Schools eligible for Title 1 funding, now known as ESSA, are eligible for exceptional funding opportunities (Stuckey, 2019). A primary goal of this program is to ensure that schools receive the funding they need to improve academic outcomes for students living in underserved communities. Then-President Obama hoped the ESSA would lead to high-quality instruction and improved standardized testing scores. However, schools still need help with disengaged students and increasing achievement gaps.

This literature review is vast regarding the characteristics of literacy specialists, best practices for engaging students in reading, school policy, and culturally relevant pedagogies. Furthermore, the extant literature identifies key characteristics of students in low socioeconomic communities and shows the economic ramifications of K-5 student disengagement in reading. Moreover, disparities in achievement among learners from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds are persistent throughout the time frame (Hanushek et al., 2022). For over 60 years, there has been evidence of a socioeconomic achievement divide. In 1954, the cohort was birthed, and the achievement gaps between those in the top and bottom groups of the socioeconomic distribution remained at slightly less than 1.2 standard deviations. The gap for students born in 2001 is less, about 1.05 standard deviations.

Compared to most-advantaged students, these are the most significant gains in achievement over the decades for most-disadvantaged students. Hanushek et al. (2022) implied

that there is a need to restructure programs to improve the learning experiences of disadvantaged students. These disparities employ the need to re-examine the current direction of national education policy, although there has been very little change between the haves and have-nots in U.S. public school education.

Beyond No Child Left Behind

The Benefits of NCLB

NCLB was created in 2001 by the U.S. Congress under former president George W. Bush (Hilty, 2011). Past legislators believe that NCLB would close education gaps and improve the learning experience for impoverished youth, students of color (SOC), students with disabilities, and English language learners. One component of NCLB was The Reading First (RF) initiative and the Reading Excellence Act (Dole et al., 2010). RF was created to improve reading through government funding. Additionally, RF required grant recipients to provide professional learning opportunities to literacy specialists to mitigate the learning gaps. Through this initiative, literacy specialists can use research-based strategies to identify early signs of reading difficulties. The desired outcome of this program was to ensure that by the end of the school year, third-grade students would be able to read at or above grade level (Dole et al., 2010).

As literacy specialists, educators, and legislators continue to work to alleviate opportunity gaps interconnected to the reading engagement of K-5 learners, it is at the third-grade level where students either excel or decline (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017). Furthermore, there is ongoing interest and a better understanding of how literacy specialists may best contribute to learners' academic success, especially in third grade.

The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance consulted with teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of RF (Gamse et al., 2008). The data indicated that readers

in grades 1–3 at RF schools scored higher in decoding and comprehension assessment, and

decoding was statistically significant at 0.17 standard deviations. It is important to note that

reading comprehension directly correlates to a learner's reading engagement (Kim et al., 2021).

Additionally, the survey responses highlighted that teachers in RF schools received more

professional development, coaching, and resources than in non-RF schools (Dole et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Dole et al. (2010) imply that literacy specialists and RF schools are more likely to

have multiple teachers who face challenges identifying best practices to engage students in

reading. Lastly, literacy specialists reportedly appreciated having an average of 59-minute

reading blocks and 109 minutes dedicated to overall reading instruction (Gamse et al., 2008).

Through longer instructional blocks, literacy specialists can spend more time catering to the

readers' needs to improve the desired outcome: reading engagement. In sum, when literacy

specialists receive government funding, they can provide teachers with the resources and

protocols to engage students in reading.

The Challenges of NCLB

According to Hilty (2011), one issue with the NCLB Act is that stakeholders often need

clarification on assessing and fixing schools. Annual test score goals were set within schools and

subgroups that measure adequate yearly progress (AYP; Horn, 2016). In this literature review,

assessing schools is identifying strengths and weaknesses. Hence, fixing the problem requires

literacy specialists to use the assessment's findings to improve data and research-based plans.

The NCLB policy also used test scores to determine school funding (Rechner, 2019). AYP also

assesses academic performance and analyzes public and school districts' standard test data

(Gupta & Lee, 2020).

According to the findings, stakeholders felt immense pressure to exhibit high test scores, negatively impacting classroom instruction (Datnow & Park, 2018). Literacy specialists began utilizing their instruction time to prepare students for math and reading standardized tests (Horn, 2016). For example, teachers reduced the amount spent introducing reading in an understandable way that drives student engagement. Teachers have also reported little to no time to check for comprehension, which results in skimming over material to allot time for test preparation and drills. Consequently, this led to decreased learner engagement in reading.

Furthermore, test scores were reported to the U.S. Department of Education, sometimes leading to teachers firing or school closures (Rechner, 2019). In 2007, it was evident that NCLB needed to be re-constructed as the testing data had not shown any distinct improvements among disadvantaged populations (Brownell et al., 2018). Moreover, when then-President Obama took office, it was the opportune time to amend NCLB (Howell, 2015). He proposed a three-year plan and administration period for the new and improved Race to The Top grant from 2010-2012. For states to receive this federal funding, school leaders must achieve the following.

- Show improvements in low-performing schools (from low to high-performing) by increasing access to resources and engaging students in reading.

- Enhance principal and teacher efficiency and productivity through professional learning communities.

- Begin opening charter schools that are considered public schools in collaboration with outside groups and the state board (Rechner, 2019).

However, at the forefront of any reform, teachers must be a part of the conversation, as alongside policymakers, they collectively play a vital role in evaluating and implementing any change (Howell, 2015). Opposed to taking a top-down approach, policymakers understood that

the best change happens with educators who are committed to improving the learning experience in public schools. In the previous 20 years, federal policy reforms have been critical in sharpening the footprint of local public education in the U.S. (Steinberg & Quinn, 2017).

Although the Race to the Top (RTTT) program and the NCLB Act shared many of the same issues and had similar goals, their approaches were different. In myriad ways, the RTTT program offered financial incentives to encourage states to reform their curricula. As part of the NCLB, states and local education systems were required to make changes that would make them eligible for Title I funds that financed and distributed educational programs according to federal formulas for disadvantaged children. Each of these reforms has worked to improve students' lives in the nation's urban schools, yet in some cases, they still need to live up to expectations despite good intentions. To this end, the following section highlights the training and development of literacy specialists.

Literacy Specialist Training and Development

The Multi-Faceted Role of Literacy Specialists

According to Parsons (2018), literacy specialists work directly with struggling students. Struggling students are identified as those who perform below grade level according to learning objectives. According to Bean et al.'s (2015) work, literacy specialists must understand and know how to provide quality literacy instruction to students. However, the role of a literacy specialist has evolved tremendously over the years. In addition to working with students, researchers have discovered that it is equally essential for specialists to work with classroom teachers to develop expertise and competence in teaching reading (Dagen & Bean, 2020).

For example, literacy specialists and teachers co-plan and problem-solve in the classroom using assessment data to drive instruction practices (Dagen & Bean, 2020). Sometimes, literacy specialists will host workshops and present best practices to engage K-5 students in reading and model their process in the classroom. In other instances, experienced literacy specialists may coach teachers, observe teachers trying a new approach, and provide in-moment feedback.

As previously mentioned, the role of the literacy specialist is currently evolving. In addition to working with students and teachers, they work with school principals and superintendents to create implementation plans to engage students in reading (Dagen & Bean, 2020). As part of this work, Dagen and Bean (2020) ensured that school literacy programs were vertically and horizontally aligned from grade level to grade level and within grade-level classrooms.

Quality Literacy Instruction and Teacher Training Impact on Student-Learning

Studies show that student achievement increases when literacy instruction is coherent and comprehensive across disciplines and grade levels within the school system (Senty, 2021). It is important to note that historically, student achievement has been measured by standardized test scores and a learner's ability to master grade-level learning objectives (Sedova et al., 2019). By 2015, when Common Core Standards (CCS) were fully implemented, principals and superintendents ensured that literacy specialists and teachers nationwide understood what skills students should master in and across grade levels (Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSSI], 2021). The CCS are academic standards that create a nationwide alignment of learning objectives (Senty, 2021). Protocols of CCS standards were designed to increase student graduation rates, create grade-level learning goals, and drive learning objectives and outcomes regardless of background (CCSSI, 2021). The support of CCS and the leadership behaviors of

principals and superintendents were paramount for its success (Meador, 2019). Educational

leaders needed to know what they were dealing with regarding CCS to avoid failing its mission.

A plan for success had to be in place that included providing professional development

opportunities for literacy specialists and teachers. A school system devoid of a CCS plan that the

community could embrace would prove disastrous.

It is important to consider students and what success looks like for them in the classroom

(Goodsett, 2020). Moreover, the design and execution of learning elements based on best

practices for reading engagement should be considered. If learners have motivation and interest

in the K-5 curriculum, they may engage fully in the learning process, which would hinder them

from gaining at-level reading skills. Although employing strategies and best practices can be

difficult and time-consuming for literacy specialists, the potential results can lead to a higher

level of impact that contributes value to overall academic achievement.

What happens when a teacher does not employ CCS in daily instruction? What happens

when an early career teacher needs help understanding how to create learning objectives aligned

with CCS? These elements influence the quality of instruction through teacher qualifications and

the conditions in which they perform (Cohen & Bhatt, 2012). Teachers must receive training on

best practices to implement CCS in their daily lessons (Senty, 2021). Advocating for quality

teachers and their continued professional development is crucial to improving the quality of

primary and secondary education in the U.S. (Harris & Sass, 2011). The goal of the secretaries of

education has been to have "highly qualified teachers" in every classroom.

A teacher is considered highly qualified when they have completed a bachelor's degree,

hold a teaching certificate or license, and have a solid understanding of the subject matter that is

taught (Texas Education Agency, 2022). In addition, teachers are required to complete 150

professional development (PD) hours. Conversely, administrative staff, such as literacy specialists, principals, and counselors, must obtain 200 PD hours each five-year renewal period. Hence, if a teacher's human capital is boosted by attending PD with literacy specialists, classroom teachers should increase the use of best practices to engage learners in reading (Harris & Sass, 2011).

The Department of Education created an initiative called the Reading First Program (Gamse et al., 2008). One of the initiatives was to provide funding for state and local research-based professional development opportunities for educational stakeholders looking to improve how they engage students in reading. Reading First (RF) required states to use at minimum 80% of the funding awarded to local schools. Thus, 20% of their RF funds were dedicated to providing training, technological help to non-funded districts and schools, and planning, administration, and reporting.

According to Harris and Sass (2011), professional development coupled with teacher experience, specifically in elementary schools, appears to matter more in reading. Meanwhile, Cohen and Bhatt (2012) suggest that despite the recommendations of literacy specialists, teachers still rely heavily on basal readers or traditional textbooks to teach reading, particularly in K-5 schools. Historically, basal readers are short stories found in textbooks that have been used to teach basic reading skills (Wright & Stenner, 1998). Diffily (2001) suggested that literacy specialists allow students to actively read using real-world sources such as magazines, brochures, internet sites, and pamphlets. Stakeholders must understand that in today's economy, complex social and political challenges demand to mitigate learning gaps and disparities (Murnane et al., 2012). To engage our students in reading, literacy specialists are encouraged to

train teachers on ways to implement project-based learning (PBL) in the classroom (Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

Research on PBL has been conducted widely in various fields, and its effectiveness in engaging learners and encouraging meaningful reading engagement has recently gained prominence (Berenji et al., 2020). Researchers Berenji et al. (2020) found promising results from a quasi-experimental study examining the impact of PBL on participants' reading engagement. Using a sample size of 40 for the experimental group and 40 for the control group, two samples of elementary school learners were chosen for the study. As an experiment, PBL was used, while the control group was taught using traditional one-way communication. Petals engagement instrument (PEI) and reading comprehension tests were administered to both groups pre-and post-intervention. An analysis of multivariate covariance and one-way analysis of covariance indicated that the PBL group had increased reading engagement and strengthened reading comprehension. Teaching student-centered methods like PBL is crucial for successful reading engagement. Learning specialists and teachers can use the findings of this study to enhance the level of reading engagement and comprehension of learners. These skills are considered two critical factors for success in literary comprehension through experiential learning. To follow is a synopsis of PBL and its benefits in engaging students in the learning environment.

Project-Based Learning

PBL allows students to actively learn and reach their goals by participating in social interactions and sharing knowledge (Kokotsaki et al., 2016). Research conducted by Kokotsaki et al. (2016) in the U.S. evaluated the effects of PBL in second grade, encompassing social studies and content area literacy. In a study by Halvorsen et al. (2012), many positive outcomes were found among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, Kokotsaki et al.

(2016) found that PBL could lower the gap between low- and high-secular socioeconomic status students in literacy and social studies. A person's interest level in reading will impact his skills in reading and writing (Sutisyana et al., 2022).

Using PBL To Engage Students In Reading

One way to overcome low student interest in reading is for an instructor to provide stimulation, encouragement, strengthening, and motivation (Sutisyana et al., 2022). Literacy specialists are encouraged to incorporate themes into their instruction to create experiences for the learners (Diffily, 2001). For example, in a children's reading unit about apples, the literacy specialist plans a week of activities that include apples. Thus, the literacy specialist is encouraged to use a research-based approach that stimulates the student's interests through engagement. Additionally, students might conduct a study observing the trees on their campus and create a field guide for others to follow. The goal is that students no longer need to rely on teachers to facilitate their learning. Students must also have the skills and opportunities to use modern technology to design and share using digital platforms (Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

PBL allows students to go beyond the text, creating opportunities for large and small group discussions and for children to share what they have learned (Diffily, 2001). Researchers have consistently found that focusing on academic achievement and student learning instead of managing classroom behavior creates a learning environment where students take a deep interest in their education (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014). PBL emphasizes the student's perspective and allows all stakeholders to reflect on their experiences (Sutisyana et al., 2022). A classroom where the teacher and literacy specialist are scaffolding instruction, motivating, supporting, and reducing the student's cognitive stress is a classroom that has successfully implemented PBL (Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

The themes cited by Kokotsaki et al. (2016) for successfully implementing PBL in the classroom are as follows.

- Student support: Students are taught time management and self-management skills.

- Teacher support: Teachers are supported regularly through professional development opportunities and networking.

- Practical group work: Participation and agency are equal in a high-quality group setting.

- Balancing didactic instruction with independent inquiry method: Students obtain skills and knowledge before engaging in independent work.

- Self and peer evaluation: Progress is monitored and collected. As a result of the PBL, students gain ownership of their learning.

Ladson-Billings (2014) also believed that teachers who infuse culturally responsive pedagogies with PBL without diminishing either take on a heightened responsibility. It has been noted that a culturally responsive classroom is one where students collaborate, hold each other accountable, and take on responsibility for the success of the learning community (Tanase, 2021).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

According to Tanase (2021), culturally responsive teaching (CRT) fosters a learning environment where one's culture is valued by creating a curriculum that adheres to the cultural background needs of the classroom demographic. Educators have been known to enhance the learning experience by ensuring stakeholders use culturally responsive strategies and curricula (Milner, 2011; Paris, 2012). Ladson-Billings (1995) believed that Black students would be successful if given educational tools tailored to their needs. Nevertheless, if the pendulum of

racial and educational equality is to advance, policymakers will need to restructure the current policies. The policy change can potentially decrease the racial divide between Blacks and Whites and lead to permanent societal gains.

Caraballo et al. (2020) believed one component of CRT was the liability to sustain culturally relevant pedagogies (CSP). Building repertoire through linguistics (language) and culture requires literacy specialists to object to whiteness in educational practices. In a 2020 discussion, a panelist brought forth a cultural mismatch within the classroom; students need to see themselves in the literature, thus making it challenging to engage in the reading process fully. Alim and Paris (2017) found the urgent need to emphasize the impact of the white gaze on communities of color as it is outdated and adds to learning curves. Again, dismantling whiteness and bringing awareness to the need for heterogeneous classrooms are at the forefront of sustaining culturally relevant learning environments.

Integrated schools can help Black students succeed by reflecting on their culture and values in the curriculum and teachers (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). For integration to fully occur, students must come face to face with others from different cultural backgrounds than themselves. In hopes of providing equitable experiences for culturally and linguistically diverse students, contemporary teacher education needs to be at the forefront of research (Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Zeichner, 2006). Neoliberal business models of school reform have marginalized culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy (CRP). CRT takes a constructivist approach with the influences of Vygotsky and Piaget (Erbil, 2020; Tsuo et al., 2006). Vygotsky focused on the sociocultural aspect, and Piaget addressed the four stages of cognitive development (Cherry, 2022). The various theories that informed this study are highlighted in the following sections.

Constructivist Approach

Constructivist Theory. Constructivism in the classroom uses student interest and prior knowledge to drive classroom instruction. There are various distinctions between a constructivist classroom and a traditional classroom. A traditional classroom is more teacher-led, while a constructivist classroom takes an exploratory approach, allowing students to be the drivers of their success. Moreover, four significant measures of success in creating a constructivist classroom exist.

1. The literacy specialist or classroom teacher is a facilitator through scaffolding.

2. Students can lead and create equally to the teacher or literacy specialist.

3. Small group instruction is at the forefront.

4. Learners and educators share knowledge (Kurt, 2021).

This theory allows the learner to connect learning to real-life situations. Individuals have asked why they are learning this because the relevancy is not apparent, negatively impacting our learning (Hare, 2019). According to Bruner's (1960) learning theory, there are three models of representation: enactive, iconic, and symbolic. Compared to Piaget, Bruner believed that regardless of a learner's age, if the information is concise and organized, they can acquire new knowledge and be engaged in reading (Mcleod, 2023).

Bruner's Stages of Learning. The first stage is identified as enactive. This phase occurs between 0–1 year old (Bruner, 1960). Much like Piaget's sensorimotor stage, during this phase, an infant begins translating and internalizing information based on physical actions (Mcleod, 2023). A baby might remember shaking a rattle as an example of muscle memory. The next phase is iconic. This occurs between ages 1 and 6 (Adov et al., 2020). Many believe this phrase highlights the need to use visual images when introducing new information. Sensory such as

smell, physical touch, and hearing also create mental images (Bruner, 1960). The last phase of Bruner's learning theory is symbolic. Similar to Piaget's concrete operational stage, it occurs between ages 6–7 years old (Mcleod, 2023). Learners begin to identify and classify words and symbols not necessarily connected to images or actions (Myers, 2021). Again, unlike Piaget, Bruner despised the notion that information is taught based on a learner's cognitive stage (Bruner, 1960). However, Bruner (1961) encourages educators to teach transferable problem-solving skills in various situations and should allow students to cultivate symbolic thinking.

Vygotsky and Piaget's Learning Theories

Piaget Cognitive Development Learning Theory. According to Piaget (1964), development is not the sum of discrete learning experiences. Hence, starting with a cognitive ability is vital to understanding how knowledge is developed fully. According to this theory, the central issue of development is understanding the organization, function, elaboration, and formation of these structures to engage students in reading. Piaget also believed that cognitive development occurs continuously throughout a child's life, regardless of the type of environment or culture (Babakr et al., 2019; Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2011). As a result, all children go through four developmental stages, including sensorimotor, preoperative, concrete, and formal operational stages (Babakr et al., 2019).

Sensorimotor Stage. A pre-verbal stage, the first stage of development in the first 18 months of life (Piaget, 1964), occurs during the first 18 months of a child's life. Infants begin to comprehend the world around them during this phase by interacting with sensory stimuli (Babakr et al., 2019; Moreno, 2010). Babakr et al. (2019) state that as infants become more familiar with objects, they start developing object permanence in the later years. However, in the early stages, infants cannot conceptualize that object still exists even when they cannot see them.

Preoperational Stage. In the second stage, infants are between the ages of 2 and 7 (Babakr et al., 2019). At the preoperational stage, infants develop symbolic ability, using words and pictures (Piaget, 1964). Although infants begin thinking logically and expressing themselves, they also struggle with animism (Babakr et al., 2019; Santrock, 2011). Babakr et al. (2019) define animism as the ability to distinguish between the real and the unreal.

Piaget (1964) found that despite Santa Claus being a fictional character, children tend to believe he is real because they see him in pictures and on TV. Additionally, Piaget highlighted that if the same amount of liquid is poured from one object to an object of a different shape, the child at this stage will think that one glass has more liquid than the other. This happens because the absence of operational reversibility results in the lack of conservation of quantity at this phase. In contrast, later studies showed that pre-school age children can execute age-appropriate conservation tasks (Babakr et al., 2019; Berk, 2006).

Concrete Operational Stage. During the third stage, children are between 7 and 11 (Sanghvi, 2020). In this stage, children now understand that a liter of water is the same no matter the vessel's size (Babakr, 2019; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010). Moreover, as children mature, they begin conceptualizing the relationship between sets and subsets (Babakr, 2019; Santrock, 2011). For example, they understand that one person can simultaneously be a grandmother, mother, and sister. During this stage, it is evident that children depend less on perception and concentrate on logic (Sanghvi, 2020).

Formal Operational Stage. The final stage occurs around 11–12 (Sevinç, 2019). According to Piaget (1964), children have reached the hypothetic deductive operations level known as formal operations. During this phase, children can use logic and apply inductive and deductive reasoning (Sanghvi, 2020). As a bottom-up approach, inductive reasoning allows

learners to take ownership of their learning (Mallia, 2014). Deductive reasoning is one's ability to move from generalizations to specifics (Cherry, 2022). Both deductive and inductive approaches form the basis for well-known teaching methods. There are numerous deductive and inductive methods of teaching grammar, including grammar translation and cognitive codes (Mallia, 2014; Krashen & Seliger, 1975).

Nevertheless, Vygotsky believed children's minds develop through interactions with others, while Piaget held that their interactions with physical objects facilitated their cognitive development (Babakr, 2019; Bernstein et al., 2008). To make another point, Vygotsky believed that social interaction could improve cognitive performance in children, but Piaget failed to recognize this influence (Babakr, 2019; King, 2011).

Cognitive Development According to Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. However, like Piaget, Vygotsky was a constructivist interested in knowledge acquisition as a collective event with new understandings and experiences merged with cognitive frameworks (Dasen, 2022). Unlike Piaget, Vygotsky believed that intercultural mediation occurred in two stages: an intra-mental stage (individual interiorization) and an inter-mental stage (social interaction). He theorized that social interaction significantly influences cognitive development and reading engagement (Babakr et al., 2019; Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2011).

Zone Proximately Development (ZPD). Vygotsky believed that learning occurs when a student receives help from those who are more knowledgeable than the student; this allows the student to acquire maximum development within their potential. This phase is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Mcleod (2022), ZPD measures how much a student can accomplish without assistance and what they can accomplish with scaffolding. Vygotsky

believed that when a student enters ZPD, scaffolding gives the student a little boost that they
might need to increase reading engagement.

A few strategies that researchers found that adults can use to scaffold a child's learning
experience are:

- creating collaborative engagement opportunities based on the child's interests,

- giving clear and concise instructions using simplified steps,

- providing socioemotional support to reduce the student's frustration level and,

- highlighting essential components of the assigned task (Maryam et al., 2019;
  McLeod, 2021).

More specifically, instructional scaffolding activities that can improve reading
performance include reading poetry aloud and engaging students in discourse and dialog (Xu &
Warschauer, 2019). Xu and Warschauer (2019) also found that creating graphic organizers helps
students think about information in new ways. Moreover, the literature review shows that
scaffolding tools in the learning environment can help improve one's comprehension, and
students can benefit in myriad ways with the assistance of teachers. Consequently, as a student
navigates through the ZPD, the necessary scaffolding level declines from 5 to 1 (Mcleod, 2023).
Additionally, as students age and become more engaged in clubs and organizations, many begin
viewing learning as a forced activity, often leading to rebellious action toward formal education
(Drakeford, 2012).

Various programs provide techniques and critical components of learning theory for
literacy specialists to identify best practices for engaging K-5 students in reading (Illeris, 2018).
The following are highlighted as each reinforces the underpinnings of learning theory, e.g., the
areas of understanding and knowledge that underlie the development of coherent theory

applications. The biological and social conditions must be met for any learning to occur. Moreover, within these learning protocols are processes and dimensions, different learning styles, and learning barriers central to the understanding of pedagogy.

Cooperative Learning. Cooperative learning creates opportunities for students to work together in heterogeneous groups to complete instructional tasks (Drakeford, 2012). A heterogeneous group is a diverse group of students who vary in gender, ability, academic achievement, interest, and personality and whose unique differences complement each other (Zhang, 2018). The group typically ranges from two to six members. Students also exhibit positive interdependence by working together while experiencing individual success through role-playing and collective reward (Drakeford, 2012; Zhang, 2018). Nonetheless, schools have begun recognizing interpersonal skills as a critical component of societal achievement, encouraging teachers to normalize cooperative learning experiences (Han & Son, 2020).

Moreover, Robert Stahl (1994) found that students participating in cooperative learning task groups are likelier to have higher self-esteem, positive social skills, more excellent content knowledge, and improved test scores. CL allows students to assist each other through peer inquiry and explanation (Segundo Marcos et al., 2020). Zhang (2018) suggests that teachers provide strategies that help increase students' cooperative skills. These strategies will employ students to solve problems collectively, trust each other, and effectively communicate. Additionally, it is essential to note that collaborative learning is not solely tailored to group projects (Erbil, 2020). Literacy circles and think-pair-share opportunities during instruction are also considered communal learning experiences (Herrmann, 2013).

Herrmann (2013) reminds us that classroom discussions are vital and strongly influence students' learning. By his definition, discussion is not students answering questions a teacher

poses. However, it is when students exchange information freely with each other for 30 seconds or more. Thus, a teacher can join a group to keep the conversation rolling when students need assistance.

Student Interest and Student Choice. Data shows that students enjoy discussing what they are reading through literature circles and book clubs (Herrmann, 2013). Literature circles are commonly used to bring small, heterogeneous groups of students together to discuss their chosen books (Herrera & Kidwell, 2018). It is important to note that in an active learning environment, one can see the correlation between how students conceptualize and organize ideas; this makes it easier to identify learning gaps in understanding (Kafai et al., 1997). Using e-portfolios in cooperative learning increases critical and reflective thinking (Nanjappa & Grant, 2003). It is also essential that educators create learning activities that are both enthusiastic and aligned with learning objectives (Pace et al., 2020). Young learners flourish when provided a space to pursue their interests and take ownership of their learning.

Interestingly, high-interest novel studies and choice boards are commonly paired to encourage learners to participate in virtual learning (Pace et al., 2020). The key term in the statement above is "choice." Everyone wins when teachers give opportunities for controlled choices during instructions. Secondly, novel studies provide a space for students to use various texts to make text-to-world connections; this technique is suggested to boost engagement among struggling readers (Guthrie & Davis, 2003).

National and International Strategies for Engaging Students in Reading

According to Bush and Huebner (1979), one's interest is directly connected to their motivation toward learning. It has been said that students can establish life-long reading habits when they foster a love for reading (Cutts, 1964). Over the years, many educators have confused

a motivated reader with a student having fun while reading (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Thus, motivation and interest are correlated to one's values, beliefs, and behaviors toward reading for any other activity (Bush & Huebner, 1979). When engaging students in reading books, there are two components one must adhere to (a) identifying a person's interests based on their experiences in an educational setting and (b) aiding in reading skills development and cultivating new and continuing reading interests. Building or capitalizing on those interests is an excellent way to do so.

Cambria and Guthrie (2010) opined that students interested in reading engage in such activities as they enjoy. One who reads solely because they believe it is of value or importance is dedicated. Then, some students read simply because they can, categorized as confident. No teacher cannot solely incite one's interest but can increase a student's confidence by fostering a safe environment and affirming them (Cutts, 1964).

In addition to cognitive and behavioral layers, reading engagement can be described as multi-dimensional (Claravall, 2021). In a study conducted by Claravall (2021), it was found that learners who participate in reading can comprehend text and participate in various activities. At the cognitive level, learners engaged in reading have mastered the basic reading skills needed to understand the material. Many methods and tools have been used to engage students in reading books, such as choral reading, read-aloud, and book reports (Bush & Huebner, 1979). However, none have proven to be more effective than story time with the teacher, known as a read-aloud (Cutts, 1964). Read-aloud allows teachers to help students identify story elements like tone, voice, and plot (Wright, 2018).

Read Aloud. This interactive technique allows teachers and students to engage in the learning process (Baker et al., 2020). This strategy creates an environment where those who are

not yet reading experience reading and use their auditory and visual senses (Cushenbery, 1969). Readers and future readers can also begin to experience reading through the eyes of a fluent reader (Wright, 2018). According to Calo et al. (2015), reading fluency happens when one can make meaningful connections with the text rather than decode it.

Secondly, read-aloud allows teachers and students to converse beyond the text (Lennox, 2013). Students are asked open-ended questions, which create in-depth dialogue (Wright, 2018). Furthermore, researchers and learning specialists believe students need space to compare learnings to their peers and other literature (Lennox, 2013). Engaging in exploratory conversation long-term impacts young readers' vocabulary development. SMART Reading (2014) wrote strategies for reading aloud with children and listed the components needed to conduct a Read-Aloud successfully.

- Ask a probing question before, during, and after the reading. ("What do you think the story is about? Why do you think that? What do you think is going to happen next? How do you know? Was your prediction correct?").

- Select books based on student interest.

- Allow students to ask questions during storytime.

- Model how to read using the finger to move across the page from left to right and point out key vocabulary words.

- When using a rhyming book, it allows opportunities for students to fill in the blanks.

These techniques can scaffold and engage students during a read-aloud (SMART Reading, 2014).

Read-aloud is an engaging experience that exposes the reader to vocabulary, text features, and literary elements that often differ from the non-academic conversation (Baker et al., 2020).

Students expand their knowledge through social interaction with peers and teachers (Lennox, 2013). This technique also incorporates and supports readers with foundational skills such as alphabetic principle and phonemic and phonological awareness (Baker et al., 2020). A stakeholder's ability to keep relevant pedagogy at the forefront is paramount because it is directly connected to the student's learning outcome. Another interactive technique that connects and engages stakeholders in the learning process is digital storytelling (Robin, 2006).

  Student Led Book Clubs. Classroom Book Clubs are another way to engage students through active engagement (Daniels, 2002). In this case, students work collaboratively to read and discuss books they choose to read based on their interests (Burns, 1998). Often, the teacher will select diverse books yet follow a similar theme or learning unit (Dail et al., 2018). Following this, students get the opportunity to work together in heterogeneous groups; the composition of the groups varies by class size. According to Dail et al. (2018), this method differs from whole-group instruction. It allows the readers to determine their pace, engage in a way that is authentic to themselves, and inspire students to become lifetime learners. Additionally, students acquire transferable skills such as effective communication and conflict resolution (Burns, 1998).

  Roles and Responsibilities of the Book Club. The group members meet regularly at least 2-3 times weekly for at least 20 minutes. While in the meetings, students adhere to their roles and responsibilities and rotate these positions weekly (Gregory, 2019). A few examples of duties students perform are discussion director, passage picker, word wizard, artful artist, summarizer, and connector. A discussion director creates the schedule and talking points to ensure the group stays on task during their discussion. The passage picker selects a phrase or scene in the text that they felt was necessary (Cherry-Paul et al., 2019). Word Wizard highlights frequently used terms or new and unfamiliar terms that may have caused some confusion. The role of the artful artist is

to illustrate a picture or pictures recreating a scene from the book they felt was significant. Then, there is the role of the summarizer, who gives a summary or overview of the reading. Lastly, there is a connector who finds ways to connect the text to real-world experiences, text-to-text, and text-to-self.

Additionally, it is suggested that students create a journal to conduct reader notes that can be used as a discussion piece. Examples include a favorite quote, probing questions, discoveries, and character analysis, which are a few of the topics a student might consider as their journal entry. The reader's journal is another resource to facilitate conversations and lively engagement among group members that allows students to construct new meanings to the text and gain new perspectives.

Book Clubs 2.0. As can be imagined, upon the brink of COVID-19, literacy specialists were unsure if they could engage students in the reading process through peer-to-peer interactions. However, COVID-19 stretched beyond the educational system, highlighted the improvement needs, and caused educators to use technology yet to be considered. Marsh (2019) encourages teachers to incorporate multimodal techniques alongside the traditional book club. It was observed that learners who use mobile devices such as cellphones, digital cameras, and electronic tablets seamlessly transition through and across multiple physical spaces that ignite the imagination for literacy learning (Dail et al., 2018). Students use these devices to create movie-like trailers, which allow them to gain new literacy and communication skills through multiple modalities (Marsh, 2019).

Digital Storytelling. PBL, student engagement, technology integration, and reflection are four student-focused strategies exhibited through digital storytelling (Barrett, 2006). Digital storytelling empowers students to express and convey their learning meaningfully; this technique

can also be used in most subjects (Robin, 2006). Additionally, in digital storytelling, unlike standard storytelling, audiences are both learners and listeners who participate in the story (Dörner et al., 2002). The following are the five recommendations van Gils (2005) presented that highlight digital storytelling's benefits.

- To individualize the learning experience.

- To elaborate on topics and make them more attractive.

- To create student-centered learning opportunities.

- To be innovative and provide variety in learning practices that may be viewed as something other than traditional.

- To make connections using real-life scenarios that are both effective and cost-efficient.

Stories are the oldest form of literature to date (Pedersen, 1995).

According to Yuksel et al. (2011), digital storytelling is a modern educational approach fusing traditional storytelling methods with digital devices. Since ancient times, storytelling has been used to share information, intelligence, culture, and principles. Unsurprisingly, storytelling is apparent in various art forms. In the learning environment, digital storytelling is commonly used because of its ability to serve as an effective tool for students and educators alike. Among the benefits of digital storytelling for students is the acquisition of 21st-century skills, considered a crucial need for learning, working, and advancing today (Robin & McNeil, 2012).

Tsou et al. (2006) stated that using digital storytelling in the curriculum is an ingenious protocol that has improved student proficiency in speaking, listening, writing, and reading. This technique encourages learners to establish a bond through shared experiences from both the present and past (Combs & Beach, 1994).

Book Bags. Providing emergent literacy support to children and families is easy with a take-home literacy bag (Zeece & Wallace, 2009). The authors, Zeece and Wallace (2009), of *Books and Good Stuff: A Strategy for Building School-to-Home Literacy Connections,* compiled lists of items that learners should have in their book bags to increase engagement with reading. Class and school libraries should award students access to various books. Library books should reflect the class demographics and interests to increase the likeliness of student engagement in reading. It is important to note that book bags can also include games and activities aligned with the books and help students practice multiple literary skills. It also suggested that literacy specialists be sure that all reading materials are readily accessible to the learners to alleviate any possible stress and anxiety regarding reading.

It is also important to note that Lucy Calkins (1994) has been deemed controversial on the topic of balanced literacy, as she relies on whole language practices (France, 2019). For clarity, during entire language instruction, learners are encouraged to make meaning of words in the literature (Bowers, 2020). Unlike the balanced literacy approach, phonics is viewed as a critical component of reading education; phonics is taught when needed. However, Reading Workshop literacy specialists are encouraged to allow students to use their reading bag to access books in the classroom during independent reading time and when she has downtime (Calkins, 2015). This strategy promotes a healthy reading culture and aids in the student's growth as a reader.

Calkins (1994) was a leading pioneer in modern literacy instruction. She launched the world-renowned Teachers College Reading and Writing Project during her tenure at Columbia University. The project was built to create a lesson format that would optimize the reading and

writing experience and allow students more time to work on their skills independently (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). The workshop model consisted of:

- opening with a mini-lesson led by the teacher that lasts no longer than 10 minutes using the Unit of Study (UOS),

- teacher-led small groups while others independently read books from their book bag, this task lasted about 30 minutes, and

- think-pair-share, students spend about 5-10 minutes sharing a book with a peer. (Calkins, 2015).

The program also provides an initiative to expand students' access to quality and up-to-date material in their classroom library (Zeichner, 2006).

What is In The Classroom Library Matters. Educational leaders in the U.S. and across the globe realize policy provisions need to be made to adhere to cultural and racial diversity demands (Adam & Barratt-Pugh, 2020). One way to strengthen the learner's confidence, sense of belonging, and identity is through inclusive literature. A classroom library reflecting class demographics makes students feel affirmed. On the contrary, students may feel excluded when the classroom library does not mirror their culture and interests. If teachers want to engage students in reading, increase their self-efficacy, and create opportunities for peer engagement, they must provide culturally diverse, authentic literature.

As such, multicultural and culturally sensitive literature is crucial. Multicultural literature is defined as literature related to historically marginalized and underrepresented by society (Gopalakrishnan & Persiani-Becker, 2011). Unfortunately, evidence shows that non-dominant cultures are often depicted unrealistically. For example, books written by authors of the dominant culture are disconnected from the viewpoints and ideologies of the subcultures,

resulting in over-dramatization and stereotypical portals (Bishop, 1990). The dissemination of misinformation leads to prejudice and increased misunderstanding (Chaudhri & Schau, 2016). Another common mistake educators make is using books with characters in traditional clothing with objects frequently associated with the dominant culture (Adam & Barratt-Pugh, 2020). Suppose an educator must use a book of this nature. In that case, it is recommended to include a complimentary piece that highlights those members of the non-dominant culture with specific garments that reflect their styles and offer opportunities for self-expression. Bishop (1990) also cautioned literacy specialists and educators that using books with White characters at the forefront foreshadowing minorities illustrates an indirect message that Whiteness is superior.

Organized groups and initiatives, such as We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) and Australia's Cultural Diversity Database (2019), were established to help locate useful and culturally relevant literature. Again, just as in any successful program, it is vital to assess the inventory through book audits periodically. Many have discovered that they have overestimated their collection of books by and about people of color until they have conducted an accurate inventory of what they are reading and teaching. It is essential to have a checklist to help guide literacy specialists and educators through the audit process. Table 1 shows a list of reflection questions that can be used as a guide to audit classroom books.

Table 1

Guide to Auditing Classroom Books

Auditing Classroom Books: Reflection Questions	
What does the data tell me?	Did patterns emerge?
Does the data align with my original perceptions?	Which characters were at the quietest? Loudest?
Were there any surprises? What? Why?	How does the data measure against the class, school, or community demographics?
	Are there any gaps that need to be filled? What are they?

Often acting as windows, books provide a world view of what is, what can be, and what has yet to come. Windows also act as sliding doors to a world imagined or reimagined by authors, allowing readers to explore them through imagination. A window can also act as a mirror when the conditions and lighting are correct. The human experience is transformed and highlights that individual experiences are a part of the more significant human experience. This allows the reading to act as an affirming tool; readers often seek their mirrors in books (Bishop, 1990). Lastly, the schema is activated when readers access culturally diverse books and use language, dialect, and familiar colloquialisms (Fisherman-Weaver, 2019).

Using Schema to Build Vocabulary. Salahuddin et al. (2022) noted that activating schema is another strategy that has been effective in teaching reading. It was also noted that students are more engaged and motivated when the schema is activated (Bransford, 1985). This makes reading more enjoyable when students use prior knowledge to connect to the text (Norris & Phillips, 1987). This strategy minimizes stress and makes reading easier (Salahuddin et al. (2022). Salahuddin et al. (2022) conducted a study to analyze students' reading skills before and after implementing schema activation.

Schema is directly correlated to comprehension, and this skill set allows readers to comprehend their reading, not misconstrue the meaning of certain words or sentences (Nguyen, 2022). Again, reading has many components, such as studying, identifying points of view, minimizing stress, and imagination (Pham, 2021). McCormick and Cooper (1991) stated that students who exhibit summarizing and retelling skills establish relationships with the text by using prior knowledge to discuss the content.

Graphic Organizers. Another way to increase engagement and reading comprehension skills is through graphic organizers (Fisher & Frey, 2018a). The ability to interpret information

from text is a vital literacy skill. Cooperrider (1986) stated that a child has begun to master reading comprehension when they can make connections and construct new meanings of the reading. According to Davenport (2007), reading comprehension has five identifiers: identifying supporting details, tone and style, main idea, inferencing, sequence of events, and concluding. It was also stated that if students merely read the words of the text without contextual meaning, they are not fully immersed in the reading process. Reading strategies allow readers to control their learning (Sari et al., 2019). This has also been a leading indicator of a student's reading performance.

Graphic organizers can be used to teach reading and help students organize critical information (Fisher & Frey, 2018b). This technique can be used before, during, and after reading; it helps categorize story elements. Various graphic organizers aid this process, such as know, wonder, and learn (KWL) charts, main ideas, sequence of events, etc. (Flores et al., 2019). A KWL chart asks the reader to write down what they know or think about a topic, what they want to know, and what they learned (Tran & Aytac, 2018). A graphic organizer that helps identify the main idea will have a slot for the reader to select three supporting details identifying the main idea (Griffin & Tulbert, 1995). In addition, a graphic organizer asking students to organize events typically has 3–4 boxes (Fisher & Frey, 2018a). Although completing a graphic organizer might be lengthy, it fosters a classroom environment where students can engage and collaborate (Sari et al., 2019). Again, researchers have found that when graphic organizers are correctly implemented, students can identify explicit and implicit information, word meaning, main idea, and story elements and become active readers.

Naturally building and fostering interest in vocabulary. Beck et al. (1994) found that early learners attain vocabulary and word knowledge through peer interaction, story readings,

and conversations with parents. In a 2014 data analysis by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), vocabulary was identified as a critical barrier to 36% of eighth graders struggling with reading comprehension. It was later discovered that repetition, contextual analysis, and semantics are significant components of improving vocabulary. Moreover, data shows that learners from middle-class families are more likely to obtain 6,000 words, while their counterparts in economically challenged homes obtain 4000 words (Dale & O'Rourke, 1981). Although students acquire new vocabulary through conversations, books have proven to be the leading contributor to obtaining new word knowledge (Neuman et al., 2011).

As previously discussed, Neuman et al. (2011) stated that text-talk, multimedia, and teaching semantics are key strategies to increase vocabulary. Text-talk is a strategy used to engage students in language instruction that has successfully demonstrated twice as many gains among first-grade and kindergarten students. Using books to generate new meaning through student-led and teacher-led conversation. Semantics is a strategy used to organize information and show similarities, often by theme. Through semantic mapping, learners can categorize keywords from the texts, which aids in their ability to contextualize new information (Tang et al., 2017).

As learners group terms together, they do so according to thematic similarities. For example, apples and pizzas belong to the food schema (Neuman et al., 2011). An object can be classified into a taxonomic group based on shared properties; for instance, the fruit consists of apples, avocados, etc. The concept of taxonomic shared properties extends beyond what looks the same; it includes more than just perceptional similarity (like looking the same) but also includes classes between lower and higher levels (Gelman, 2003). This skill set has also been

proven to aid one's ability to make inferences and increase word acquisition (Neuman et al., 2011).

Kozma (1991) stated that students thrive when information is presented using technology and multimedia compared to environments where one outlet is used. For example, learners can retain and comprehend content by connecting words to pictures. Furthermore, multimedia allows learners to conceptualize and gain word knowledge collaboratively (Neuman et al., 2011).

Partner Reading. Reading is also valuable because it is the leading tool for acquiring new knowledge (Sinaga et al., 2020). Kuhn and Schwanenflugel (2008) recommended partner reading to enhance confidence and comprehension. According to the National Reading Panel, one advantage of partner reading is that learners frequently practice reading aloud, which enhances their fluency and automaticity. For those who need to become proficient in reading, partner reading allows readers to work together and build schema and confidence (Rasinski, 2004). Through shared experiences, students can construct new meanings at accelerated rates and have in-depth conversations, increasing their vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and cognitive skills (Sinaga et al., 2020).

Positive Organizational Scholarship: The Learning Environment

An organization's behaviors are highlighted by Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). In this approach, positivity and processes are focused on maximizing capabilities and strengths to achieve optimal performance. The POS viewpoint focuses on three core elements: (a) flourishing, (b) building strengths or capabilities, and (c) organizing in a generative, life-giving manner. A critical aspect of understanding POS is recognizing that it is contextually embedded (Cameron et al., 2003; Yeager et al., 2019). POS theorizes that contexts are essential

for explaining how individual and collective strengths are created, developed, and changed in organizations; this might involve the embeddedness of contexts in organizations.

The positive outcomes produced by an organization with a high level of virtuous behavior include human well-being, economic and financial success, and ethical behavior in compliance with the law (Meyer, 2016). One of the many obstacles to implementing positive culture within traditional education systems is that teachers often need to engage in self-reflection, which is essential to shift their professional practice from what they were taught to what they believe to be effective. (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021).

Brookfield (2017) created a four-lens theory to transition literacy specialists and other educators from one level of professional practice to a more desired, strength-based approach. The four lenses consist of what the students see, how colleagues perceive, individual experience, and theoretical frameworks (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021). This framework further encourages literacy specialists and educators to identify their role in the learning process, approach, and impact on their students and colleagues.

Educational Policy and Equity Outcomes

At the global level, there is more to literacy education than reading a book (Thomason, 2008). Literacy acquisition and competency are increasingly contingent on reading engagement. Equality has been the focus of many policymakers (Machin & Vignoles, 2005). However, policymakers must shift toward providing equitable learning experiences (Caro et al., 2009). Unlike equality, which says everyone should get the same things. By creating these policies, lawmakers hope to combat generational poverty and increase economic growth amongst marginalized groups (Machin & Vignoles, 2005). As the learning environment becomes increasingly diverse, many subgroups are impacted by social isolation and poverty, hence the

importance of equitable classrooms as a driving force for reading engagement (Wilcox & Lawson, 2022). As national and local policies differ, so do the resources supporting equity outcomes. Environments, funding sources, and constraints influence equity policy and development initiatives. Such unavoidable influences necessitate disclosures with forthright acknowledgment of inherent limitations. Three are noteworthy.

1. First, Literacy specialists are often forced to make decisions based on research findings and determine how to communicate results best and implement them. However, it is challenging as it is impossible to summarize every study and strand of literature derived from it.

2. Second, Through rich professional development infused with equity-research training, literacy specialists are empowered to create summaries of articles and employ theoretical frameworks that offer equitable learning experiences.

3. Third, It is essential to recognize that limitations are indicators of research and development selectivity and are often attributed to the broad public policy agenda. Researchers have found that quality educational experiences have the potential to create opportunities and encourage social mobility. At the same time, national and local policies vary, as do resources supporting equity outcomes (Wilcox & Lawson, 2022).

Social mobility is hindered as privilege, and poverty become increasingly divided by geographic location (Neuman & Celano, 2015). Learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds with limited access to books attend schools with fewer resources and inexperienced teachers. On the contrary, learners from higher-income homes attend schools with well-paid teachers and have access to more reading experiences and books. This further perpetuates the ideology that the rich

get more prosperous and the poor get poorer, known as the Matthew effect (Duff et al., 2022). In light of the theoretical framework and research questions that inform this study, the section below provides a treatment for the gaps in the literature and the aim of this study to determine the best practice for engaging K-5 learners in reading through literacy specialists.

Gaps in the Literature

In reviewing the extant literature, research on varying feedback sources and their impact on reading engagement has proliferated within the past 20 years (Barber & Klauda, 2020). For effective learning to occur, literacy specialists must facilitate learner engagement that addresses learning resistance such that it is identified, understood, and acknowledged as a part of the K-5 curriculum. The most effective ways learners engage with multiple strategies and practices still need to be explored.

It is suggested that future researchers investigate how literacy specialists understand how theories impact learners' achievement in word knowledge and reading comprehension (Moody et al., 2018). In addition, research on theory and vocabulary instruction could benefit pre-service teacher preparation programs, professional development, and vocabulary research. Initiatives such as the We Need Diverse Books movement have made significant advances by creating databases to help locate diverse literature. Further research such as these initiatives also influences the use of diverse children's literature (Adam & Barratt-Pugh, 2020). To narrow these research gaps, this study will respond by analyzing how specific practices and tools of reading engagement best foster literary reading. Successful reading comprehension demands complex cognitive skills and motivation to make meaning from text (Barber & Klauda, 2020). Based on the findings of this study, the revealed best practices in reading engagement and motivation can inform policy and improve reading achievement.

Chapter Summary

As reflected in the extant literature, the general conclusion is that learning is highly complex, and analyses, programs, and learning discussions must consider the entire educational landscape adequate and reliable (Illeris, 2018). The literature review shows that students' lack of reading engagement, decreased reading enjoyment, and limited access to quality literature are the leading causes of low reading (Jayanti, 2016). There is a call to action to improve the selection of the literature we use in early learning settings (Adam & Barratt-Pugh, 2020). This level of improvement requires training and guidelines that aid literacy specialists and other stakeholders' ability to select books that meet the demographic needs of the classroom.

Practical approaches to improving the reading experiences of learners are evident through positive organizational scholarship and constructivism. Engagement, creativity, and innovation are vital components of POS (Dutton & Glynn, 2008). Data shows that student engagement in reading impacts one cognitively, socially, and economically. In tandem with PBL applications, POS can also deepen students' learning and content mastery (Lucas & Goodman, 2015). In short, this research aims to identify the best practices to engage students in reading through the tenets of learning theory that have proven to be successful.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This qualitative study identified challenges, strategies, recommendations, and the lived experiences of literacy specialists employing best practices for engaging K-5 students in reading. An overview of phenomenology, chosen research design, instruments, participant selection process, protection of human subjects, and data collection procedures was explored in this chapter. Lastly, the chapter concluded with a summary of essential points.

Restatement of Research Questions

This study examined the best practices used to engage K-5 students in reading. Strands of the extant literature showed a need to engage students in reading effectively, but a lack of knowledge is needed. Moreover, an exploration of policy, strategy, and resource-based factors that help make reading experiential for learners was explored. Literacy specialists, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders can actively interest students in reading and provide quality experiences by understanding these factors. As such, the following research questions were used to inform this study:

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

- RQ1: What are the best strategies and practices used by literacy specialists to teach reading to K-5 children?

- RQ2: What challenges do literacy specialists face in implementing their best practices in teaching K-5 children?

- RQ3: How do literacy specialists define, track, and measure student engagement among K-5 students?

- RQ4: What recommendations do literacy specialists in K-5 education have for others in the field?

Nature of the Study

In considering this as a qualitative study, Creswell and Poth (2018) noted how it begins with an interpretive worldview or theoretical framework that informs the study through a research problem that addresses the meaning an individual or group ascribes to a phenomenon. Through thematic analysis, a qualitative researcher collects rich data in a natural setting using inductive means to establish themes and similarities. There are several distinctions in conducting a phenomenological study. Creswell and Báez (2021) suggest the practical aspects of qualitative research and find a foundation of crucial essentials and forms of logic for phenomenological studies. This study style allowed the researcher to make human interactions through face-to-face or virtual interviews. More importantly, this data collection tool provided a method in which the experiences of literacy specialists engaging K-5 learners in reading were documented.

Furthermore, inductive reasoning was used to identify, code, and organize themes revealed through the data collection. The perceptions and experiences of the study participants needed to be at the forefront rather than using the literature findings or the researcher's experiences. Inductive reasoning allows for research to transpire from observations specific to broad generalizations. Moreover, qualitative research is designed to use the research participant's various experiences and perspectives as rich data.

For this study, the interviews were conducted via Zoom, enabling the research participants to express successes and challenges in the reading engagement of K-5 students. Participants also shared their processes for measuring and tracking student engagement. Additionally, because this data collection involved the real-life experiences of the study participant, one should be willing and able to make adjustments if any unplanned situations arise. Moreover, this study allowed for the researcher's reflections as an educator, one component of

this research. Upon completing the data collection, the researcher provided a well-rounded analysis of the participants and their perceptions of the reading engagement of K-5 learners.

Creswell (2018) deemed several other components of conducting qualitative research noteworthy, such as employing ethical practices, using phenomenology or another specified qualitative approach, emphasizing one topic, and investigating a single theory or idea. Collecting data is a diligent process that results in thematic coding and reporting that leads to a comprehensive narrative. In the data report, the researcher used language that is clear, concise, easily understandable, and engaging to readers. Thus, the researcher aimed to employ the components highlighted by Creswell in this study.

Strengths

All research studies have weaknesses and strengths rather than qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. However, Taylor et al. (2015) highlighted that researchers can collect descriptive data as a key strength. This design also allows the researcher to use interviews instead of surveys and questionnaires. Interviews will enable the researcher to clarify any misconceptions a participant may need to comprehend the questions.

Weaknesses

As a result of the wide range of experiences and ideologies among participants of a research study, it may become difficult to code themes and prolong the data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Notwithstanding, the researcher's professional experience could influence how data is interpreted. To alleviate discrepancies in the data analysis, epoché and bracketing were used during this phenomenon's transcription, thematic coding, and organizing.

Assumptions

Creswell (2018) presents various assumptions for qualitative researchers: ontological, philosophical, axiological, and epistemological. This qualitative study captured various perspectives and required the researcher to understand and communicate the findings, known as ontological assumptions. Ontological and symbolic interactionism work in tandem to highlight the need to understand and interpret varying viewpoints. Additionally, the use of epistemological assumptions suggests the researcher has content knowledge and understands the subject of this study.

In addition, Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasizes connecting with the participant while employing qualitative inquiry. Moreover, Creswell (2018) brings forth axiological assumptions, the association or disassociation of the researcher, and their own biases regarding disseminating data. For this study, it was imperative to note that Creswell established a final philosophical assumption, methodology. The methodology specifies the research process, including the research protocol, interview questions, and any follow-up questions or clarifications needed for a detailed understanding of the phenomenon.

Methodology

This phenomenological study was based on the lived experiences of the literacy specialists whom the phenomenon at hand has directly impacted. The process was structured to illuminate the lived experiences of K-5 literacy specialists through their viewpoints (DeHart, 2020). According to DeHart (2020), phenomenology can be used when conducting studies on literacy. As a part of this process, the interview and clarifying questions were pre-planned to foster conversation between the interviewer and interviewee.

To understand their responses to the interview questions, the researcher must gain insight into reading engagement and how it is defined through the lens of the interview participants. The researcher must also acknowledge that each individual's response will be based on their lived experience. Lived experiences shape how we view the world. Thus, teacher expectations of students as viewed through the lens of literacy specialists, continue to establish the benchmark for high-level reading engagement (Johnston et al., 2021). Additionally, these expectations affect students when communicating with teachers through differing treatments in the learning environment. The researcher hopes to discuss how various experiences have influenced how literacy specialists view the reading engagement of K-5 students and the impact of reading engagement for Black students and those attending low-socioeconomic or disadvantaged schools. For example, symbolic interactionism is assessing how the world is viewed from the lens of another. Therefore, the researcher explored the impact and role of professional development on literacy specialists and how it impacted student learning outcomes, specifically K-5 reading engagement.

Process of Phenomenology

Using this method, individual narratives were combined and analyzed for common patterns that focused on understanding the essence of a particular group's lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology is often used when exploring a larger concept, e.g., in education, the phenomenon could be literacy specialists and their coaching styles when training teachers (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). A phenomenological research method was most appropriate for this study because the study considered the phenomenon of engaging K-5 students in reading by literacy specialists.

Appropriateness of Phenomenology. The study explored effective ways to engage K-5 students in reading and what measures literacy specialists took to minimize the negative impact of not engaging children in reading. It further explored best practices employed by literacy specialists that defined engagement in the classroom and offered recommendations and strategies to be implemented in the learning environment to provide a more equitable learning experience for marginalized students. An examination of these practices used by literacy specialists in engaging K-5 students in reading was conducted via a phenomenological lens.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Phenomenology. There are strengths and weaknesses when conducting research studies, whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research can be less reliable than quantitative research, but it is considered to yield comprehensive results. This method also consists of an exploratory process that allows the researcher to make in-depth findings and connections to the data (Creswell, 2018). Notably, a research plan should maintain consistency in code results in a valid, reliable study and measure the claims it makes (Robbins & Judge, 2015).

Furthermore, phenomenology research begins with a literature review, followed by the researcher using inductive reasoning to analyze and assess the lived experiences of those impacted by the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). Through this process, the data highlighted similarities in the opinions of those with shared experiences. Moreover, since the researcher is an intricate part of the data collection and has shared in the lived experience, it was necessary to refrain from showing bias. Although this may be challenging, the researcher committed to conducting the research unbiased and openly (Moustakas, 1994). Accordingly, researchers using phenomenological approaches should set aside prejudices to avoid bias in the study. As a final step, the researcher evaluated the data analysis methods and how the results were produced.

Research Design

According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research enables collecting data, developing research questions, and analyzing and interpreting all components of the research design. The researcher began this process by identifying the analysis unit, population, sample size, and the method to be used for sampling. The research aimed to show that the research design used in this study would provide valid and reliable data.

Analysis Unit

The unit of analysis for this study was a U.S. literacy specialist with a graduate degree in education or related field who worked in a school or as an independent consultant for a minimum of 3 years. For this study, literacy specialists were responsible for designing and implementing the curriculum, especially for those with difficulty engaging with reading, according to the International Literacy Association (2020). Literacy specialists, like reading coaches or literacy coordinators, may hold varying leadership roles.

Population

At least three measures define one as an expert: years of experience, content-specific background knowledge, ability to provide meaningful contributions, and willingness to designate adequate time to engage in the study (Alarabiat & Ramos, 2019). The researcher has complete discretion to decide what characteristics qualify a volunteer participant as an expert for their study (Keeney et al., 2001; Strauss & Zeigler, 1975). The researcher also determined the number of participants needed to participate in the study to attain validity (Turoff, 2002). Skulmoski et al. (2007) suggest that the researcher should consider manageability and whether a homogenous or a non-homogeneous sample is needed before determining the size.

In this study, the population was all literacy specialists who were school leaders or consultants who supported schools and teachers by providing one-to-one coaching (Calo et al., 2015). They provided deep and broad pedagogical content knowledge that aided in assessing the instructional needs of learners and teachers (Bean et al., 2015). Furthermore, they collaborated with teachers, encouraging them to reflect on and observe their skill sets (Parsons, 2018). They also worked together to identify areas of improvement to bring about lasting change in practice (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Parsons, 2018).

Sample Size

In qualitative research, selecting an adequate sample size can be challenging. The rationale for establishing acceptable sample sizes has been developed through principles, guidelines, and tools. This phenomenon is an essential marker of the validity and reliability of the qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods use small samples to conduct thorough phenomenological analyses essential to this kind of research (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Additionally, aligning qualitative samples ensures rich data relevant to the phenomenon and purposive sampling (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Even though sample size norms are helpful rules of thumb, it is recommended that methodological epistemology is employed to consider how saturation affects sample size strongly. This qualitative study aimed to understand better reading engagement among K-5 students. The sampling size of 15 participants was determined to be sufficient and provided an opportunity to identify themes (Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell (2018), researchers can reach saturation more efficiently due to the data collection.

Purposive Sampling. Unlike convenience sampling, purposive sampling ensures that the interview participants meet the maximum criteria and those who understand the phenomenon that is currently being analyzed (Creswell, 2018). Purposeful sampling is a system that requires

the researcher to be intentional with their interview selection process. Therefore, participants who meet the maximum variation criteria are the ideal candidates because they can share information that is closely aligned with the purpose of this study.

Participant Selection. For this study, the researcher employed multiple approaches. LinkedIn (https://www.linkedin.com/) was the primary social media platform to target and recruit potential study participants who met the maximum criteria for study participation. Following, a master list was devised. Once the prospective study participants were identified, an email was sent requesting their participation. If one could not be reached by email, a formal message was sent via LinkedIn requesting contact information to distribute the recruitment letter. Secondarily, the Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/) sampling method was used to recruit the 25 participants for this study.

Sampling Frame. Sampling frames create a master list based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Acharya et al., 2013). This master list is mandatory when studying subsets within a population. As such, social media platforms were utilized to develop the sample frame that provided the names of literacy specialists from various regions across the US who worked with K-5 students. Considering this study, qualitative research groups, educator groups, and doctoral groups within the Facebook platform were targeted for recruiting purposes. Moreover, an infographic was developed that outlined the nature of the study, criteria for inclusion, expectations, and a hyperlink that allowed for participation in the research study. Additionally, through LinkedIn, a filter tool was used to identify literacy specialists who matched the criteria for maximum variation.

Criteria for Inclusion. The criteria for inclusion of the participants were as follows.

- Participants with a master's degree or higher in curriculum and instruction or reading education.

- Participants with a minimum of three years of experience as a literacy specialist.

- Participants who have worked in a K-5 school or as an independent consultant within a K-5 school setting (to ensure the participants work directly with teachers and students).

Criteria for Exclusion. The criteria for exclusion of the participants were as follows.

- Participants who do not consent to be recorded.

- Participants who are unavailable between March and April 2023.

- Participants who neglect to sign the consent form.

Criteria for Maximum Variation. The criteria considered for maximum variation were as follows.

- Geographical location: urban schools in multiple regions of the U.S.

- Experience as a literacy specialist who worked in a K-5 school environment

- At least three years of experience in K-5 education, but preference was given to those with more than three years of experience.

The criteria for maximum variation was essential to ensure the selected sample has experience as a literacy specialist working with teachers and students to implement evidence-based theories that highlight best practices in engaging K-5 students. The interviews took place between March and April 2023. Preference was given to those who earned advanced degrees and had more than three years of experience as a literacy specialist. Furthermore, once the targeted

group of literacy specialists had been identified, the list was reduced to 15 and added to a master roster.

Protection of Human Subjects

The study participants consisted of adult volunteers who were actively employed in various organizations and not members of protected groups. It is not necessary to deceive participants to solicit them. Therefore, their participation in this study did not present greater than minimal risks. Participants did not receive any compensation for their participation except for access to the research results through a copy of the final dissertation in exchange for their participation. The study results were reported in aggregate form to maintain the confidentiality of each participant's response. Even so, disclosing the study's data would not put participants at risk about their professional reputation or finances. Hence, the study met the requirements for exemption under section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(3) of the federal regulations of the National Institutes of Health, which stated explicitly, unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

> Category (2) of the 45 CFR 46.101. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior, unless (a) the information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation. (Section 45 CFR 46.101).

Hence, an application for the claim of exemption was filed with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pepperdine University in adherence to its policy.

Pepperdine University's policy is that all research involving study volunteers must be conducted by accepted ethical, federal, and professional standards for research and that all such

research must be approved by one of the University's IRB members. The IRB's key objective is to protect human subjects' welfare and dignity. This process involved submitting a proposal to the board that detailed the project procedures.

Further safeguards were taken to protect the collected data in the study, including storing any electronic data in a password-protected digital file in the researcher's home office. Immediately following the study's conclusion, the researcher destroyed all data. As part of this study, the following data collection procedures were followed.

Data Collection

The data collection process began after IRB approval and the finalized participant list. As previously stated, social media platforms, including LinkedIn and Facebook, were employed for recruiting. An infographic was posted on Facebook, replete with a hyperlink to provide an at-a-glance schema of the research design. Each participant who met the criteria for inclusion was contacted via email using the recruitment email script. If a participant's email was unavailable, a message was sent to the prospective participant via the LinkedIn messaging tool requesting their email address. If a participant failed to respond to the email, a follow-up email was sent within the next 3-5 days. A third follow-up email with a final deadline was sent if the second email went unanswered.

Once the participant met the criteria for inclusion, acknowledged, signed, and returned their letter of informed consent (LOC); they received an interview date, a copy of the interview questions, and their signed LOC. The goal of this study was to interview a minimum of 15 participants. If, for any reason, a participant declined the offer to participate in this study, the researcher chose a name from the master list of literacy specialists based on various criteria.

Lastly, all data was password-protected and saved on an encrypted external hard drive to ensure confidentiality.

Interview Techniques

For this phenomenological study, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with literacy specialists. Their unique lived experiences captured data that can be identified through other research means (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Their stories provided an in-depth look into the challenges and success one may have when engaging K-5 students in reading. The researcher began the process by sharing about herself and why she selected the participant. An ethical interview is one where the interviewee knows the purpose of the study and is provided resources that clearly define frequently used terms to ensure consistency. The interviewee and researcher understood and consented to remaining ethical during this process, how data was collected and stored, and confidentiality procedures (Patton, 2015).

The researcher informed the interviewee about the platform used to conduct the interview. More explicitly, interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed using the Pepperdine University Zoom conference tool (https://pepperdine.zoom.us/). The researcher began the interview process by asking open-ended questions; during that time, the researcher actively listened, took notes, and asked clarifying questions as needed.

Interview Protocol

A phenomenological study approach empowers the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews and analyze and interpret a phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). Considering this study, defining and implementing an interview protocol was essential. Interview protocols work to minimize confusion and ensure that interviewees understand the interview questions (Creswell, 2018).

Castillo-Montoya (2016) created an interview protocol framework (IPR) composed of four phases. IPR is used to align the interview and research questions, foster inquiry-based conversation, encourage feedback, and pilot questions. This process aids in increasing the reliability and validity of the data collection. Therefore, the researcher implemented Castillo-Montoya's interview protocol framework for this study by

- contacting each interviewee by phone and emailing them 1–2 days before the scheduled interview to address any questions, comments, and concerns they might have had,

- utilizing open-ended questions to foster and cultivate conversation, and

- ensuring each interviewee received the research questions 3–4 days before the interview.

The interview process aimed to foster an environment where the interviewees felt comfortable and safe sharing their authentic experiences correlated to engaging K-5 students in reading. As such, the following are the corresponding interview questions for the research questions, as presented in Table 2.

- RQ1: What are the best strategies and practices used by literacy specialists to teach reading to K-5 children?

- RQ2: What challenges do literacy specialists face in implementing their best practices in teaching K-5 children?

- RQ3: How do literacy specialists define, track, and measure student engagement among K-5 students?

- RQ4: What recommendations do literacy specialists in K-5 education have for others in the field?

Table 2

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What are the best strategies and practices used by literacy specialists to teach reading to K-5 children?	IQ1: What strategies do you employ in classrooms that provide exemplary success in your profession and facilitate reading engagement? IQ2: How do you maintain reading engagement among less active students?
RQ2: What challenges do literacy specialists face in implementing their best practices in teaching K-5 children?	IQ3: What challenges do you face in implementing effective reading engagement strategies? IQ4: How do you overcome those challenges? IQ5: What impact, if at all, do these challenges have on reading engagement?
RQ3: How do literacy specialists define, track, and measure student engagement among K-5 students?	IQ6: How do you know the strategy/strategies that you use are successful? IQ7: How do you keep up with the most recent findings in the field of reading to revise your methods?
RQ4: What recommendations do literacy specialists in K-5 education have for others in the field?	IQ8: What is your advice for the other literacy specialists who aspire to elevate their efficiency on their school campus? IQ9: If you could go a few years back in your career, is there anything you would do differently? If yes, why or why not? IQ10: Is there anything you would like to add?

Relationships Between Research and Interview Questions

The research questions were used to develop corresponding interview questions for this study. The research questions were intended to allow literacy specialists to share in-depth responses on their experiences with engaging K-5 students in reading. Through the interview questions, the researcher identified themes and similarities of challenges and successes among the lived experiences of literacy specialists (Grossoehme, 2014). It is essential to note that the research and interview questions were subject to change or be modified based on the feedback that the researcher received from the chair and committee, which emphasized the importance of academic rigor all the while employing creativity, collaboration, and scholarly excellence in research practices.

Validity

Again, to ensure the validity of the findings it was necessary to have a heterogenous group of interviewees from vast backgrounds (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). This study's validity was apparent once the intended outcomes and measures were reached (Jerkins & Smith, 1994). Additionally, the IPR and research findings were disseminated in a manner that is ethical and aligned with the protocol and procedures that were previously outlined to ensure the best possible outcomes (Patton, 2015).

Prima Facie Validity and Content Validity

The review of the literature was used as a guide to create the 10 interview questions. The researcher needed to understand that content validity is the measurement tool to ensure that the research questions and protocols are appropriate for this study (Newhart & Patten, 2023). Prima facie helps identify the validity of that data at face value or first glance. Creating content validity involves ensuring that the interview questions provide the researcher with answers that align

with the research questions and address the construct. Furthermore, content validity measures the appropriateness of the interview questions. Table 3 shows the revised research questions and corresponding interview questions.

Table 3

Revised Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What are the best strategies and practices used by literacy specialists to teach reading to K-5 children?	IQ1: What strategies do you employ in classrooms that provide exemplary success in your profession and facilitate reading engagement? IQ2: How do you maintain reading engagement among less active students?
RQ2: What challenges do literacy specialists face in implementing their best practices in teaching K-5 children?	IQ3: What challenges do you face in implementing effective reading engagement strategies? IQ4: How do you overcome those challenges? IQ5: What impact, if at all, do these challenges have on reading engagement?
RQ3: How do literacy specialists define, track, and measure student engagement among K-5 students?	IQ6: How do you know the strategy/strategies that you use are successful? • SubQ: How do you define success in your work? • SubQ: How do you measure your success? • SubQ: How do you ensure you are on the right track on a continuous basis? IQ7: How do you keep up with the most recent findings in the field of reading to revise your methods?

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	• SubQ: Is it necessary for literacy specialists to stay up to date with these practices? • SubQ: What other resources can contribute to the knowledge of literacy specialists regarding best practices?
RQ4: What recommendations do literacy specialists in K-5 education have for others in the field?	IQ8: What is your advice for the other literacy specialists who aspire to elevate their efficiency on their school campus? • SubQ: What is your recommendation for classroom management and cultivating a "love for reading"? IQ9: If you could go a few years back in your career, is there anything you would do differently? If yes, why or why not? IQ10: Is there anything you would like to add?

Peer Review Validity. The peer review process works as a check and balance system to ensure that the interview and research questions align. During this phase, the researcher consulted with peers to confirm or deny the validity of the research design, questions, and protocols (Creswell, 2018). Two doctoral students from Pepperdine University's Doctor of Philosophy program participated in the peer review process and were asked to assess whether any questions needed modification.

Reliability

Reliability is evident when there is a similarity in results and conclusions in similar studies (Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, researchers can gauge the degree of reliability of the study by comparing its results and conclusions with those of another researcher if they use

different participants but the same inclusion criteria, research questions, and interview questions. To increase the reliability of this study, the researcher administered a pilot study composed of experts from the field of literacy to ensure that the questions were clear, concise, and easy to interpret for the intended audience.

Statement of Personal Bias

The researcher has a background in advocating for equitable learning experiences, mitigating reading gaps, and conducting literacy research. Qualitative research design, specifically phenomenology, relies on participants' experiences to mitigate any possible biases the researcher holds. Additionally, the following were the researcher's personal biases.

- The researcher worked in low socioeconomic disadvantaged schools (Title 1) as a reading program manager, campus coordinator, school site council, reading interventionist, and classroom teacher for 10+ years.

- The researcher holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Interdisciplinary Studies and a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction-Reading Education, including a K-5 teaching credential.

- The researcher has worked as a literacy interventionist and program coordinator for 7+ years.

- The researcher understands the components of teaching reading and the importance of reading engagement of students who live in underserved and under-resourced schools.

Bracketing and Epoche

To limit the conformation of biases in qualitative research, epoché and bracketing must be accomplished (Creswell, 2018). According to Moustakas (1994), epoché is the process that

eliminates the researcher's use of judgments, experiences, and preconceived notions. Moreover, the researcher must be mindful of prejudgments to eliminate potential presuppositions. The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research. Additionally, research uses epoché and bracketing interchangeably. Such practices include interfacing with study participants to understand their experiences and state of being. The researcher must demonstrate self-awareness to mitigate pre-judgment during qualitative research.

Thus, the investigator has no rigid notions or prejudices about the topic and approaches the interview process objectively and amenably (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher used journaling and note-taking as a bracketing method in this study. Taking notes and journaling as the study progresses allows the researcher to reflect genuinely on the information gathered and become more aware of assumptions.

Data Analysis

The researcher reviewed transcriptions from the participant interviews after completing the data collection. The researcher used the notes captured to code to identify themes (Patton, 2015). For researchers unfamiliar with qualitative research, determining how to conduct qualitative analyses takes a lot of work (Lester et al., 2020). This is mainly due to the seemingly unlimited approaches that a qualitative researcher might leverage.

Moreover, there are multiple practices whereby one might analyze qualitative data, with each inquiry offering a unique theoretical assumption or expectation (Lester et al., 2020). Qualitative data analysis is generally described as a nonlinear and iterative process. Thus, it is common for researchers to refrain from preparing a step-by-step analytic process. Structured data analysis in phases creates a transparent process for the qualitative researcher and the reader. For the purpose of this study, a thematic analysis was conducted. To follow are the

phases that were employed.

Phase 1: Preparing And Organizing The Data For Analysis

It is common for qualitative fieldwork to generate a significant amount of data (Lester et al., 2020). When data is collected, hours of interviews or focus groups can be reviewed, pages of observational notes can be compiled, and countless documents can be retrieved. In many cases, the amount of data collected depends on the length of the fieldwork. It is, therefore, necessary to prepare and organize the data for thematic analysis as one of the first steps in qualitative analysis (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Typically, this involves organizing audio or video recordings of interviews and converting observational notes into electronic form.

Phase 2: Transcribing the Data

Qualitative researchers often collect audio or video data to prepare for further analysis, so they usually dedicate time to transcription (Lester et al., 2020). Transcripts are used in qualitative research in many ways (e.g., multimodal transcripts, gist transcripts, verbatim transcripts), closely related to the research methodology and purpose. The transcription process provides an opportunity to become familiar with a data set to better understand the participant's perspective and analyze the data more quickly. Qualitative researchers should consider technological advances related to transcription when deciding how and to what extent to transcribe a data set.

Phase 3: Becoming Familiar With The Data

Once organized and transcribed, researchers must become familiar with the data they collect (Lester et al., 2020). It can be helpful to think of this step as the initial analysis, wherein researchers take note of the ideas or experiences described by participants that appear in interviews. These initial understandings can inform a researcher's later, more detailed analysis. It

also helps to become familiar with the corpus of data so that a researcher is aware of the gaps in the collected data, which can inspire further data collection.

Phase 4: Memoing The Data

During the process of reviewing data, researchers can generate memos that describe their initial reflections. Data interpretation is influenced by potential biases noted in memos to capture emergent understanding (Creswell, 2018). Memos are also helpful for capturing places in the data with potentially analytically relevant statements or experiences and serve as invitations for further analysis. Researchers can now attach memos directly to primary data sources due to the advent of qualitative analysis software packages. These memos can be generated electronically and linked directly to segments in the data, and the researcher can retrieve both their written memo and the data that inspired its development.

Phase 5: Coding The Data

When conducting thematic analysis, coding data is an extremely important step (Saldaña, 2021). In simple terms, a code is a short, descriptive word or phrase that gives meaning to the data relating to the researcher's research topic. Our argument is that it is essential for a thematic analysis to consider coding in multiple phases, even though it is often unstructured. The researcher can identify important statements, reflections, and experiences using this coding layer. The first coding layer primarily concerns priming the data set and identifying the statements, experiences, and reflections. Usually, the codes assigned in the first phase are descriptive and reflect relatively little inference. As part of the second phase, researchers often revisit the passages/data segments they coded in the first phase and assign additional codes. This phase aims to identify common themes. Researchers generally make explicit connections between their coding and their study's conceptual, theoretical framework as a final step.

Phase 6: The Transition From Codes To Categories And From Categories To Themes.

Generally, thematic analysis involves researchers engaging with data inductively, moving from isolated cases to broader interpretations (Patton, 2015). As a result, codes are applied, categories are developed, and themes are produced. As an intermediate step, this aggregation is crucial to producing themes. Researchers aim to create themes once they have developed their categories, which involves two steps. The first step is to bring together various related categories. To do this, one needs to recognize similarities and differences across categories. After acknowledging these relationships, the researcher assigns each category a statement. As a general rule, themes are designed to address the study's primary research questions and are aligned with its analytic goals.

Phase 7: Making The Analytic Process Transparent

To conduct a thematic analysis effectively, information about the analytical process must be presented transparent and verifiable (Lester et al., 2020).

Coding

The researcher should prepare text-based qualitative data, e.g., coding and analyzing, printing interview transcripts, reviewing field notes, and interpreting other researcher-developed materials in a double-spaced format on the left half of the page to allow for a wide right-hand margin to include writing codes (Saldaña, 2021). Rather than keeping rich data running together as long passages, the text should be separated into short paragraphs with a line break in between the topic or subtopic should the theme appear to change. This process is also instrumental when formatting data for analysis that was assisted with computer-assisted software.

Inter-rater Reliability And Validity

Creswell (2018) provides a step-by-step process to ensure reliability and validity. As a component of reliability, the researcher works with two peers and two professionals as co-raters who have conducted qualitative research for suggestions and comments. The researcher will use the first three interviews to establish categories and themes. Then, the team will examine interview transcriptions and themes to reach a consensus. Consequently, the researcher would consult with committee members if the team still sought a consensus.

Again, the researcher would continue the thematic coding process and analyze the interview transcriptions to ensure consistent reporting. Upon completing this process, colleagues would be consulted again to reach a consensus. If this process fails, members were to provide advice. Then, coding would commence once the committee agreed with 80% of the themes.

Data Presentation. The notes taken by the interviewer were compiled, synthesized, and organized. The interview responses were coded through an inductive process to identify key themes. A textual analysis of the data must be conducted. Therefore, for this study, the responses and themes of the respondents' questions followed a structured coding process. The recurring topics developed from the interviews were also placed as subheadings within an Excel spreadsheet. Again, through inductive coding, subtopics and themes were now grouped within the major themes. After organizing the themes and subthemes, two experts assessed their categorization and made suggestions. The researcher then created bar charts to highlight the trends derived from the interviews. Furthermore, it is essential to note that the themes will be defined and put into subcategories through additional terms.

Chapter Summary

When viewing phenomenology in human and social sciences, one may get the impression

it offers an inconsistent array of tenets (Manen & Manen, 2021). Yet phenomenology offers distinctions for determining order: firstly, great foundational publishing; secondly, exegetic publications of significant works; and thirdly, phenomenological studies conducted on phenomena. Moreover, phenomenology is a qualitative methodology uniquely positioned to support this inquiry (Neubauer et al., 2019). Therefore, the aim of this study was to discuss how conducting phenomenological research directly equates to espousing a particular attitude and practicing a keen awareness of how the world works and how we live and experience it (Manen & Manen, 2021). Data analysis is the most challenging aspect of qualitative studies that requires practice for researchers to learn and implement an effective system (Babchuk, 2019). Notwithstanding, it is essential to underscore there are no mutually agreed protocols for conducting qualitative research, yet commonalities exist among the different approaches. In short, phenomenology is positioned to help literacy specialists and other educational practitioners learn from the experiences of others (Neubauer et al., 2019). An individual's lived experience is the focus of phenomenology, a qualitative inquiry.

Furthermore, this methodology's unique approach and nature are often intimidating (Neubauer et al., 2019). Reviewing the methodological differentiation of phenomenology from other forms of inquiry provides an understanding of the epistemological assumptions underpinning this approach. Chapter 4 offered an analysis of the findings regarding the lived experiences of literacy specialists and reading engagement of K-5 learners.

Chapter 4: Findings

As students grow in their engagement with reading, they are in a state of flow; they are so immersed that they naturally practice everything they have learned about the work of readers (Scoggin & Schneewind, 2021). Through this study, the researcher sought to identify the best practices for engaging K-5 students in reading, according to literacy specialists. The literacy specialists shared their expertise and experiences working in Title 1 schools. Furthermore, this study sought to answer the following research questions.

- RQ1: What are the best strategies and practices used by literacy specialists to teach reading to K-5 children?

- RQ2: What challenges do literacy specialists face in implementing their best practices in teaching K-5 children?

- RQ3: How do literacy specialists define, track, and measure student engagement among K-5 students?

- RQ4: What recommendations do literacy specialists in K-5 education have for others in the field?

Additionally, 10 open-ended questions were developed for the interview protocol. The researcher used an inter-reliability and validity process to ensure the questions aligned with the research questions. The interview questions were the following.

- IQ1: What strategies do you employ in classrooms that bring you exemplary success in your profession and help facilitate students' reading engagement?

- IQ2: How do you maintain the reading engagement of less active students?

- IQ3: What challenges do you face in implementing effective reading engagement strategies?

- IQ4: How do you overcome those challenges?

- IQ5: What impact, if at all, do these challenges have on the reading engagement of K-5 students?

- IQ6: How do you know the strategy/strategies that you are successful?

- IQ7: How do you keep up with the most recent findings in the field of reading to revise your methods?

- IQ8: What is your advice for the other literacy specialists who want to elevate their efficiency on their school campus?

- IQ9: If you could go a few years back in your career, is there anything you would do differently? If so, why or why not?

- IQ10: Is there anything you would like to add?

The literacy specialists were asked to respond genuinely and truthfully to the 10 open-ended questions. Creswell and Poth (2018) opined that the authenticity of the responses to research questions is accepted as plausible. Therefore, the selected participants were expected to have integrity and truthfully answered the interview questions without bias. It was presupposed that each participant had adequate literacy, reading awareness, and concerns about inequity among K-5 learners. Including the interview questions, each participant was provided a recruitment script and an informed consent form via DocuSign.

Participants

The researcher recruited 27 potential participants for this study, intending to interview a minimum of 15 participants. The participants in this study held experience as literacy specialists ranging from 3 to over 20 years. According to the criteria, maximum variation was given to literacy specialists with at least three years' experience. Additionally, the participants were

representatives from the following regions: South, West, Midwest, and Northeast of the U.S.

Upon completing two interviews, the data was analyzed and coded. Moreover, after coding 16

interviews, these data displayed consensus from identifying common themes. Therefore, the

dissertation committee agreed that 16 participants were sufficient. The interview process was

concluded after the 16th participant. Figure 1 displays the participants interviewed by region, age

range, sex, and years of experience.

Figure 1

Participant Demographics
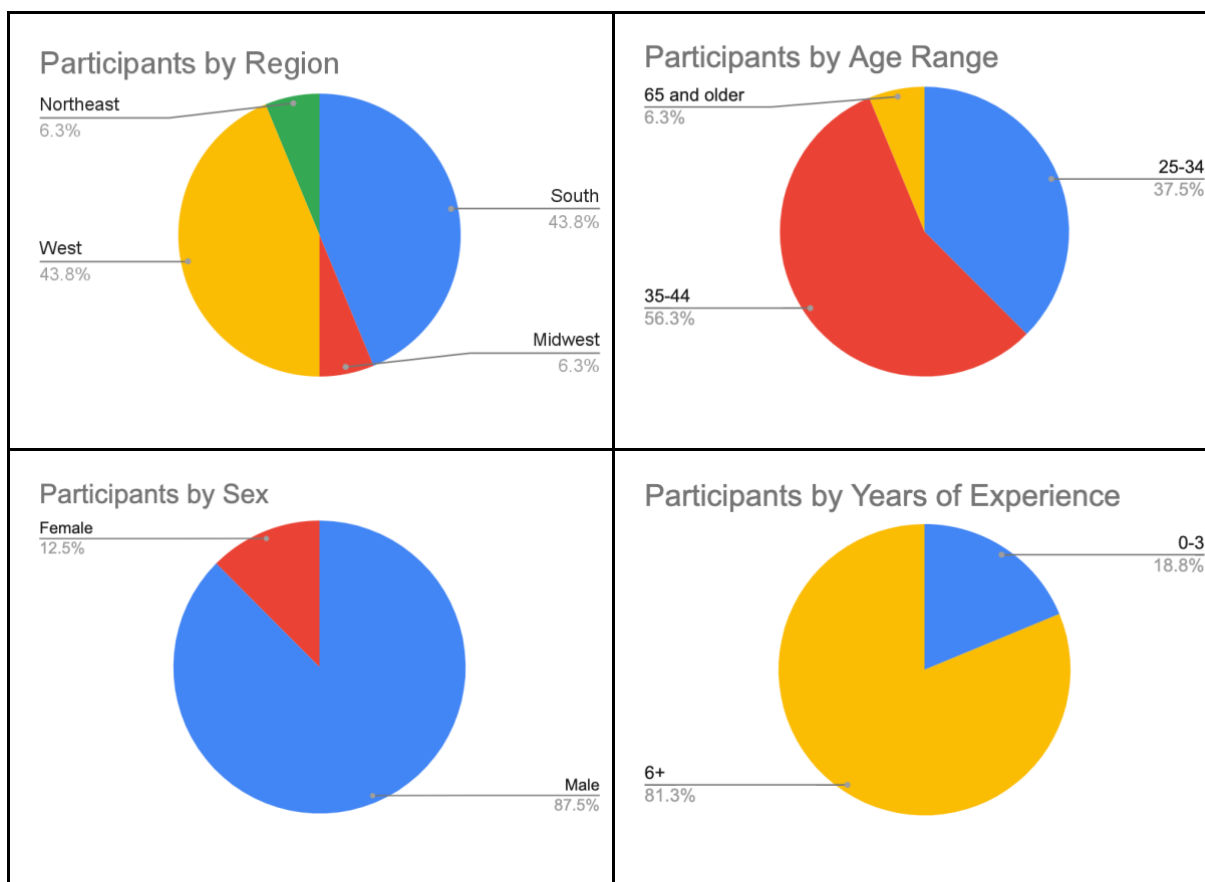
Data Collection

  The researcher obtained the CITI Human Subjects Certification outlined by the policies

in tandem with the Pepperdine University IRB (See Appendix A). Next, the researcher received

IRB approval on March 31, 2023 (See Appendix B). The researcher began the data collection by utilizing LinkedIn's advanced search tool, which provided a list of literacy specialists from various regions in the U.S. The researcher then assessed the profiles of those whose names appeared in the search results to ensure they met the criteria for inclusion. Additionally, the researcher used education-based Facebook groups whose target audience was literacy specialists and reading coaches. The researcher then posted a recruitment flyer to the group and emailed potential participants (see Appendix C). The recruitment flyer gave an overview of the study and listed the target audience.

Based on this, the researcher was able to curate a list of 27 potential participants who met the criterion for maximum variation. Upon obtaining IRB approval, she emailed the potential recruits and received messages or comments from those expressing their interests. The email included the informed consent form (see Appendix D), interview questions, and a recruitment flyer which the participants signed and returned. The data collection began in April, and 16 potential participants agreed to proceed and partake in the interview process. A second round of emails was sent, and the remaining 11 participants declined or did not respond to the email. Interviews were conducted over two weeks, from April 3 to April 14, 2023.

It is important to note that the researcher ensured the confidentiality of all participants by ensuring that their name or school name was not disclosed. Additionally, each participant was assigned a number to identify them throughout the study. The participants were also informed that interviews would range between 30-60 minutes. However, the interviews ranged between 30-45 minutes. Table 4 shows the number of participants and the date of each individual's interview with the researcher.

Table 4

Dates of Participant Interviews

Participant	Date of Interview
Participant 1	April 3, 2023
Participant 2	April 4, 2023
Participant 3	April 5, 2023
Participant 4	April 5, 2023
Participant 5	April 6, 2023
Participant 6	April 6, 2023
Participant 7	April 9, 2023
Participant 8	April 10, 2023
Participant 9	April 10, 2023
Participant 10	April 10, 2023
Participant 11	April 10, 2023
Participant 12	April 11, 2023
Participant 13	April 11, 2023
Participant 14	April 11, 2023
Participant 15	April 13, 2023
Participant 16	April 14, 2023

Data Analysis

For this study, the researcher used a qualitative approach. In qualitative research, coding is often used to simplify and identify characteristics (Richards & Morse, 2013). More specifically, thematic coding helps the researcher analyze their notes to gain a more in-depth understanding of the data (Creswell, 2018). The first step in this process began with audio-recorded interviews and note-taking. Ahern (1999) recommended maintaining a reflexive journal before and during the data collection to eliminate implicit assumptions or personal biases that might influence the data results (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Upon completion of the audio recordings, the interviews were then transcribed. The researcher used Adobe Premiere, a software program, to transcribe the interviews. The interviews were then saved to an encrypted external hard drive to ensure the transcriptions were safe, secure, and unretrievable. The researcher then used Google Sheets to break up the texts into small categories of information to search for evidence supporting the code (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An individual sheet was created for each interview question, allowing the researcher to identify and interpret the data more efficiently. The researcher could identify commonly used phrases and terms among the participants through this process. The data was then analyzed from the first two interviews to identify patterns that highlighted stories the participants conveyed during the interview process, clustering the codes into meaningful themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher used the inter-rater reliability process to corroborate the data as a final measure.

Inter-Rater Review Process

After coding the first two interviews, the data and thematic coding process were assessed through the inter-rater review technique. The two peer reviews include doctoral students enrolled at Pepperdine University's Doctor of Philosophy in Global Leadership and Change program. They reviewed two transcripts and the researchers' codes. The reviewers were asked to provide specific feedback, recommendations, and comments about the selected themes. It was suggested to rename a few theme phrases with words that better represent the data. Once the feedback was applied and the thematic coding was agreed upon, the remaining interviews were transcribed and coded. As a final step, the peer reviewers conducted a final analysis to ensure that these data were coded correctly.

Data Display

The research and subsequent interview questions organized and presented the data for this study. The key phrases, keywords, and viewpoints generated by each interview question were then classified using codes and similar themes. A participant quote and a detailed description were included for each theme. The researchers presented participant quotes verbatim to maintain the integrity of the study's data, which may have included incomplete sentences. During the research process, the researcher took vital steps to ensure that the participants' intent was accurately described and their confidentiality was maintained. As a result, participants are identified by their participant numbers and referred to as P1, P2, etc.

Research Question 1

RQ1 asked, "What are the successful strategies literacy specialists use to engage K-5 students in reading?" The following interview questions corresponded to RQ1:

- IQ1: What strategies do you employ in classrooms that bring you exemplary success in your profession and facilitate the ability to engage students in reading?

- IQ2: How do you maintain the reading engagement of less active students?

Interview Question 1. IQ1 asked, "What strategies do you employ in classrooms that bring you exemplary success in your profession and facilitate the ability to engage students in reading?" Through an in-depth data analysis of responses to the interview question, 34 key terms and phrases were coded into six themes. The following themes identify the strategies that literacy specialists use in the classroom to engage students in reading: (a) data tracking, (b) phonics instruction, (c) classroom library, (d) rewards, and (e) small group. Figure 2 shows a bar chart that depicts the themes from IQ1, and multiple answers per participant.

Figure 2

IQ1 Thematic Analysis Bar Chart

Interview Question 1
(N = 16 - multiple codes per respondent)
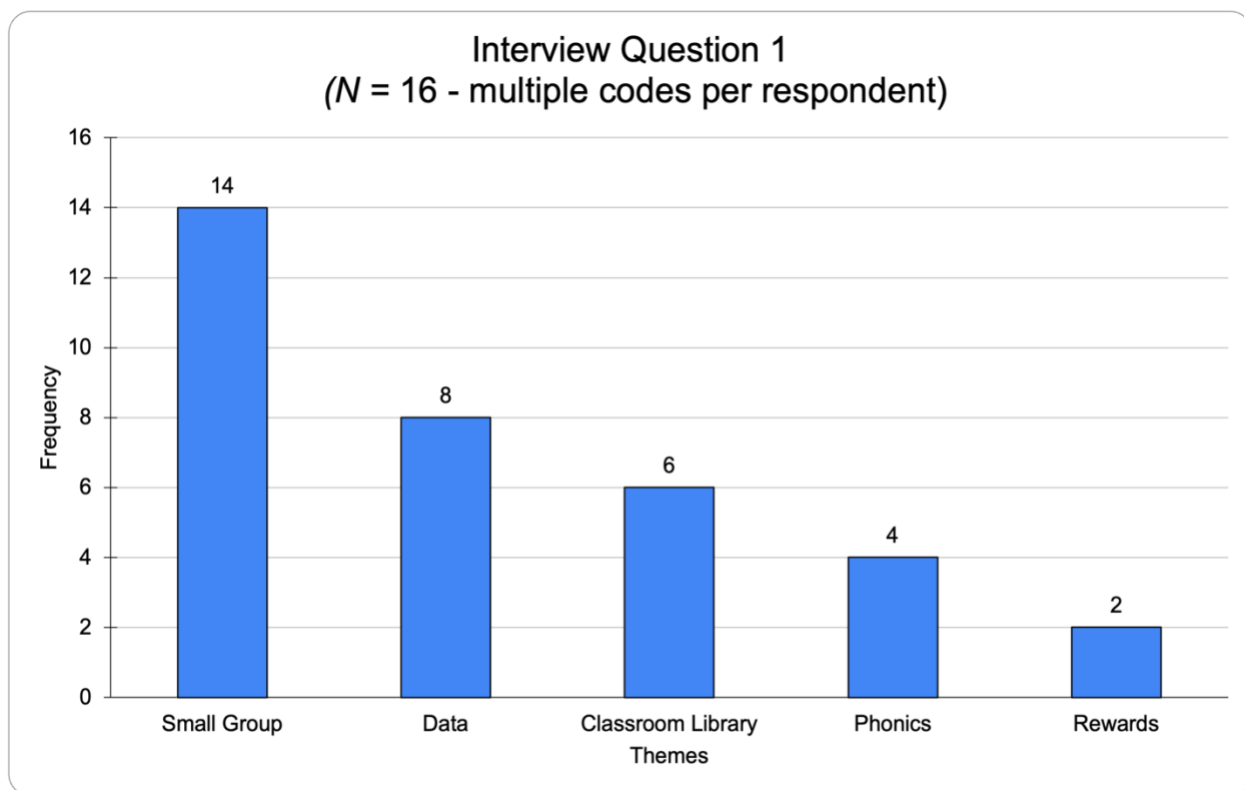
Small Group. As a result of the answers from participants regarding IQ1, other materials emerged as the most significant theme when defining student engagement. In total, 14 (41.2%) of the 16 participants' key phrases, viewpoints, or responses related directly or indirectly to successful reading engagement strategies. Several keywords, phrases, or viewpoints were included, including making text-to-self connections, modeling reading, small group instruction, silent sustained-reading time (independent reading time), books–talks, turn and talks, graphic organizers, and overall classroom environment. For example, P14 stated,

> Small group instruction. Pulling a group of about four to six students gets more individualized instruction, encouraging engagement. In a smaller setting, students can also express their views on texts we may be reading, enabling them to understand the texts better.

P12 highlighted the importance of modeling and reading at various times of the day.

Reading throughout the day and ensuring that kids see you reading fosters a love for reading. So, whether or not that's highlighting reading during writing, math, snack, or lunch, read all the time. Just reading, reading, reading, because it's fun. It's essential, and reading is often limited to 90 minutes on the schedule. My number one priority is ensuring that we're constantly 100% of the time engaging kids in reading and showing them how it's meaningful.

Data. According to the participants, the second most significant theme of reading engagement is data. Data yielded a frequency of eight (23.5%), with the following keywords and phrases: assess student trends, analyze class demographics, identify trends, test, and identify individual needs. P13 stated, "I love doing a book interest at the beginning of the year, so I know what type of books the scholars like." P4 also added,

First and foremost, just like my students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), having a snapshot of those students is essential. So, assessing them and knowing exactly where they are and their reading level. Then, creating different interventions in time and space to continue to use different, you know, different techniques throughout the lesson that promote reading.

Classroom Library. The third most identified theme was the classroom library. This theme's frequency yielded six (17.67%), with the following keywords: student interest, inclusivity, and just right books. P4 stated,

First, it's crucial to create an environment in a safe space that shows kids how reading is essential. So definitely a library with different, you know, genre books, especially books that look like them. There are so many multicultural books about the different procedures and routines in a classroom. So basically, it's making reading in the forefront like a goal.

P16 also elaborated by saying,

So, reading engagement, you want to give students a choice of just the right books. Oftentimes, we use reading conferences to do that, to try to match kids with "just right" books. It's sometimes a comprehension issue if students need to be more engaged. Sometimes, a student wants to read a book but can't comprehend it.

Phonics. In addition, phonics had the fourth highest impact on reading engagement, according to the participants. In response to IQ1, four (11.8%) of the 55 essential phrases, viewpoints, or responses were directly or indirectly related to students' knowledge of and access

to phonics, including keywords like phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, and high-

frequency words (sight words). P10 responded,

> I've used the five fundamental pillars of reading in the past, including vocabulary, phonics, fluency, phonemic awareness, and comprehension; those are the platforms for teaching reading. So, those are the strategies that I have had the students engage in. I noticed that less engaged students sometimes it's because they are strugglers.

Additionally, P2 stated,

> I prioritize my phonics block and ensure that I'm holding it with fidelity because I know that when students have a strong foundation in phonics, that will allow them to want to engage with reading more versus if they need a strong phonics curriculum. They're going to grow as an independent reader slowly.

> *Rewards.* The last identifiable theme for reading engagement strategies was rewarded.

Among the 55 keywords and phrases for IQ1, two (5.9%) had direct or indirect correlations with

successful reading engagement. P5 stated,

> My favorite strategy for my lowest readers is to reward them for reading. So she gets a reward anytime she's caught reading or uses her strategies of breakin. For example, she gets time to be set by someone she likes in class, which is her favorite reward. However, I recommend implementing a reward system that goes with their reading goals.

> **Interview Question 2.** IQ2 asked participants, "How do you maintain reading

engagement of less active students?" After an in-depth analysis of the interview questions,

responses yielded 16 participants' essential terms and phrases that were categorized into four

themes. The following themes emerged: (a) instructional strategies, (b) student interest, (c)

literary resources, and (d) rewards. Figure 3 shows a bar chart with the thematic analysis based

on multiple responses per participant.

Figure 3

IQ2 Thematic Analysis Bar Chart
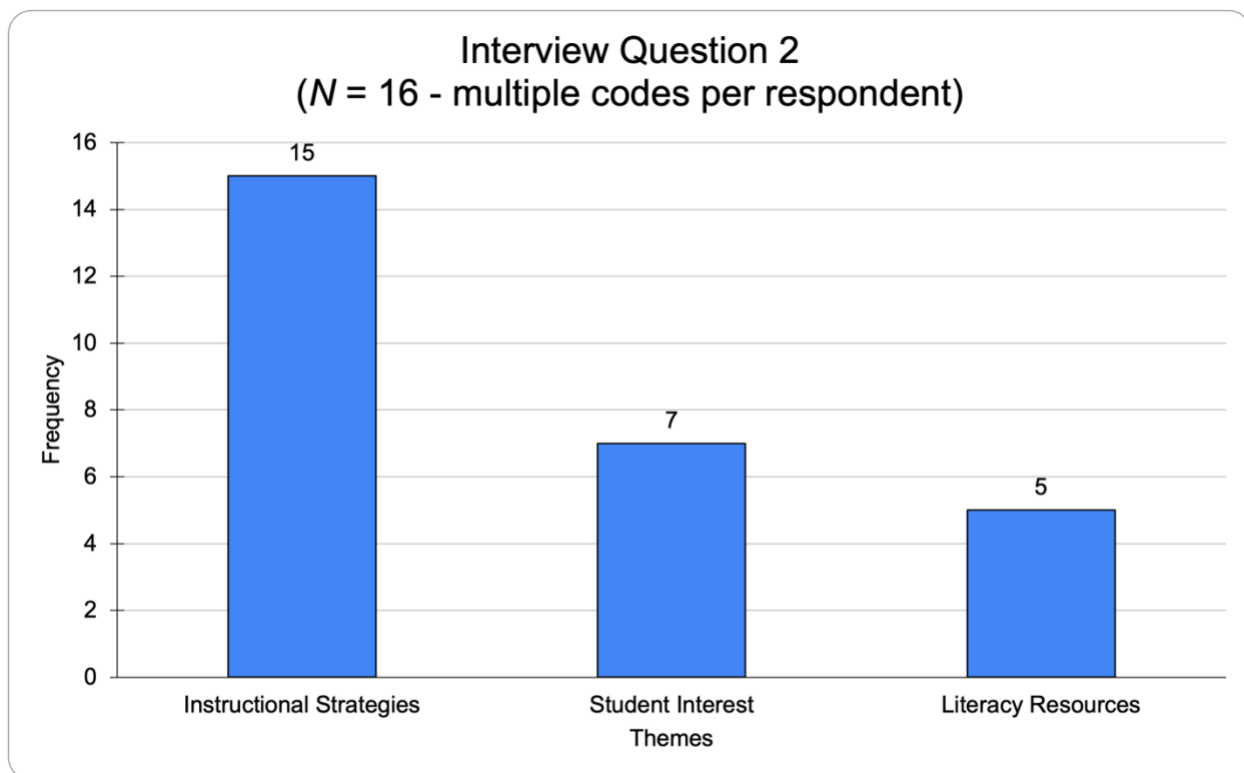
Instructional Strategies. IQ2 yielded instructional strategies as the most identified theme

for maintaining reading engagement. From the 27 key terms, responses, or viewpoints, 15

(55.6%) stated that instructional strategies are directly or indirectly related to maintaining

students' reading engagement. Those responses included partner reading, interactive read-alouds,

book talks, book shopping, strong phonics block, small group, reading conferences, inviting

parents to read, and assigning classroom library jobs. P1 highlighted that "engagement is not

because it's not necessarily interesting, but it could also be a skill level issue. Having them

partner with another student who might be a little bit stronger might also help motivate them."

P4 added,

> It is essential to get them a reading buddy and build in that time within the day when
> those students, whether in a small group, have goals and reward their progress. Making it

something that they look forward to. Building those interventions within the lesson would help keep kids more engaged. It'll be a part of everything. That's important. It can't just be like, oh, this is reading time. Like reading has to be across all content. So it's something that the kids have to continue to hear ongoing. And like I said, just creating those different times and interventions for those kids who may need a little more support with reading, just creating that time to do for them to grow in that area.

Student Interest. The second theme for IQ2 also addressed strategies for maintaining

reading engagement. Seven (25.9%) of the 27 keywords and phrases related directly or indirectly

to maintaining reading engagement included code words such as student interest, home life,

making connections, student choice, and student-centered. P12 stated how they used student

interest to maintain reading engagement.

> It's always been about finding what the kids are interested in, and I know that's the obvious answer. However, it does work, and being patient with the fact that it may take time, like it may take a whole school year, to find out what a kid is interested in. Then, once you've done it, that kid now loves reading. So it's a lot of patience and willingness to explore their interests. What they love and not caring what it is.

P13 also said,

> I love doing a book and was interested at the beginning of the year. I know what type of books the scholars like. Knowing and understanding their type helps keep the kids engaged who don't like reading. I like to read books that they are interested in. My young men love graphic novels, and I make time for them to read to them or allow them to read them to me. For my girls, I noticed they love books with a bit of drama in them. I use trauma-filled books based on things like what's on TV. Those are some of the blueprints. My students love reading these books because it relates to real-world problems they could be facing.

Literary Resources. The last theme, literary resources, yielded five (18.5%) of the 27 key

terms and phrases for maintaining reading engagement. P6 stated,

> I have a variety of books in my classroom for basic phonics books that are mostly CVC words or more complex. The sources and things like that with more significant words. So I, having a variety of reading levels in my classroom and making sure that even simply having books in my classroom that are targeted towards the spelling patterns that we're learning, so just making sure that I'm acknowledging that some students are not going to find reading engages, but because reading is just challenging. So ensure you're meeting them at their level when engaging them in reading.

P11 explained, "I try to make sure that I always pick culturally relevant reading selections." P12 shared,

> If they are reading graphic novels, who cares if they're looking at books that are way above their reading level like? Who cares? Just ensuring they have something they want to be looking at and engaging with is number one.

P4 emphasized,

> I think it's essential to create an environment in a safe space that kind of shows kids how reading is essential. So, definitely a library with different genre books, especially books that look like them. A lot of multicultural books in a classroom have different procedures and routines. So, making reading in the forefront is a goal.

Summary of RQ 1

RQ1 analyzed literacy specialists' successful strategies to engage K-5 students in reading. Eight themes were identified through an in-depth analysis of key terms, viewpoints, or responses to the interview questions. The eight themes were (a) data tracking, (b) phonics instruction, (c) classroom library, (d) rewards, (e) other materials, (f) instructional strategies, (g) student interest, and (h) literary resources. The responses to the two interview questions were assessed for commonality in the participants' responses to employing exemplary strategies and maintaining reading engagement.

Research Question 2

RQ2 asked, "What challenges do literacy specialists encounter when engaging K-5 students in reading?" Three interview questions helped answer RQ2.

- IQ3: What challenges do you face in implementing effective reading engagement strategies?

- IQ4: How do you overcome those challenges?

- IQ5: What impact, if at all, do these challenges have on the reading engagement of K-5 students?

The responses to three interview questions were examined for commonality among the participants' responses to the challenges they have faced in engaging K-5 students in reading.

Interview Question 3. IQ3 asked, "What challenges do you face in implementing effective reading engagement strategies?" Comprehensive data analysis of the interview question yielded 40 key phrases, viewpoints, and terms, which were coded into four different themes: (a) teacher training, (b) resources, (c) high-stakes testing, and (d) parent involvement. Figure 4 depicts a bar chart with the thematic analysis based on multiple responses per participant.

Figure 4

IQ3 Thematic Analysis Bar Chart
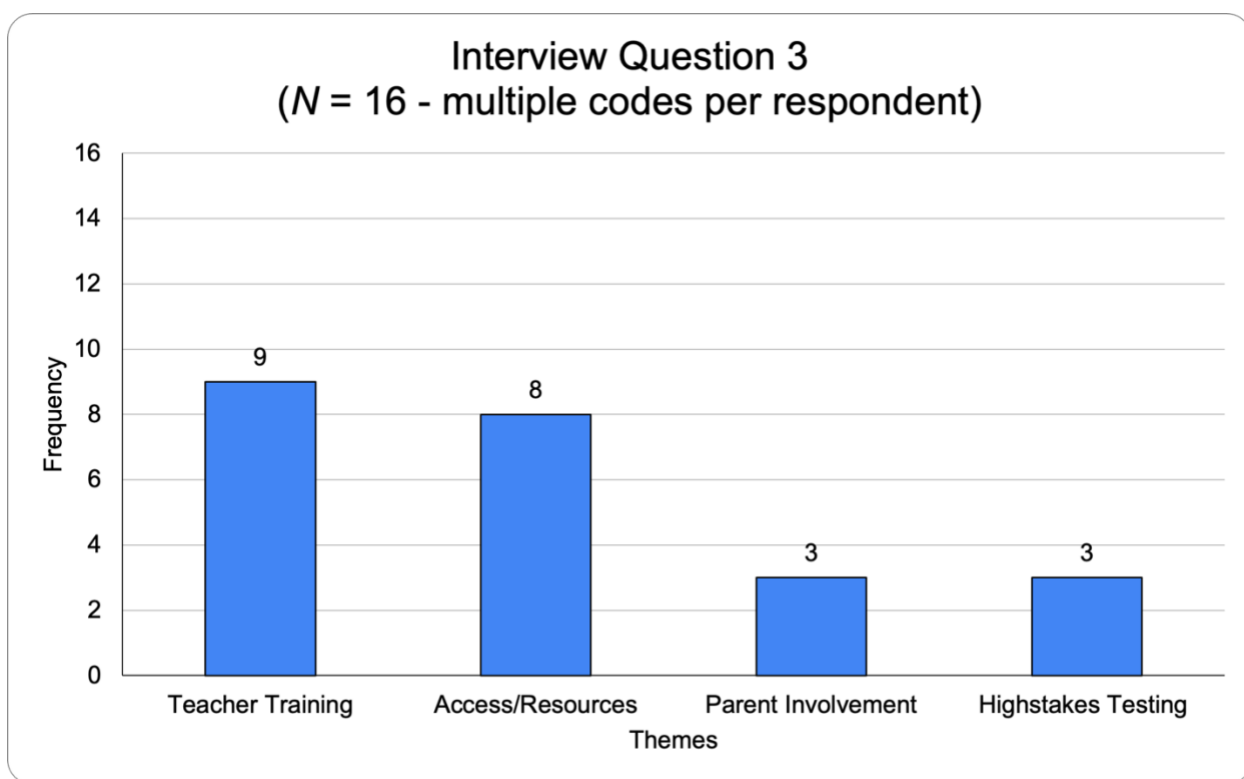
Teacher Training. IQ3 yielded teacher training as one of the most significant themes, with nine (39.1%) keywords, phrases, and viewpoints addressing literacy specialists' challenges in reading engaging. The key terms, phrases, and viewpoints included lack of leadership support,

knowledge needed to teach phonics, planning time, resources, teacher experience, and

pedagogical knowledge. P14 shared, "The barrier we see is teachers not having the pedagogical

skills or even the content knowledge to teach reading." P8 also stated that,

> Of course, there are challenges when teaching a particular grade level and you want to maintain the instruction. Sometimes, you have to step back to close those achievement gaps. Therefore, if one of my engagement strategies is to support the students or meet them where they are, I understand that certain situations may create a challenge because you still have to expose them to ongoing level texts and grade-level text instruction, so you need the necessary training.

> *Access/Resources.* Access/resources were the second most identified theme for IQ3,

yielding 11 (27%) key terms, phrases, and perspectives that illuminated the following challenges

experienced by literacy specialists when attempting to engage K-5 students in reading: (a) book

banning, (b) lack of resources, (c) lack of equity, (d) low-interest books, (e) lack of funding, (f)

outdated technological tools, and (g) poor monitoring of students with an IEP. P3 explained,

> We have book burning going on, which brings the challenge of finding books that are engaging for the audience that you have in your class. So I try to find the right books that match the book's faces. So that they're like, wow, some stories look like me.

P12 stated,

> The biggest one had been access to resources. For instance, money resources, book resources, and access to. Really, if I had my druthers, it would be ideal money and books, so I could put something in front of each kid they love. So, finding the actual resources and getting access to them has been a big challenge. You know, many hours personally spent on weekends and evenings in libraries, combing through to find things going to garage sales. I mean, just so much time and money spent trying to find that one thing that will spark engagement for a kid.

P5 stated,

> I'm working with a new student with low attendance and may need an IEP due to her learning difficulties. She possibly has an IEP, but we need the complete background information from her previous school. Therefore, pushing her further is challenging due to the need for more data and support.

Parent Involvement. The third theme that emerged from IQ3 was parent involvement, yielding three (13%) key terms, phrases, and viewpoints as a description of literacy specialists' challenges when engaging K-5 students in reading. The terms for this theme were home life, lack of support, and student attendance. P9 stated,

> We are one of the top countries where our students need to improve in literacy. We don't have parent involvement as much. Again, I know in my district, our parents are working. Our parents are trying to figure out how to be there for four or five kids at one time without support. With the lack of parent involvement and equity amongst districts, and even within the same district, there needs to be more equity based on what side of the world or tracks your school is on. Overall, there are so many different entities that we have to deal with. That's going to continue to widen. If there's no equity amongst our students, regardless of background or ethnicity, everybody has to access the resources required to develop and grow our students in literacy.

P4 asserted,

> It's essential once you, you know, you know your students, and you build a relationship and know the challenges that they face. For example, if I know that one of my students needs help, maybe their parents are busy working, and nobody reads with them at home. I would structure my lesson and make sure that I include interventions in my lesson that year. Maybe they need more reading time or me to set goals with them. Okay, take this home, read this, and bring it back. Just give them different or more techniques that they could use. You have to work a little harder regarding resources, but I don't want to use it as an excuse.

High-Stakes Testing. The final theme from IQ3 was high-stakes testing, yielding three (13%) critical terms, phrases, and perspectives to indicate literacy specialists' challenges when engaging students in reading. These keywords were: kids over-test, assess the data, and high stakes testing. According to P16,

> Well, one challenge is high-stakes testing because in schools, especially those that serve impoverished students, Title I schools. Those schools need help keeping up with accountability. When schools focus on testing, there is less time in the teacher's schedule and their day and their ability to focus on reading workshops and matching kids with "just right books." Sometimes, a teacher has to spend much more on direct teaching in the format they'll be assessed on the State test. Also, sometimes test preparation can overwhelm the engagement in allocating time for kids to read books and focusing on educators, minds.

Interview Question 4. IQ4 asked, "How do you overcome those challenges?" Upon completing thorough data analysis, IQ4 yielded 25 key terms, phrases, and perspectives on overcoming the challenges of reading engagement of K-5 students. The five themes that emerged were (a) professional development, (b) classroom environment, (c) small group, (d) student interest, and (e) data analysis. Figure 5 depicts a bar chart with thematic analysis showing the answers based on participant interviews.

Figure 5

IQ4 Thematic Analysis Bar Chart
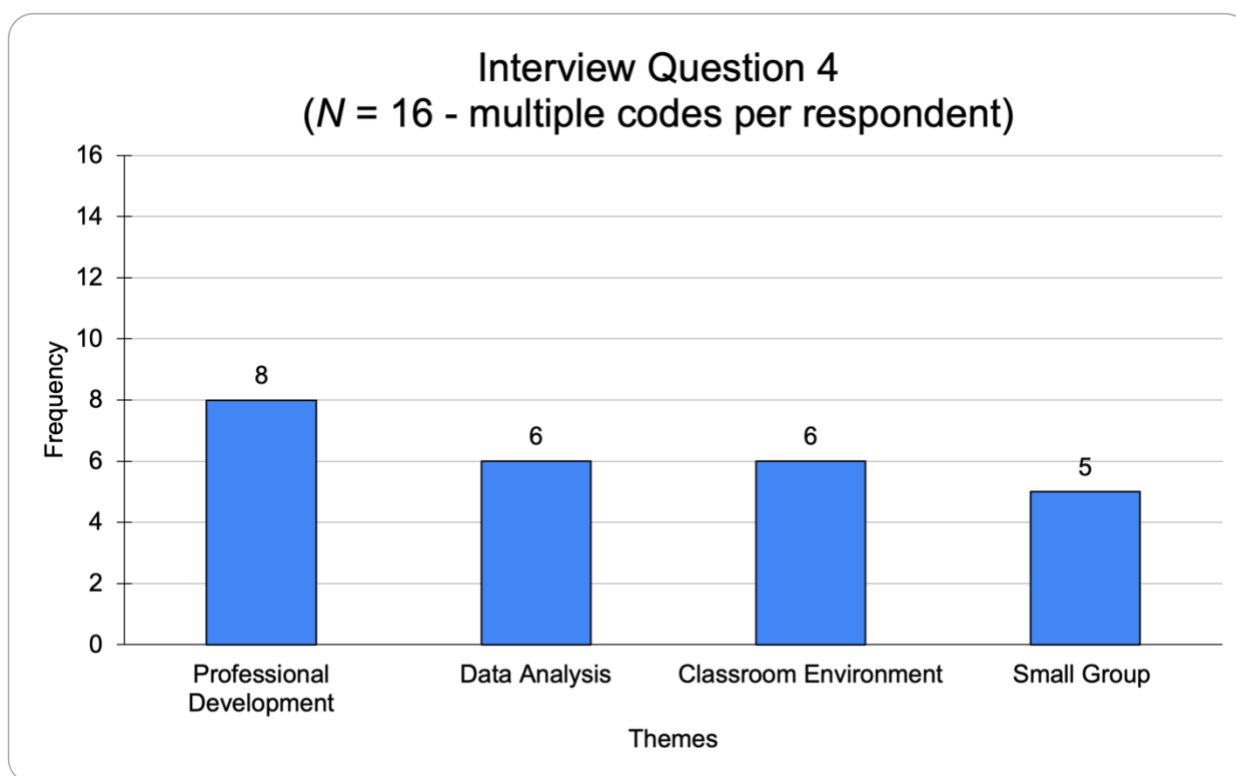
Professional Development. IQ4 yielded professional development as the most recurring theme for overcoming challenges literacy specialists encounter while engaging readers. Of the 25 key terms, perspectives, or responses, eight (32%) related directly or indirectly to overcoming challenges of literacy specialists, including key terms such as collaboration, planning, accessing

resources, training, and teacher development. P12 said, "I think it's just time, patience, asking for help, going to go everywhere you can, libraries, book fairs, everywhere to find books." P15 asked,

> How do we support our teachers strategically to build leaders in the school? Having multiple teachers take ownership of what teaching in the 20th century looks like? And together, we create what this looks like for our building. How can we best effectively use the technology and the curriculum in the same space? Learning how to transform kids together because we work better in cohorts and share resources, ideas, best practices, and bringing in content that will help benefit not only the one classroom but everybody on the grade level.

P8 stated, "Understanding the science of teaching reading and ensuring that teachers go through a reading academy. Meeting with teachers to show the importance of reading provides teachers with resources to 'bridge the gap.'"

Data Analysis. IQ4 yielded data analysis as the second recurring theme for overcoming challenges literacy specialists encounter while engaging readers. Of the 25 key terms, perspectives, or responses, six (24%) related directly or indirectly to overcoming challenges of literacy specialists, including the following key terms: diagnostic test, student reading level, and assess data. P6 stated,

> I do diagnostics of letter names and sounds, and this is in second grade. I still do this because you never know who has been slipping through the cracks since kindergarten. Students will only stay in the same group the whole school year. I'm analyzing the data and continuing these diagnostics throughout the school year.

P11 explained,

> Making sure that I know the reading levels of everyone in my classroom. So that I can break up the group and allow the more advanced readers to partner with struggling or low-performing readers. So they can be used as a peer tutor and a reinforcer of what they know. So, I understand the needs of my students and can change the instruction to meet those needs.

Classroom Environment. IQ4 yielded classroom environment as the third recurring theme for overcoming challenges literacy specialists encounter while engaging readers. Of the 25

key terms, perspectives, or responses, six (24%) related directly or indirectly to overcoming

challenges of literacy specialists, including critical terms such as model reading books, celebrate

growth, and reward systems. P4 asserted,

> Creating that space where kids know they can come and read and be safe, that it's essential, and it's fun. I create as many opportunities as I can in the classroom that make them feel self-motivated to want to go home and read a book and not wait for somebody to tell them to do it. They do it on their own. Ongoing goal setting with the kids, exposure, and creating their love for reading. They hope they will want to do it more and improve.

P1 expressed,

> For the students who graduate from my reading program, I give them certificates and things like that. I'm just trying to let them know that with any progress they make, whether a lot or a little, they are progressing nonetheless.

P3 expressed,

> I generate my own list and contact other educators to see what they are reading. Make sure that the books are all approved by the local board. Also, I make sure I'm teaching the kids about the different kinds of books, whether it's the chapter book or dialog reading book. We must read all of them because we have to read different things.

> ***Small Group.*** IQ4 yielded small groups as the fourth most recurring theme for

overcoming challenges literacy specialists encounter while engaging readers. Of the 25 key

terms, perspectives, or responses, five (20%) related directly or indirectly to overcoming

challenges of literacy specialists, including the following key terms: individualized instruction,

partner reading, and one-to-one. P5 explained,

> I like to provide differentiated instruction. If there are no strong basics in phonics, then there is no engagement in reading because there is no reading, so if we don't have strong and you can't even jump over to sign words right, you can't just say, well, they know some of their letters. Let's skip over some steps and do some sight words for you. They can't read sight words if they don't know the sounds of the letters they make because not all sight words are. I don't even like using sight words anymore because some side words are decodable.

P7 also discussed the following,

Support students where they are. I've overcome that particular challenge by designating a time when we can have small group instruction geared towards supporting individual students' needs. We will be exposed to ungrateful takes on grade-level instruction and push that forward.

Interview Question 5. IQ5 asked, "What impact, if at all, do these challenges have on the reading engagement of K-5 students?" In-depth analysis responses to IQ5 yielded 17 key terms, perspectives, and phrases, coded into the following 3 themes: reading gaps, low engagement, and low confidence. Figure 6 shows the bar chart with the thematic analysis based on the number of participants and their responses.

Figure 6

IQ5 Thematic Analysis Bar Chart

Interview Question 5
(*N* = 16 - multiple codes per respondent)
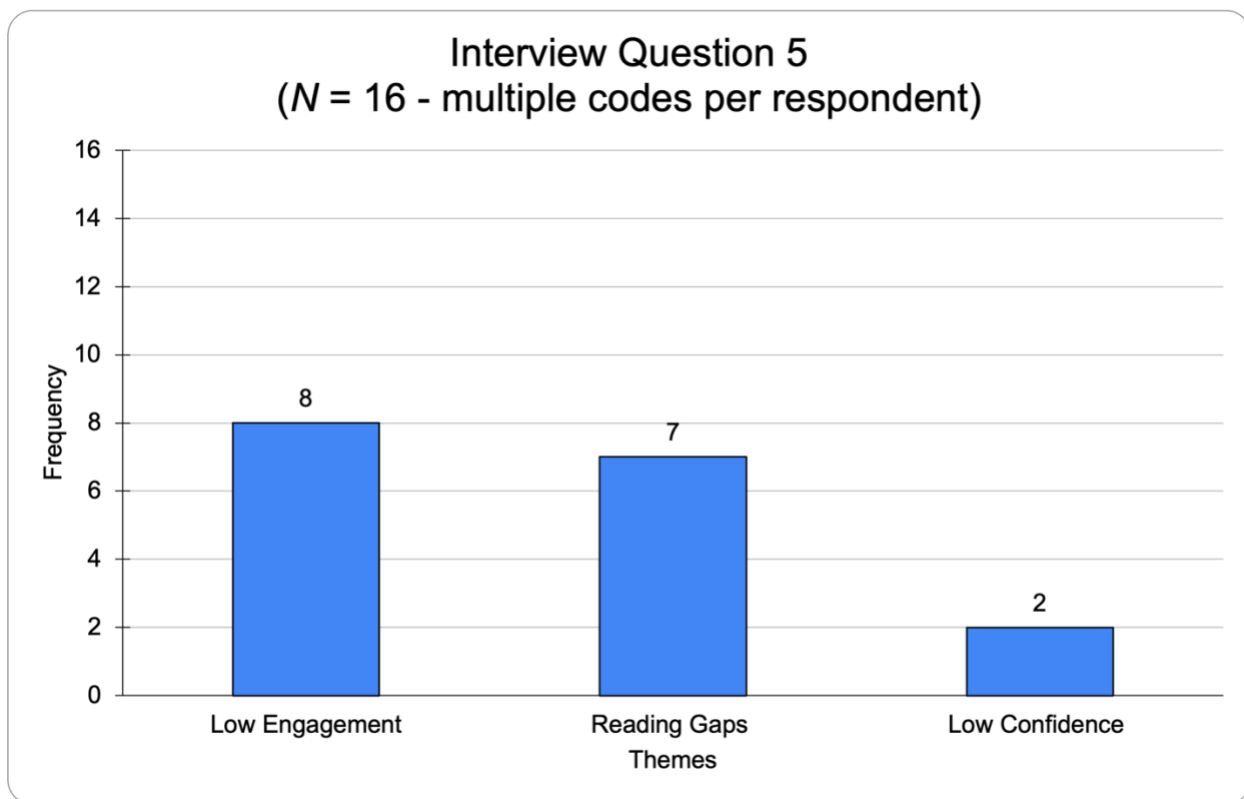
Low Engagement. IQ5 yielded low engagement as the most significant theme discussed when identifying the impact of literacy specialists' challenges while engaging students in reading. Of the 17 key terms, perspectives, or responses, eight (47.1%) related directly or

indirectly to the impact of challenges faced by literacy specialists, including the following key terms: low literacy, low interest, shy away from reading, and love for reading is loss. P5 stated, "There is a lack of engagement and resources when reading texts at their level. In our classroom. They've only been able to move up to a calendar level." P10 adds, "There's less chance of them to be engaged in the reading activity. To get them engaged, continue them one-on-one with them, or place a higher student with a low student, so they feel better about their learning."

Reading Gaps. IQ5 yielded reading gaps as the second most significant theme discussed when identifying the impact of literacy specialists' challenges while engaging students in reading. Of the 17 key terms, perspectives, or responses, seven (41.2%) related directly or indirectly to the impact of challenges faced by literacy specialists, including the following key terms: learning gaps widen, difficulty closing learning gaps, student achievement decreases, lack of learning, hinders fluency, and hinders comprehension. P6 noticed, "One thing I see is that most students are not on grade level. The grade-level students tend to fall behind because we're so focused on catching up from other grades." P13 said, "The stories that could be more interesting to them. It impacts their learning or their how. If they don't understand the story or find it boring because they're just reading words, they're not reading to understand or comprehend."

Low Confidence. IQ5 yielded low confidence as the third significant theme discussed when identifying the impact of literacy specialists' challenges while engaging students in reading. Of the 17 key terms, perspectives, or responses, two (11.8%) related directly or indirectly to the impact of challenges faced by literacy specialists, including the following key terms: discouragement, defeat, and low self-efficacy. P5 explained, "If a student does not think they're a good reader, oftentimes they don't want to engage in text. I think about consistent

quality, instruction, and student engagement." P14 further stated, "If a student does not think they're a good reader, oftentimes they don't want to engage in the text. I think about consistent quality, instruction, and student engagement."

Summary of RQ2

RQ2 addressed literacy specialists' challenges when engaging K-5 students in reading. Eleven themes were identified by analyzing key phrases, viewpoints, or responses given to IQ3, IQ4, and IQ5: (a) reading gaps, (b) data analysis, (c) small groups, (d) classroom environment, (e) professional development, (f) teacher training, (g) low engagement, (h) low confidence, (i) access/resources, (j) parent involvement, and (h) high stakes testing.

Research Question 3

RQ3 asked, "How do literacy specialists define, track, and measure student engagement among K-5 students?" The interview questions which helped determine the themes for this question were as follows.

- IQ6: How do you know the strategy/strategies that you use are successful?
- IQ7: How do you keep up with the most recent findings in the field of reading to revise your methods?

These questions were asked to find the commonalities in the participants' answers, which were analyzed to find the themes.

Interview Question 6. IQ6 asked, "How do you know the strategy/strategies you are successful in?" In-depth analysis responses to IQ6 yielded a total of 36 key terms, perspectives, and phrases, which were coded into the following four themes: (a) formal and informal assessments, (b) student excitement, (c) self-reflection, and (d) parent involvement. Figure 7 shows the bar chart with the thematic analysis depicting the number of participants per theme.

Figure 7

IQ6 Thematic Analysis Bar Chart
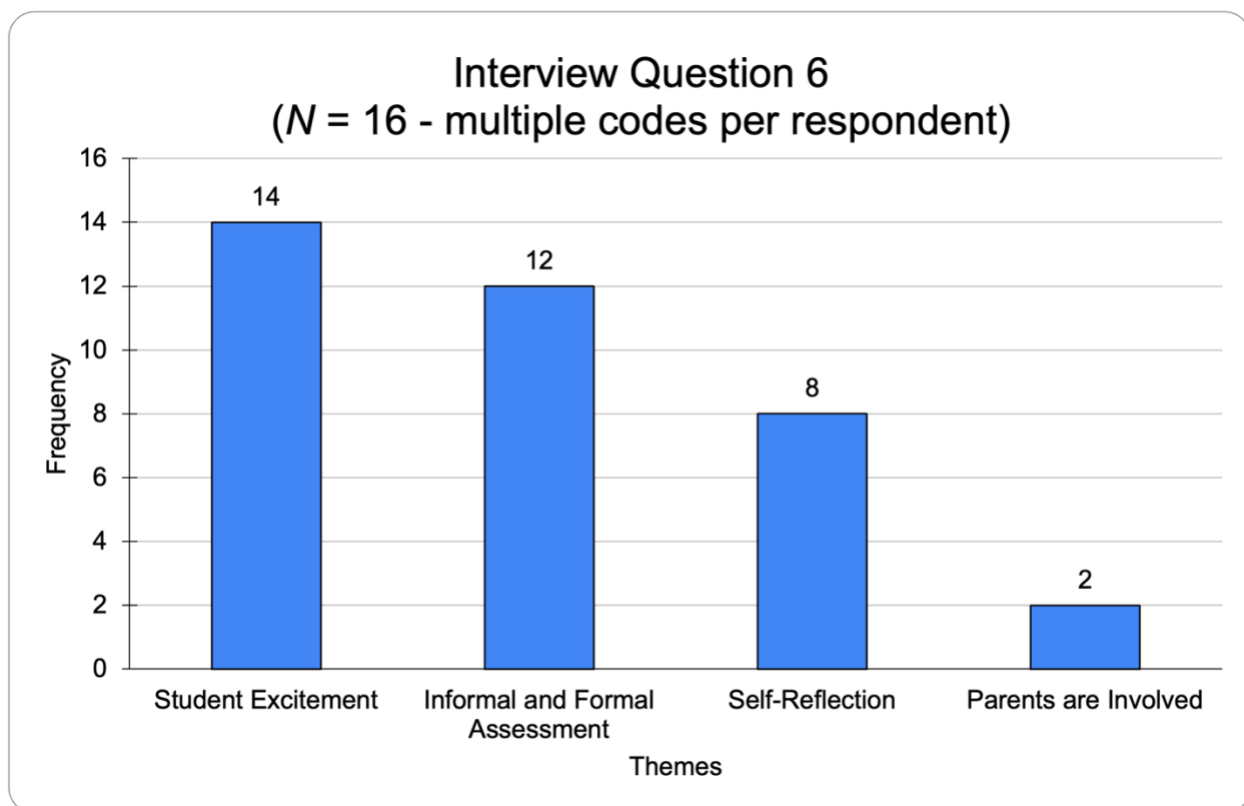
   Student Excitement. IQ6 yielded student excitement as the most significant theme

discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading.

Of the 36 key terms, perspectives, or responses, 14 (38.9%) stated that student excitement is a

successful strategy to engage students in reading. P4 expressed,

> I monitor student learning. I know my strategies are working when kids are talking about reading, showing their excitement, picking out books on their own, reading to their peers, and finding a safe place in the classroom or corner. They're getting lost in the book, and I know that the strategies are working when they are doing it while no one is watching. Kids are being super resilient despite their fear.

P6 stated,

> I measure my success based on how many students at the end of my school year are excited about being at school and learning. They are excited about what they have already learned and what they're excited to continue to learn.

Informal And Formal Assessment. IQ6 yielded informal assessment as the second most significant theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 36 key terms, perspectives, or responses, 12 (33.3%) stated that informal assessment successfully engages students in reading. P4 expressed,

> Are learning, are progressing, if they're growing and, you know. I can see that the, you know, informal or formal assessments that succeed for me when students come back and tell me how much they love reading or how much they love learning new things and building knowledge, that that's rewarding.

Furthermore, P6 expressed,

> I look at data from I-ready and unit tests like our students continuing to make those low rates. Is there some progression going on? If there's no progression, what did I do to prevent the progression, or what do we need to do to make sure that the next time around, there is progression? If I'm not testing it or using diagnostics tests or things like that, it's really hard for me to see it.

Self-Reflection. IQ6 yielded self-reflection as the third significant theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 36 key terms, perspectives, or responses, eight (22.2%) stated that self-reflection is a successful strategy to engage students in reading. P10 also discussed the theme of self-reflection, stating, "I define success by setting goals for myself and making sure that I achieve those goals." P2 communicated,

> I am a successful teacher; it means that 100% of my students are making the growth they need, are on grade level, and are prepared for the next grade. I've never been entirely successful as a teacher because if even one of my students isn't ready for the next grade, that's a failure on my part. Now, they need to prepare for what they need to be prepared for, but I also look at it on the flip side of how success is growth, and growth is success. If students are growing, that is a success. My goal as a teacher is to close the achievements.

P4 shared, "I think it's important that the educators take ownership and responsibility of children's learning. Yes, we're successful when the kids are successful."

Involved Parents. IQ6 yielded involved parents as the fourth significant theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 36 key terms, perspectives, or responses, two (5.6%) stated that parent involvement is a successful strategy to engage students in reading. P14 also discussed the theme of parent involvement, stating,

> I look at all those different things as measurements. Of course, other things are observable when I'm moving through the building. I have mentioned that how my parents respond plays a role in measuring success. Sometimes, they will give me feedback about how our students are doing. So, not just thinking about the test scores but getting a feel from different stakeholders.

Interview Question 7. IQ7 examined, "How do you keep up with the most recent findings in the field of reading to revise your own methods?" In-depth analysis responses to IQ7 yielded 41 key terms, perspectives, and phrases coded into the following five themes: (a) professional development, (b) collaboration, (c) peer-reviewed, (d) social media, and (e) online blogs. Figure 8 depicts a bar graph that shows the thematic analysis based on the participants' answers.

Figure 8

IQ7 Thematic Analysis Bar Chart

Interview Question 7
(N = 16 - multiple codes per respondent)
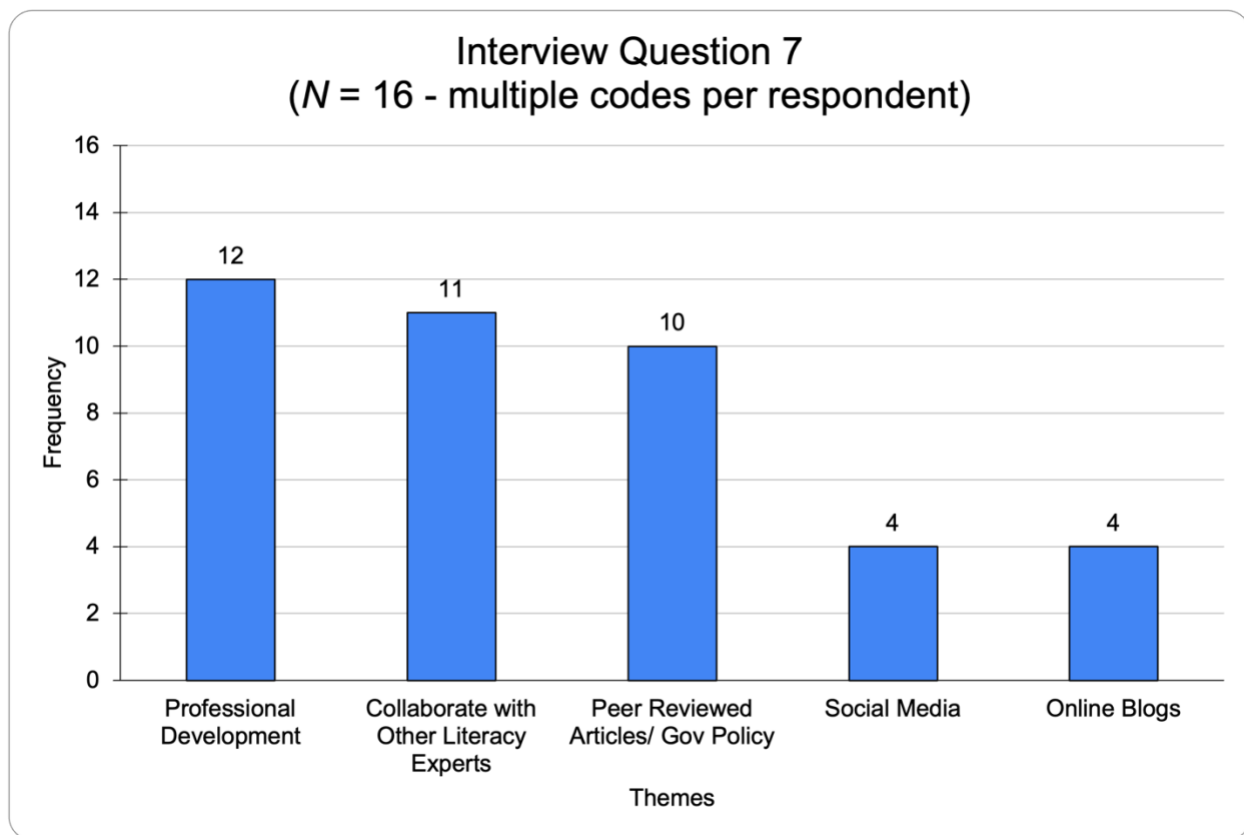
Professional Development. IQ8 yielded professional development as the most significant

theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in

reading. Of the 41 key terms, perspectives, or responses, 12 (29.3%) were stated as a best

practice for staying knowledgeable. P7 stated, "Working with the consultants, between my

district and providing professional development opportunities. I built my methods and ability to

help other teachers effectively in the classroom." P13 explained,

> I attend different professional developments, not just with my district. I go to Region 4
> trainings. I was sent to Atlanta to learn different practices at Ron Clark Academy. I spent
> a whole day with him at his school, which helped me publish my beliefs.

Collaboration. IQ8 yielded collaboration as the most significant theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 41 key terms, perspectives, or responses, 11 (26.8%) were stated as a best practice for staying knowledgeable. P12 expressed,

> You know it's great always to be the expert in the room to help others, but at some point, you want to make sure you are not the expert in the room in the places you go so that you can continue learning and build your network.

P7 stated,

> Connect with other literacy specialists. For you to be an effective coach, it's okay to say although I have all of the knowledge, there is still a skill set that I need to develop, and to develop that, I may need some practice. So, having others come in and share their view and provide you with feedback. The ability to transfer your knowledge and skill onto someone else. Is that also effective?

Peer-Reviewed Articles/Government Policies. IQ8 yielded reviewed articles as the most significant theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 41 key terms, perspectives, or responses, 10 (24.4%) were stated as a best practice for staying knowledgeable. P13 stated,

> I don't have any specific books now, but I go to different articles online to see if I have any concerns or need clarification about any strategies my boss may want me to implement. I do my own research online. So, any resource that's an accountable website, expert, or any book.

P9 also explained the importance of staying abreast of current policies.

> I signed up for even court hearings; things like that are different bills addressing education. It sends me a reminder when bills are being introduced based on education. It's that reminder when things are being put on the floor and when decisions are being made at every step of every level, so when a bill is introduced, I receive text messages and emails when it gets to the floor. That's one of the ways that I keep up with the most recent findings.

P16 also emphasized,

> One of your best bets is to attend the International Literacy Association or the National Council of Teachers of English Language. Those are two of the biggest literacy

associations in the United States, so looking at their position papers on their websites about various topics.

Online Blogs. IQ8 yielded online blogs as the most significant theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 41 key terms, perspectives, or responses, four (9.8%) were stated as a best practice for staying knowledgeable. P4 stated,

> Follow the top five blogs to read about future education. I stay up on what's happening in the metaverse we've been trying to think about. How do we coach teachers in the metaverse online? But staying close because education is tricky in higher ed.

P5 expressed, "reading different articles online, just having a tag to inform when new strategies come out with new data based on scores. In our city. What does it say is the best strategy for students?" P3 stated, "Edutopia is a great website. Also, always look at the American Library Association website; their magazines are always good. I make sure I attend any local or state nationals conferences on reading."

Social Media. IQ8 yielded social media as the most significant theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 41 key terms, perspectives, or responses, four (9.8%) were stated as a best practice for staying knowledgeable. P9 expressed,

> We use social media. Social media has become essential to learning new things. I have joined different curriculum groups, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter literacy groups. It's been amazing just to be, even if you're not a person who reads a lot or enjoys those types of things. But you enjoy quick little tips and knit bits that will even help support your growth and learning about education in our stance.

P12 also stated that she listens to "podcasts, watching videos, and talking with other folks in the field." P14 added, "Social media is like looking at Twitter. Sometimes you'll see something, and it'll be like, oh, I've never heard of that, and then it will, you know, spark you to want to learn more."

Summary of RQ3

RQ3 addressed literacy specialists' methods to measure the success of K-5 reading engagement strategies. Nine themes were identified by analyzing key phrases, viewpoints, or responses given for IQ6 and IQ7: (a) collaboration, (b) professional development, (c) online blogs, (d) peer-reviewed articles, (e) social media, (f) formal and informal assessments, (g) parent involvement, (h) self-reflection, and (i) student excitement.

Research Question 4

RQ4 asked, "What recommendations do literacy specialists in K-5 education have for others in the field?" The following interview questions were asked, and data was collected to find the themes based on the participants' answers.

- IQ8: What is your advice for the other literacy specialists who aspire to elevate their efficiency on their school campus?

- IQ9: If you could go a few years back in your career, is there anything you would do differently? If yes, why or why not?

- IQ10: Is there anything you would like to add?

Interview Question 8. IQ8 examined methods used by literacy specialists to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. The question asked the participants about the advice they would provide to other literary specialists aspiring to elevate their efficiency on their school campus. In-depth analysis responses to IQ8 yielded 42 key terms, perspectives, and phrases, coded into the following themes: model, professional development, classroom environment, and planning. Figure 9 shows a bar graph depicting the thematic analysis based on the multiple answers per participant.

Figure 9

IQ8 Thematic Analysis Bar Chart

Interview Question 8
(N = 16 - multiple codes per respondent)
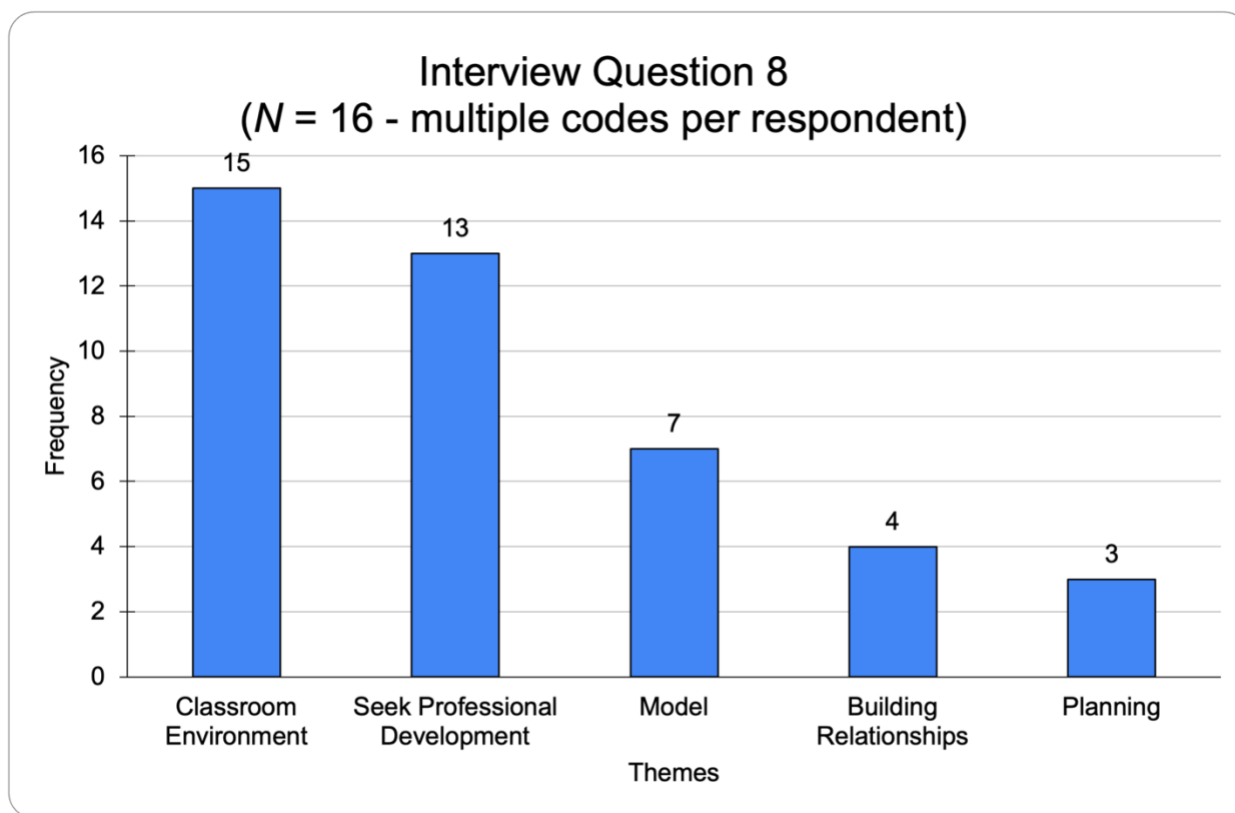
Classroom Environment. IQ8 yielded classroom environment as the most significant

theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in

reading. Of the 42 key terms, perspectives, or responses, 15 (35.7%) stated that they used the

classroom environment to engage students in reading. According to P2,

> You have to have strong classroom management because how can you possibly get
> through all the things we've been talking about, such as one-to-one assessing, meeting
> with kids in small groups, stopping by students' desks, and having them read to you in a
> class of 30 kids that are all reading at the same time.

P8 explained,

> I also empower my students to know that this is our classroom. We all take part in this, so
> I provide jobs. This allows them to sign up for jobs, hold them accountable for doing
> their job, and get their feedback on how things are going in the classroom. Above
> everything, really resting in a space of these are the things that we said that we were

going to do and these are the things that need to happen. The more that you reinforce the expectations that were established together as a class, it helps students. They will take charge in the classroom, and the second part of that question is cultivating a love for reading.

Finally, P4 expressed,

The culture of the school is also very important. There must be incentives, rewards, and shout-outs promoting reading. I think that will help. At the school that I work at, kids earn panda books they can use to buy things. They should be buying books of all kinds of things. We should be having reading challenges and literacy nights.

Professional Development. IQ8 yielded professional development as the second most significant theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 42 key terms, perspectives, or responses, 13 (31%) stated that they used knowledge gained through professional development to engage students in reading. P3 explained,

Everybody needs to attend conferences. The specialist alone can skip conferences and then bring back information. People need to hear information for themselves first hand instead of second hand. And I think a lot of districts and schools missed that mark on that.

Modeling. IQ8 yielded modeling as the third theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 42 key terms, perspectives, or responses, seven (16.7%) stated that they used modeling to elevate their efficiency in engaging students in reading. P1 stated,

Make sure the students understand that reading is serious. Make sure that they catch you reading your personal books, too. Nowadays, teachers only sometimes find time to do things like read aloud and our guided reading, or whatever the case may be. So the teacher must practice what they preach.

P2 also said,

Modeling pushes the love of reading. Allowing kids to bring in books they are interested in promotes a love of reading. I firmly believe that every child in my classroom is a capable learner and reader. I have to figure out how to get them there.

Building Relationships. IQ8 yielded building relationships as the fourth theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 42 key terms, perspectives, or responses, four (9.5%) stated that building relationships can elevate their efficiency in engaging students in reading. Moreover, P15 stated,

> Getting along with the parent, you know, reaching out to the parent way beforehand. I'm very excited. I get your son. Is there anything they love so I can acquire into the classroom way beforehand? Invite the parent to see the parent's skills and expertise and try to find ways to incorporate that in the classroom, which helps with classroom management.

P3 expressed,

> We have reading nights, reading time, curating lists that reflect school and classroom demographics, and ensuring parents know about free resources from the school or public libraries. Also, allowing students to meet authors curating read-alouds. Then, allowing other students to come and read to younger students and spark excitement on both ends.

Planning. IQ8 yielded planning as the final theme discussed when identifying ways to elevate their efficiency while engaging students in reading. Of the 42 key terms, perspectives, or responses, three (7.1%) stated that planning is a method to elevate their efficiency in engaging students in reading. P14 suggests "looking at your calendar and your week and quantifying it. The number one thing that changed and allowed me to articulate what I was doing and that I knew that my work was impactful."

Interview Question 9. IQ9 asked, "If you could go a few years back in your career, is there anything you would do differently? If so, why or why not?" In-depth analysis responses to IQ9 yielded 23 key terms, perspectives, and phrases, coded into four themes: (a) more intervention blocks, (b) seek professional development, (c) increase parent involvement, and (d) culturally relevant books. Figure 10 shows a bar chart with the thematic analysis based on the answers provided by the participants.

Figure 10

IQ9 Thematic Analysis Bar Chart

Interview Question 9
(N = 16 - multiple codes per respondent)
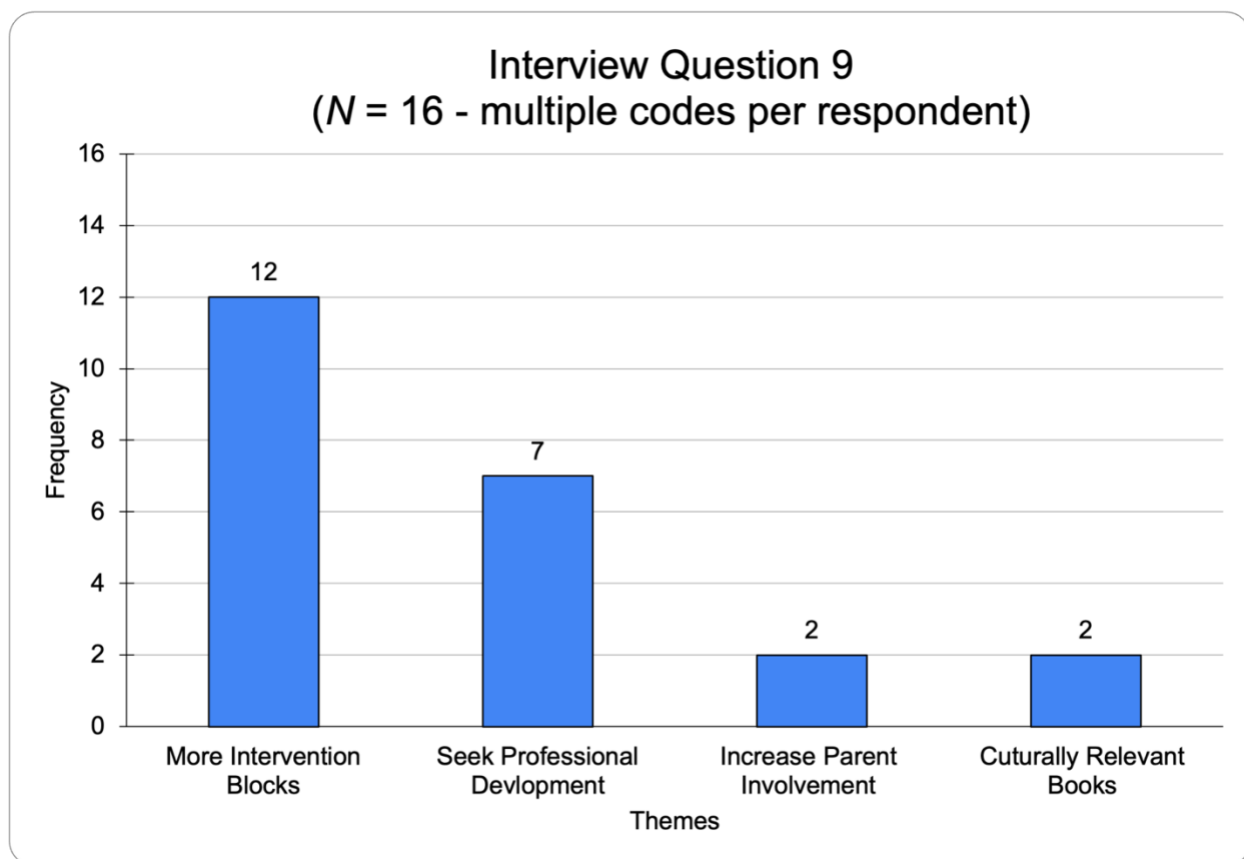
> **More Intervention Blocks**. IQ9 yielded more intervention blocks as the most significant theme discussed when identifying whether or not literacy specialists would do anything differently in their previous years to engage students in reading. Of the 23 key terms, perspectives, or responses, 12 (52.2%) stated they would incorporate more intervention blocks. P11 stated,

> I would go back in time and try to create some books, and maybe even, I'd have the students create their own books, you know, that could provide the reading intervention but also the level of engagement and cultural connection that was missing.

P2 expressed,

> If I could take things from a few years ago and still be able to employ them now, I would have more tremendous success with a more substantial intervention block. That's where

we close the gaps. Meeting kids, where they're at, and pushing them on what they need versus relying on whole group instruction. This is something that I feel very strongly about now that I am learning how to do it.

Seek Professional Development. IQ9 yielded seeking professional development as the second most significant theme discussed when identifying whether or not literacy specialists would do anything differently in their previous years to engage students in reading. Of the 23 key terms, perspectives, or responses, seven (30%) stated they would seek or provide professional development and mentorship. P16 stated,

> I would definitely. It took me a long while to know the balance between literacy, best practices, and the requirements for a leadership position in a school. I was very idealistic in my youth, and I wanted to promote that love of reading I wanted to promote, that joyful and meaningful reading. I would also add the reading and writing connection because one of the best ways to promote engagement in reading. That both promotes engagement and reading and greater analysis of reading because they are okay, they're thinking purposely.

P10 stated,

> I would have stayed in the classroom longer because we have a lot of new teachers who have not been trained in the art of teaching, and a lot of it is innate; either you're born with it, or you're not. I have a deep love for teaching and love for students. I want to make sure that I make every deposit I can possibly make to those students so they will live a successful life.

Increased Parent Involvement. IQ9 yielded increased parent involvement as the third most significant theme discussed when identifying whether or not literacy specialists would do anything differently in their previous years to engage students in reading. Of the 23 key terms, perspectives, or responses, two (8.7%) stated they would get parents more involved in their classrooms. P2 also stated,

> Be transparent with families; we're not sugarcoating where your kid is. I will tell you, and I will make you uncomfortable. I used to fear making parents uncomfortable, but now people only do things when uncomfortable. You have to be honest with families as a reading teacher. They will only do something different to support their kiddos if they know.

For the purpose of this study, the participant defined the term sugar coating as relaying information and data in a filtered manner to protect the parents emotionally.

Culturally Relevant Books. Interview question 9 yielded culturally relevant books as the third most significant theme discussed when identifying whether or not literacy specialists would do anything differently in their previous years to engage students in reading. Of the 23 key terms, perspectives, or responses, two (8.7%) would be more intentional about the books they use in the classroom. P11 stated, "Make sure all your books are culturally relevant. For example, they have high interests, and they may have. They may be tailored to our students with reading difficulty. So low readability, high interest. Culturally relevant."

Interview Question 10. IQ10 asked, "Is there anything else you would like to add?" A comprehensive analysis of the responses to this interview question yielded a total of 21 key terms, phrases, and viewpoints, which were coded into three different themes: (a) classroom environment, (b) take ownership of your learning, and (c) engage parents. Figure 11 shows the bar chart with the thematic analysis based on the number of participants.

Figure 11

IQ10 Thematic Analysis Bar Chart

Interview Question 10
(N = 16 - multiple codes per respondent)
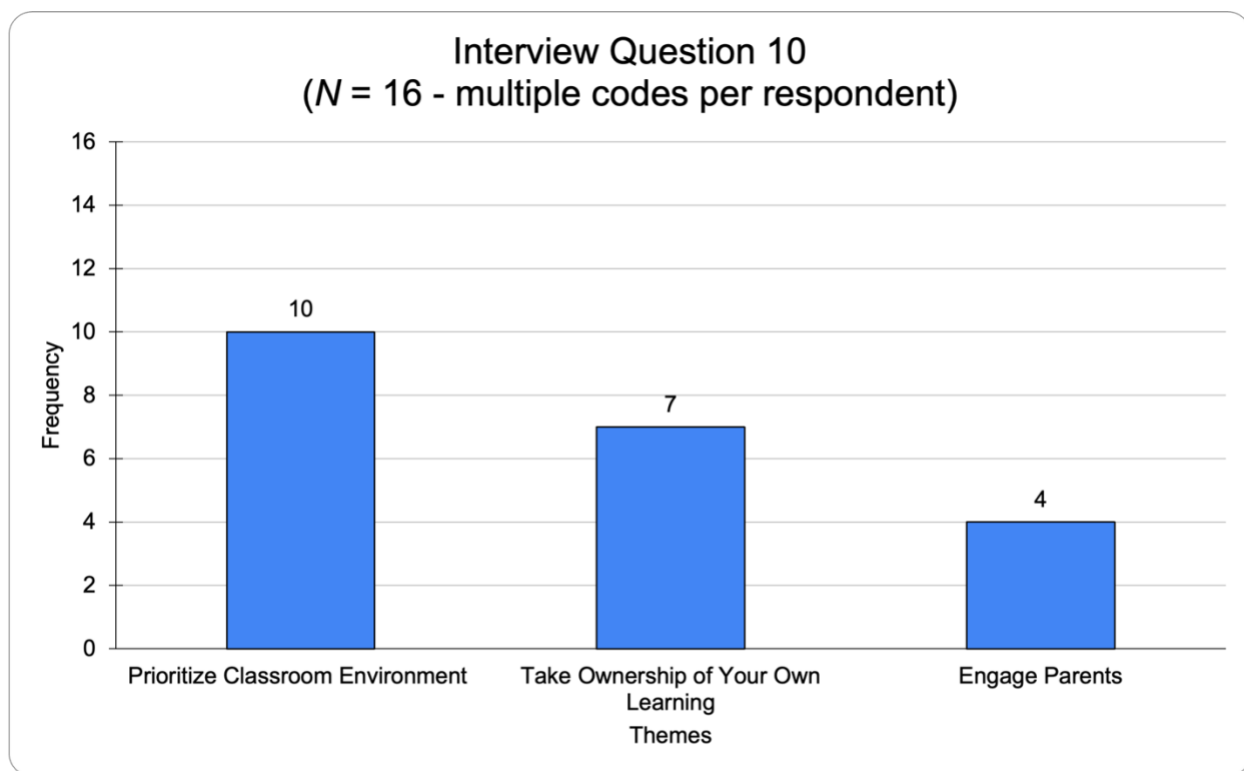
   Prioritize Classroom Environment. The most-ranked theme for IQ10 was to prioritize

the classroom environment. Of the 21 key terms, phrases, and viewpoints that emerged in

response to this interview question, 10 (47.6%) indicated that the participant had closing

thoughts. P11 stated,

> When you're talking to a reading interventionist or specialist, they often have more
> specialized knowledge and teaching but do not know how to implement reading. I found
> that a lot of classroom teachers, even early elementary teachers, don't know how to
> pronounce phone names properly. So that translates to students coming to me sometimes
> later.

   Take Ownership Of Your Own Learning. The most-ranked theme for IQ10 was

prioritizing taking ownership of one's learning. Of the 21 key terms, phrases, and viewpoints that

emerged in response to this interview question, seven (33.3%) indicated that the participants

encouraged literacy specialists and other stakeholders to take ownership of their own learning.

P4 explained, "I continue doing the research changes, identifying what the experts in this field say or best practices for engaging students in reading. I also want to thank you for mentioning this because it's an ongoing learning process."

Engage Parents. The last-ranked theme for IQ10 was engaging parents. Of the 21 key terms, phrases, and viewpoints that emerged in response to this interview question, four (19%) indicated that the participant expressed the need to increase parent engagement in the student's academic journey. P5 expressed,

> If we pushed in on robust strategies when you let families know when they came in. Your kid has to get to this level and accessible interventions they have to use. We hit hard on it like we do for football, like we do for sports and arts. We can have the same strategy. 100% family engagement goes into reading. The best strategy to host our kids right now. More family engagement.

Summary of RQ4

Research question 4 addressed the advice that experienced literacy specialists would give to beginner literacy specialists to help them engage K-5 students in reading. Ten themes were identified by analyzing key phrases, viewpoints, or responses given to IQ8, IQ9, and IQ10: (a) model, (b) professional development, (c) classroom environment, (d) building relationships, (e) planning, (f) more intervention, (g) seek professional development, (h) parent involvement, (i) culturally relevant books, (j) classroom environment, (k) ownership of their own learning, and (l) engage parents.

Chapter Summary

This study aimed to determine best practices literacy specialists use to engage K-5 students in reading books, examine their challenges, and obtain the recommendations experienced literacy specialists have to offer to new literacy specialists to promote and increase reading engagement. To accomplish this task, 16 experienced literacy specialists teaching in K-5

schools were recruited. Each participant was asked the same 10 open-ended interview questions constructed to answer the four research questions.

- RQ1: What are the successful strategies literacy specialists use to engage K-5 students in reading?

- RQ2: What challenges do literacy specialists encounter when engaging K-5 students in reading?

- RQ3: How do literacy specialists measure success in creating and establishing K-5 reading engagement strategies?

- RQ4: What recommendations do literacy specialists have for incoming literacy specialists that foster high levels of reading engagement among K-5 students?

The data for this study was collected by conducting 16 semi-structured interviews. Moreover, these interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and then coded by theme. To validate the thematic coding, an inter-rater review process was employed. Thus, a phenomenological approach was used to assess and analyze the data; this process was outlined in Chapter 3. The data yielded 38 themes. Furthermore, Table 5 included a data collection summary categorized by the research question and its corresponding themes. Chapter 5 included an in-depth discussion of the themes, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion of the study.

Table 5

Summary of Themes for the Research Questions

RQ1. What are the successful strategies literacy specialists are using to engage K-5 students in reading?	RQ2. What challenges do literacy specialists encounter when engaging K-5 students in reading?	RQ3. How do literacy specialists measure success in creating and establishing K-5 reading engagement strategies?	RQ4. What recommendations to literacy specialists have for incoming literacy specialists that foster high levels of reading engagement among Black and students?
Student Interest	Low Engagement	Collaboration	Model
Literary Resources	Low Confidence	Online Blogs	Professional Development
Data	Reading Gaps	Peer Reviewed Articles	Classroom Environment
Phonics	Data Analysis	Social Media	Classroom Environment
Classroom Library	Small Groups	Informal and Formal Assessments	Building Relationships
Rewards	Classroom Environment	Parent Involvement	Planning
Instructional Strategies	Professional Development	Self-Reflection	Yes
Other Materials	Teacher Training	Student Excitement	No
	Parent Involvement	Professional Development	Nothing to Add
	High-stakes Testing		Closing Thoughts

Note. An overview of all the themes derived from the data analysis can be found in this table.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Educators nationwide are challenged to combat systemic disparities and learning loss due to COVID-19. Specifically, literacy specialists are seeking training, strategies, and resources to engage students in reading. However, it is essential to note that reading engagement is a multi-layered construct (Wen et al., 2016). Reading engagement can be measured in three ways, according to Wen et al. (2016): (a) reading time, (b) reading amount, and (c) diverse reading content. As a result, many literacy specialists who want to engage students in reading face many challenges that make it difficult to provide quality instruction.

The researcher's aim of this study was to present findings that would contribute to the existing literature by identifying best practices and effective strategies for literacy specialists to engage K-5 students in reading and provide educators with more insight into the impact of reading loss. Moreover, the researcher espoused analyzing strategies literacy specialists are using to engage students in reading, understand the challenges faced by literacy specialists, and provide a model that could be used in schools throughout the U.S. Furthermore, the goal of this study was to establish a model that can serve as a framework for literacy specialists, to quickly identify and implement best practices for reading engagement of K-5 students. The researcher believes the study results will also help minimize literacy gaps among young learners and aid in a higher quality of life.

An overview of the study was presented in this chapter. Moreover, this chapter provided a synopsis of the key findings. The implications of this study were also outlined. In recognizing the findings of this research, the Read, Engage, Assess and Develop (R.E.A.D.) Model for Engagement was developed by the researcher as a framework aiding in implementing the revealed strategies and best practices for literacy specialists to engage K-5 learners in reading. In

conclusion, this chapter provided the researcher's final thoughts and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

This study aimed to identify the best practices of exemplary literacy specialists in engaging K-5 students in reading. This study was guided by a review of the literature, four research questions, and 10 open-ended interview questions were developed. The four research questions are as follows:

- RQ1: What are literacy specialists' best strategies and practices to teach reading to K-5 children?

- RQ2: What challenges do literacy specialists face in implementing their best practices in teaching K-5 children?

- RQ3: How do literacy specialists define, track, and measure student engagement among K-5 students?

- RQ4: What recommendations do literacy specialists in K-5 education have for others in the field?

In addition, this was a qualitative study using phenomenological methods. Using the phenomenological approach, Grossoehme (2014) determined that stories could be elicited from the participants. As Creswell (2018) explained, a phenomenological study describes the commonality of an individual's shared lived experience with a particular concept or phenomenon. The participants for this study were recruited through the utilization of LinkedIn and educator Facebook groups, which provided the researcher with persons willing to participate in the study and met the maximum variation. The sample was comprised of 16 participants with three or more years of experience working in Title 1 schools. Moreover, each participant agreed

to be audio-recorded. In addition, participants from different schools in various regions (West, Midwest, and South) of the U.S. were included according to maximum variation criteria.

Furthermore, the data collection for this study was compiled through 16 semi-structured interviews. Participants in this study were asked a series of 10 open-ended questions that were constructed through the interrater and validity technique using the following: (a) prima facie validity, (b) peer-reviewed validity, and (c) expert review (See Appendix E). Each participant's interview was audio recorded and saved on a password-protected external hard drive. The interviews were transcribed using external software and saved on an encrypted external hard drive to ensure confidentiality. The data was analyzed and categorized through a thematic coding process. Thus, the interrater process was employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Following the interrater review procedure, the data were summarized in 10 bar graphs that correlated to each interview question, further identifying key terms, perspectives, and responses from each participant.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this section is to present a discussion of the 39 themes identified during the phenomenological research. Every theme in this dialogue is accompanied by its corresponding research question. Furthermore, each research question is accompanied by a comprehensive discussion of how the theme correlates with the question. Moreover, the study's results were compared with existing literature on reading engagement, professional development, equity, challenges faced by literacy specialists, and the tools and best practices used by literacy specialists who yield exemplary results. Here, the goal is to determine if the study's findings and existing literature agree, whether there are conflicts, or if the study's findings complement the existing literature.

Results for RQ1

      RQ1 asked, "What are the successful strategies literacy specialists use to engage K-5 students in reading?" The primary focus of RQ1 is to discern which strategies literary specialists use frequently to promote reading engagement and yield student growth. This study identified eight themes closely related to RQ1, which are used to identify strategies literacy specialists employ in the classroom to engage students in reading. The themes for employing reading engagement strategies that were collected were (a) small group, (b) data collection, (c) classroom library, (d) phonics instruction, and rewards. The themes that correlated to maintaining reading engagement were (a) instructional strategies, (b) student interest, (c) and literary resources. Figure 12 highlights the most frequently identified themes for RQ1.

Figure 12

Summary of Themes for RQ1

Summary of Themes for Research Question 1
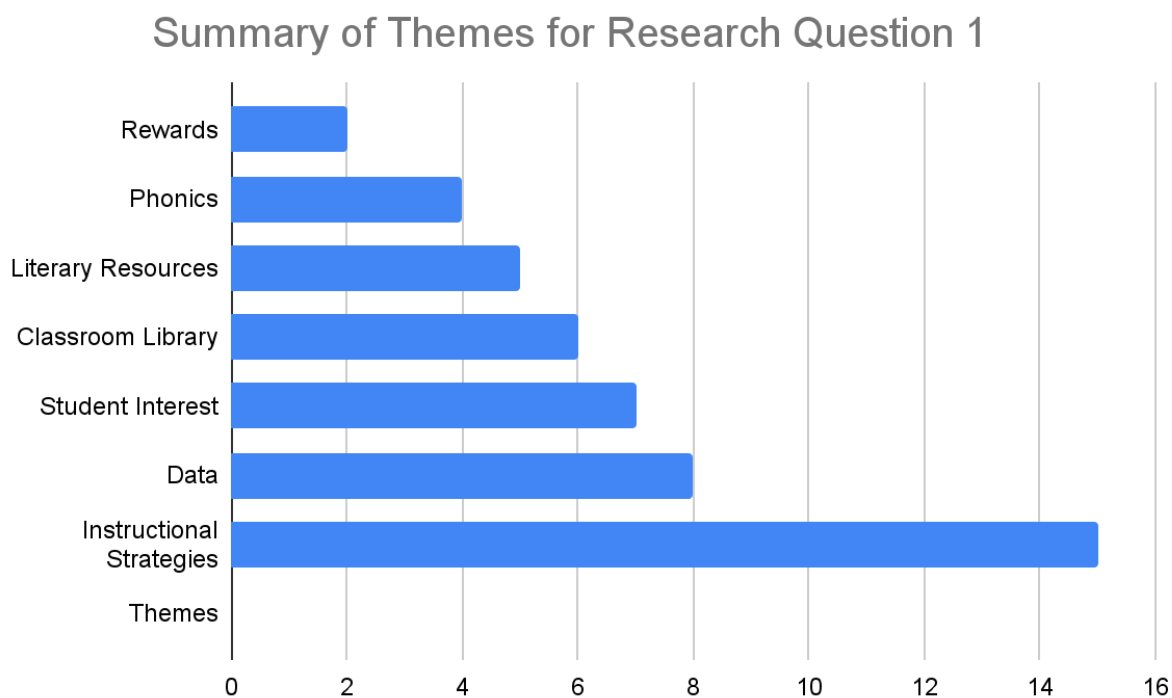
Discussion of RQ1. As a literacy specialist, support, supplement, and extended classroom instruction and collaboration are employed to implement a research-based and practical reading program. This research question aimed to determine and identify the strategies that bring exemplary results in reading engagement and methods used to maintain reading engagement. It was evident that literacy specialists used various strategies, but no identifiable theoretical framework was employed. Nonetheless, the themes that emerged for RQ1 were data collection, phonics instruction, inclusive classroom library, and rewards.

According to the literature, Wen et al. (2016) examined three dimensions of reading engagement: reading time, reading amount, and diversity of reading content. Reading time refers to the time and energy one puts into actively interacting with text (Brookbank et al., 2018). Furthermore, a reader's engagement with reading is divided into two categories: personal reading engagement and school reading engagement (Wang et al., 2022). This research question aimed to determine and identify the strategies that bring exemplary results in reading engagement and methods used to maintain reading engagement. It is evident that literacy specialists used various strategies, but no identifiable theoretical framework was employed.

Nonetheless, the themes that emerged for RQ1 were data collection that correlates to the strategies being employed by literacy specialists as follows: small group instruction, data collection, classroom library, phonics instruction, and rewards. The strategy used by participants to employ reading engagement was small group instruction. The findings showed that teachers gained more success with student engagement after transitioning from whole-group lessons to small-group and mini-lessons. According to the research, cooperative learning aims to create opportunities for students to work collaboratively in heterogeneous groups to complete instructional tasks (Drakeford, 2012). Heterogeneous groups are composed of diverse individuals

with differing abilities, academic accomplishments, interests, and personalities who complement each other uniquely (Zhang, 2018). According to Stahl (1994), students participating in cooperative learning task groups are likelier to have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and more excellent content knowledge.

Literacy specialists can collect, analyze, and assess data through small-group instruction. The participants also expressed the need for longer phonics blocks to teach students the foundational skills they need to engage in reading. It was also suggested that literacy specialists understand the five fundamental pillars of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. This directly impacts students' ability to read and contextualize information. Another component identified in RQ1 is the quality of books in classroom libraries. Identifying a person's interests based on their educational experiences and building or capitalizing on them is the best way to cultivate new and continuing reading interests (Bush & Huebner, 1979).

Furthermore, the strategies that literacy specialists need to engage students in reading were identified through this study. It was unveiled that literacy specialists employ various strategies in the classroom to increase reading engagement. It was also discovered that literacy specialists rely heavily on data collection to determine what instructional strategies best support the student's needs. The literature and the findings in the study, as they relate to RQ1, are in alignment. This study adds to the literature by increasing the tools and strategies required to maintain reading engagement.

Results of RQ2

RQ2 inquired, "What challenges do literacy specialists encounter when engaging K-5 students in reading?" RQ2 is intended to distinguish the challenges or barriers that literacy

specialists embark on engaging students in reading. Of the three interview questions asked to address RQ2, 11 themes appeared. The four that emerged as challenges that impact implementation were: (a) teacher training, (b) parent involvement, (c) lack of access to resources, and (d) high-stakes testing. The four themes for overcoming challenges were (a) classroom environment, (b) professional development, (c) small group, and (d) data analysis. The four themes that correlated to the student impact of these challenges were (a) reading gaps, (b) low engagement, and (c) low confidence. Figure 13 highlights the most frequently identified themes for RQ2.

Figure 13

Summary of Themes for RQ2
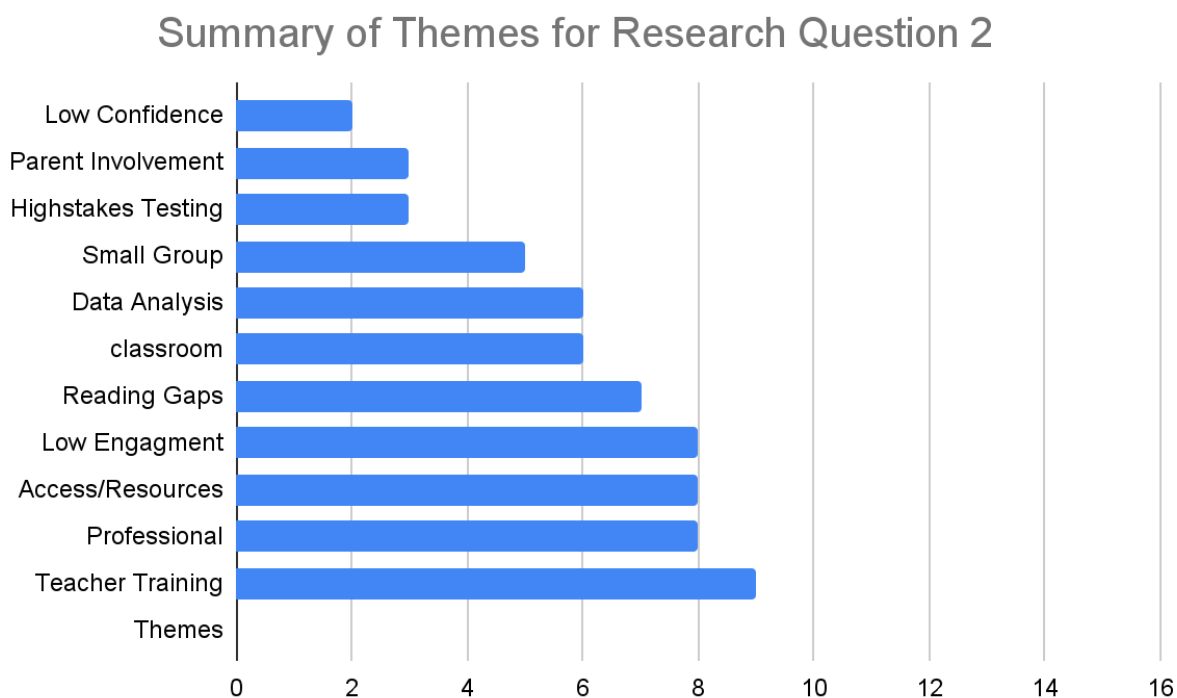
Discussion of RQ2. According to RQ 2, literacy specialists have employed strategies to overcome reading education challenges. The literacy specialists expressed the following challenges: lack of teacher training, lack of parent involvement, lack of access to resources, and

the stress of high-stakes testing. Literacy specialists find that novice teachers need more experience and knowledge, while veteran teachers need help to adapt to new practices.
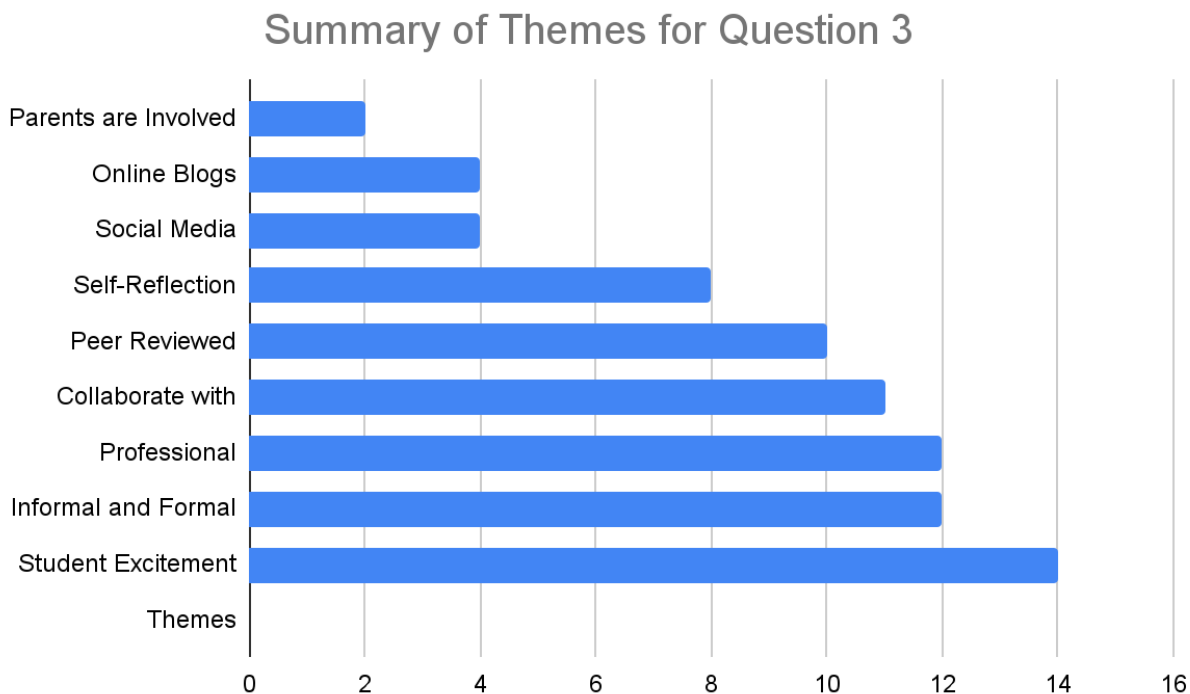
One of the research findings indicated that literacy specialists are serving teachers struggling to balance providing meaningful learning opportunities due to high-stakes testing. They are finding less and less time in their day to conduct phonics blocks small group instruction, and provide students with time to read leisurely. A few participants expressed that there needs to be more emphasis placed on high-stakes testing and that students need opportunities to be fully immersed in reading non-textbook material. As a result, students may not be able to gain at-level reading skills if they lack motivation and interest in the K-5 reading curriculum (Goodsett, 2020). Additionally, in past years, test scores were reported to the US Department of Education, which resulted in the firing of teachers or the closure of schools in some cases (Rechner, 2019).

Participants further discussed the struggle to engage parents in the learning process. Participants in the study expressed that many of their student's parents need more time or the skill set to help their students at home. Another challenge that transcends between the classroom and home is students' access or lack thereof to resources such as diverse library books with images that look like them and books that are based on their learning interests. As Diffily (2001) suggested, literacy specialists must provide students with opportunities to actively engage in the reading process by using magazines, brochures, websites, and pamphlets in the classroom. Unfortunately, this study revealed inequity among literacy specialists regarding access to knowledge and resources, such as professional development and teacher training. Harris and Sass (2011) conclude that in elementary schools, professional development, and teacher experience seem to matter more regarding reading instruction and mitigating reading gaps. Therefore,

literacy specialists would benefit from hosting data talks highlighting the importance of quality reading education and professional development for all staff.

Results of RQ3

RQ garnered, "How do literacy specialists measure success in creating and establishing K-5 reading engagement strategies? The ambition of RQ3 is to determine how literacy specialists define, measure, and analyze their success. Nine themes were derived from the two interview questions that correlated to RQ3. The four themes that emerged as methods to measure reading engagement were (a) formal and informal assessments, (b) student excitement, (c) self-reflection, and (d) parent involvement. The five themes that correlated to ways to stay up to date on best practices and refine one's skill set were: (a) collaboration with other literacy specialists and field experts, (b) seeking and attending professional development, (c) peer-reviewed articles and government policy, (d) online blogs, and (f) social media. Figure 14 highlights the most frequently identified themes for RQ3.

**Figure 14**

Summary of Themes for RQ3

Summary of Themes for Question 3

Theme	Value
Parents are Involved	2
Online Blogs	4
Social Media	4
Self-Reflection	8
Peer Reviewed	10
Collaborate with	11
Professional	12
Informal and Formal	12
Student Excitement	14

(Horizontal axis: 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16)

Discussions of RQ3. The purpose of RQ3 was to identify how literacy specialists define, track, and measure student engagement in reading among K-5 students. Again, implementing strategies and best practices can be challenging and time-consuming for literacy specialists, and advancing academic achievement can be increased as a result (Goodsett, 2020). While little research has been conducted on measuring and tracking reading engagement, participants utilize different strategies and tools that align with what is known. Moreover, to ensure student success, it is necessary to consider what success looks like for them in the classroom. Participants in this study mentioned the use of formal and informal assessments. According to the participants, formal assessments include but are not limited to high-stakes testing and diagnostic assessments. Informal assessments of the findings are observable things such as students showing excitement, engaging in conversation about the text, and being willing to read a book of their choice

unprompted. In this way, PBL allows students to actively participate in the learning process and meet their goals through social interaction and knowledge sharing (Kokotsaki et al., 2016).

Additionally, participants suggested that literacy specialists should be self-reflective in their practices to measure success. According to the literature, in traditional education systems, one of the biggest obstacles to implementing a positive culture is the fact that teachers often fail to engage in self-reflection, which is crucial to shifting from their professional practice to what they believe works (Kern & Wehmeyer, 2021). Participants expressed that literacy specialists should be self-reflective, read peer-reviewed articles, collaborate, and join subject-based groups on social media. Furthermore, although there is existent literature highlighting the importance of professional development, there needs to be more research that brings about the use of collaboration and learning through social media.

Results of RQ4

RQ4 asked, "What recommendations do literacy specialists have for incoming literacy specialists that foster high levels of reading engagement among students in Title 1 schools?" Figure 15 highlights the most frequently identified themes for RQ4. Nine themes were derived from the recommendations of literacy specialists incoming literacy specialists. The themes that were correlated to suggest that literacy specialists would provide were: (a) a classroom environment that fosters reading, (b) seeking and advocating for professional development, (c) model reading expectations, and (d) building relationships (with students, parents, and other experts). Figure 15 highlights the most frequently identified themes for RQ4.

Figure 15

Summary of Themes for RQ4
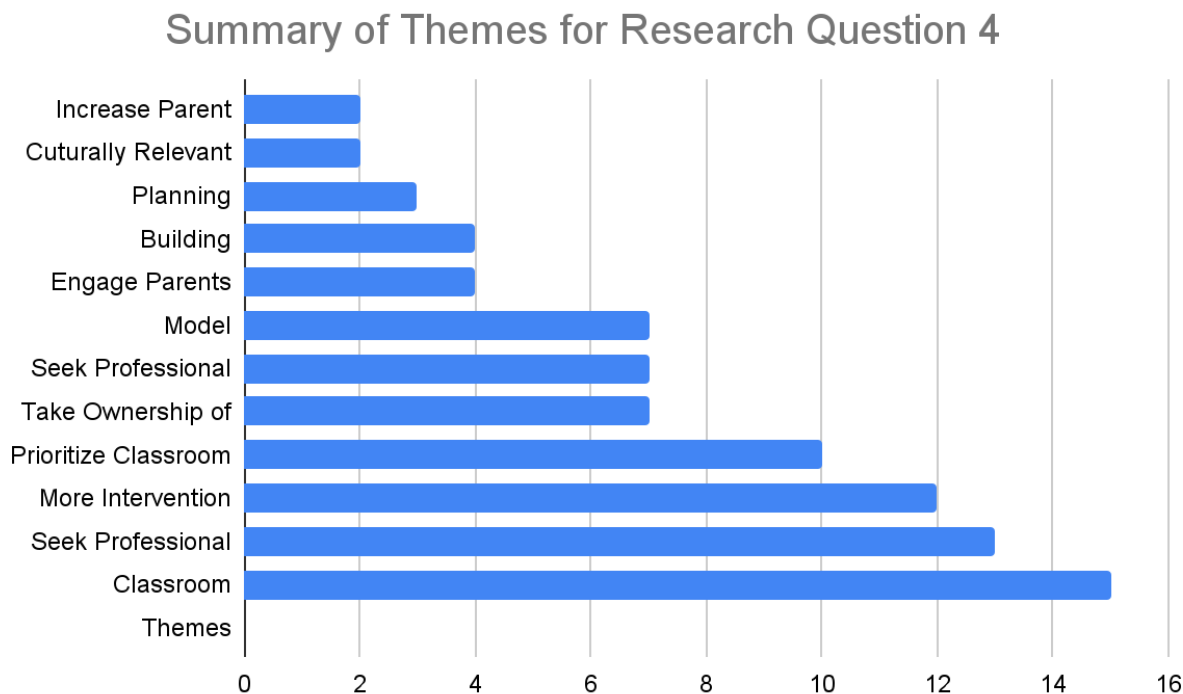
Discussions of RQ4. To address RQ4, the study obtained guidance, ideas, and recommendations from the participants on successfully engaging K-5 students in reading for new and experienced literacy specialists. Many of those who shared their experiences mentioned making mistakes, but they believed they had learned from them and incorporated them into their approach to new strategies. The findings confirmed that classroom environment, relationship building, seeking professional development, modeling, and planning are essential in the classroom. Building relationships and classroom environment are vital components to a literacy specialist's ability to engage students in reading successfully. Literacy specialists should seek to build relationships with their school leadership, teachers, students, parents, other literacy specialists, or content experts. It is important to note that each stakeholder plays a role in the success or lack thereof of literacy specialists and their communities. Literacy specialists learn

more about the students and their home lives through building relationships with students and their parents. As a driver of success, once literacy specialists identify whom they are serving, they can support their students better and address their academic and personal needs. CRT, as described by Tanase (2021), focuses on fostering a learning environment where people's cultures are valued by creating a curriculum that considers the cultural background needs of the classroom.

Creating a culturally responsive classroom requires intentionally planning and adapting instruction as necessary, a skill set not all literacy specialists hold. The findings also indicated that teachers need professional development and should advocate for their learning to better engage students in reading. It is important to note that there are cases in which literacy specialists are asked to conduct workshops and make presentations on best practices for engaging K-5 students in reading and demonstrating their process in the classroom (Dagen & Bean, 2020). Hence, literacy specialists emphasized the need to collaborate with other literacy specialists and content experts to revise their knowledge and skills as a best practice.

To commence the discussion for RQ4, a classroom environment that fosters learning is all-encompassing. The environment is where literacy specialists and other educators who work with the students are provided with the necessary training to employ their acquired strategies. Through the acquired education, they can build a toolkit and have the knowledge and skills to implement the best practices in the classroom.

Implications of the Study

This study seeks to develop best practices and strategies for literacy specialists to enhance their chances of success and effectiveness. According to Dacin et al. (1999), POS theorizes that contexts are essential for explaining how individual and collective strengths are

created, developed, and changed in organizations; this might involve the embeddedness of contexts in organizations. Literacy specialists are often forced to make decisions based on research findings and determine how to communicate and implement the best results (Wilcox & Lawson, 2022). Therefore, the results of this study provide a set of insights and conceptions that will significantly increase literacy specialists' chances of success and effectiveness when applied as indicated. Even though this study focuses on literacy specialists' ability to engage K-5 students in reading and the development of a roadmap to support their growth and achievement, its findings have significant implications for principals, teachers, students, and society in general.

Implications for Principals

Principals and other school leaders play a vital role in the culture and climate of schools. According to the findings, many literacy specialists feel they need to be supported by their leadership. Many have also expressed that their school leadership, who do not have experience or a background in reading education, needs to pay more attention to critical components. These factors could hurt literacy specialists and their ability to implement research-based strategies. School leaders must acquire skills that help them identify ways to enhance learners' performance through training, according to Tsivgiouras et al. (2017). It was highlighted that when literacy specialists feel supported, they successfully engage students in reading. As a result, this research contributed to rethinking how principals view reading engagement and the components of such. Moreover, principals can provide compelling learning opportunities for their staff.

Implications for Teachers

Furthermore, many literacy specialists discussed the need for more knowledge and training that many teachers are impacted by in their day-to-day duties. Moreover, this research provided a paradigm to improve reading engagement among their students. The perceptions of

students' teachers influence motivation, classroom climate, engagement, and academic performance, according to Mazer and Hunt (2008). The research findings indicated that teachers and literacy specialists should have firsthand access to professional development.

It was mentioned that post-COVID education looks drastically different from previous years, and teachers need help to meet the diverse needs of their students. When teachers are provided with tools, strategies, and training, they can motivate students to read more, boost confidence, and academic achievement will improve across all disciplines. This study could aid teachers in assessing, revising, and implementing strategies to drive success in reading engagement.

Implications for Students

Providing teachers with best practices to engage students in reading, those specifically living in high poverty, are improving their overall quality of life and increasing their confidence and self-efficacy in reading. The findings of this study highlighted that teachers see more significant results from small-group instruction versus whole-group instruction as it pertains to reading. Through activities such as partner reading, teachers allow high and lower-performing students to come together and build each other's confidence and morale.

The research also indicated that students need a strong phonics foundation. Therefore, phonics instruction should be prioritized as it is the foundation of reading and transcends to fluency and comprehension. Additionally, a driver of reading engagement is access or lack thereof to literary resources that act as mirrors. The research findings found that students show excitement when they can make meaningful connections and fully immerse in the text. Students need to be in a classroom environment that fosters a love for reading and a space where they see themselves as readers through literature. This study acts as a guide to teachers' and literacy

specialists' ability to provide high-quality education that leads to long-term benefits for students as they continue their academic journey.

Implications for Society

The research adds to the body of knowledge by emphasizing reading engagement, components of reading, and instructional strategies. It benefits society by bringing awareness to disparities in education, specifically reading education for those who work and attend Title 1 schools serving high populations of socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. In the findings, several gaps have been made evident in the true impact of reading engagement and its correlation to quality of life.

In school, there is a positive correlation between reading and academic performance. Reading engagement is an essential strategy for improving literacy; according to Jensen (2013), students of low socioeconomic status will benefit from these programs, which will directly impact society. As a result, to prevent school dropouts and mitigate reading gaps, all students must have access to high-quality education that supports skills needed in present-day society.

Application

According to Patterson's R.E.A.D. Model for Engagement, the study's findings were combined with those from the literature review. With the aid of this tool, literacy specialists can prepare their young learners for success by utilizing effective strategies and best practices as they embark on their reading journey. The R.E.A.D. Model for Engagement is a multi-dimensional framework that consists of three levels. R.E.A.D. is an acronym for Read, Engage, Assess, and Development. As one looks at the model, one will notice the overarching task. The next layer outlines what educators should do to accomplish the end goal. For example, under assess, there

are forms of assessment that can be used to collect and analyze data. The process is categorized

as data analysis. Data analysis is vital to one's ability or inability to engage readers.

The first level is the outer layer of the model that highlights the challenges that impact

literacy specialists in engaging students in reading. The lack of teacher training, access to

resources, parent involvement or lack thereof, and high-stakes testing are the main issues literacy

specialists encounter as they mitigate low reading engagement among their students. Other

challenges and roadblocks were identified during the investigation, but these issues were

grouped with the four main concerns. Therefore, the four main difficulties will also solve any

other additional challenges.

Throughout the middle level, the wheel represents the ongoing process of addressing

literacy specialists' barriers and difficulties and the strategies and best practices that specialists

should employ for maximum effectiveness and success. As a result of the study's findings,

strategies and best practices are developed and identified in the framework's third level. The

middle level is composed of the following four key strategies: (a) a classroom environment that

fosters a love for reading, (b) professional development, (c) small group instruction, and (d)

ongoing data analysis.

Moreover, the literacy specialists' ultimate goal is to mitigate and decrease challenges

associated with reading engagement, represented by the inner layer of the Patterson R.E.A.D

Model for Engagement. The study defined success as (a) increased reading engagement, (b)

increased reading confidence, and (c) lowered reading gaps, which was also supported by the

findings of the literature review. Through the continuous implementation of Patterson's R.E.A.D.

Model for Engagement methods, literacy specialists will increase their ability to develop

effective and successful strategies for engaging K-5 students in reading. Figure 16 depicts the

Patterson's R.E.A.D. Model for reading engagement.

Figure 16

Patterson's Model for Reading Engagement
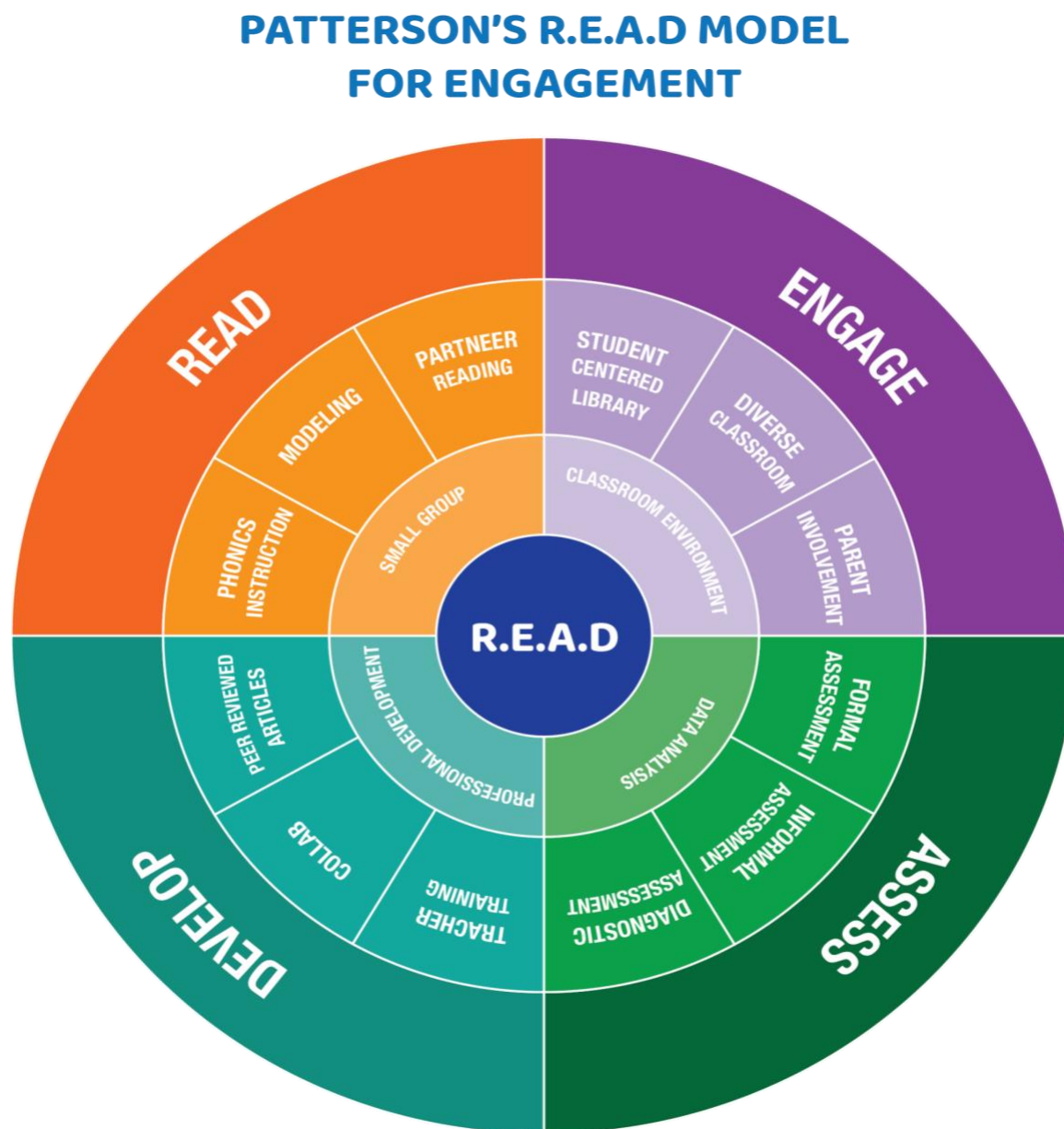
Note. The R.E.A.D. Model which explains each component and sub-components of this framework.

Study Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the barriers and quandaries affecting expert literacy specialists and their strategies to overcome challenges promoting reading among K-5 students. An investigation of K-5 literacy specialists was conducted as part of this quantitative, qualitative phenomenological study. Sixteen literacy specialists addressed ten open-ended questions during the interview protocol. In conclusion, this study provided invaluable insights into literacy specialists' challenges, obstacles, and what they need to understand and do to succeed. In the study, key insights were gained regarding the challenges and obstacles literacy specialists encounter, the concepts they must grasp, and the actions they should take for success. Patterson's R.E.A.D. Model for Engagement was created by combining the study's findings with the findings of the literature review. This tool aims to aid literacy specialists as they strive to mitigate literacy gaps and foster a love of reading for life.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study took a phenomenological investigative approach through virtual interviews. Due to the nature of this study, the following limitations were evident:

- Recruitment and participation were only open to K-5 literacy specialists.

- The number of literacy specialists interviewed in this study was limited because the study analyzed various regions and school districts due to time restraints.

- The lived experiences of teachers with or without onsite literacy specialist and their impact on student reading engagement was not included in this study but could've added value to the effectiveness of their instructional practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

As part of this phenomenological study, literacy specialists of all levels examined barriers and obstacles they encounter in encouraging their students to succeed at reading. Thus, it was necessary to conduct additional research in certain areas to address the goal of this study. The following are the recommendations for future research.

Further In-Depth Study of The Findings

Although this study has raised awareness of reading engagement, challenges, obstacles, and best practices and methods used by successful literacy specialists, more research is needed. Consequently, it would be beneficial to dive deeper into each of the identified themes. Understanding the essence, effects, and relevance of each challenge, obstacle, and best practice is paramount.

The Impact of Diverse Children's Books

One of the study's findings was the need to have students engage with books that look like them. Many literacy specialists spoke about students' access to books in their classroom library and its significance to reading education. However, more research needs to identify the impact of the representation of diverse characters in book genres. Additionally, more supporting information must be provided on literacy specialists' challenges and barriers when obtaining such books. As a result, it is suggested that an in-depth analysis of the impact of diverse children's books as it relate to reading gaps of Black and Brown students is conducted.

Final Thoughts

Educators nationwide who work in urban or low socioeconomic disadvantaged schools are seeing reading gaps widen post-COVID. The literacy specialists interviewed in this study expressed their desperation for training and access to resources to support their students better.

According to what can be inferred from this study, reading engagement is a key to improved quality of life. The author, who attended Title 1 schools and has had an extensive career in education, more specifically reading education, understands the firsthand impact of quality reading education or lack thereof. This research began with exploring the impact of Black students without or with access to books that reflect their images. For example, could the representation or lack thereof across book genres directly impact reading gaps? After consulting with several committee members, it was suggested to take a deeper dive into reading engagement and identify best practices to engage students in reading. Through this ongoing process, the researcher has gained new knowledge and a burning desire to continue research around reading and equity in schools.

Furthermore, it is the researcher's belief that students, regardless of their zip code, deserve to attend schools where they have equitable learning experiences and are surrounded by highly trained staff who can employ research-based practices. The research demonstrates that literacy specialists can be successful when provided with the necessary training and resources to engage students in reading. This research tells the stories of literacy specialists who are determined to navigate through the many challenges and obstacles in hopes of engaging students in reading. It is the researcher's aim to influence literacy specialists nationwide to take action and advocate for change, resources, access, and support that aids in fostering a safe, student-centered learning environment where reading education is at the forefront. Lastly, the researcher hopes that literacy specialists will use the Patterson R.E.A.D. Model for Engagement to employ strategies and best practices to aid literacy specialists in achieving success, providing equity, and mitigating reading gaps.

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APPENDIX A

CITI HSR Certificate

Completion Date 10-Dec-2021
Expiration Date 09-Dec-2024
Record ID 46325567

This is to certify that:

Cydnee Patterson

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Graduate & Professional Schools HSR
(Curriculum Group)
Graduate & Professional Schools - Psychology Division Human Subjects Training
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Pepperdine University

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w0dc7d47a-5675-4cbe-ae37-9fa654e42fdd-46325567

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval Form

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: March 31, 2023

Protocol Investigator Name: Cydnee Patterson

Protocol #: 22-09-1940

Project Title: Best Practices for Literacy Specialists to Engage K-5 Students in Reading

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Cydnee Patterson Nixon:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Email and Flyer

[INSERT DATE]

Dear [Name],

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Cydnee Patterson. I am a doctoral candidate in the Ph.D. in Global Leadership and Change program at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. To fulfill my degree requirements, I am conducting a dissertation study titled "Best Practices for Literacy Specialists to Engage K-5 Students in Reading." This study aims to identify critical factors to reading engagement in young learners. Upon reviewing your profile, your years of experience, philosophy of education, insight, and expertise as a literacy specialist would be valuable to this body of research.

I seek volunteers to participate in this qualitative study by completing an open-ended, face-to-face interview. It is important to note that your participation in this study will be confidential and your identity will not be disclosed. Moreover, the data collected for this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the home office of the researcher who is the only one that has access to the key. All electronic data will be secured on a password-protected laptop and research materials will be destroyed three years after the study.

Again, your participation in this study will encourage new and aspiring leaders in education and scholars and practitioners in the field. If you are willing to move forward with participating in this study, see and acknowledge the informed consent form. If you have any further questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me via email.

Best regards,

Cydnee C. Patterson

Figure C1

Recruitment Flyer

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

PEPPERDINE

— UNIVERSITY —

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

IRB #: 22-09-1940

Formal Study Title: Best Practices for Literacy Specialists to Engage K-5 Students in Reading

Authorized Study Personnel:

Principal Investigator: Student Name: Cydnee C. Patterson
                  Student Number: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
                  Student Email: cydnee.pattersonnixon@pepperdine.edu

Key Information:

If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:

- (Males and Females) between the ages of (18-90)
- Procedures will include (Contacting participants using the recruitment script, informed consent, data collection via questionnaire, analysis of data, and documentation of findings)
- The completion of one audio recorded interview.
- The total time commitment of 30-60 minutes for an interview).
- There is minimal risk associated with this study
- You will not be paid any amount of money for your participation
- You will be provided a copy of this consent form

Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Cydnee C. Patterson, M.Ed. at Pepperdine University because you fit the following eligibility requirements: (a) you hold a bachelor's degree or higher in Curriculum and Instruction or Reading Education (b) participants who have a minimum three years of experience as a literacy specialist (c) participants who have worked in a K-5 school or as an independent consultant within a K-5 school setting to ensure the participants work directly with teachers and students. Please read the information below and ask any clarifying questions before deciding whether to participate. You are encouraged to read the consent form carefully. Please note that you can choose to discuss your participation with your family or friends at your discretion. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a leader in the education industry with expertise in literacy education. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. You are literacy specialists working/worked in a U.S. school serving K-5 learners for at least three years.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

The purpose of the study is to explore the instructional practices of exemplary literacy specialists to understand reading engagement K-5 students. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to determine: (a) the challenges that literacy specialists in engaging students ; (b) the instructional strategies and practices that literacy specialists can implement to facilitate academic success; (c) how the three dimensions of reading engagement provide a construct for analyzing academic achievement, and (d) what recommendations exemplary literacy specialists have for future literacy specialists.

What will be done during this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30-60 minutes. The semi-structured interview includes ten open-ended questions designed in advance, with probes, either planned or unplanned, to clarify your responses. These types of questions will elicit valuable practices and strategies that current literacy specialists employ for reading engagement of K-5 students. During the interview, your answers will be recorded. If you choose not to have your answers recorded, you will not be able to participate in this study.

How will my data be used?

Your questionnaire responses will be analyzed and aggregated to determine the findings of the established research questions.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

Although no study is entirely risk-free, the potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study are no more than minimal. Potential risks to participants include fatigue, in which breaks will be given. The participants may cease participating in the study at any time if they become uncomfortable with the interview questions.

What are the possible benefits to you?

There are no direct benefits to the participant. You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

However, sharing the participant's insights about engaging K-5 students in reading can benefit educational leaders, literacy specialists, teachers, students, and society. Other emerging leaders might also benefit from any additional recommendations that are shared through this process.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. There are no alternatives to participating other than deciding not to participate.

What will participation in this research study cost you?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?

Your welfare is the primary concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be deidentified and stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and until the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):
Phone: 1(310)568-2305
Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

APPENDIX E

Peer Review Form

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What are the best strategies and practices used by literacy specialists to teach reading to K-5 children?	IQ 1: What strategies do you employ in classrooms that provide exemplary success in your profession and facilitates to engage students in reading? IQ 2: How do you maintain reading engagement of less active students?
RQ2: What challenges do literacy specialists face in implementing their best practices in teaching K-5 children?	IQ 3: What challenges do you face in implementing effective reading engagement strategies? IQ 4: How do you overcome those challenges? IQ5: What impact, if at all, do these challenges impact reading engagement of K-5 students?
RQ3: How do literacy specialists define, track, and measure student engagement among K-5 students?	IQ 6: How do you know the strategy/strategies that you are successful? -Sub Q: How do you define success in our work? -Sub Q: How do you measure your success? -Sub Q: How do you make sure you are on the right track on a continuous basis? IQ 7: How do you keep up with the most recent findings in the field of reading to revise your own methods? -Sub Q: Is it necessary for teachers to stay up to date with these practices? -Sub Q: What are other resources can contribute to the knowledge of literacy specialists' knowledge about best practices?
RQ4: What recommendations do literacy specialists in K-5 education have for others in the field?	IQ 8: What is your advice for the other literacy specialists who aspire to elevate their efficiency on their school campus? Sub Q: What is your recommendation for classroom management and cultivating a "love for reading"? IQ 9: If you could go a few years back in your career, is there anything you would do differently? If so, why, or why not? IQ 10: Is there anything you would like to add?