A CASE STUDY INVESTIGATING TEACHERS' USE OF STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS ANXIETY TOWARD READING IN FIRST-GRADE AND SECOND-GRADE STUDENTS

by

Sherri Jane Friddle Swaim

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. Reading anxiety can affect a person behaviorally, socially, and academically. Bandura's social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theory guided this study, as they showed how behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy could influence reading anxiety. Bandura also stated that cognition affected performance and that self-efficacy dealt with a student's determination in the performance. The central research question asked, How are teachers addressing reading anxiety in the classroom? The participants in this study were first-grade and second-grade teachers who taught in a rural county in North Carolina. Data were collected through individual interviews and focus groups with first-grade and second-grade general education teachers. In addition, the teachers were asked to complete a participant reflection journal documenting two lessons in which they used various strategies to address reading anxiety during small group reading instruction. I used Yin's case study data analysis steps. Four themes emerged in this study: positive reinforcement, reading one-on-one with the teacher, small reading groups, and developing reading skills. The theme that all the participants mentioned was positive reinforcement. This demonstrated that providing encouragement, building confidence, and praising a student can go a long way towards helping those who struggle with reading anxiety. Allowing a student to work one-on-one or in a small group builds the student's confidence in reading. Lastly, working on those reading skills such as decoding and fluency could also help a student who struggles with reading anxiety.

Keywords: reading anxiety, social cognitive theory, self-efficacy, anxiety, reading self-concept

Copyright Page

Dedication

I first want to dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am so thankful that God called me into education at 15. He has guided me every step of the way. Some steps in education have been harder to take than others, but His peace comes no matter how easy or hard those steps of faith may be.

I dedicate this to my amazing husband, Shawn Swaim, who has been my constant supporter throughout this entire journey. I will be forever thankful that he encouraged me to pursue my M.Ed. in 2010 and my EdD degree. His encouragement, patience, and love throughout our 15 years of marriage means more to me than he will ever know. I am so thankful that God brought us together. We have had a fantastic journey, and I look forward to many more years together.

To my son Caleb, I started this journey when you were 2 years old. You have watched me work on many assignments. You've always checked in on me, brought me snacks, and never once complained when I've been working. You have been so easy during this journey, and I will always be grateful for the positive attitude and the encouragement you have given me. I love you bunches and bunches, forever and ever!

To my parents, David and Kimi Friddle, I dedicate this dissertation. I will be forever thankful for the years you invested in me to have a Christian education from preschool through college. You have been cheering me on to become Dr. Sherri Jane Friddle Swaim before I was ready to begin this journey. I love you so much, and I thank God for you being my parents.

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through my master's degree, the birth of Caleb, and my doctoral degree. We were a solid first-grade team. One of the hardest things to do was to step away from the classroom and the joys of working with you each day to finish my dissertation. Thank you for understanding and still being a wonderful friend. I could not have done this without you.

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List of Abbreviations

Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)

Central Research Question (CRQ)

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Sub-Question (SQ)

Professional Development (PD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Research suggests that 10% of children and 20% of adolescents will suffer from anxiety (Grist et al., 2019). Anxiety can affect academic performance and social interactions, create depression, and cause drug dependence (Grist et al., 2019). This research focused on the connection between anxiety and academics. Three types of anxiety may occur in the classroom. These include separation anxiety, social anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD; Ehmke, n.d.). The one anxiety that was the focus of this research is social anxiety.

Social anxiety is when a child is so self-conscious that it affects their ability to participate in class and peer interactions (Ehmke, n.d.). Social anxiety could play a factor in reading fluency and comprehension, causing some students to struggle with reading (Tysinger et al., 2010). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), "32% of all fourth-grade students were found to be reading below basic levels, demonstrating difficulties with making simple inferences and finding relevant information to support their understanding of a text" (Hudson et al., 2020, p .1). Lauermann et al. (2017) stated that learning how to read is affected when students struggle with worry and anxiety toward reading. According to Ramirez et al. (2019), anxiety toward reading could start in lower elementary when students begin associating letters and sounds, blending the sounds to make words, and putting the words into sentences. Ramirez et al. (2019) conducted a study that found that anxiety toward reading could affect students as early as first and second grade. They suggested that because reading anxiety could occur at an early age, teachers need to be aware of strategies to help students overcome their anxiety towards reading. The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders.

Chapter One includes a discussion of the background of the problem and the situation to self. Then the chapter addresses the purpose of this study, its significance, and the research questions. The chapter concludes with a listing of relevant definitions and a summary of the chapter.

Background

This section addresses the historical, social, and theoretical contexts of teachers' interactions with students who have anxiety toward reading. Since reading anxiety is still a new topic, researchers are still learning how it affects a person internally and externally. This section concludes with a look at the social cognitive theory (SCT).

Historical Context

The ability to read has been valued for hundreds of years. But the idea of reading anxiety has only surfaced in the last 50 years. Anxiety was first linked to academic performance in the 1950s with the work of Castaneda, McCandless, and Palermo. These researchers developed the "children's form of the Manifest Anxiety Scale" (Castaneda et al., 1956, p. 317) that measured the level of anxiety in students. This test opened the door for researchers to study anxiety in elementary school students (Merryman, 1974). Merryman (1974) studied elementary students to determine if high anxiety affected reading tasks. Pratt et al. (1997) stated that people retain less of what they read when they have anxiety. Katzir et al. (2018) studied how reading skills “could be affected by reading self-concept and anxiety” (p. 1). Throughout the last 50 years, the researchers noted that reading anxiety affects reading performance.

It has been stated that reading anxiety could come from an internal desire to please someone else, like a parent, teacher, or others (Blicher et al., 2017). Some adults have too high or unrealistic expectations for students in reading, which can cause reading anxiety. If a mother

displays anxiety, the child has a greater chance of producing the same anxiety (Blicher et al., 2017). Sometimes, teachers may not address reading anxiety because they may not know how to help them. At other times, they may misinterpret it as the student has attention deficit hyperactive disorder or a misbehavior (Manassis, 2012).

Social Context

Teachers must understand that anxiety toward reading could affect students socially. When a child reads, certain emotions are triggered in the brain, which will become associated with reading. One emotion that happens with reading anxiety is fear. The student could fear not reading well orally, making multiple errors, or other students' ridicule (Piccolo et al., 2017). Another emotion that could occur is worry. According to Pekrun (2006), worry comes from the cognitive part of the brain and is considered an achievement emotion, which means it is connected to an activity or outcome. The part of the brain that is hindered during anxiety is the prefrontal cortex. This area is responsible for focusing attention, anticipating events, and managing emotions (Bishop, 2009).

In addition, teachers must also understand that anxiety toward reading could affect reading habits (Baki, 2017; Melanlioglu, 2014). "A regular habit of reading helps develop a logical thinking mind and craft new ideas by constantly constructing meaning and gaining information from the printed text" (Lee et al., 2019, p. 2). Baki (2017) stated that students with higher anxiety had poor reading habits, but those with positive attitudes and low anxiety had higher reading habits. Children who fear reading, whether aloud or silently, are not likely to read for pleasure (Baki, 2017). Melanlioglu (2014) stated that reading anxiety is one of the factors that could hinder reading from becoming a habit. Melanlioglu suggested that the concern for reading must be removed before reading habits can occur. When a reading habit is not

established, reading growth may not occur as quickly as it does for students with a positive reading habit (Melanlioglu, 2014).

The lack of reading could carry over into middle school, high school, college, and adulthood if reading anxiety is not addressed. Many adults who struggled with reading anxiety as a child continued to struggle in middle school (Baki, 2017), high school (Ameyaw & Anto, 2018), college (Huang et al., 2014; Mokhtari et al., 2009), and adulthood (McHardy et al., 2018). The middle school years are a crucial time when reading becomes a habit (Smith et al., 2012). According to Baki (2017), the middle school years are also when a student's attitude toward reading may decrease. Baki (2017) also stated that attitude was an important factor affecting reading habits in middle school. At this age, a student's main source of reading anxiety is fear of failure (Meer et al., 2016). By the time a student is in high school, they may have a "low enthusiasm for reading" (Ameyaw & Anto, 2018, p. 3). In this same study, Ameyaw and Anto (2018) stated that only "45% of high school students saw reading as an important habit" (p. 2). The lack of a reading habit can carry over into college. The college level has seen a decline in reading habits over the years. A study in 2009 of 539 college students showed they only spent an average of 5.7 hours a week reading for pleasure (Mokhtari et al., 2009). Huang et al. (2014) also conducted a study on college students and their reading habits and found that the average number of hours per week that the students read for pleasure was 2.5 hours. Reading anxiety can influence an adult's employment, level of earning, social life, and can carry over into the next generation with their children (McHardy et al., 2018).

Theoretical Context

The social cognitive theory (SCT) and self-efficacy theory (SET), both developed by Bandura (1986, 2001), were the foundations for this research study. Bandura (1977) originally

developed the social learning theory but revised it to be the SCT in 1986. Bandura's (1991) ongoing studies resulted in the addition of the SET in 2001. The SCT looked at how a person was motivated through self-efficacy. That self-efficacy included behavior, environmental circumstances, and cognition. A person's actions are based on internal and external sources of influence. The SCT supports reading anxiety because behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy are all factors that, when not addressed, may result in reading anxiety for some students.

Problem Statement

The problem examined in this study was that few strategies had been identified to effectively help teachers with students who struggle with reading anxiety in first and second grade. If reading anxiety is not addressed early, it can affect other reading areas, such as fluency, decoding, expression, and comprehension (Eysenck et al., 2007; Katrancı & Kuşdemir, 2016; Katzir et al., 2018; Pratt et al., 1997). Reading anxiety could affect a student's reading confidence and reading self-concept (Katzir et al., 2018). It could also affect other academics (Katrancı & Kuşdemir, 2016; Katzir et al., 2018; Piccolo et al., 2017; Ramirez et al., 2019) such as testing (Bulgan, 2018; Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012) and math (Hill et al., 2016; Punaro & Reeve, 2012).

There have been studies on reading anxiety in upper elementary (Bonifacci et al., 2008; Katrancı & Kuşdemir, 2016; Lauermann et al., 2017; Nielen et al., 2016; Tysinger et al., 2010) but not as many studies in lower elementary. This may be because lower elementary students typically do not realize that they have reading anxiety. Interviews and observations with younger students do not always reveal accurate information. Therefore, this study focused on the teachers' perspectives and strategies they use to help students with reading anxiety. It was an attempt to

examine how teachers identify reading anxiety, how they addressed reading anxiety in the classroom, and how teachers addressed the environment of those with reading anxiety.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. Piccolo et al. (2017) defined reading anxiety as a phenomenon that occurs when a student has an unpleasant emotion toward reading. The theories guiding this study are Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) and self-efficacy theory (2001). Bandura (2001) examined at how a person's behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy shape the internal and external influences of an action and, as a result, may influence a student's reading anxiety.

Significance of the Study

The empirical, theoretical, and practical significance of this case study is discussed in this section. The empirical section addresses various studies showing the relationship between reading anxiety and reading performance. Next, the theoretical section focuses on the social cognitive theory and the self-efficacy addition that supports this research. Finally, the practical significance of this research is presented and explains why there is a need to investigate strategies that teachers use to help students with reading anxiety.

Empirical

After extensive research, it appears that there are very few if any studies investigating tools that teachers can use to help students who struggle with reading anxiety in first and second grade. There have been studies on reading anxiety and its effects on different components of reading. Reading anxiety can affect a student's reading skills of fluency and comprehension. Reading fluency is when a student reads at an appropriate rate and accuracy (Tysinger et al.,

2010). When a student struggles with reading anxiety, it could hinder them from reading fluently. A student's reading anxiety may be a fear of reading aloud to a teacher or in front of classmates (Ramirez et al., 2019).

A student who has reading anxiety and struggles with fluency could also struggle with reading comprehension (Connor et al., 2016; Katrancı & Kuşdemir, 2016). Connor et al. (2016) stated that when students struggle with decoding, they will struggle with fluency, which could negatively impact comprehension of the text. Comprehension involves "fluency, word recognition, activation of prior knowledge, making guesses, and the ability to distinguish the important ideas" (Katrancı & Kuşdemir, 2016, p. 252). When a student struggles with reading anxiety, they may not be able to execute the tasks needed for successful reading comprehension.

There have also been studies on how reading anxiety affects a student's self-efficacy as a reader, even at an early age. Self-efficacy was defined by Bandura (2001) as "a person's judgment of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (p. 391). Lee and Jonson-Reid (2016) found that students as young as first grade began to have self-efficacy as a reader. However, Lauermann et al. (2017) discovered that when first-grade students have anxiety about their reading performance, it can affect their learning ability in other areas. Therefore, this study focused on the strategies that first-grade and second-grade teachers might use to help students overcome reading anxiety and improve their reading performance and overall learning ability.

Theoretical

The theories for this study were Bandura's SCT and the addition of self-efficacy. SCT shows how behavior, environment, and cognition shape a person's actions (Bandura, 1991). Bandura (2001) added self-efficacy because he believed that a person could perform a task based

on their perception of their ability to do the task. When a person looks at their ability or inability to perform a task, they look at their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy affects the classroom activities in which a student may or may not want to participate. When a student has reading anxiety, their self-efficacy as a reader is low.

There have been several studies that have used the SCT to address anxiety. Katrancı and Kuşdemir (2016) used the SCT when researching the connection between reading anxiety and reading comprehension. Katrancı and Kuşdemir (2016) saw that students with reading anxiety had an adverse reaction (self-efficacy) toward reading and low comprehension. Carroll and Fox (2017) used the SCT when researching the connection of cognition and self-efficacy to reading anxiety. Each of these studies that used the SCT focused on the students' perspectives, not teachers' perspectives. In this study, I used the SCT to focus on how teachers view a student's behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy when using strategies to help students with reading anxiety.

Practical

Conducting a case study on strategies teachers use to address reading anxiety is practical for several reasons. First, one goal is that this study will give teachers some strategies to help their students who struggle with reading anxiety. Reinke et al. (2011) stated that most teachers never receive formal training on how to help students with any type of anxiety. As I reflected on this topic and my experiences in education, I realized I never had any professional development on reading anxiety. In addition, I asked colleagues in public and private schools, and all have concurred that they do not feel like they know enough to address reading anxiety in their classrooms. This study aims to help teachers better address reading anxiety among beginning readers.

This case study is also practical because addressing reading anxiety in first and second grades will help students succeed academically. It extends the knowledge about reading anxiety in lower elementary to focus on a younger group of students. There have been studies of students with reading anxiety in third grade and higher (Baki, 2017; Bonifacci et al., 2008; Katrancı & Kuşdemir, 2016; Lauermann et al., 2017; Sun & Luo, 2018), but few studies have examined first-grade and second-grade students with reading anxiety. In addition, there were no research studies that focused on first-grade and second-grade teachers' perspectives of students with reading anxiety. Therefore, a study investigating strategies teachers could use to help students with reading anxiety would bring a possible solution to all these areas. Although we know what areas reading anxiety effects and how early it can start, focusing on the teachers' strategies in this case study will help both teachers and students succeed in the classroom.

Research Questions

The following section discusses the questions that were answered through this research. The participants in this case study were first-grade and second-grade classroom teachers. The SCT and SET were used to formulate these questions that deal with the behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy of students with reading anxiety.

Central Research Question

How do teachers address reading anxiety in the first-grade and second-grade classroom?

Sub-Question One

How does a teacher address a student's behavior during reading when the student is suspected of having reading anxiety?

According to the SCT, a person's behavior can influence their actions (Bandura, 1991). Katrancı and Kuşdemir (2016) stated that students with reading anxiety might exhibit behaviors

such as avoiding reading, postponing starting an assignment, or getting frustrated. Students with reading anxiety typically do not have a positive attitude toward reading (Katzir et al., 2018). A student with reading anxiety may see reading as a negative experience (Ramirez et al., 2019). Katzir et al. (2018) stated that "significant levels of reading anxiety in children have been found to be negatively associated with reading in children" (p. 2). Since teachers build relationships with their students, they may be the best individuals to identify when they are struggling with reading anxiety. This question aims to share how teachers use their strategies to address behaviors, such as avoidance and frustration, with students struggling with reading anxiety.

Sub-Question Two

How does a teacher adjust a student's environment during reading when the student is suspected of having reading anxiety?

This question addresses the teachers' strategies to make the environment calm and relaxing for students with reading anxiety. According to the SCT, the environment is another factor that could affect a person's performance (Bandura, 1991). Therefore, environmental factors could play a role in a student's level of anxiety. Environmental factors in the classroom that affect anxiety could be student–teacher relationships, competitiveness among students, and singling students out for correction (Liao & Wang, 2015). Manassis (2012) stated that when a teacher has a student who exhibits possible reading anxiety, they must pay attention to the "environment around the child as well as specific anxiety-focused strategies" (p. 97) that could alleviate the child's anxiety. This question aimed to share strategies the teachers use to change environmental factors to help their students with reading anxiety.

Sub-Question Three

How does a teacher strengthen a student's cognitive ability and self-efficacy during reading when the student is suspected of having reading anxiety?

According to the SCT, cognition plays a role in a person's performance (Bandura, 1991). Reading performance is hindered by reading anxiety. Reading can be a joyous experience when a person reads something they enjoy. All teachers want their students to love reading. Unfortunately, students with reading anxiety do not enjoy reading. Since anxiety is an emotion triggered in the brain, the cognitive area of anxiety must be addressed. The part of the brain that is hindered during anxiety is the prefrontal cortex. This area is responsible for focusing attention, anticipating events, and managing emotions (Bishop, 2009). Teachers may see that a student who struggles with reading anxiety may also lack confidence in their reading ability (Olivier et al., 2019). The student may not think they are a good reader because their self-efficacy is low (Carroll & Fox, 2017). Bandura (1977) stated that self-efficacy played a role in a student's determination to participate in an activity. If a student has reading anxiety, he probably is not reading for pleasure and may have poor reading habits (Melanlioglu, 2014). This question sought to answer how teachers address the cognitive factors of reading anxiety in their students and their strategies to help build self-efficacy to overcome reading anxiety.

Definitions

1. *Reading Anxiety* – Reading anxiety is when a student has an unpleasant emotion towards reading (Piccolo et al., 2017).
2. *Reading Self-Concept* – Reading self-concept refers to "an individual's perception of competence in performing reading tasks" (Retelsdorf et al., 2011, as cited in Retelsdorf et al., 2014).

3. *Reading Skills* – Reading skills are fluency (smoothness of reading), decoding (sounding out words), and comprehension (Katrancı & Kuşdemir, 2016).
4. *Self-Efficacy* – Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to perform an action (Bandura, 1991, 2001).
5. *Working Memory* – Working memory is where information is temporarily stored in the brain (Gathercole et al., 2019).

Summary

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. The problem is few strategies have been identified to effectively help teachers with students who struggle with reading anxiety in first and second grade. If reading anxiety is not addressed in the early grades, it can affect the academic areas of fluency and comprehension (Katrancı & Kuşdemir, 2016; Katzir et al., 2018), writing (Truax, 2018), math (Hill et al., 2016), and testing (McCutchen et al., 2016). The theories that guided this study are Bandura's SCT (1991) and the SET (2001), which state that behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy could all affect a person's performance. The goal of this study was to discover strategies that first-grade and second-grade teachers use to help students with reading anxiety.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. Chapter Two includes a review of the literature related to reading anxiety. First, the chapter begins with an overview of the theoretical framework chosen for this study. The history of the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theory is discussed and how it is related to self-efficacy and anxiety toward reading. The second part of this chapter includes a discussion of the literature related to reading anxiety. First, reading anxiety is examined by looking at the definitions of anxiety and reading anxiety and literature related to reading anxiety. Second, this chapter includes the literature related to the behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy of reading anxiety. Third, this chapter includes a discussion of literature related to how reading anxiety affects students of different ages. A variety of grade levels are discussed, although the focus for the study is first and second grade. The next part of the literature review focuses on how reading anxiety affects different areas of academics. Then, reading anxiety and gender are discussed through related literature. Finally, the literature review concludes with a discussion of how teachers handle anxiety since that is the focus of this dissertation topic. By looking at the whole picture of reading anxiety, one can see the gaps in the literature and the importance of investigating strategies that teachers could use to address reading anxiety in first and second graders.

Theoretical Framework

The social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theory serve as the theoretical framework for this study. The social cognitive theory developed from the social learning theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1977). The SLT states that a person's behavior can be learned through observational

learning (Bandura, 1977). Observational learning has two components: imaginal and verbal. Imaginal learning occurs when the person is exposed to the stimuli and creates images of the modeled behavior. Verbal learning is when the person codes the observed event (Bandura, 1977). If learning is achieved through the verbal stage, it can be produced more accurately. The SLT was developed based on an experiment called the *Bobo Doll Experiment*. In this experiment, children were divided into three groups: one group of 24 children was shown how to play aggressively with a Bobo Doll, the second group of 24 students was shown how to play with the Bobo Doll non-aggressively, and the third group of 24 students was the control group. The experiment concluded that those who observed aggression were more likely to play aggressively. Cognitive processes were working simultaneously with observations. When a child is observing a behavior, they will begin to process the behavior (mediational behavior) and decide to imitate or not imitate the behavior. This experiment showed that, in the SLT, "new patterns of behavior can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behavior of others" (Bandura, 1977, p. 3). In the SLT, there are three types of learning reinforcement: informative, motivational, and cognitive (Bandura, 1977). During the informative phase, the learner is exposed to the behavior. In the motivational phase, the learner realizes that "certain actions will gain them the outcome they value" (Bandura, 1977, p. 3). In the cognitive phase, the rewards and consequences will be weighted. While the SLT explained learning and mediational process, it did not cover the emotional side of learning, thoughts, and feelings.

In 1986, Albert Bandura revised his SLT and named it social cognitive theory (SCT). SCT states how behavior, environment, and cognition shape a person's actions (Bandura, 1991, 2001). "The SCT is extensively motivated and regulated by the ongoing exercise of self-influence" (Bandura, 1991, p. 248). When the SLT evolved into the SCT, the three parts of

mediational behavior expanded and became the self-efficacy theory (SET) in 2001. Self-efficacy affects a person's "behavior, goals, outcome expectation, perception of impediments, and opportunities" (Bandura, 2000, p. 75). It influences a student's motivation and ability to do an action. There are different degrees of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy can differ in magnitude, depending on the task's difficulty level. It can also differ in generality, which refers to the function of the task. Self-efficacy can also differ in strength, which refers to a person's expectations about completing a task. High expectations or low expectations could affect the strength of self-efficacy.

These theories were chosen because the SCT and the SET deal with how reading anxiety could affect behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy. When people have anxiety toward reading, their confidence in performing the task is low. The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers use to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. This research focused on how the strategies effect the student's behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy and, in turn, affect the student's reading.

Related Literature

The empirical literature related to reading anxiety is presented in this section. First, I reported on the topic of anxiety in general, followed by the ways that reading anxiety is defined. Secondly, the literature was examined to learn how reading anxiety impacts one's behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy. Following this, the connections between reading anxiety and students with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) are given. Next, I examined the literature to see what reading anxiety may look like in different grades if this is not addressed in early elementary school and how reading anxiety can affect other academics. Next, literature regarding reading anxiety and gender was examined for the research. Finally, this

related literature section concluded by focusing on the teachers' perspectives on reading anxiety. This section aimed to discuss the empirical literature that supports this qualitative study and show gaps in the literature that demonstrate why this study is relevant in education.

Understanding Anxiety in General

To understand reading anxiety, a discussion of anxiety in general must be examined first. Anxiety is one of the most reported emotional issues in the classroom and is one of the earliest emerging disorders in childhood (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). It has been stated that "between 2.5% and 5% of children meet the criteria for having anxiety" (Rapee et al., 2009, p. 312). In one classroom, there could be two to three children who suffer from some form of anxiety (Manassis, 2012). In adults, it has been stated that 20% experience anxiety at some point during a year (Bishop, 2009).

Researchers have developed several definitions of anxiety. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), anxiety is the "subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the nervous system" (p. 125). Derakshan and Eysenck (2009) stated that anxiety was an "aversive motivational state that occurs in situations in which levels of perceived threat are high" (p. 168). Bandura (1977) stated that anxiety comes from nervousness about a problem that could happen. Anxiety could also have a negative effect on a student's learning (Piccolo et al., 2017). Jalongo and Hirsh (2010) stated that anxiety impairs learning. Although the fear is imagined, it affects what is to come. When a student struggles with anxiety, the brain is overpowered by this intense emotion (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010).

There are four types of anxiety: general anxiety disorder, social anxiety, specific phobias, and panic disorder. Reading anxiety is considered a specific phobia because the anxiety only occurs during the specific time of reading. Anxiety can also fall into two different categories:

trait anxiety and state anxiety (Leal et al., 2017). Trait anxiety is a stable type of anxiety and comes from concerns or worries over time. State anxiety happens at a specific moment. Over time, trait anxiety can cause state anxiety. State anxiety can stop once the threat has ended, but trait anxiety continues until the next threat. Trait anxiety involves the personality trait of a person, while state anxiety involves the psychological and physiological parts of a person. There are four different instances where trait anxiety could happen: "social evaluation, physical danger, ambiguous threat, and threat during daily routines" (Leal et al., 2017, p. 149). State anxiety could occur through worry and emotional experiences (Leal et al., 2017). In reading anxiety, both anxieties play a role. Trait anxiety occurs when the student knows the reading is coming and becomes anxious in anticipation of it happening. Then state anxiety happens during reading when the student experiences worry.

Reading Anxiety Defined

One area in which a student could have anxiety is reading. Researchers associated cognitive factors with being the main reason for reading issues in the past. However, more recent research has discovered that psychopathological factors, like anxiety, could negatively affect reading (NoackLeSage et al., 2019). There are varied definitions of reading anxiety. According to Ramirez et al. (2019), reading anxiety is the fear of being in a situation where the person must process textual information, whether internally or out loud. Piccolo et al. (2017) stated that reading anxiety could occur when a student reads and experiences a negative emotion. One commonality with all the definitions is that anxiety deals with the emotional side of reading. Reading anxiety is a type of negative emotion that inhibits the brain's ability to process new information.

A person with reading anxiety displays the emotion of fear. The student could have a fear of not reading well aloud, a fear of messing up, or a fear of other students making fun of them (Piccolo et al., 2017). A student may fear reading aloud because the teacher calls on everyone to read, and the student knows their turn is coming. When a student makes errors, they may be afraid of what their peers may say or do. Anxiety may make a student feel hopeless, lowering their self-esteem (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010).

Reading has three stages: before, during, and after reading, and reading anxiety can occur in one or more of these stages (Tobias, 1986). In the before stage, a student may not be able to focus or not understand the purpose of the reading, which can cause anxiety. These factors can also hinder the during stages of reading. If the anxiety continues into the after-reading stage, the student may not connect with the text or recall the information that was read.

The Effects of Having Reading Anxiety

The following paragraphs examine how reading anxiety could affect a student's behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy. These four areas are based on Bandura's SCT (1986) and SET (2001) and were used to formulate the three research sub-questions for this study. These areas were addressed individually because reading anxiety affects each one differently. By examining each area individually, one can see how reading anxiety could affect all areas of a student's academic experience.

Reading Anxiety and Its Effects on Behavior

Reading anxiety could have a negative effect on a student behaviorally (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012). Any time the student knows they will read out loud, the anxiety may come in anticipation of reading out loud. As a result, their behavior may change. Behavior issues may include avoiding the reading activity, being fidgety during reading, being restless, distracted, or

having meltdowns during the reading activity. These students may also be known as "reluctant readers" (Nielen et al., 2016, p. 263). Reluctant readers are those who "do not engage in reading longer stretches of text in their leisure time and avoid free reading at school" (Nielen et al., 2016, p. 263). These students do not have a motivational drive to read (Conradi et al., 2014). Reluctant readers see reading as a threat and are often associated with those who have reading anxiety (Nielen et al., 2016).

A student's negative behavior toward reading could also affect them emotionally, socially, and physically (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012, 2013). One emotional effect could be depression (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012). The depression may come across as being unhappy, nervous, having low interest, or not being motivated to read (Cheung et al., 2019). Another emotion is fear (Piccolo et al., 2017). When a child reads, certain emotions are triggered in the brain, and those emotions will become associated with reading. The student could have a fear of not reading well out loud. They may be afraid of what their peers may say or do. They may show signs of avoidance (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2013). That emotion will be attached to reading unless intervention strategies are used to help the student overcome the reading anxiety. "Poor academic achievement may occur if students are distracted by anxious thoughts and feelings, which in turn, interferes with their ability to concentrate, learn, and complete academic tasks" (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2013, p. 53).

Not only can reading anxiety affect a student's behavior emotionally, but it can also affect them socially. Social impacts may include "peer rejection, school avoidance, and social incompetence" (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012, p. 35). A student may avoid interaction with their peers, stay alone at school, or even try to avoid going to school because of the anticipation of what they think their peers may say or do to them. The student focuses on the anticipation of

what may come. They think that their peers may make fun of their reading ability. They may isolate themselves at school to avoid interaction so that no one will comment on their poor reading skills. They believe that if they stay home, that will solve their problem with reading anxiety. The avoidance, if not reversed, could cause negative reactions every time the student knows or anticipates that they are going to have to read aloud.

A student's negative behavior with reading anxiety can affect them physically. Physical signs that may not be as visible are "sweating, tension, and increased pulse" (Tysinger et al., 2010, p. 1). Physical signs of anxiety that are visible and that might occur in the classroom could be the student complaining of a "stomachache, headache, shaking hands, and frequent absences" (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2013, p. 392) or insomnia (Manassis, 2012). These have been known as somatic complaints. Somatic complaints occur when a student consistently complains about a physical issue, like a headache or stomachache (Bernstein et al., 1997). Students who show physical signs of anxiety and have somatic complaints tend to miss more school (Bernstein et al., 1997; Hughes et al., 2008). When students are focused on their physical issues from anxiety, they may miss important information from their teacher. They may not complete an assignment because of their lack of focus on instruction. Studies have linked anxiety and ADHD-1 inattention (Massetti et al., 2008; Mayes et al., 2009). Mayes et al. (2009) stated that "one-third of students who have anxiety also have ADHD" (p. 540). With the combinations of reading anxiety and attention issues from ADHD, some students will have difficulty if reading anxiety is not dealt with early.

Reading Anxiety and Its Effects on a Student's Environment

Reading anxiety could have a negative effect on the student's environment. One environment could be the classroom (Manassis, 2012). The classroom environment involves

interaction between the student and teacher and the student with their peers. Students with reading anxiety may not function in the same way in the regular classroom as everyone else. A student with reading anxiety may not perform in a large group setting because they fear what others may say or think (Piccolo et al., 2017). They may not complete a reading assignment (Manassis, 2012). A student with reading anxiety may not be able to read a story or even an essay they wrote in front of the class. Manassis (2012) stated that some students with reading anxiety should not be required to read their assignments out loud. Manassis (2012) also mentioned that students with reading anxiety might need their reading assignments broken into small chunks.

In older students, the anxiety may come from the teacher. This may include the tone in which the teacher speaks, the mannerisms of the teacher, or how the teacher responds to the student's anxiety (Liao & Wang, 2015). Young (1991) stated that instructors who constantly correct students or conduct the classroom like a drill sergeant are likely to contribute to anxiety in the classroom. Older students have reported that they experienced anxiety in the classroom when "being incorrect in front of their peers, looking or sounding dumb, making mistakes" (Young, 1991, p. 429). The environment has also played a role in a high school student's self-efficacy and achievement goals. The motivation to learn could play a significant role in their academic success. But if they have reading anxiety, their motivation to learn may be very slim. These are areas where reading anxiety could have a negative effect on the student's environment.

Reading Anxiety and Its Effects on a Student's Cognition

Reading anxiety can also affect a student's cognition. Cognition occurs when a student understands and processes information. Information is stored in long-term memory and short-term memory. Emotions are an essential part of cognition and reading development. "Emotions

facilitate symbol development, create meaning, drive attention, and have their own memory pathways" (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010, p. 433). When students read, they use their emotions to create meaning from print. Meaning happens gradually as a child reads, and eventually, the meanings turn into symbols. The symbols are usable once they are "encoded in the brain with an emotion" (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010, p. 433). When a student has reading anxiety, cognition is hindered in the long-term and short-term memory. Reading anxiety causes worry (Pekrun, 2006). When a negative emotion, like worry, is dominant in the brain, the brain cannot process new information because the brain is trying to control the intense emotion of worry (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010).

The prefrontal cortex is another part of the brain hindered during anxiety. The prefrontal cortex focuses attention, anticipates events, and manages emotions (Bishop, 2009). When a student is trying to read but is experiencing worry, they may not process or focus on the information they are reading if worry becomes too intense. Eysenck (1984) stated that "prolonged worry occurs mainly in those individuals who have highly organized clusters of worry-related information stored in long-term memory" (p. 545). Negative emotions "increase cortisol and other hormones in the brain and can eventually lead to damage to the hippocampus, which affects the brain's ability to convert new information from short term memory to long term memory" (Jensen, 2005, as cited in Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010, p. 432). The reading is stored in the short-term memory, but if a student struggles with reading anxiety, they may not convert the knowledge to their long-term memory for comprehension. This can affect a student academically because if they cannot convert the knowledge to long-term, they may do poorly on a reading comprehension test, not answer questions orally, or complete a reading assignment.

Reading Anxiety and Its Effects on a Student's Self-Efficacy

Reading anxiety has also been related to a student's self-efficacy. SET was added to Bandura's SCT in 2001. Bandura defined self-efficacy as "a person's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Academic self-efficacy deals with behavioral, cognitive, and motivational engagement (Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2016). Behavior involves effort, cognition involves strategy, and motivation involves interest (Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2016). All these working together help define a student's self-efficacy toward academics. A person's self-efficacy beliefs have been shown to influence their level of stress and anxiety, which affects academic achievement (Pajares & Miller, 1994). "Self-efficacy influences task choices students make, effort students expend on an activity, and persistence and resilience when confronting obstacles" (Lee & Jonson-Reid, 2016, p. 79).

Self-efficacy builds from four internal sources, "mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological state" (Bandura, 1986, as cited in Shehzad et al., 2019, p. 91). Mastery experience deals with past experiences of successes and failures. The student has had many past failures in reading anxiety, so their mastery experience is low. Vicarious experience occurs when observing others. If a student sees another student's success in reading, they may begin to believe that they can also succeed. Or the opposite can happen with reading anxiety. Some students may feel intimidated when others read better than they do or may negatively compare themselves. Verbal persuasion comes from parents, teachers, and anyone who plays an essential role in the student's life. This source is essential for a student who has reading anxiety. These students need to hear positive verbal praise. The last experience is a physiological state, which refers to "anxiety and exhaustion" (Shehzad et al., 2019). The first

three (mastery, vicarious, and verbal) feed into physiological, which feeds into a student's self-efficacy.

Researchers have conducted studies at all grade levels to see how early a student's self-efficacy could influence their academic achievement. Self-efficacy looks different at different ages. The earliest studies have been in first grade. In first grade, self-efficacy comes from several factors: feedback from teachers, instruction, and the performance of other students (Wilson & Trainin, 2007). These could be positive or negative. When a student receives positive feedback after reading out loud, their self-efficacy in their reading ability will be positive and the student will begin to believe that they can succeed in reading. Unfortunately, the opposite can also occur. Wilson and Trainin (2007) shared that a student could also have low self-efficacy if they compare themselves to other students. When a student does not read well but hears other students reading well, the self-efficacy of their reading ability is low. They may believe that they cannot read and become anxious when called on to read. In third grade, positive self-efficacy can develop through motivation and practice. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) studied one third-grade classroom where students could practice specific reading strategies to improve their reading while given opportunities to practice. As a result, their self-efficacy was positive because they were given the tools and opportunities to develop reading skills. Self-efficacy can affect students from one grade to the next. Liew et al. (2008) studied first through third graders and saw that students who had high self-efficacy in second grade had high reading achievement in third grade, and those who had low self-efficacy in second grade had low reading achievement in third grade. In upper elementary and middle school, self-efficacy was controlled more by emotions versus teachers and instruction in lower elementary. Their emotional engagement affected their self-efficacy and academic achievement (Olivier et al., 2019). In high school, there is a shift once

again in self-efficacy. Students begin to make personal goals for themselves, and as they meet those goals, their self-efficacy increases. Zimmerman et al. (2016) found that high school students who demonstrated low self-efficacy were taught how to set goals for themselves. Zimmerman's study concluded that these high school students had higher interest and effort in their learning.

If a student has reading anxiety, their self-efficacy toward reading would be low, and the result should be a low reading achievement. At first, it was unclear whether young students' self-efficacy could be measured. But a successful study by Lee and Jonson-Reid (2016) showed that younger students' self-efficacy could be measured. Lee and Jonson-Reid (2016) studied first through third-grade students at risk for reading failure and concluded that their self-efficacy was related to their reading achievement. This showed that even at an early age, self-efficacy does play a part in reading achievement. Carroll and Fox (2017) also studied second through fifth graders' self-efficacy and reading achievement. Their study concluded that the higher the self-efficacy, the higher the reading achievement, and the lower the self-efficacy, the lower the reading achievement. A student's self-efficacy towards reading anxiety can affect their reading achievement.

Reading Anxiety and ADHD

While researching reading anxiety, the topic of ADHD with anxiety continually came up in literature. This is known as comorbid anxiety. Comorbid anxiety is when a person has another disorder with anxiety (NoackLeSage et al., 2019). Research has revealed that "between 25% and 50% of people with ADHD have comorbid anxiety" (NoackLeSage et al., 2019, p. 793). This is an increase from 2013, where only "20–25% of students struggled with ADHD and comorbid anxiety" (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2013, p. 392). There have been multiple studies on how

psychopathological symptoms can affect a student's academic success (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2013; Rogers et al., 2011; Stankov et al., 2012). It has been discovered that students who have ADHD and anxiety struggle with their "working memory and maladaptive cognition" (NoackLeSage et al., 2019, p. 793; Skirbekk et al., 2011; Weissman et al., 2012). A more recent study by NoackLeSage et al. (2019) researched whether anxiety and ADHD together significantly impacted a student's reading, writing, and math. They concluded that there was a positive relationship between anxiety and achievement outcomes and a negative relationship between ADHD and achievement. Students who have inattention and anxiety have been shown to have lower reading and math scores versus students who do not have these symptoms. When a student cannot focus because of ADHD, they may exhibit anxiety because they cannot focus on the task. Then they may begin to display signs of avoidance or frustration. This combination of anxiety and ADHD has been known to appear in children as young as 6 years old (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2013).

Reading Anxiety at Different Grade Levels

Many studies present the idea that reading anxiety has a negative impact on reading throughout all grade levels, from elementary to college (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012; Grills et al., 2014; Merryman, 1974; Tsovili, 2004). Most of these studies have been quantitative and focused on student outcomes instead of the proactive teacher. This illustrates a possible gap in the literature. While anxiety toward reading has been addressed, there have not been studies investigating what strategies teachers use to address reading anxiety, specifically in first and second grades. This section examines reading anxiety at different grade levels and how it affects a student's reading achievement when not dealt with early.

Reading Anxiety in Elementary School

The earliest studies of reading anxiety have been with students in the first grade (Bonifacci et al., 2008; Grills et al., 2014; Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012, 2013; Piccolo et al., 2017; Ramirez et al., 2019). It has been stated that when a young student struggles with reading anxiety, it can affect them academically (Ramirez et al., 2019). Reading anxiety can negatively affect a student from "completing a difficult task (like reading) that requires efficient information processing" (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012, p. 36). First grade is an essential year in reading development (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012). Some students come into first grade able to read, while others barely know their alphabet. With the wide range of reading abilities, teachers must meet each student's needs. The most common way for students to learn to read in first grade is through small reading groups. Usually, students are divided by reading abilities and are placed with other students of similar abilities. While some students soar in reading groups, others struggle in reading groups. When a student has reading anxiety, they are able to read but fear they cannot. They have the mentality "I'm afraid I will fail" (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012, p. 36). A study was completed with 684 first-grade students, which found that students with reading anxiety in the fall of their first-grade year were in the lowest percentile for reading in the spring. While teachers can identify students with reading anxiety, teachers also need strategies they can implement to help them overcome their reading anxiety.

Another area that reading anxiety can affect is a student's positive or negative reading effect. The reading effect involves a student's attitude, interest, and motivation to read (Grills et al., 2014; Kasperski et al., 2016; Ramirez et al., 2019). When a child loves to read and is interested in what they are reading, they have a positive reading effect. But when a child has anxiety toward reading, they could have a negative reading effect. Their self-perception of

reading could be low (Kasperski et al., 2016). Ramirez et al. (2019) conducted a study with first and second graders on anxiety and reading effect, seeing how anxiety coincided with a negative reading affect.

A specific area that reading anxiety can affect in first grade is phonological processing. First grade is an essential year in learning many phonological sounds. In kindergarten, students learn the 26 sounds of the alphabet. In first grade, students learn different sounds when certain letters are put together. Phonological processing involves "an individual's mental operations that use phonological or sound structure of oral language" (Torgesen et al., 1994, p. 276). There are three parts of phonological processing: phonological awareness, phonological memory, and phonological information (Torgesen et al., 1994). Phonological awareness is when a student can blend individual sounds (phonemes) into a word. Phonological memory involves verbal sequencing. Phonological information is where a student can recall information in their long-term memory. Reading anxiety can affect these areas because, as mentioned earlier, worry affects information stored in the short-term memory to be transferred into the long-term memory (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010).

If not addressed early, reading anxiety could continue throughout a student's elementary school years (Butler et al., 1985; Scarborough, 1998; Torgesen et al., 1994). In the early grades, like first and second grade, reading anxiety affects the student's attitude, interest, and motivation and affects them academically. Students who struggle with reading anxiety may not read for pleasure or during silent reading time in class. These are the students who may play, get up multiple times, or distract others. A healthy reading habit for a first grader should be at least 10 minutes a day. But for those who struggle with reading anxiety, that can seem like an impossible task.

If reading anxiety continues into second grade, it could also begin to affect reading skills. Reading skills involve working memory and word reading accuracy. The brain's working memory is the area where information is stored for short-term retrieval. Working memory is essential for comprehension and learning (Grills et al., 2014). When a child is anxious, their working memory is hindered (Katzir et al., 2018). Reading skills also include fluency, decoding, expression, and comprehension. All these components work together in reading. Reading fluency is when a student reads with "appropriate rate, accuracy, and prosody" (Tysinger et al., 2010, p. 2). In reading anxiety, the student struggles with reading at an appropriate rate and reading with accuracy. Decoding involves the ability to use the correct sounds to sound out words. When a child has reading anxiety, they may not associate the correct sound with decoding the words. This, in turn, slows down their fluency. Expression involves a student using the correct tone, pauses, and emphasis on punctuation. When a child has reading anxiety, they may ignore who is speaking in the story, when to pause after a comma, or which expression to use at the end of the sentence. They may not read an interrogative sentence as a question or an exclamatory sentence with excitement.

Also, in elementary school, students may become anxious during different reading stages, like oral reading or answering comprehension questions. Oral reading is a common reading activity in elementary (García & Cain, 2014; Ivey, 1999). A child may perceive themselves as a strong oral reader or a poor oral reader. This refers to their self-concept (Katzir et al., 2018; Walgermo et al., 2018). Self-concept is a student's belief in their competence and ability (Walgermo et al., 2018). It is a self-perception as a reader (Katzir et al., 2018). It has been stated that a student's self-concept in an academic area could be associated with their later academic achievement (Grills et al., 2014; McCauley et al., 2018; Walgermo et al., 2018). Walgermo et al.

(2018) conducted a study with second graders, which concluded that reading anxiety was negatively associated with reading self-concept and motivation. Walgermo et al. (2018) researched the importance of creating a positive self-concept in reading in first grade, carrying over into second grade. The earlier a positive self-concept is created, the more likely reading anxiety will not be a factor in a student's reading achievement.

Not only does reading anxiety affect a student's self-concept in oral reading but also their reading comprehension. Emotions play a role in reading comprehension (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). Since reading anxiety is a type of internal emotion, it affects reading comprehension. During reading, some emotions that could occur include "joy/pleasure, anticipation/curiosity, anxiety/ threat, and sadness/disappointment" (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010, p. 432). Emotions help students comprehend text because they bring value and meaning to the text (Eynde et al., 2006; Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). Olivier et al. (2019) stated that students begin to bring emotions into text comprehension in third through sixth grades. Reading comprehension involves understanding the text, processing the text, and making connections with the text (Katrancı & Kuşdemir, 2016). Students connect with text in three ways: text to self, text to text, and text to the world (Gritter, 2011). When a student's emotion is anxiety, they cannot comprehend the text because they are focused on their inability or fear to read instead of the meaning of the text. Therefore, they cannot connect with the text, relate it to another text, or make connections in the world. Katrancı and Kuşdemir (2016) studied fourth-grade students' reading anxiety and its effects on reading comprehension. Students who showed anxiety toward reading struggled with reading comprehension. The students who had anxiety could not find the text's main idea or wrote an incomplete main idea. Tysinger et al. (2010) also studied reading anxiety and its effect on reading comprehension in fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students. Their study showed that

the higher the anxiety, the lower the reading comprehension. Students in third through sixth grade also had a greater tendency to worry over their reading performance than younger students (Lauermann et al., 2017).

One area that reading anxiety does not have a substantial effect on in fourth through sixth grade is reading fluency. By fourth grade, fluency is considered more automatic (Tysinger et al., 2010). Reading comprehension "requires repeated retrieval from long-term memory and continual processing in working memory, or short-term memory" (Tysinger et al., 2010, p. 3).

Reading Anxiety in Middle School

There are many studies on middle school students with reading anxiety (Bandura et al., 1996; Louis & Mistele, 2012). If reading anxiety continues into middle school, it may affect a student's reading habits. When students are young, they are encouraged to read daily. As time goes on, many students begin to read for enjoyment, and reading becomes a habit. They have a positive attitude (reading effect) toward reading. But for the students who struggle with reading anxiety, they may not form a positive reading habit (Baki, 2017). Baki (2017) conducted a study with fifth through eighth graders and saw that students' reading anxiety and reading attitude were the most significant factors in students' reading habits. Students who had no reading anxiety had a positive reading habit. Students who struggled with reading anxiety had a poor reading habit.

In higher education, "reading comprehension is considered one of the most important skills a student can have" (Shehzad et al., 2019). When reading anxiety hinders reading, it also hinders reading comprehension. The following section will discuss barriers students may face who struggle with reading anxiety in high school and college.

Reading Anxiety in High School and College

When a student enters high school and college with reading anxiety, it can also affect their secondary language. In high school, students usually learn foreign languages like Spanish or French. But when a student already struggles with reading anxiety in their first language, they may also struggle with anxiety in their second language. Studies have been conducted researching the relationship between reading anxiety and foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; Sun & Luo, 2018; Yoğurtçu, 2013). Zhou (2017) stated that reading anxiety could occur when someone reads in their new language or second language. A student may fear being evaluated after completing the reading assignment (Bell & Perfetti, 1994). Anxiety toward reading can occur in a person's first language or second language (Sun & Luo, 2018). One study focused on the symptoms of anxiety. High school students may experience symptoms such as "apprehension, worry, dread, missing class, or postponing homework" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 126). Another study by Yoğurtçu (2013) linked reading anxiety and comprehension with learning a foreign language. Yoğurtçu (2013) stated that those with low comprehension skills and reading anxiety are more likely to struggle with learning a foreign language. Sun and Luo (2018) conducted a study by examining Chinese language learners in college. This qualitative study used interviews, observations, and journaling to conduct its research. The two students in the study stated that they experienced reading anxiety in English and Chinese because of the difference in expression (Sun & Luo, 2018). This study was also unique because it suggested strategies that the two students could use to help with the anxiety at the high school level. Most studies do not give strategies to help with anxiety. They share the problem with data but not how to fix the problem. This is a gap in most literature.

In college, reading anxiety can affect reading comprehension, self-efficacy, achievement motivation, and reading habits. It has been shown that as few as "27% of high school graduates show proficiency in reading on the ACT college entrance exam" (Brown-Kramer, 2021, p. 48). Many students enter college unprepared for rigorous academics. The average college student reads 350 words per minute. Those who struggle with reading anxiety read at a much slower pace. Shehzad et al. (2019) stated that "it is utterly essential for the students to comprehend what they read to cope with the demanding subjects offered at a university level" (p. 90). It has been researched on the university level that college students who believe in their ability (self-efficacy) to comprehend are more likely to be consistently motivated to complete reading assignments (Solheim, 2011; Unrau et al., 2018). Therefore, if a student does not believe they can comprehend the text, they are less likely to complete the reading assignment. Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in a college student's ability to complete reading assignments and have strong reading comprehension skills. This can be detrimental for a college student since most classes require heavy reading assignments.

Reading anxiety also affects the reading habits of college students. There has been a decline in leisure reading among college students over the years. Students who struggle with reading anxiety will more than likely not read for pleasure. One factor has been the evolution of the internet and instant information. College students who struggle with reading anxiety are likely to go to the internet versus reading a book (Huang et al., 2014).

Reading Anxiety and Its Effects on Other Academic Areas

When a student has reading anxiety, it could also cause the student to struggle in other academic areas, such as testing, writing, and math. Reading is a foundational skill that is needed

in all academics. The following paragraphs expand on the effects of reading anxiety on other academic areas.

Reading Anxiety and Its Effects on Testing

One area that a student could struggle with is testing. Grills-Taquechel et al. (2012) studied 153 students in first grade. This study focused on how reading anxiety affected test scores. The students who were not reading at level had a lower test score than those who read at or above reading level. As students get older, they may realize that their anxiety could affect their testing ability. Students in third grade had a lower perception of test anxiety (20.6%) than sixth-grade students (50.0%). Another example in middle school revealed that seventh-grade students had higher test anxiety than students in sixth grade (Bulgan, 2018). The older the student gets, the more their anxiety may hinder their testing ability.

Reading Anxiety and Its Effects on Writing Skills

Reading anxiety can also affect writing skills. Anxiety has two different paths with writing. One is avoidance, and the other is perfectionism (NoackLeSage et al., 2019). The one that reading anxiety is associated with is avoidance. Avoidance deals with avoiding the writing assignment. In the lower grades, their anxiety may not allow them to remember their phonetic sounds. If they did not comprehend the sounds taught during phonics, they might not apply them in writing. Therefore, they struggle to write out words and may struggle to write complete sentences. This anxiety could also affect their spelling. A study by Bonifacci et al. (2008) revealed that students in third grade who had anxiety had more errors in spelling. Writing is more associated with writing responses to reading assignments in the upper grades. If a student cannot comprehend what they are reading, they may not complete the writing assignments, like short answer questions or essay response questions.

Reading Anxiety and Its Effects on Math

Not only can reading anxiety affect testing and writing, but it can also affect math. Reading anxiety and math anxiety often go together. Punaro and Reeve (2012) discovered that students with high reading anxiety also expressed anxiety in math. Students with reading anxiety know math is valuable but may believe it is not attainable (Lauermann et al., 2017). As a result, they may not do well in math. In math, students must read directions and math problems independently as they progress through school. This combines reading comprehension and the ability to process math problems. If a student has anxiety toward reading, it will be difficult to comprehend the math problems. Their reading expectancy during math brings negative emotions when they have reading anxiety (Lauermann et al., 2017). This affects their self-efficacy toward math. Students in elementary school do not deal with math anxiety as much as middle school students. Math anxiety could begin to appear around fourth grade and continue through middle school and high school (Hill et al., 2016), whereas reading anxiety could start as early as first grade (Ramirez et al., 2019).

Reading Anxiety and Gender

There have been studies to see if gender is a factor in academic anxiety. Research has revealed that females also have higher reading anxiety than males (Katzir et al., 2018). Females are more critical of their reading abilities than males. Females are naturally more emotionally minded, which could be why females have more anxiety than males. Multiple studies also suggested women struggle more with test anxiety than males (Dursun & Bindak, 2011; Peleg-Popko, 2002). Other studies suggest women have more math anxiety than males (Ferguson et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2016; Kaya & Savrun, 2015; Oksal et al., 2013; Segool et al., 2013). Math anxiety was more prevalent in secondary education than elementary education (Hill et al., 2016).

While there are studies on reading anxiety and its effect on testing, writing, and math, what are teachers' perspectives about their student's reading anxiety? The following section will discuss the literature on teachers' perceptions and ability to handle anxiety in the classroom. This is an essential component of the research because if teachers do not know how to handle reading anxiety, they cannot help their students. I hope that this research will help teachers understand reading anxiety and give ways to help their students.

Teachers' Perceptions on How to Handle Reading Anxiety

The following section discusses what teachers know about handling anxiety in the classroom. There have been some studies on handling anxiety in general, but none could be found on handling reading anxiety. This section discusses how teachers lack formal training on anxiety and their perceptions of their ability to handle anxiety. It concludes with the idea of a growth mindset.

Some teachers believe that emotional skills play an essential role in a student's education (Pirskanen et al., 2019). They also believe that the crucial years are when students go from preschool to elementary school. Teachers in the first grade viewed the importance of teaching their students "emotional skills, emotion management, and regulation" (Pirskanen et al., 2019, p. 417). It has been stated that anxiety will often manifest itself in these transitional years (Pirskanen et al., 2019). Sometimes it reveals itself behaviorally and sometimes academically. "Students with excessive anxiety present challenges to teachers who require specialized skills to manage students' anxiety-related social, emotional, behavioral, and educational issues in the classroom" (Ginsburg et al., 2019, p. 2). Most teachers never receive formal training on how to help students with anxiety (Reinke et al., 2011).

The Department of Education conducted a 3-year study in three stages to address anxiety. In Phases 1 and 2, 40 elementary schools in Connecticut worked with the Teacher Anxiety Program for Elementary Students (TAPES). During these phases, teachers had individual conferences with parents to explain the anxiety study and testing with TAPES. Teacher and parent behavior were discussed to see what areas both parties could improve to help the student with their anxiety. In the second meeting, the teacher met with each student individually, explained TAPES, showed the student three types of anxiety and how to spot them. During the third meeting, the students learned how to face their fears with anxiety. In meetings four and five, the teachers and parents met to discuss areas that need to be reworked, celebrated what was working, and planned ways to avert future anxiety. Teachers were given strategies to help students in the classroom: "Respect, Empathy, Listening, acknowledging efforts, Teamwork, and Encouragement or RELATE" (Ginsburg et al., 2019, p. 3). The findings were beneficial for teachers. First, it gave teachers a process to identify anxiety and steps to help students overcome the anxiety, whether behavioral or academic. The study also provided researched-based professional development for teachers.

While teachers are taught professional development on fluency and comprehension, many teachers are not taught how the effect (in this case, anxiety) plays a role in a child's reading success (Ramirez et al., 2019). Ramirez et al. (2019) also stated that "the affective component of children's reading experiences, particularly negative effect about reading, is an important but unexplored determinant of reading acquisition and achievement" (Ramirez et al., 2019, p. 17).

Growth Mindset

While there is not ample research on strategies for teachers to use with reading anxiety, one idea that has continued to appear in research with anxiety, in general, is the idea of a growth

mindset. A mindset is the "beliefs that people hold about their most basic qualities such as intelligence, talents, and personality" (Boylan et al., 2018, p. 17). A growth mindset is an idea that intelligence can grow through effort and time (Fraser, 2018). Schroder et al. (2017) stated that a growth mindset could be learned. Carol Dweck (2006) has led the research for over 20 years on the idea of a growth mindset. Dweck believed that people have one of two mindsets, either a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. While a growth mindset believes that intelligence and abilities can change, a fixed mindset believes that abilities cannot change (Dweck, 2006). A fixed mindset believes what a person is born with will stay the same throughout that person's life. Mindsets have been known to be present in students as early as kindergarten and first grade (Cain & Dweck, 1995; Schroder et al., 2017; Smiley & Dweck, 1994).

Boylan et al. (2018) stated that a growth mindset allows students to take responsibility for their learning. They set goals for learning. When students create goals, they achieve those goals through practice and effort. The goals help students learn about themselves and the way they learn. They may learn that they are either intrinsically motivated or extrinsically motivated (Boylan et al., 2018). Intrinsically motivated is when students can set their own goals and motivate themselves. Extrinsically motivated is when a student is motivated by outside sources, such as a teacher or parent. Most elementary students are extrinsically motivated. Students setting their own goals could be a valuable tool for teachers.

Dweck (2006) stated that a student's mindset plays a crucial role in their motivation and achievement. While students can create goals, their goals may be focused in one of two ways: learning-goal focused or performance-goal focused (Boylan et al., 2018). Students who use a learning goal are typically "intent on developing mastery over time and demonstrate more resilience toward learning when it comes to failures and setbacks" (Boylan et al., 2018, p. 17).

These students usually do not exhibit anxiety in their learning. On the other hand, a performance-goal-focused student may display anxiety. Their focus is not on the result but on their current ability to perform a task, hindering performance (Boylan et al., 2018). Using growth mindsets also helps students to learn from their mistakes. Schroder et al. (2017) said that those who believe in a growth mindset believe that people react more positively to errors. Teaching students how to use a growth mindset sets a person up for future success, according to Thomas et al. (2019).

Greene et al. (2004) stated that three things could motivate a student to learn: "self-efficacy, achievement goals, and perceived instrumentality" (p. 463). We know that self-efficacy deals with student's belief in their ability and having achievement goals that help develop a growth mindset. Perceived instrumentality deals with seeing if the task is essential in reaching future goals. If the assignment helps a student get closer to their goal, they are more likely to have the motivation to complete it. Dweck (2006) also stated that "a student's mindset influences their learning behavior" (Dweck, 2006, as cited in Robinson, 2017, p. 18). When a student believes that their abilities can improve, they are more likely to put forth the time and effort to achieve their goals. But when a student believes that their abilities are fixed, they are more likely to quit or put forth little effort.

Teaching students the science behind how our minds work and how a growth mindset works in our brains could be valuable. Robinson (2017) stated that teachers should explain to the students about the brain's neuroplasticity and how it changes during learning. When the brain is learning, it is changing and forming neural connections. The hippocampus, which handles spatial information, grows when growth mindset learning occurs (Fraser, 2018). Students can learn that they can rewire their brain whenever they practice a concept, whether reading, writing, or math.

As students learn about different brain parts, they can see how their mindset develops their brain. When a student has a growth mindset, their brain can change, and anxious behavior can diminish over time. If the student continues to have a fixed mindset, their brain may not change as much as those with a growth mindset (Robinson, 2017).

Robinson (2017) also stated that teachers could teach the students positive self-talk through a growth mindset. This should be taught daily, according to Bates (2016). Teaching students that "I can do . . ." and setting goals allows them to take ownership of their learning and see the positive results from their learning and rewiring the brain. Bates (2016) also stated that teachers should also use the term "not yet" (p. 30). This term is one that Dweck (2006) shared that teachers should teach in the classroom. Instead of students saying they cannot do something, they should say, "I can't do it yet." This instills in them that they have the ability, and with hard work and perseverance, they could eventually say, "I can."

A growth mindset does not just involve the student making personal goals. There are several things involved in using a growth mindset in a school, including "trust, fairness, and school climate" (Thomas et al., 2019, p. 1). First, the student must feel a sense of trust in their school, classroom, and teacher. The environment plays a vital role in the mindset of a student. When a student trusts their teacher, they are more likely to develop a growth mindset and create learning goals. Also, when a teacher "praises the effort, not the talent" (Bates, 2016, p. 30), the student will see their teacher as being fair. Students must also feel that their environment is fair. If they perceive their school and classroom as fair, they have learned delayed gratification (Thomas et al., 2019). Delayed gratification would involve the student working hard and persevering to the end to receive the delayed gratification. Trust and fairness create a positive school and classroom climate. Studies have revealed that teachers have positively accepted a

growth mindset. Of the teachers surveyed, "98% said growth mindset would lead to student learning, 90% of teachers said it would help with persistence and effort, but only 22% felt prepared to teach growth mindset" (Boylan et al., 2018, p. 18).

Summary

Anxiety can take on many forms, such as students avoiding the reading activity, being fidgety during reading, restless, distracted, or having meltdowns during the reading activity (Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012). Anxiety can appear in many forms, and one is reading anxiety. When a student has anxiety toward reading, they avoid it at all costs. According to Ramirez et al. (2019), reading anxiety is the fear of processing textual information. Piccolo et al. (2017) stated that reading anxiety is an "unpleasant emotional reaction experienced by students when reading" (p. 537). Anxiety toward reading affects students in elementary school (Grills et al., 2014; Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012; Lauermann et al., 2017; Ramirez et al., 2019; Tysinger et al., 2010). Reading anxiety also affects a student's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to perform a task (Carroll & Fox, 2017). A student can become worried about their ability to read aloud or read for comprehension and, as a result, can trigger their anxiety. There are many studies about student self-efficacy in middle school (Bandura et al., 1996; Louis & Mistele, 2012) and high school (Greene et al., 2004; Steinmayr & Spinath, 2009; Zimmerman et al., 2016); there are also some studies of upper elementary students (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; Wilson & Trainin, 2007).

If anxiety is not dealt with during the early years of elementary school, it could impact other academic areas. One area is testing (Bulgan, 2018; Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012). Students may struggle with answering questions because they are so focused on reading the questions. Another area that reading anxiety can affect is mathematics (Hill et al., 2016; Punaro & Reeve,

2012). A student may struggle to read the question and not comprehend what they are supposed to do. Reading anxiety can also affect a person's second language (Sun & Luo, 2018).

The theories guiding this study are SCT and self-efficacy by Bandura (2001). The SCT explained how behavior, environment, and cognition shape a person's actions (Vinney, 2019). Self-efficacy, introduced in the social cognitive theory, is a person's belief in their ability to perform a task (Carroll & Fox, 2017). This theoretical framework was chosen because anxiety toward reading can come from a person's internal feelings, cognition, or the outside environment.

While there are many studies focusing on the student's anxiety toward reading, few research articles deal with teachers' ideas on how to deal with anxiety toward reading. There has been research on using a growth mindset to help with anxiety, but there has not been a study using growth mindset on students with reading anxiety. Most teachers do not know how to handle anxiety toward reading. Teachers want to help all their children succeed, but anxiety has been one of the hardest to tackle. Most universities do not equip teachers with the tools to help students with reading anxiety. Evidence has revealed that it is crucial to intervene early in lower elementary (Baki, 2017). While anxiety toward reading is an issue in elementary school, it can continue into middle school, high school, college, and adulthood. As students get older, the anxiety toward reading begins to affect reading habits and comprehension. The purpose of this case study was to investigate the teachers' use of strategies to address anxiety toward reading in first-grade and second-grade students.

Chapter Three includes a discussion of the methods of this case study. There is a discussion of the design, setting, participants, and researcher's role. There is also a review of the data collection methods and how the research was conducted ethically.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. Bandura's social cognitive theory (1991) and self-efficacy theory (2001) guided this research. The participants were asked to describe the strategies they use to help students with reading anxiety. This case study may benefit teachers because it gives teachers a tool to use for students who struggle with reading anxiety.

This chapter provides a rich description of the design used in the case study. The setting, participants, and researcher's role are explained in thorough detail. The three types of data collection methods are described: interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. Following the data collection methods, there is a description of the data analysis process. Finally, the trustworthiness and ethical considerations for this study are explained.

Research Design

The qualitative study design was chosen because this research deals with investigating experiences in their natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). A qualitative study involves a theoretical framework and assumptions that steer the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, data collection from people who have experienced the phenomenon being studied is an essential part of any qualitative study.

The case study approach was chosen because "the research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). Case studies involve data from interviews, focus groups, observations, notes, documents, photographs, and memos (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I conducted individual interviews with teachers, had the

teachers complete participant reflection journals, and conducted focus group interviews. The case study is bounded because the focus was a small group (Yin, 2018). The participants were first-grade and second-grade teachers from four schools in a rural county in North Carolina. The case analysis was holistic in nature because I analyzed the entire case (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and examined the teachers' strategies based on their interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups.

The case study was intrinsic because I studied the case itself (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, I investigated what strategies teachers use to address reading anxiety and because the case "presents an unusual or unique situation" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The unique situation was that all the students in the study had reading anxiety, and teachers used different strategies to address those needs.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

How do teachers address reading anxiety in the first-grade and second-grade classroom?

Sub-Question One

How does a teacher address a student's behavior during reading when the student is suspected of having reading anxiety?

Sub-Question Two

How does a teacher adjust a student's environment during reading when the student is suspected of having reading anxiety?

Sub-Question Three

How does a teacher strengthen a student's cognitive ability and self-efficacy during reading when the student is suspected of having reading anxiety?

Sites and Participants

The following section describes the sites and participants used in this study. Four sites and 10 participants took part in this study. Pseudonyms were used for the sites and the participants, ensuring confidentiality for everyone involved.

Sites

The research was conducted at four schools in a rural county in North Carolina: Swisher Elementary, Little Creek Elementary, Foothills Elementary, and Big River Elementary (pseudonyms). The schools were chosen because of the convenience of the location, and the schools have average scores on their reading tests. This implies that the teachers met the standards taught and worked closely with their students. The facts given for each site are based on the demographics at the time of this study.

Swisher Elementary School was a Title I school with 72.1% of students receiving free/reduced lunch. The student population consisted of 594 students from PK through sixth grade. Student diversity included 49.2% Caucasian, 41.6% Hispanic, and 5.4% African American. End-of-grade (EOG) test scores for the 2019 school year showed that third grade tested at 63.3% in reading, and fourth grade tested at 43.7%. Swisher Elementary School had one principal and one assistant principal. The principal answered to the county school board and superintendent. For the 2018–2019 school year, Swisher Elementary met its performance growth with a C (64).

Little Creek Elementary School had 260 students from PK through sixth grade. Student diversity included 84.6% Caucasian, 11.9% Hispanic, and 1.2% African American. EOG test scores for the 2019 school year showed that third grade tested at 69.2% in reading and fourth grade tested at 68.4% in reading. Little Creek Elementary had one principal and answered to the

county school board and superintendent. The school had a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support system in place to have a safe, welcoming environment. Little Creek Elementary also had a school improvement plan that consisted of teachers, the principal, support staff, instructional assistants, and parents. On their NC Report Card for 2018–2019, their overall performance grade was a B (77).

Foothills Elementary School had 538 students from preschool to fifth grade. The school had 63% of students receiving free/reduced lunch. Student diversity included 59.9% Caucasian, 37.9% Hispanic, and 1.3% two or more races. Foothills Elementary School had a principal and an assistant principal and answered to the county school board and superintendent. The school had a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support system in place. EOG test scores for 2019 showed that third grade tested at 66.7% in reading and fourth grade tested at 30.1% in reading. On their NC Report Card for 2018–2019, their overall grade was a C (55).

Big River Elementary School had 272 students from preschool to fifth grade. The school had 62.5% of students receiving free/reduced lunch. Student diversity consisted of 76.1% Caucasian, 18.8% Hispanic, and 2.9% two or more races. The school had a principal who answered to the county school board and superintendent. EOG test scores for 2019 showed that third grade tested at 50% in reading and fourth grade tested at 45.2% in reading. On the NC Report Card for 2018–2019, their overall grade was a C (61).

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to gather participants for this study. This approach was used because "it will best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 148). The focus for this study was on the first and second grades because, according to Ramirez et al. (2019), reading anxiety can affect students as early as first

and second grade. The criteria to participate in this research was that the teachers must be either first-grade or second-grade teachers and teach reading. There were 10 female teachers selected to participate in this study. Experience ranged from 2 years to 31 years of teaching.

Researcher Positionality

As a former elementary teacher, having witnessed students struggle with reading anxiety in the classroom, I was interested in investigating teachers' strategies to support students who struggle with this area. As I considered researching reading anxiety, it became apparent to me that this topic had not been included in my professional development experiences, or in any of my master's or doctoral courses. When conversing with different colleagues, they also expressed interest in learning more about how to help their students who struggle with reading anxiety. I hope that this research will be helpful for all teachers, but specifically first-grade and second-grade teachers.

Interpretive Framework

The paradigm for this case study was constructivism. Constructivism involves "understanding the world in which we live and work" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). In this study, I investigated how reading anxiety affects a student's life and schoolwork and how different strategies can help improve a student's daily living skills and work within the classroom. The constructivist approach looked at the situation through the participant's view (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants in this study were first-grade and second-grade teachers. They described the strategies they use with students who have reading anxiety. Data were collected through interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

This research was approached with three assumptions in mind. Those assumptions were ontological, epistemological, and axiological. The following paragraphs explain why these three assumptions are included in the research.

Ontological Assumption

My first philosophical assumption was ontological because I realized that there would be multiple realities in this research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The multiple realities were the different perspectives of the observed and interviewed individuals. Different strategies were shared during the interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. As the researcher, I examined the perspectives of first-grade and second-grade teachers regarding the use of strategies to address reading anxiety among their students.

Epistemological Assumption

I also had an epistemological assumption that dealt with the "nature of knowledge" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 8). In addition to the individual interviews and focus groups, the teachers completed a participant reflection journal. In this journal, the teachers reflected on two different lessons where they used a strategy to help a student with reading anxiety. They reflected on their knowledge of the situation. My goal, through this data, was to share different strategies teachers used to address reading anxiety with their first-grade and second-grade students.

Axiological Assumption

Finally, I had an axiological assumption because this deals with my values toward the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This included my bias towards the topic and any data collected during the research process. This was recorded in my researcher’s reflexive journal. In

this journal, I recorded my thoughts and shared my research positions and any bias towards the settings and context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher's Role

As the human instrument, I gathered data from the teachers through interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. One bias that I brought to the research is 13 years of experience teaching first grade. Another bias I brought to this study is that I am an avid proponent of small group reading instruction and have seen the value of individualized instruction in the classroom.

At the time of the study, I was not teaching in a classroom and did not use the school where I previously taught. The topic of reading anxiety intrigued me because I would like to learn more about helping students overcome this barrier. This research will help all teachers reach those students who struggle with reading anxiety.

Procedures

The following section discusses the procedural steps in conducting this study. It explains the steps to gain permission to conduct the study and concludes with how I recruited participants. The purpose of explaining these procedures is so that someone can take this study and replicate it for further research.

Permissions

To begin this process, I emailed the county public school superintendent and requested permission to conduct research. He stated that he likes to have the university's IRB approval and share it with his cabinet before granting a request for research in the district. Once IRB approval was obtained from Liberty's IRB committee, I submitted the IRB approval letter to the superintendent, and he granted approval to conduct the study.

After I was granted IRB approval (Appendix A), I conducted a pilot study of the interview questions, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. The purpose of a pilot study was to test the questions before conducting the actual study (Krueger & Casey, 2015). This also allowed me to practice data collection methods to ensure the research questions gave detailed results. The pilot study was conducted with a second-grade teacher at Forsyth Christian School. She met the criteria for the research because she taught reading and had taught students who had reading anxiety. After she completed the interview and participant reflection journal, I informally reviewed the data from the pilot study and believed that I would be able to answer my research questions from the actual data retrieved in the study. The teacher and data acquired in the pilot study were not included in the actual study.

Recruitment Plan

After completing the pilot study, I emailed the principals at the site schools and asked for permission to conduct the study with their teachers. All principals permitted me to recruit their teachers for the study. I emailed the recruitment letter (Appendix B), which included a screening survey as a Google Form (Appendix C), to the first-grade and second-grade teachers using the names and emails given to me by the principals. An explanation of the research and a screening survey were included in the recruitment letter. After reviewing the screening survey and determining whether an individual met the criteria necessary to participate in this study, I sent the participants an acceptance email (Appendix D) linked to the Consent form as a Google form (see Appendix E). If they did not meet the criteria necessary to participate in the study, I sent them a rejection email (Appendix D). The sample pool of first-grade and second-grade teachers was 41, and the sample size was 10 participants. Purposeful sampling was chosen because the criteria given for inclusion in this study was that participants taught first or second grade. Once

they agreed to participate and signed the consent form (Appendix E), a phone conference was set up to answer questions. Data were collected through interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. Eight interviews and two focus groups were audio-recorded through Zoom. Zoom is a platform that people can use to conference with other people online. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded using the EVISTR Digital Voice Recorder.

Data Collection Plan

Data collection was conducted through interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. These three forms of data collection were chosen because case studies involve interacting with individuals in their real-life setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Eight of the interviews were conducted online through Zoom, and the other two were conducted face to face. The two focus groups were conducted using Zoom. The participant reflection journals were emailed to the teachers to complete and email back to me before their focus group meeting.

Individual Interviews

The first type of data collection conducted in this study was individual interviews. This data collection procedure involved meeting one-on-one with each participant and asking them a series of questions related to reading anxiety. Each interview was audio recorded to ensure accuracy and validity. I met with two teachers in person and used the EVISTR 16GB Digital Voice Activated Recorder. I met with the other eight teachers through Zoom for the individual interviews and used the recording feature on Zoom to ensure all data were recorded. Each interview was saved in a file labeled by the participant's pseudonym. All files were saved on a USB drive, locked in a safe.

The purpose of the interview was to allow each teacher to share their background knowledge on reading, their strategies, and their expectations for their students with reading

anxiety. The following questions were based on the central research questions and sub-questions:

Individual Interview Questions (see Appendix F)

1. Please introduce yourself to me as if we just met one another. (Central Research Question [CRQ])
2. Please explain to me your idea of reading anxiety. CRQ
3. Why do you think it is important to address reading anxiety in young students? CRQ
4. Please share any formal training you have received on reading anxiety. CRQ
5. Please share your comfort level in helping students overcome reading anxiety. CRQ
6. Please share examples that you have seen where a student who had reading anxiety also had other academic issues. CRQ
7. Do you see more boys or more girls struggle with reading anxiety? Why? CRQ
8. What behaviors do you observe in the students who struggle with reading anxiety? (Sub-Question [SQ] 1)
9. How do you address the behavior of the students who struggle with reading anxiety? SQ1
10. What are some environmental issues you have observed in students who struggle with reading anxiety? SQ2
11. How do you address the environment of students who struggle with reading anxiety? SQ2
12. What are some cognitive or self-efficacy issues you have observed in students who struggle with reading anxiety? SQ3
13. How do you address the cognition and self-efficacy of students who struggle with reading anxiety? SQ3
14. What other strategies have you tried to help students with reading anxiety? CRQ

15. What strategies have you tried that did not address reading anxiety? CRQ
16. What would you like to add to any part of this interview? CRQ

Questions 1–3 asked for the teachers to share some background information. These questions allowed for open dialogue to begin at a comfortable level (Yin, 2018). This also gave information on their knowledge of reading anxiety.

Questions 4 and 5 provided insight into whether or not the teacher received any training in addressing reading anxiety or if the teacher was confident in addressing reading anxiety. Reinke et al. (2011) stated that most teachers have never received training on addressing reading anxiety.

Question 6 asked the teachers to share if they see the student's reading anxiety affecting other academics. Studies have shown that reading anxiety can affect math (Hill et al., 2016; Punaro & Reeve, 2012) and testing (Bulgan, 2018; Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012). This question shared whether the teachers saw this in first and second grade.

Question 7 asked the teachers if they saw reading anxiety in more boys or girls. Katzir et al. (2018) stated that girls show reading anxiety more often than boys. This question shared whether the teachers saw this in first and second grade.

Questions 8 and 9 gave the teachers the chance to share what behaviors they saw in students with reading anxiety and how they addressed those behaviors. The question supported the literature from Katrancı and Kuşdemir (2016), which stated students with reading anxiety might avoid reading or get frustrated. After sharing which behaviors the teachers saw in the classroom, the teacher had the opportunity to share the strategy they used to address the behavior.

Questions 10 and 11 gave the teachers the chance to share what environmental issues they saw in students with reading anxiety and how they addressed those issues. Bandura (1991) stated that the environment could affect performance. Liao and Wang (2015) shared that environmental factors could be relationships or competitiveness. After sharing which environmental factors the teachers saw in the classroom, the teacher could share the strategy they used to address the issue.

Questions 12 and 13 gave the teachers the chance to share what cognitive and self-efficacy issues they saw in students with reading anxiety and how they addressed those issues. Bandura (1991) stated that cognition could affect a person's performance. Bandura (1977) also stated that a person's self-efficacy could affect their determination to participate in an activity. The teachers could share what strategies they used to address the issue.

Question 14–16 wrapped up the interview. These questions allowed the teachers to share anything they may have forgotten and some strategies that did not work. After the interview was complete, I gave each teacher directions for the participant reflection journal and then emailed the participant reflection journal to them.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Once interviews were completed, I transcribed each one and stored it on the USB drive under that participant’s pseudonym. Then I emailed each participant a copy of their individual interview to check for accuracy. I asked them to check for accuracy and to change any part of the transcript that was not accurate. Once I received each participant’s member-checked transcript, I printed out each interview. At this point, all the data from each individual question were grouped together, which allowed me to make raw data notes (Yin, 2018). From my raw data notes, I created preliminary codes by "assigning of some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects

of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 199). By grouping together sentences that stated the same thing, I further grouped the preliminary codes that could be used to possibly become the final themes later when I synthesized the whole data set.

Participant Reflection Journal

The second type of data collection was participant reflection journals. After completing the individual interview, the teachers were given a participation reflection journal (see Appendix H). I discussed the questions with each participant and emailed them the template. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), documents like participant reflection journals are appropriate supplements to interviews. In this journal, the participants recorded their plans for two reading lessons where they used a strategy to help a student with reading anxiety. They were asked to complete their participant journal before their focus group meeting. There were several parts to the participant reflection journal. First, the teacher recorded their name, school, date, and time of the lesson. They briefly described the lesson, the observed anxiety, and how they addressed it. The final component was for them to reflect on the strategy.

Participant Reflection Journal Analysis Data Analysis Plan

Once I received the participant reflection journals, they were stored on a USB drive under the file name “participant reflection journals.” I grouped the Question 1 responses based on grade-level reading lesson and grade-level activity during that lesson. I grouped the responses for Question 2 based on the type of reading anxiety behavior observed during the reading lesson. Then I grouped Question 3 responses based on the strategies used and placed the strengths (Question 4) and weaknesses (Question 5) if they were noted. Finally, I grouped Question 5 responses based on similarities in reflective thoughts.

Focus Groups

After the interviews and participant reflection journals were completed, the focus group discussions were conducted (see Appendix G). The purpose of focus groups was to bring together a group of people who have a common characteristic (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In this case study, the common characteristic is that all the participants were first-grade or second-grade teachers who had experienced reading anxiety. I conducted two focus groups to reach saturation (Krueger & Casey, 2015) and coordinate with all the teachers' schedules. I created a Sign-Up Genius with the dates and times so that teachers could pick the time that fit their schedule. I kept the group sizes to four to six participants so that there would be enough opportunity for everyone to share and the focus groups would not take an excessive amount of time. Each focus group was conducted over Zoom and was recorded through the Zoom video recording.

Focus Group Questions

Introductory Questions:

1. Share with the group your name, how long you have taught first (or second) grade, and how long you have taught at (school name). CRQ
2. What do you enjoy most about teaching? CRQ

Transition Questions:

3. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase reading anxiety? CRQ
4. Can you think back to when you first realized a student in your class had reading anxiety? CRQ

Key Questions:

5. What characteristics did the student with reading anxiety display? SQ1,2,3

6. What is the process of identifying students at your school with reading anxiety? CRQ
7. What are your goals for students with reading anxiety? CRQ
8. What strategies have you used with students who have reading anxiety? SQ1,2,3
9. How have you seen improvement in the students who had reading anxiety and are using your strategies? SQ1,2,3
10. Unless the teacher has the same student for more than one year, how do you monitor these students from one grade to the next? CRQ

    Ending Questions:

11. If there was one thing you could tell your students with reading anxiety, what would it be? CRQ

Questions 1–4 began the focus group interview with basic questions about themselves and the topic of reading anxiety. Questions 1 and 2 were introductory questions that allowed each person to share about themselves (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Questions 3 and 4 were transition questions that encouraged each participant to start thinking about the topic. These questions moved the conversation from introducing everyone to discussing the topic (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Do the teachers think of things like fear of reading aloud or fear of reading incorrectly (Ramirez et al., 2019), or avoiding reading (Piccolo et al., 2017)?

Questions 5–11 were the key questions in the conversation (Krueger & Casey, 2015). These questions allowed the participants to share openly their experiences of what they observed when students were asked to read. They shared how the reading anxiety was displayed and if the student showed fear or avoidance in reading (Piccolo et al., 2017; Ramirez et al., 2019). We discussed how they identified students with reading anxiety. Is this a school-wide process or an individual teacher process? We discussed the strategies that the teachers used with the students.

Did the student's anxiety decrease with the interventions (Manassis, 2012)? The questions closed with how goals were set for the students and how monitoring continued to the next grade. Question 11 is an ending question (Krueger & Casey, 2015). This question allowed the participants to add anything they missed and share something they would like to tell their students.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Once the focus groups were completed, I transcribed each one and stored them on a USB drive in a folder titled “focus groups.” Then, I labeled each file as Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2. On the focus groups, the teachers’ pseudonyms were used beside their answers. Then I emailed each participant a copy of their focus group answers. I asked them to check for accuracy and to change any part of the transcript that was not accurate. Once I received each participant’s member-checked transcript, I printed them out. At this point, all the data from each individual question were grouped together which allowed me to make raw data notes (Yin, 2018) and from my raw data notes, I created preliminary codes. I further grouped the preliminary codes that could be used to possibly become the final themes later when I synthesized the whole data set.

Data Synthesis

Once the three data types were analyzed separately, I synthesized the data by looking at all three types of data together. All the preliminary codes were grouped, and from the preliminary codes possible themes and subthemes were developed. The four common themes that were evident in all three types of data were positive reinforcement, one-on-one, small group, and reading skills. Then I placed the themes and subthemes back into the central research question and sub-questions. Once the themes and sub-themes were placed into the central research question and sub-questions, data were presented by using direct interpretations when

sharing the data findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An interpretation of the findings for the reader was also presented. The purpose of sharing interpretations was so that the reader could understand the thinking behind the research and the interpretations of the research. I also used the data to share implications for practice and shared how these themes help teachers teach students with reading anxiety.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness ensures the data is true, applicable, consistent, and neutral of bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It involves taking research and providing enough details to show that the "author's conclusion makes sense" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 238). This involved examining several areas: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility was ensured in three ways: triangulation, member checks, and prolonged engagement. The first type of credibility was through triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018). Triangulation involved using multiple sources to ensure credibility. In this study, the multiple sources were interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. Using multiple sources of data enhanced the consistency of the findings. The next source of credibility was through member checks (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checks allowed all participants to review their data, correct any errors, or give additional information. This ensured credibility because all participants checked the data. After the interview questions and focus group questions were completed and transcribed, the teachers were provided with a verbatim transcript of their interview to ensure each answer was complete and accurate. All participants approved of their written transcripts. The final type of credibility was through prolonged engagement

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were engaged over 3 months through interviews and focus groups.

Transferability

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that transferability refers to a "highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting and, in particular, the findings of the study, and reliable to the extent to which the research findings can be replicated" (p. 239). Transferability is evident as a detailed description of the processes used to conduct this study is given. This was completed through an audit trail (Appendix J). In this audit trail, descriptive notes were written of events during the dissertation process. This included collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Lincoln & Guba, 1982).

Dependability

Dependability was ensured by using an external auditor. This person had no connection to the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The external auditor ensured that the findings were accurately portrayed by the data collected during the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The auditor "first examined the process by which the data was kept ensuring fairness and dependability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 317–318). Next, she “examined the product, which included the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendation, to ensure that the data was internally coherent and established dependability” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318). I met with her in person and shared the research topic, types of data collected, and findings. We discussed how the themes and sub-themes were developed from the codes. She agreed with the accuracy of the findings from the data collected during research. She suggested adding journaling to the subthemes since that was a strategy discussed during an interview. She agreed that all data, findings, and interpretations were accurate and established dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability was ensured by using a researcher's reflexive journal (see Appendix I). This journal could contain these elements: "a log of perceptions prior to entrance to the research site, personal introspections, and developing insights" (Lincoln & Guba, 1982, pp. 12–13). The researcher's reflexive journal could include thoughts before conducting the interviews and focus groups, reflections after conducting interviews and focus groups, the process of changing or adding to the research questions and running thoughts during the whole process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics was considered during the research process. First, IRB approval was granted before any research occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Second, pseudonyms (Creswell & Poth, 2018) were used for the schools' names and teachers involved in the study. A file with the teachers' names and pseudonyms was stored in a file and kept separate from all other files. This ensured the confidentiality of the schools and the people involved. Third, teachers were given a Consent Form that gave a detailed description of the study to know about everything that took place. They understood that they would be interviewed, participate in a focus group, and complete a participation reflection journal. Fourth, data were backed up on a USB drive that was stored in a locked safe. Each teacher was only allowed to use their pseudonym for the interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. All forms were kept in a file and locked in a safe for storage. Once the study was complete, all data were locked in storage for 3 years and then shredded.

Summary

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. The study is qualitative because it

investigates experiences in their natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). A qualitative study involves a theoretical framework and assumptions that steer the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, data collection from people who have experienced the phenomenon being studied is an essential part of any qualitative study. The case study approach was chosen because "research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96).

Data were collected through interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. All data were analyzed, coded, and categorized for similarities. Coding was used to find reoccurring themes among the interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was ensured through triangulation and member checks. Dependability and confirmability were ensured through a reflexive journal and an external auditor. Finally, transferability was ensured through a rich, detailed description of the study so that it could be replicated with a different population.

Ethical considerations were considered by using pseudonyms for the teachers and schools involved. All participants filled out a consent form (see Appendix E) before participating in the research. Next, data were stored on a USB drive. The participants' actual names and schools were kept in a separate file on the USB drive for confidentiality. All forms were kept in a file and locked in a safe for storage.

In conclusion, this qualitative case study focused on reading anxiety from the teacher's perspective, gathered strategies that the teachers have used successfully, and presented those strategies through this dissertation. It was a successful case study if it helps one teacher reach a student with reading anxiety.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. Chapter Four focuses on the data found through the teachers' interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. The chapter begins with a detailed description of the participants. Next, the data findings are divided into themes and sub-themes. The chapter concludes by sharing the answers to the central research question and sub-questions.

Participants

This section presents a description of the participants who volunteered for this study. First, their years of experience, highest degree earned, content area, and grade they taught are presented in a table format. Following that is a description of the participants. This allows the participants to come alive, and the reader will get a glimpse of their personalities and love for teaching. Ten teachers were chosen to participate in the study. The 10 teachers ranged from 2 years to 31 years of service. All teachers were females. Five teachers held a bachelor's degree, and five teachers held a master's degree. Six teachers taught first grade, and four teachers taught second grade.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Jayla	16	Bachelors	K–6 Elementary Education	1st
Mary	2	Bachelors	K–6 Elementary Education	2–3 Combo
Penelope	18	Masters	K–12 Reading Specialists	1st
Jean	26	Masters	K–12 Curriculum with add–on Administration	2nd
Callie	14	Masters	K–6 Elementary Education	2–3 Combo
Bridgette	22	Masters	K–6 Language and Literacy	1st
Katie	16	Bachelors	K–12 Elementary Education with add-on Special Education	1st
Beth	31	Bachelors	K–6 Elementary Education	1st
Susan	3	Bachelors	K–6 Elementary Education	2nd
Ann	27	Masters	K–6 Reading	1st

Jayla

Jayla was the first interviewee, and I thoroughly enjoyed talking with her because she was the first to jump onto the research. She had experience in both public school and homeschool. One thing that stood out during the interview was that Jayla said, “she would love nothing more than to help a student regain their confidence in reading.”

Mary

Even though Mary was only in her second year of teaching, she understood reading anxiety. Mary had a very calm personality. This would be very beneficial for a student with reading anxiety. She was delighted to contribute to the research because she was also working on her master's degree. She understood the hurdles of getting participant participation. During her interview she talked about how since she had taught a 2–3 combo class for two years, she had seen the student who had reading anxiety in second grade exhibited growth in third grade.

Penelope

With a master's degree as a reading specialist, Penelope loves teaching reading. During her interview, one thing that stood out was how she likes to put her students' minds at ease when they come to reading groups. Before her students start reading, she makes the small group environment relaxed and welcoming. Penelope might play a warmup game with the students and then transition into the reading lesson. She was aware of her students' feelings.

Jean

Jean had her National Board Certification and her master's degree in curriculum. She was very knowledgeable on reading anxiety. Jean was a firm believer in small group reading groups being no more than four students. Jean had a great plan on weekly reading in small groups. She spent 2 days on the phonics concept, 1 day on vocabulary and introducing the text, then a day on letting them go somewhere in the room and read the text silently, and on the final day, they read as a small group. Jean worked on their confidence by allowing them to pre-read the text. Her motto in the classroom is "hard work pays off." She would say "hard work," and the students would say, "pays off."

Callie

It was exciting to have Callie in the study because she taught a 2–3 combo class. She had the opportunity to watch students who struggled with reading anxiety in second grade grow out of their reading anxiety in third grade. During our interview, one thing that stood out was how she helps her students set goals. The students had goal posters, and when they met their goals, she bragged on them. She loved looping in with her second-grade students because of the classroom community built over those 2 years. She believed that was one thing that helped her students with reading anxiety.

Bridgette

Bridgette has done her share of continuing education. She was National Board Certified and had gone through recertification. In addition, she also had a master's degree in language and literacy. Bridgette was a teacher who took into consideration the feelings of her students. She had a chair at her reading table for the student who had anxiety. They could sit in their chair and read to her while their back was to their classmates. She also went out of her way to find books that interested her students.

Katie

Katie had an extensive background in education. Before getting her bachelor's degree in elementary education, she was a teacher's assistant. Katie also worked at an alternative school with K–3 students before moving to first grade. She came across as a team player. Since Katie had not been in first grade very long, she was not afraid to go to others for advice and work as a team to help her students succeed. This indicated that she was teachable and believed in the importance of working one-on-one with a student who had reading anxiety.

Beth

The interview with Beth was very extensive but very thorough. Her interview was the longest by far. She enjoyed sharing her knowledge of 31 years. One thing that stood out during the interview was that even though she had taught for 31 years, she still loved learning new things. Her newest learning adventure was learning about the science of reading. Beth was the teacher that genuinely cared for her students and brought personal experiences into learning. She mentioned that when her students had show-and-tell that "I really try and pay attention to the kinds of things they bring in and make notes so when it's time to write or read, we have some ideas."

Ann

Ann was getting ready to retire in December, so I am very thankful she agreed to participate in the study. She had a very outgoing, bubbly personality. Ann stated in her interview, "I feel like it is my mission when I'm working with students, like I'm so passionate to work with them and help them and give them those skills."

Results: Themes Development

The results of the teachers' interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups are presented in this section. All quotes from participants in this results section are presented verbatim, which includes verbal ticks and grammatical errors in speech and writing to accurately depict the participants' voices. The first section includes the theme development, with the findings divided into themes and subthemes. Throughout the research, four themes emerged: positive reinforcement, reading one-on-one with the teacher, small reading groups, and developing reading skills. Each theme is addressed below, along with its codes and subthemes. Following this discussion, I provided the responses to the research questions.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Codes	Themes	Subthemes
Encourage Praise Build Confidence Hard Work Pays Off Goal Poster Class Dojo PBIS Reward System "Not Yet" Believe in Themselves Build Relationships	Positive Reinforcement	Pre-active Safe Environment Growth Mindset
Chair Turned Away Close Proximity Pull Out Time with Individual	Reading One-On-One with the Teacher	No Subtheme
Reading Buddies Partner Read Read to Preschool Read with Someone Who is Patient Read with a Friend Interventions Fun Activity at Beginning Peer Buddy/Helper Sit Near the Teacher in Groups	Small Reading Groups	Partner Reading Games
Sounds Sight Words Letter Land Read and Reread Fluency Books on Interest Level Phonics Skills Comprehension Journaling	Developing Reading Skills	Decoding Expert Reader Read Aloud Journaling Lesson Modification

Positive Reinforcement

The one theme that occurred in every teacher's data was the idea of using positive reinforcement. One positive reinforcement that was mentioned was encouragement. In her interview, Jayla mentioned that she tells her students, "You can do this; I am here to help you." Another phrase that occurred in almost every teacher's data was building the confidence of students who had reading anxiety. In her participant reflection journal, Ann wrote, "Supporting students who struggle is essential to building a child's confidence." Penelope said, "I try and stay positive and share the positive attributes they have in reading like, 'Hey, look how far you've come!'" Jean shared that her students have a chant to reinforce a positive response. She would say, "hard work," and her students would say, "pays off." She used this frequently with her students who had reading anxiety to build their confidence in reading. Three subthemes occurred with positive reinforcement: teachers being pre-active, nurturing a safe environment, and developing a growth mindset.

Teachers Being Pre-active

One strategy that the teachers used to foster positive reinforcement was being pre-active. Jean was very aware of her students who have reading anxiety. In her interview, Jean shared that when she knew something in reading was coming up that would cause anxiety, she would be pre-active and prepare her student for the reading material. She would begin by reading a story page, then have the student go to her seat and read two to three pages silently. Then she would have that student come back to her and read some of those pages out loud. In her participant reflection journal, Jean stated that "it can always be challenging if you have a student who is anxious about reading but preparing a student with knowledge before, they read has been helpful."

Nurturing a Safe Environment

Establishing a safe environment was mentioned frequently in the data. Letting students know they will be loved and accepted was a huge step in helping them with reading anxiety. Callie shared in her interview that "establishing relationships where they feel comfortable" was essential in helping her students with reading anxiety. Jean shared a great analogy during her interview. At the beginning of the year, she would tell her students that the classroom was like a doctor's office. Everyone may need different medicine, and your medicine may look different than someone else's medicine. Jean told her students, "But we are all learning together, and we've got to help each other."

Developing a Growth Mindset

Mary was the only teacher who specifically shared the idea of using a growth mindset in her interview. Other teachers mentioned similar ideas, but Mary was the only one who used the phrase "growth mindset." Mary stated in her interview that "at my school we try and teach about a growth mindset. We focus on the power of yet . . . so I can't do that yet, or I'm not comfortable with that yet." She taught her students with reading anxiety to have a positive mindset. Mary told her students that "although you may not be able to read well yet, you will if you think positive."

Reading One-On-One with the Teacher

In their interviews, seven out of 10 teachers mentioned using a one-on-one reading strategy with their students who have reading anxiety. This strategy involved having the student read just to the teacher before reading aloud in a group. Jayla mentioned in her interview that students with reading anxiety "find more comfort in reading one-on-one with the teacher." The student does not feel like they are on the spot. In her interview and her participant reflection journal, Mary shared how reading one-on-one helped her student with reading anxiety. At the

beginning of the year, she read with the student one-on-one before having him read in a small group. As the year went on, the student worked up to reading in a small group. In Bridgette's interview, she shared another strategy that she uses with her students who have reading anxiety. She turned a chair away from the other students in her small group, which made the student with reading anxiety feel like they were reading one-on-one with the teacher, and the other students could not hear them. Katie summarized this strategy very well in her participant reflection journal: "It lets the student know that you are still expecting them to do the assigned task, but they also have you there to help make sure they are not put on the spot and asked to do something that will increase their anxiety."

Small Reading Group

Six of the 10 teachers shared in their interview about the strategy of using small reading groups with their students who have reading anxiety. Some of the students started the year reading one-on-one with the teacher, but they moved into a small reading group as the year progressed. The small reading groups were usually two to five students. Ann shared in her interview that she would always place her student with reading anxiety right in front of her. That let him know that she would help him and keep him accountable in reading. Two subthemes emerged with small reading groups: partner reading and games.

Partner Reading

Partner reading was a common strategy mentioned by the teachers during our interviews and focus groups. In Mary's interview, she shared that she used this strategy with her student who had reading anxiety. Mary stated that she would "partner him up with someone that wouldn't judge or make fun of him so he would get comfortable reading with someone." Another type of partner reading that Penelope mentioned in her interview was partner reading with a

younger student. She stated, “I would have the student with reading anxiety read with a preschooler, and that helped his confidence in reading.”

Games

Another strategy shared during the interviews by several teachers was using games in small groups. Penelope shared during her interview that she used games at the beginning of the small group lesson time. This helped the student with reading anxiety feel relaxed in the small group. Penelope also shared during her interview that when she used a phonics game or sight word game, she would make sure that her student with reading anxiety would get a word they knew to build their confidence and ease their anxiety. Bridgette stated in her interview that she would play a game where the students had to “beat the teacher” with their sight words.

Developing Reading Skills

Four teachers in this study mentioned the strategy of focusing on a child’s reading skills. In their interviews, all 10 teachers mentioned how reading affects different academic areas. Still, only four mentioned the importance of developing those reading skills as a strategy for reading anxiety. Callie stated in her interview, “I see it with kids who struggle with reading or phonics or decoding skills, and they are starting to notice as they get older. So, it’s building their vocabulary and building their phonics knowledge.” The following subthemes came out in the study: decoding skills, expert reader, read aloud, journaling, and lesson modification.

Decoding Skills

Decoding skills were discussed in four interviews. Callie stated in her interview that for her students with reading anxiety, “they may not grasp the phonics skills for their grade level yet. One of those skills could be decoding.” It is important to establish those skills of learning phonics sounds and how to blend them together to make words. Teaching decoding skills could

look different in each classroom. For example, Jean shared in her interview that she spends one week on a phonics skill as her strategy. She looks at the text coming up and focuses her small group phonics lesson on that skill before ever introducing the text.

Expert Reader

This subtheme could also be called "fluent reader." Callie uses the term "expert reader" because students like to be experts. Being an expert reader means that the student can read the passage fluently. Callie shared in her interview that being an expert reader meant that "they read a text and then reread it." Her students with reading anxiety build fluency the more times they read a passage, thus building their confidence as a reader. Bridgette stated in her participant reflection journal, "I allow him to have three reads with the book to build confidence and fluency." Another strategy to help a student with reading anxiety become an expert reader was finding books that interest them. Beth shared during her interview that she uses her show-and-tell time each week to pay attention to her students' interests, especially those with reading anxiety. She will then try to find books that interest them and have them read and reread them to become an expert reader.

Read Aloud

Four teachers mentioned using the strategy of reading aloud in their interviews. Read aloud could be the teacher reading a story to the students or listening to an audiobook. Bridgette shared in her interview that she uses read aloud frequently with her students who have reading anxiety. This helps her assess their comprehension. Bridgette said,

> It is hard to assess reading comprehension when a student struggles with reading and with anxiety, so if a book is read out loud to them, then you can have the conversation, and you can see where they are with comprehension.

Jayla stated in her interview that she uses read aloud in whole group to help the student with reading anxiety feel more comfortable and included in the reading experience.

Journaling

This strategy was mentioned once by Beth during her interview. Beth used journaling to get those who struggled with reading anxiety excited about reading. She stated this worked well because the student was "learning to write about experiences with complete sentences and complete thoughts and then sharing those thoughts with the class." This strategy helps students build confidence in reading their work and enjoy sharing their experiences.

Lesson Modification

This strategy was mentioned once during the study. Katie stated, "I have modified their assignment and made it a little less taxing on them." Research does support the idea of lesson modification. McGlynn and Kelly (2019) researched several helpful lesson modification strategies: "providing the text on the student's instructional level and not their grade level or assign three paragraphs instead of five paragraphs" (McGlynn & Kelly, 2019, p. 38). This allows the student to complete their reading assignments without the added anxiety.

Outlier Data and Findings

This section focuses on the outlier finding that occurred during data analysis. The finding was only mentioned one time during the research. Still, it will be shared because it should be noted that based on research, bribing does not truly help a student long-term with reading anxiety.

Bribing

Susan mentioned in her interview that she used bribes with her students with reading anxiety. She would tell them they could have smarties or Dum-Dums if they read their entire

book. As the researcher, I could not support this strategy because this could put added anxiety and pressure on the student. After all, they want the candy but struggle with reading. There has been research that supports the idea that bribery may not help a student. Hall (2009) conducted a study where students were given tokens throughout the day if they completed assignments or stayed on task. At the end of the day, they could buy a toy from the class store. One girl could not complete her assignment and therefore did not receive enough tokens by the end of the day to get a toy. Hall (2009) observed, "When students with learning problems and/or performance difficulties strive for rewards but do not attain them, they are crushed. When their self-concept has been hammered enough, they stop trying" (p. 50). Based on research, bribery would not be a successful long-term strategy to use with a student who has reading anxiety. If the students in Susan's class did not earn their Smarties or Dum-Dums, they might stop trying.

Research Question Responses

Data from the teachers' interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups provided answers to the central research question and sub-questions. As the responses to these research questions are reviewed, one can see how these teachers use their strategies to help students with reading anxiety. The following section presents a thorough explanation of the data in the central research question and sub-questions.

Central Research Question

How do teachers address reading anxiety in the first-grade and second-grade classroom? During the focus group meetings, one question that the participants answered was "when did you first realize that a student in your class had reading anxiety?" Callie, Jean, and Susan all mentioned that they noticed a student might have reading anxiety when they performed the first reading assessment during the school year. Katie stated in the focus group, "It's when you first

start reading with them and working with them, and you see how they interact." Beth said, "I think I can usually tell by Labor Day." Through the interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups, four common themes occurred as the teachers addressed reading anxiety in their classrooms: positive reinforcement, reading one-on-one with the teacher, small reading groups, and developing reading skills.

Sub-Question One

How does a teacher address a student's behavior during reading when the student is suspected of having reading anxiety? First, the teachers shared what types of behaviors they have seen in students with reading anxiety. Jayla said that she believed reading anxiety was "when a child showed emotional distress with the thought of having to read, knowing that their time is coming up during the day." In their interviews, Mary and Bridgette both mentioned the phrase "fear of reading." Some outward signs that the teachers have seen are nervousness, avoidance, never volunteering, putting their heads down, and not making eye contact. In her participant reflection journal, Beth stated that when her student started displaying signs of reading anxiety, "she would stop and look at me without reading any words or trying any sounds." Jayla shared during her focus group meeting that she saw the student "rocking back and forth." Callie stated in her focus group that she saw the student "being wiggly, rock their body, talk really low or very fast."

There were different perspectives from the teachers on how to address this behavior. One word mentioned in several interviews was the word "encourage." This could come in the form of praise or positive reinforcement. Several teachers believed that reading anxiety came from an internal response to reading. The more confidence the student had about themselves, the less anxiety they would have. When Penelope had her student with reading anxiety in a small reading

group, she would begin by choosing words that the student knew to help build their confidence. Beth mentioned that when her girl with reading anxiety would know an answer and raise her hand, she would try her best and call on her to build her confidence.

Another strategy that the participants discussed was the idea of being "pre-active, not post-active." Jean believed that reading anxiety came from a student who did not grasp phonetic skills. She had a weekly plan to build the students who struggled with reading anxiety. The students would work on phonics skills on Monday and Tuesday before seeing their reading text. On Wednesday, she would give the students their text and read a page to them. Then she allowed the student to go and read two to three pages to themselves and then come read one-on-one with her. On the last day, they would read the text as a small group, but the students with reading anxiety have already seen it, so they should not exhibit reading anxiety. Beth used a similar strategy but called it re-reading. She would have her student who struggled with reading anxiety re-read the passage a few times to help build her confidence in reading.

Working one-on-one or in small groups were commonly mentioned strategies among the teachers. Katie mentioned that "working one-on-one with her student helped so that he didn't feel like he was on the spot." Penelope said that "reading one-on-one puts my students at ease." When Ann had her reading anxiety student in a small group, she would make sure they were sitting right in front of her. A few teachers mentioned one thing they would not do: call on the student in a whole group setting unless they volunteered or raised their hand.

Sub-Question Two

How does a teacher adjust a student's environment during reading when the student is suspected of having reading anxiety?

This question had several different responses from the teachers on what they saw the students do when they had reading anxiety. One response by Ann was that the student avoided the task by distracting others around them. Ann mentioned that "they may be silly or a jokester and get their peers around them off task." On the other hand, some teachers saw their students with reading anxiety as introverts, like a wall was around them. They may not interact as much with their peers. An interesting response that came from one teacher was that their students would "cover up" for themselves. Jean mentioned that when her student would mess up in reading, they would try and cover for themselves and say, "Oh yeah, I knew that word, I knew that" when they did not know it.

When the teachers were asked how they adjusted the student's environment, there were different strategies depending on whether the students were in a whole group or small group setting. Jayla's strategy was to be all inclusive if they read as a whole group. She would do the reading and only have the students read in small groups or one-on-one. The student who had reading anxiety could sit and enjoy the reading without worrying about reading aloud. Bridgette had an excellent strategy she used with her student with reading anxiety. When the students were in a small group, she had a chair beside her that faced away from all the other students. When her student with reading anxiety sat in that chair, they could not see any other students, and no one could hear them read except the teacher.

Sub-Question Three

How does a teacher strengthen a student's cognitive ability and self-efficacy during reading when the student is suspected of having reading anxiety?

Jayla mentioned in her interview that her student would say, "I can't do that. They don't believe they can do it." Mary stated in her interview that at her school, they have been focusing

on using growth mindset with their students. She explained, “This year, we’ve been focusing on the power of yet, so I can’t do that yet, or I’m not comfortable with that yet.” So, by saying things like this, they realize that what they say about themselves will most likely happen. Mary stated in her interview that she would have “little conferences to motivate them and tell them, ‘I noticed that you did this today’ or ‘I liked that you volunteered today’ or ‘Great job that was a bold step.’” These conferences would give the student with reading anxiety a boost in their self-efficacy.

Jean had another strategy that she used with all her students, including her students with reading anxiety. She told her students at the beginning of the year that their classroom was like a doctor’s office. She specifically said:

> I have a whole lot of medication. And no one’s going to get the same medicine. Everyone needs different medicine because we are all struggling in different ways. So, my medicine and your medicine and his medicine and her medicine will all look different. So, all of us are learning together but we’ve got to help each other. So, no one in here is behind in any way. We’re all on the same page. We all have things we are really great at and we all have things we struggle with. But we’ve got to help each other figure out what those are.

She has taught her students a phrase: “hard work pays off.” She would say, “hard work” and the students would say, “pays off.” She often uses this strategy with her students with reading anxiety.

Summary

Chapter Four focused on the data from the teachers’ interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. This study had four major themes: positive reinforcement, reading

one-on-one with the teacher, small reading group, and developing reading skills. Every participant spoke about the importance of positive reinforcement through praise or encouragement, being pre-active and planning, or teaching them how to use a growth mindset. The strategy of one-on-one reading allowed the student to read in a calm setting and helped build their confidence as a reader. The small group reading strategy gave the student a chance to become more confident in reading with others. Lastly, several participants mentioned focusing on reading skills such as decoding and fluency to help those with reading anxiety. By applying these different strategies, participants in this study have seen success in their students who struggle with reading anxiety.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. This chapter concludes the study by interpreting the findings for the reader. Chapter Five begins with a discussion of the findings from the data analysis, followed by the implications of practice. Theoretical and methodological implications are addressed next, along with the limitations and delimitations. The chapter concludes with several recommendations for future research on reading anxiety.

Discussion

This section presents the study's findings based on the themes developed in Chapter Four. First, the findings and interpretations of the research are addressed for the reader. Four findings emerged in the research: positive reinforcement, reading one-on-one with the teacher, small reading groups, and developing reading skills. Second, a summary of each finding and its relation to literature is presented for the reader. This allows the reader to see how the data from the research develops the themes and interpretations. Third, an explanation of how the findings support the social cognitive theory (SCT) and self-efficacy theory (SET) for this research is provided for the reader. Next, the two empirical implications of the research are indicated: limited studies on reading anxiety and how reading anxiety affects fluency, comprehension, and other academics. Finally, the limitations, delimitations, and recommendations for future research are addressed for the reader.

Interpretation of Findings

The following section shares the summary of each thematic finding and implications for practice. The purpose of summarizing the thematic findings is for the reader to see how the

research connects to the central research question, sub-questions, and theories guiding the study. After a summary of the findings, implications for practice are addressed so that the reader can see how these strategies could be shared with other teachers.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Based on the data gathered from the participants' interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups, four themes emerged from the data for this study. Those themes are positive reinforcement, reading one-on-one with the teacher, small reading groups, and developing reading skills. The following section provides a brief interpretation of each theme and how these themes are supported by the SCT and SET and the literature supporting this study.

Positive Reinforcement. Every participant mentioned the strategy of using positive reinforcement with their students who struggle with reading anxiety. There were multiple ways the teachers shared that they use positive reinforcement. These include encouragement, praise, using goal posters, being pre-active, creating a safe environment, and using growth mindset. The latter idea, using growth mindset, connects with research that states that mindsets can be present (either fixed or growth) in students as early as first grade (Cain & Dweck, 1995; Schroder et al., 2017; Smiley & Dweck, 1994). This is a vital strategy to use for students with reading anxiety. Based on data from the participants in this study, the students who received positive reinforcement demonstrated growth in overcoming their reading anxiety. They became more confident readers, began volunteering to read in class, and had fewer meltdowns during reading instruction.

Reading One-On-One with the Teacher. Seven participants mentioned the importance of using a one-on-one reading strategy with students who exhibited a reading anxiety versus reading with other students. Piccolo et al. (2017) stated that students with reading anxiety could

fear reading aloud, messing up, or fear what their classmates think of their reading ability. Jalongo and Hirsh (2010) stated that this lowers student self-esteem. Several teachers mentioned pulling their students with reading anxiety aside to work one-on-one on phonics skills, sight words, or reading texts. This strategy was often combined with positive reinforcement. The teacher was able to share with the student their growth during the one-on-one time, which in turn built their confidence as a reader. Bridgette's chair strategy, where a chair was turned away from the class, helped her student because the student could not see the class, and the class could not see the student. The fear was reduced, and the student had fewer meltdowns. This strategy is important because when a teacher works one-on-one with a student, the student realizes that the teacher cares about them and wants to see them succeed. The student is supported and encouraged during this time, which helps build their confidence as a reader. This relates perfectly to Bandura's self-efficacy theory which stated that self-efficacy affects a person's "behavior, goals, outcome expectation, perception of impediments, and opportunities" (Bandura, 2000, p. 75).

Small Reading Group. Small reading group instruction is a strategy that plays an important part in learning in lower elementary classrooms. Six of the participants in this study mentioned this strategy as beneficial for their students with reading anxiety. Some students with reading anxiety began reading one-on-one with their teacher but then graduated to reading in a small reading group. Small reading groups could include partner reading or a group of three to five students. Several participants mentioned using the strategy of games in small groups. One benefit they saw in using games was that their student with reading anxiety would relax during the game time. The teacher would give that student something she knew the student would get right, and it helped build their confidence as a reader. Small reading group instruction is an

important strategy for every elementary classroom, especially one with a student with reading anxiety. A student with reading anxiety may not perform in a large group setting because they fear what others may say or think (Piccolo et al., 2017). Small reading group instruction allows the teacher to tailor the learning to meet the needs of the students in each group.

Developing Reading Skills. The strategy that four participants mentioned was developing the student's reading skills. They believed that reading anxiety came from the student's inability to decode or read fluently. Connor et al. (2016) stated that when students struggle with decoding, they will struggle with fluency, which could negatively impact comprehension of the text. Reading anxiety can affect decoding and fluency because the worry from anxiety affects information stored in the short-term memory (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). If information is hindered in the short-term memory, it may not make it to the long-term memory. If the decoding makes it to the long-term memory, it will become a phonological memory (Torgesen et al., 1994). If the child has reading anxiety, that process is hindered. These four teachers spent their small group reading time applying decoding and fluency strategies to help their students with reading anxiety. They would use ideas like Letterland, a phonics program, or the term "expert reader," where the students practiced reading and rereading a text. While this strategy was not as popular as the other three strategies mentioned above, developing decoding and fluency strategies is important to help a student with reading anxiety. When students learn their phonics sounds, they can decode words and read sentences. Then with reading practice, they can become more fluent and build their confidence as a reader.

Implications for Practice

While reading anxiety is still a new research topic, some implications for practice could develop strategies further. One implication could be to provide the teachers with a list of

practices that teachers could follow to help students with reading anxiety. Some examples include teaching growth mindset, encouraging one-on-one reading with the student, or developing their phonics skills. Several teachers declined to participate in the study because they did not believe they had the knowledge to share about reading anxiety. If the teachers had a list of strategies that worked, they would have more knowledge to use when helping a student with reading anxiety.

Another implication for practice could be to create a workshop on how to help students with reading anxiety. Each participant shared in their interview that they had never received any training on helping a student with reading anxiety. Bridgette mentioned in her interview that her strategies were developed through trial and error. Many teachers are doing great things with their students who struggle with reading anxiety, and those strategies should be shared with all educators.

Theoretical Implications

Bandura's SCT and SET were chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. Bandura stated how behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy shape a person's actions (Bandura, 1991, 2001). The problem in this study was reading anxiety. Based on the data from this research, one can see that reading anxiety does affect a student’s behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy as a reader. This study extended this idea because it focused on how each teacher addressed the behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy of students with reading anxiety. This study focused on how teachers are helping their students with reading anxiety and gave strategies for future teachers to use in their classrooms. All the teachers used the strategy of positive reinforcement, which included strategies like praise, encouragement, being pre-active, providing a safe environment, or teaching growth mindset. Several teachers

also used the strategy of reading one-on-one with the student who has reading anxiety. When teachers read one-on-one with their students, they could motivate them verbally and build their self-efficacy as a reader. This resulted in the students growing in their confidence as a reader. The strategy supports the idea from Bandura (2000) that stated, “self-efficacy affects a person's behavior, goals, outcome expectation, perception of impediments, and opportunities" (p. 75). Some teachers used the strategy of small reading groups to help their students with reading anxiety. In those small reading groups, a few teachers also used the strategy of developing reading skills to help their students with reading anxiety.

Empirical Implications

The following section presents the empirical implications of this study. Two implications arose from this study. The first implication was that there are minimal studies on what teachers are doing to address reading anxiety in first-grade and second-grade students. The second implication was that there are limited studies on the effects of reading anxiety on fluency, comprehension, and other academics. Each of these implications is discussed in more detail below with support from empirical literature.

Limited Studies on Reading Anxiety From the Teacher’s Perspective

Before this case study, there was minimal research on the teacher’s perspective of handling reading anxiety in first-grade and second-grade students, although there was research on students and teachers in third grade and above. This study added to previous research because it focused on teachers and their strategies with students with reading anxiety in first and second grade. Previous research found that reading anxiety could be seen in students in first grade (Bonifacci et al., 2008; Grills et al., 2014; Grills-Taquechel et al., 2012, 2013; Piccolo et al., 2017; Ramirez et al., 2019). In addition, Grills et al. (2014) used students as participants and

found that students in this study who continued to struggle with reading anxiety in second grade saw an effect on their future reading skills. However, none of these studies examined teachers' strategies to help these first-grade students who struggled with reading anxiety. This study took a different direction because the focus was on the teachers' perspectives, not the students' perspectives. I believed that the teachers' perspectives would be more accurate in information versus the first-grade and second-grade students. This path was chosen because younger students may not be able to share about reading anxiety because they do not understand it. Therefore, their information would not be as credible.

Effects on Fluency, Comprehension, and Other Academics

Also, before this study, there was limited research on the effects of reading anxiety on fluency, comprehension, and other academics in first-grade and second-grade students. Based on the data from the participants of this study, students in first and second grade who have reading anxiety also struggle with fluency. Bridgette mentioned in her interview that she used read aloud to assess her students who have reading anxiety. Bridgette, Jean, Callie, and Susan mentioned building fluency by developing decoding skills. Previous research suggested that worry can affect information stored in short-term memory and long-term memory (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010). Reading anxiety causes worry, and when students worry, they struggle to develop those decoding skills in first and second grade. Data from this study suggested the importance of working one-on-one and in small groups with these students to try and develop those decoding skills. If those decoding skills are not developed, reading anxiety could flow into other academics like reading and math in first and second grade.

Limitations

Limitations are types of weaknesses in the study. Weaknesses are things that the researcher cannot control but may impact the study results. This study had three weaknesses: limited participation, COVID-19 pandemic, and single gender of teachers.

Limited Participation

Participation in this study was challenging. There were 41 emails and 28 follow-up emails sent out to garner enough participants. Thirteen teachers never returned the first email. Nineteen teachers took the initial screening survey, but seven teachers said they did not want to participate either because they did not know about reading anxiety or had too many obligations. Twelve teachers qualified for the study but two chose not to participate for personal reasons. In the end, 10 teachers participated in all data collection methods included in this study.

COVID-19 Pandemic

In March of 2020, schools across the country shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the 2020–2021 school year, the county chosen for the study went from 50% in-person learning to all in-person learning and some virtual learning. During the 2021–2022 school year, the district was all in-person instruction. Although the teachers were in-person, the COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on the morale of many teachers and their willingness to participate in this study.

Single Gender Teachers

All 10 participating teachers were female teachers. Of the 41 teachers emailed in the county, only one teacher was male. Unfortunately, he never returned the initial or follow-up emails, so he did not participate in the study. It would have been interesting to see how a male

teacher's perspective of reading anxiety would have compared with a female teacher's perspective.

Delimitations

There were multiple delimitations in this study. To focus on this specific topic and a specific group of people, the following delimitations were made: the case study approach was chosen, teachers had to teach first or second grade, teachers had to teach reading, and the teachers had to have a student with reading anxiety during the 2020–2021 school year or 2021–2022 school year. These delimitations ensured that the data gathered would be accurate and reliable for this study. This study sought to determine what strategies first-grade and second-grade teachers used to help students who struggle with reading anxiety.

Case Study Approach

When I first began looking at which qualitative design to use, I narrowed it down to two: a case study and a phenomenological study. After a thorough analysis of each, I chose the case study approach because "the research involves the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). Case studies involve data from interviews, focus groups, observations, notes, documents, photographs, and memos (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For data collection, I used interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups to collect data.

First and Second Grade Teachers

During my initial research on reading anxiety, I could not find any research that focused on just the first-grade and second-grade teachers' perspectives of how they handled reading anxiety in their classrooms. Therefore, because very little research focused on this area, I focused on first-grade and second-grade teachers. According to Ramirez et al. (2019), reading anxiety

can start as early as first grade. Teachers were chosen as the focus of this study versus the students because younger students may not give accurate data.

Teach Reading

Another qualification that the teachers had to meet was that they had to teach reading. To provide accurate data on different strategies for reading anxiety, the teacher must have used the strategies with their student who had anxiety toward reading. This ensured that the strategy worked with the student who had reading anxiety.

Taught a Student with Reading Anxiety

The last criterion was that the teachers had to have a student with reading anxiety last school year or this school year. This ensured that the teacher understood what reading anxiety looked like in a first-grade or second-grade student and had experience in helping the student overcome reading anxiety. Also, this ensured that the strategy was current and that they used the strategy successfully with the current reading curriculum.

Recommendations for Future Research

This section provides recommendations for future research. The purpose of these recommendations is so that a researcher can extend and build upon this study. Looking at the teachers' versus the students' perspectives is a new angle for studying reading anxiety. One recommendation could be researching teachers in other types of schools. Several schools could be examined individually: private schools, Montessori schools, and charter schools. Some of these schools have a different methodology in teaching, so it could be beneficial to research what strategies they are using to help their students with reading anxiety.

Another recommendation could be to follow the students who exhibited reading anxiety into third and fourth grade and see how the teachers' strategies were helping the students. Two of

the participants in this current study taught a second/third combination class. They both stated that they were beginning to see their third-grade students grow in overcoming reading anxiety. Following these students into third and fourth grade would be a beneficial study. The researcher could see if the strategies were changed, removed, or remained the same. Another recommendation could be to research schools in other countries and see how the teachers are addressing reading anxiety in other parts of the world. Many countries excel in education, like Japan, China, and Finland, to name a few. A researcher could compare the countries to see how similar or different the strategies are.

Conclusion

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. This study took a different perspective and focused on the teachers versus the students. Extensive research revealed that very few studies shared what teachers were doing in the classroom to help their students overcome reading anxiety. The theories that were the foundation for this study were the social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theory by Bandura. He stated that a person's behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy could shape a person's actions (Bandura, 1991, 2001). The four components (behavior, environment, cognition, and self-efficacy) were used to develop the central research question and sub-questions. A case study approach was chosen because the study took place in a real-life setting. The chosen participants were first-grade and second-grade teachers because there was limited research focusing on these grade levels. The criteria for the participants were that they must teach reading in either first or second grade, and they must have had a student either last school year or this school year who had reading anxiety. Ten teachers participated through interviews, participant reflection journals, and focus groups. The data were

analyzed and grouped by using themes and subthemes. Four themes (strategies) were developed from this research: positive reinforcement, reading one-on-one with the student, small reading groups, and developing reading skills. Possible implications for future research on this topic could be to study teachers from different schools (private, charter, or Montessori), follow the students to third and fourth grade, and study teachers' strategies from other countries. In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to investigate what strategies teachers are using to help students in first and second grade. The goal of this study was to give future teachers proven strategies that they can use to help their students with reading anxiety.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 3, 2021

Sherri Swaim
Gail Collins

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-1002 A CASE STUDY INVESTIGATING TEACHERS' USE OF STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS ANXIETY TOWARD READING IN FIRST AND SECOND GRADE STUDENTS

Dear Sherri Swaim, Gail Collins,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification

submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of my research is to investigate strategies teachers use to address reading anxiety in first-grade and second-grade students, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must teach first or second grade and teach reading. Participant must also have a student in their classroom last year with reading anxiety. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an interview, fill out a participant reflection journal, and participate in a focus group. Participants will then be asked to review their interview and focus group transcripts for accuracy. The interview should take 30 minutes, the reflection journal should take 30 minutes, and the focus group should take 45 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please click on the link provided below to complete a screening survey: Screening Survey Google Form.

You will be notified by email of your study eligibility. If you are determined to be eligible based on your responses to the screening survey, you will receive a link to the consent document, which will be available via Google Forms. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to type your name on the consent form to digitally sign it.

Sincerely,
Sherri Swaim
Graduate Student, Liberty University

Appendix C: Screening Survey

Name _____

Date _____

School _____

Thank you for your participation in this screening survey. Your answers will be kept confidential. Participation in this screening is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or [redacted] Public Schools.

What grade do you currently teach? _____

Do you teach reading? _____

Please answer the following yes/no questions.

Do you have experience with students who have had reading anxiety? Yes No

Do you have a student this school year who has reading anxiety? Yes No

Would you be willing to share your experiences on how you have dealt with reading anxiety in your classroom? Yes No

Would you be willing to participate in an interview and answer questions about reading anxiety? Yes No

Would you be willing to share what strategies you use to help your students with reading anxiety? Yes No

Would you be willing to use a participant reflection journal and record two lessons where you share how you used your strategies? Yes No

Would you be willing to participate in a focus group with other teachers and share about how you handle reading anxiety? Yes No

If you are willing to participate in this study, please share your preferred email address so I can send you the consent form to participate.

Thank you for completing this survey. Please email this survey to sfswaim@liberty.edu.

Signature of Participant _____

Appendix D: Acceptance/Rejection Emails

Acceptance Letter:

Dear [Recipient],

Thank you for completing the screening survey for my research. Based on your answers, you would be a great candidate to participate in the research study. Please click the consent form link below to read the consent form, then sign if willing. Once I have received your consent form, I will contact you by email within the next week to set up a time for the interview.
Consent Google Form

Sincerely,
Sherri Swaim
Graduate Student, Liberty University

Rejection Letter:

Dear [Recipient],

Thank you for completing the screening survey for my research. Based on your answers, you have not been chosen to participate in the research. Your responses have been discarded. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Sherri Swaim
Graduate Student, Liberty University

Appendix E: Consent Form

Title: A case study investigating the teachers' use of strategies to address reading anxiety in first-grade and second-grade students.

Principal Investigator: Sherri Swaim, Liberty University School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must teach first or second grade in a classroom, you must teach reading, and you must have a student with reading anxiety in your classroom. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this intrinsic case study is to investigate what strategies teachers are using to address reading anxiety in first and second graders. Studies have shown that reading anxiety can affect several areas, such as confidence, reading skills, and reading habits. When a child struggles with anxiety, they cannot focus on the content they are reading and in turn, struggle with remembering important facts from the story.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a digital, audio-recorded interview through Zoom or Google Meet. This will take 30 minutes.
2. Complete a participant reflection journal where you will share two experiences in which you used your reading anxiety strategy. This will take 30 minutes to fill out.
3. Participate in a focus group discussion with others at your school to discuss strategies that you use to address reading anxiety. The focus group will be digital through Zoom or Google Meet. I will audio record the focus group. This will take 45 minutes.
4. Review the transcript of your individual interview and your part of the focus group for accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

There are no direct benefits from taking part in the study.

Benefits to society would be sharing the strategies with other teachers, so they could help their students with reading anxiety.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using pseudonyms. Interviews and focus groups will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Yadkin County Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Sherri Swaim. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gail Collins.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio and video record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Print Name _____

Appendix F: Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.
2. Please explain to me your idea of reading anxiety.
3. Why do you think it is important to address reading anxiety in young students?
4. Please share any formal training you have received on reading anxiety.
5. Please share about your comfort level in helping students overcome reading anxiety.
6. Please share examples that you have seen where a student who had reading anxiety also had other academic issues.
7. Do you see more boys or more girls struggle with reading anxiety? Why?
8. What behaviors do you observe in the students who struggle with reading anxiety?
9. How do you address the behavior of the students who struggle with reading anxiety?
10. What are some environmental issues you have observed in students who struggle with reading anxiety?
11. How do you address the environment of students who struggle with reading anxiety?
12. What are some cognitive or self-efficacy issues you have observed in students who struggle with reading anxiety?
13. How do you address the cognition and self-efficacy of students who struggle with reading anxiety?
14. What other strategies have you tried to help students with reading anxiety?
15. What strategies have you tried that did not address reading anxiety?
16. What would you like to add to any part of this interview?

Appendix G: Focus Group Questions

Introductory Questions:

1. Share with the group your name, how long you have taught first (or second) grade, and how long you have taught at (school name).
2. What do you enjoy most about teaching?

Transition Questions:

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the phrase reading anxiety?
2. Can you think back to when you first realized a student in your class had reading anxiety?

Key Questions:

1. What characteristics did the student with reading anxiety display?
2. What is the process of identifying students at your school with reading anxiety?
3. What are your goals for students with reading anxiety?
4. What strategies have you used with students who have reading anxiety?
5. How have you seen improvement in the students who had reading anxiety and are using your strategies?
6. Unless the teacher has the same student for more than one year, how do you monitor these students from one grade to the next?

Ending Questions:

1. If there was one thing you could tell your students with reading anxiety, what would it be?

Appendix H: Participant Reflection Sample

Teacher Name _____

School _____

Grade _____

Date & Time _____

Briefly describe a lesson that you might have adapted when you identified a student who was experiencing reading anxiety. Talk both about your planned lesson and how it changed when it was evident that a student in the small group was experiencing reading anxiety.
Each school year we administer beginning of year reading assessments to all our students to get a glimpse into their reading abilities. We use this data to plan our small group "reading groups" and to see where each child's reading strengths and weaknesses lie. During the DORF (Dibels Oral Reading Fluency) assessment I noticed one of my students seemed anxious while reading aloud. (This is a one-on-one assessment where students are given one minute to read aloud a grade level passage to measure fluency and accuracy. We also ask a couple oral comprehension questions to measure comprehension.) During this child's DORF assessment I was marking the words he read incorrectly. This student seemed to pick up on what I was doing and immediately began to stumble over his words and wiggle in his seat. At the end of the assessment it gave me a fluency and accuracy score. His fluency score was borderline "on level" (52 words correct per minute) and his accuracy was slightly below level (94 % accurate). He got his oral comprehension questions all correct, scoring a level 3. I couldn't help but wonder if his accuracy fell slightly below due to his anxiety.

What type of anxiety did you observe during the lesson?
The student was really wiggly. Seemed to stutter some. Just had overall signs of anxiousness.

What strategies did you use to address reading anxiety in your classroom?

After the initial (October 2020) BOY DORF assessment I spoke to this child and reminded him that this was a safe learning environment and to not worry about what I was doing during the assessment–marking his errors or timing him. Just to read and do his best. I placed him in a reading group that focused on phonics, decoding, and fluency. We went over grade level phonics skills during these daily 20 minute sessions. We also choral read together and practiced reading with good reading fluency.

At parent conferences at the end of October in 2020 I met with his parents and discussed his reading progress. I told them we were working on reading fluency and accuracy and explained his BOY reading assessment data. I told them he seemed very anxious when reading aloud and wondered if that contributed to his scores. They told me he gets nervous when things are timed. I asked them to make sure they read at home to help build his fluency and vocabulary skills. I also told them to practice **rereading** a text to build his fluency and accuracy.

Throughout the school year we continued working on those same skills during small group reading instruction. As you can see from the chart, his scores improved greatly. Through

his phonics and fluency work, and his comfort level improving his scores ended up being above grade level in all areas of the EOY DORF assessment.

What are the strengths of this strategy?
Phonics (weekly Letterland spelling lists)-builds decoding skills to help with fluency
Choral & repeated reading-builds reading fluency and confidence
Home reading-builds vocabulary, reading fluency, accuracy, and comprehension (if they are asking questions and discussing text as they read)

Are there any weaknesses with this strategy?
I can't think of how any of these strategies would hurt the reader.

Also add your reflective thoughts about the strategy you used.

Overall in the 2020-2021 school year (when he was in 2nd grade) I just tried to remind the student that he was in a safe reading environment where he can be at ease when reading. I also tried to put him in a reading group where **all** students in the group needed to improve their fluency skills.

This student is currently in my 3rd grade class. His BOY DORF scores fell slightly below grade level in reading accuracy and fluency again at the beginning of the year. He scored 66 WCPM with 93% accuracy. The BOY 3rd grade goals are 73 WCPM with at least 96% accuracy. He is yellow in both areas. (Oral comprehension is tested by other assessments in 3rd grade.) I'm currently using the same strategies with this child to build his fluency–weekly Letterland phonics instruction, choral reading, and home reading. I will also be adding an Expert Reader strategy to this mix. This is a timed repeated reading strategy to build fluency and accuracy. I'm also wondering if he dropped so much from the end of 2nd grade due to the fact that he was out of practice over the summer. We will see how he does on his middle of year reading assessments and go from there. Hopefully they will show growth.

Appendix I: Researcher's Reflexive Journal

Dates	Entries
Spring 2020	I have chosen to research reading anxiety because I see a gap in the literature. I also have some students in my first-grade class this year who seem like they may have reading anxiety. I have seen more boys struggle with the anxiety over girls. I wonder if that is because girls seem to like reading more than boys. I am hoping to learn ways to help future students. I asked some of my colleagues if they knew how to help a student with reading anxiety and they said no. This may end up being a very helpful study.
Summer 2020	I have been researching, and there is not much information on helping younger students. I feel like this may be my target area. First and second grade may be my target area.
Fall 2020–Spring 2021	I'm not in the classroom anymore. The more I read about reading anxiety, the more I think that a student with reading anxiety may also have another issue like ADD or ADHD, or dyslexia. Thinking back to my classroom, some of those I thought may have anxiety also had something else going on like ADD.
Summer 2021	July: Waiting on IRB approval. It is a little frustrating because I'm not using my time wisely. August: 8 weeks of waiting and finally have IRB approval
Fall 2021	September: I feel like I may have a hard time finding participants. I know teachers are already stressed, so I pray I can get participants. I wonder how many teachers feel comfortable sharing about reading anxiety. October: My interviews have started, and the ones I have done are moving quickly. They have similar answers so far. November: I had one teacher I could tell didn't have much knowledge based on her answers. I feel her answers may be my outliers, but we will see. Then I had one teacher that talked for 40 minutes. My first focus group went well. It was short, but I got a lot of good feedback. I feel like my next one will be very long because I have two teachers that like to talk. Hopefully they will stay on topic. December: All data has finally been collected, and member checked. I am now analyzing data. I often see the words "fear" and "lack of confidence." Do kids really fear reading? I have thought about kids not liking reading before but not fearing it. I read research on it for chapter 2, but to hear it from actual teachers changes your perspective. Then I also see the opposite "encourage." I came up with six themes but

	narrowed them down to four. After more analysis, I found eight possible outliers, but I narrowed it down to two.
Spring 2022	January: I have my rough draft of chapters 4-5 written. I feel good about the four themes that emerged. March: Defended Dissertation

Appendix J: Audit Trail

December 8, 2020	Emailed superintendent to request permission to conduct research in the county.
January 11, 2021	I had a phone conversation with the superintendent, and he told me that he would like my IRB before officially granting approval. Once he has the IRB, he will share it with his cabinet and grant approval.
June 8, 2021	Completed IRB request.
July 13–15, 2021	Made revisions to IRB and sent back in.
August 3, 2021	Received IRB approval.
August 13, 2021	Sent IRB approval to superintendent for approval.
August 30, 2021	Received permission to conduct research from the superintendent.
September 6, 2021	Began conducting Pilot Study
September 6, 2021	I began emailing principals for permission to conduct the study in the schools.
September 12, 2021	I began emailing teachers to take screening surveys for study.
September 28, 2021	I began sending out acceptance letters and rejection letters.
October 13–December 1, 2021	Interviews were conducted, and participant reflection journals were given to participants.
November 22, 2021	Conducted focus group #1
December 8, 2021	Conducted focus group #2
December 13–15, 2021	Sent member checks to all participants to check their information for accuracy.
December 14–24, 2021	Received emails from all participants that all their information was accurate.
December 27, 2021–January 20, 2022	Analyzed data.