THE TEXAS READING ACADEMIES AND THE EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS WHO

INSTRUCT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Suzanne S. Jones

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

To build today's students' reading skills, teachers must know effective instructional reading practices. Therefore, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension by teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas. The Texas Reading Academies' goal is to provide teachers with reading instructional practices grounded in the science of reading. The theory guiding this study was Malcolm Knowles' adult learning theory, with the central research question asking what the experiences of teachers who instruct students with disabilities were with learning and incorporating the language comprehension elements after completing the Texas Reading Academies' training. Data for the study was collected from 11 teachers who instruct students with disabilities using interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. Data concerning the teachers' experiences were analyzed using the phenomenological model outlined by Moustakas (1994). Four major themes emerged from the data: teachers' focus on learning, factors that impacted teachers' learning, implementation of reading instruction, and maximizing strengths for students with disabilities. Within these four themes, teachers articulated being overwhelmed during the training; however, the interactive training experience led them to grow professionally in their knowledge and application of the science of reading. In addition, future research recommendations were discussed, including a longitudinal study to examine teachers who instruct students with disabilities' motivation to continue applying the science of reading into their daily reading instructional practices.

Keywords: language comprehension, the science of reading, reading instruction, students with disabilities, professional development, and Texas Reading Academies

Copyright Page

Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my sons, Jonathan and Wesley, who are my biggest encouragement, as they continually make me a better person through their love, support, and knowledge.

This manuscript is also dedicated to the new educational diagnostician cohort that I had the privilege to train in 2018-2019, as they inspired me to make my dream of earning a Ph.D. a reality.

This manuscript is also dedicated to the support and encouragement of my friends, who inspired me to keep powering through and never quit, as I remember God's words in Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord."

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As my doctoral journey comes to a close, there are several people that God put in my life to make this dream a reality. First, I want to thank Dr. Meredith Park, my committee chair, for her positive insight, support, and encouragement. Second, I also want to thank my committee member, Dr. Melissa Wells, for her support and encouragement. Then when my research needed major polishing at the very early stage, Dr. James Eller's time and guidance were greatly appreciated. Also, many thanks to my editor, Dr. Susan Stanley.

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List of Abbreviations

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

House Bill 3 (HB 3)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

National Reading Panel (NRP)

National Early Literacy Panel (NELP)

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)

Texas Education Agency (TEA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Building a literacy-focused environment that focuses on children acquiring reading skills through various methods is essential for early education (Petscher et al., 2020; Wolf, 2018). To facilitate improving early education, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) established the Texas Reading Academies for all kindergarten through third-grade teachers and principals to increase their knowledge in reading research instruction (TEA, 2020b). Therefore, this transcendental phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of teachers who instruct students with disabilities with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension. This chapter provides background information regarding students with disabilities who are served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as well as the study's historical, social, and theoretical context. Then, a broad overview of the study's problem and significance will be discussed to facilitate the research purpose and questions. In closing, pertinent definitions of the study will be discussed as well as a summary of the chapter.

Background

Reading is a foundational component in building a literate society, as high literacy rates allow members to develop a sense of well-being (Castles et al., 2018; Gatlin-Nash et al., 2020; Kim, 2020a; Miller & McCardle, 2019). Scholars advocate for practices that lead to high student literacy rates (Hindman et al., 2020; Seidenberg et al., 2020; Spencer & Wagner, 2018; Spencer et al., 2020; Stanley et al., 2018) by incorporating effective reading research practices into the curriculum that is referred to as the science of reading (Hindman et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2021; Petscher et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2020b). Improving student literacy and proficiency is

especially important for educators who teach students with disabilities, as there is an achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without a disability (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Gilmour et al., 2019). *The Texas Education Annual Report for 2020* compares reading proficiency on the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) between special and general education students. The range of ability for special education students was considerably lower than the general education students, with 28% to 49% approaching grade level in reading compared to 72% to 90% approaching grade level in reading for general education students (TEA, 2020a). To narrow this academic gap, effective practices for students with disabilities must be intentionally integrated into instruction (Collins et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2019).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

When educating students with disabilities, public schools in the United States are required to adhere to IDEA mandates (IDEA, 2019). IDEA is a federal law that ensures students with disabilities who need specially designed instruction are provided with a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment under special education. In the United States, 14% of the public school population is served in special education (Irwin et al., 2021); in Texas, the percentage is 11.3 (TEA, 2021b).

To be eligible for services under IDEA, a student must meet the eligibility requirements of one of thirteen disabilities sanctioned by the law and also demonstrate the need for specially designed instruction (IDEA, 2017). The majority of students being served in special education under IDEA in the United States (US) and in Texas (TX) have a specific learning disability (33% US and 32% TX), speech impairment (19% US and 19% TX), other health impairment (15% US and 14% TX), or autism spectrum disorder (11% US and 15% TX) (TEA, 2022a; Irwin et al.,

2021). Within the population of students with disabilities, there are a number of students who are also English learners (IDEA, 2022b). The number of dually identified English learners with a disability has grown over the years. Currently, 11.78% (US) and 20% (TX) of students who are being served under IDEA are also English learners (IDEA, 2022b; TEA, 2021c; TEA, 2021a).

For students being served under IDEA, a collaborative effort between general and special education needs to occur to provide intensive interventions that allow students to access the general education curriculum (Fletcher et al., 2019) in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2019). For English learners who have a disability, the collaboration between general and special education is especially important to ensure that these students' language and disability needs are dually met (Kangas, 2018b; Ortiz et al., 2020; TEA, 2022c).

Historical Context

Effective reading instruction has been a concern for policymakers in Texas, as seen by past legislative action. In 2007, the 80th Texas legislative session passed House Bill 2237 to establish reading academies for teachers who instruct students in sixth through eighth grades (Texas Public Law, 2007). Then, the 84th Texas legislative session in 2015 passed Senate Bills 925 and 972 to address reading instructional practices for teachers who instruct students in elementary grades (Texas Public Law, 2015a, 2015b). In Senate Bills 925 and 972, academies were created as a sit-and-get model of professional development, lasting four days, with districts deciding which teachers to send to the training (E. Keith, personal communication, June 2, 2022). To create the professional development material for early and middle elementary grade teachers, TEA partnered with The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at The University of Texas. The training material for kindergarten through third-grade teachers focused on teaching students how to read, while fourth and fifth-grade teachers emphasized reading to learn. When developing the training material, TEA

emphasized reading interventions only (TEA, 2019a) instead of explaining how and why the interventions work according to evidence based research (E. Keith, personal communication, June 2, 2022).

To continue training teachers on intervention, TEA extended the requirements of Senate Bills 925 and 972 by establishing the Reading Excellence and Academies Development (READ) grant program using funds from the U.S. Department of Education (TEA, 2018b, 2019b). These funds provided training and a $1,500 stipend for 1,800 elementary teachers (TEA, 2019a). The timeline for the READ grant to begin was in July 2019 and continued through the 2019-2020 school year (TEA, 2018b).

Meanwhile, in June 2019, the 86th Texas Legislative session passed the House Bill 3 (HB 3) Reading Academies mandate (TEA, 2022d). The purpose of the HB 3 Reading Academies is to train all kindergarten through third-grade teachers and principals by the end of the 2022-2023 school year in the science of teaching reading to improve the reading skills of the students in Texas (TEA, 2022d, 2022f). With this mandate in mind, TEA developed the Texas Reading Academies in-house, with the Early Childhood Division seeking some assistance from The Meadows Center. During this development stage, TEA was completing the READ grant; therefore, several participants of the READ grant had the opportunity to pilot a few main modules of the newly created Texas Reading Academies (E. Keith, personal communication, June 2, 2022).

With the Texas Reading Academies' implementation, changes were addressed from previous legislation literacy initiatives. The Texas Reading Academies, changed from voluntary participation with a stipend; to a mandatory training for all kindergarten through third-grade content teachers and principals without stipends (E. Keith, personal communication, June 2,

2022). TEA recognized that reading growth is not just the responsibility of the reading teacher but the responsibility of all content teachers (TEA, 2022f). This viewpoint comes from TEA examining the reading data for students in Texas. On the 2017 Nation's Report Card, Texas students' reading achievement rank fell from forty-first to forty-sixth. Then, in 2019, 65% of fourth and eighth graders in Texas who participated in the National Assessment Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Assessment Test scored below proficiency. Therefore, the Texas Reading Academies focuses on the science and research behind teaching reading to ensure the implementation of evidence-based research practices (TEA, 2022f). In contrast, past TEA reading professional development initiatives focused on general instructional methods and not on the brain research behind learning to read (My Wolfforth News, 2021).

With this present initiative, TEA focuses on how to train all teachers by providing alternatives to in-person-only training. Although a comprehensive in-person option is offered, few districts opt to use this method (E. Keith, personal communication, June 2, 2022). Most districts have chosen to use the online asynchronous training models, which TEA refers to as the blended models (TEA, 2022f). Each teacher is enrolled in the Canvas online asynchronous training for the blended models, with a cohort leader supporting the learning. Throughout the 11-month training, the cohort leaders provide periodical virtual meetings, grading, and feedback on discussion posts and artifact submissions. TEA approved the authorized providers to offer both online and in-person training (E. Keith, personal communication, June 2, 2022).

Social Context

In today's 21st-century technology print-rich society, there is a positive social aspect to being able to comprehend print in daily life (Miller & McCardle, 2019). Reading comprehension is essential for academic learning, including social and business engagement, such as email,

texting, and internet use (Oakhill et al., 2019). However, recent data indicated low literacy rates among adults (NCES, 2019) and children (Irwin et al., 2021). In 2019, the NAEP concluded that only 35% of fourth-graders and 34% of eighth-graders in the United States scored at or above the proficiency standard for reading. Therefore, due to the low rate of students' reading proficiency, educators must be successfully trained to implement evidence-based instructional practices to improve student reading outcomes (Brion, 2020; Elleman & Oslund, 2019; Pittman et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2020b; Zipke & Hauerwas, 2018).

Improving reading outcomes begins with collaboration between policymakers and teachers to develop quality professional development (Elleman & Oslund, 2019) with a focus on improving students' literacy skills (Zipke & Hauerwas, 2018). Quality trainings transfer into effective instructional practices by teachers (Brion, 2020), especially in reading instruction (Pittman et al., 2020). Therefore, teachers need the opportunity to participate in professional development on reading research that yields positive outcomes (Zipke & Hauerwas, 2018).

TEA's goal for the Texas Reading Academies is to promote collaboration between policymakers and educators to increase teachers' and principals' knowledge of reading research (TEA, 2020b). Teachers' and principals' knowledge and implementation of reading research will influence public perception of education, as student functional reading skills are a social expectation of education (Shanahan, 2020b). This study provides a base for educators and policymakers to understand teachers' motivation and ability to complete the Texas Reading Academies and incorporate the science of reading oral language components for students with disabilities.

Theoretical Context

Adults are intrinsic learners with unique needs (Powell & Bodur, 2019) and have experiences to draw from when learning new information (Knowles et al., 2020; Loeng, 2018; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Therefore, this unique characteristic of adult learning has been examined by scholars over the years under the term *andragogy.* The term *andragogy o*r adult learning was first used in the publication *Plato's Educational Ideas* in 1833 by a German high school teacher, Alexander Kapp. Kapp used the ideas of Plato to describe learning as a lifelong process, with adults learning differently from children (Knowles et al., 2020).

The idea of *andragogy* or adult learning can be traced to European scholars in the 19th century (Knowles et al., 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014) who recognized that adults take responsibility for their learning (Knowles et al., 2020; Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Mews, 2020). Then, during a summer workshop in 1967 at Boston University, Dusan Savicevic, a Yugoslavian adult educator, introduced the term *andragogy* to the United States. Malcolm Knowles, a United States scholar on adult learning who had begun his work in the United States in the 1950s by shifting the framework of teaching adults away from a child-centered pedagogy model, attended the workshop (Knowles et al., 2020; Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Mews, 2020). In 1950, Knowles had set the stage for adult learning with his publication of *Informal Adult Education.* In this publication, Knowles advocated for adult learning to transition from a formal to a relaxed environment; thereby, creating an adult education model (Knowles et al., 2020; Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Mews, 2020).

After attending Savicevic's workshop, Knowles began expanding his concepts of adult learning in the United States with the publication of his seminal work in *Adult Leadership,* "Andragogy, not Pedagogy" (Knowles, 1968). Based on the model of *andragogical,* Knowles developed the adult learning theory as a process model for the adult learner (Knowles et al.,

2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014) emphasizing that adults learn for the purpose of solving problems (Knowles et al., 2020). Therefore, the concept of *andragogy* was cemented, as the foundation for adult learning theory, and educators separated it from the pedagogy model of childhood learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Problem Statement

The study's problem is that teachers are not applying scientifically based reading research to implement the effective components of the science of reading to ensure that students acquire proficiency in reading (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Kilpatrick, 2015; Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020; Seidenberg et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2020b; Solari et al., 2020). Current research focusing on students with (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Gilmour et al., 2019) and without disabilities identifies the lack of functional grade-level reading skills necessary to prepare them for their future (Hindman et al., 2020; Seidenberg et al., 2020; Spencer & Wagner, 2018; Spencer et al., 2020; Stanley et al., 2018). Of the adult population in the United States, 21% have difficulty with basic literacy skills (NCES, 2019). For school-age students in the United States, only 35% of fourth-graders and 34% of eighth-graders scored at or above the NAEP proficient standards in reading (Irwin et al., 2021). For students with disabilities, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS, 2021) reported that the median percent of students' proficiency for grades three through high school in reading on a grade-level assessment ranged from 11.7% to 18.8%. For students in Texas, the NAEP reported that 35% of fourth-graders in the state, who participated in the reading assessment, scored at or above proficient (NAEP, 2019). On the reading STAAR, 63% of all fourth-grade students scored at or approaching grade level, compared to 35% of fourth-grade students with disabilities (TEA, 2021a).

To mitigate these low literacy rates, scholars have advocated for teachers to use effective instructional reading practices in their classrooms based on the science of reading (Hudson et al., 2021; Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020; Shanahan, 2020b). For classrooms that have students with disabilities, it is even more imperative that teachers employ instructional practices based on the science of reading (Collins et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2019). Over the years, teachers have not been given clear guidance on implementing effective reading practices (Seidenberg et al., 2020; Solari et al., 2020). With this concern in mind, Texas policymakers have mandated that all kindergarten through third-grade teachers, including principals, complete the Texas Reading Academies to gain knowledge of the science of reading (TEA, 2022d; TEA, 2020b). This study sought to address the gap in qualitative research literature (Hudson et al., 2021) concerning how to best train teachers in effective reading practices that are based on research (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Kilpatrick, 2015; Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020; Shanahan, 2020b).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension by teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas. For this study, learning and incorporating language comprehension components will be understood as the science of reading language comprehension elements as defined in the Texas Reading Academies' online asynchronous training with the purpose of implementing research to instructional reading practices. Teachers who complete the training can bridge their prior instructional knowledge to new learning (Knowles et al., 2020), thus allowing their experiences to facilitate the improvement of reading instruction. Therefore, describing teachers' experiences who instructed students with disabilities through a qualitative method, and using Knowles' adult

learning theory (1968), gave an understanding of how teachers apply new learning acquired through an asynchronous online platform.

<div align="center">**Significance of the Study**</div>

This phenomenological study has theoretical, empirical, and practical significance for teachers, educational specialists, and educational policymakers involved in implementing the science of reading research into classroom practices. There is a need for educators to grasp the science of reading research to facilitate the movement of research into instructional practices (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Hindman et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2021; Petscher et al., 2020; Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020; Seidenberg et al., 2020). Since teachers often continue to follow the same instructional practices built on tradition rather than research (Shanahan, 2020b), this study will add significance for educators implementing reading instructional practices based on research rather than on tradition.

Theoretical Significance

This study's theoretical implications explored how Knowles' adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 2020) applies to teachers in Texas learning the science of reading. Adult learning theory focuses on the adult as a self-directed learner who draws on their intrinsic motivation and experiences to solve everyday problems (Knowles et al., 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). When designing relevant quality professional development for teachers, the outcome of the training should be for teachers to transfer their learning into everyday classroom practices (Brion, 2020; Powell & Bodur, 2019). Creating relevant professional development demonstrates respect for the adult learner, as it allows for the attainment of a problem-centered solution (Knowles et al., 2020). This study will assist educational policymakers and specialists in evaluating teachers' ability to transfer and apply the new knowledge learned from the Texas

Reading Academies to improve the development and implementation of reading professional development.

Empirical Significance

The empirical significance of this study was to narrow the gap in qualitative literature (Hudson et al., 2021) that focuses on teachers' best practices for the implementation of reading research into instructional practices (Hindman et al., 2020; Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020; Seidenberg et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2020b; Solari et al., 2020). The framework for the Texas Reading Academies incorporates the research behind the science of reading and its application to instructional practices (TEA, 2020b). Kilpatrick's (2015) seminal work provided considerable evidence of how teachers are not provided with the research knowledge behind effective instructional reading practices. Consequently, this study will add to the empirical literature on effectively implementing policies that bridge the gap between teacher research knowledge and instructional practices.

Practical Significance

Practical implications can be applied to this study, as the ultimate focus of the Texas Reading Academies is to positively impact the reading achievement of students in the state of Texas by increasing teachers' knowledge of the science of reading (TEA, 2020b). A significant component of the Texas HB 3 in June of 2019 was the Texas Reading Academies as this bill prioritized early literacy (TEA, 2022d). The mandate from HB 3 required that teachers gain research knowledge through the Texas Reading Academies on effective reading practices, with the goal of gaining knowledge in the two significant components of reading research, word recognition and language comprehension. (Flores, 2020; Solari et al., 2020). This study can assist policymakers and educational specialists in the creation of professional development

opportunities that focus on adult learning to improve instructional practices for students (Brion, 2020; Greenleaf et al., 2018; Pittman et al., 2020), emphasizing reading proficiency improvement for students with disabilities (Swanson et al., 2021; Zipke & Hauerwas, 2018).

Research Questions

Early literacy instruction begins with teachers' knowledge (Pittman et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2020b). Thus, training teachers on the critical components of the science of reading (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Hudson et al., 2021; Kilpatrick, 2015) is essential for student learning (Powell & Bodur, 2019), especially in reading (Seidenberg et al., 2020). Therefore, the questions for this research study were grounded in the literature and focused on teachers completing the Texas Reading Academies and then incorporating the science of reading elements of language comprehension in the classroom for students with disabilities.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of teachers who instruct students with disabilities with learning and incorporating the language comprehension elements after completing the Texas Reading Academies' training?

Sub-Question One

What are teachers, who instruct students with disabilities, prior experiences and knowledge factors that contributed to learning the elements of the Texas Reading Academies?

Sub-Question Two

What are teachers, who instruct students with disabilities, motivational self-directive learning factors that contributed to learning the elements of the Texas Reading Academies?

Sub-Question Three

What language comprehension elements, as outlined in the Texas Reading Academies, did teachers, who instruct students with disabilities, incorporate into everyday reading instructional practices?

Definitions

The terms and definitions listed below are pertinent to this study and are grounded in the literature.

1. *Asynchronous Training* - is distant online learning that allows learners to participate in training at separate times (Brady & Pradhan, 2020).

2. *The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* - The federal law requires each state to provide a free and appropriate public education to children with disabilities who are eligible for special education and related services in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2022a).

3. *Language Comprehension* - is the language skills of vocabulary, knowledge, and listening comprehension that interact to impact reading comprehension (Kilpatrick, 2015).

4. *Science of Reading* - is the phrase used to describe reading development and instruction grounded in scientific research (Petscher et al., 2020).

5. *Simple View of Reading* - is the view that reading acquisition comprises two parts: decoding and comprehension (R=D X C) (Gough & Tunmer, 1986).

6. *State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)* - is the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness program, implemented in the spring of 2012 (TEA, 2022e).

7. *Texas Education Agency (TEA) -* Texas's state governing agency for education with the central purpose of overseeing primary and secondary public education through guidance and support to school systems in the state (TEA, 2022b).

8. *Texas Reading Academies -* is a HB 3 initiative from the 86th legislative session of Texas that requires all kindergarten through third-grade teachers, including principals, to participate in one of the academies by the end of the 2022-2023 school year. The purpose is to increase teacher knowledge and implementation of reading practices based on the science of teaching reading to positively impact students' literacy skills in Texas (TEA, 2020b).

Summary

Building the literacy skills of reading is foundational to a productive society (Castles et al., 2018; Gatlin-Nash et al., 2020; Kim, 2020a; Miller & McCardle, 2019). However, a large number of students in the United States are not meeting adequate standards in reading (Irwin et al., 2021). Consequently, the reading proficiency of students with disabilities is even lower than students without disabilities (OSERS, 2021; TEA, 2021a). In Texas, the Texas Reading Academies were established to mitigate and improve the reading proficiency of all students through the training of teachers and principals (TEA, 2020b). Therefore, this transcendental phenomenological study examined teachers' experiences in learning and incorporating effective language comprehension practices into daily reading instruction. In addition, the study addressed a gap in the literature for the need of qualitative research to understand teachers' experiences with learning and incorporating effective reading practices (Hudson et al., 2021) for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The underlying focus of the literature review is professional development practices for teachers, research to practice elements of reading acquisition, and instructional practices for children with disabilities. Knowles' adult learning theory is the theoretical underpinning for this study (Knowles et al., 2020). This chapter will define the adult learning theory and then detail the current literature related to this study. After discussing adult learning theory, the literature review sections will examine teacher training through professional development, the science of reading, research to practice through the Texas Reading Academies, the simple view of reading framework, the essence of language comprehension through oral language, and instruction for students with disabilities. These sections support the research to practice guidance in the Texas Reading Academies, focusing on the language comprehension components and teacher professional development as it relates to instructing students with disabilities. In addition, a gap in the literature will be identified, thus presenting a sufficient need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is Malcolm Knowles's adult learning theory, which focuses on the attributes of the adult learner (Knowles et al., 2020; Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Mews, 2020). Knowles began his work by differentiating the learning needs of adults compared to the learning needs of children, as adults primarily take responsibility for their learning. Adults have knowledge and experiences that allow them to be self-directed learners to solve problems (Chametzky, 2018; Knowles et al., 2020; Loeng, 2018; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Mews, 2020), thus, leading adults to be intrinsically motivated to learn by seeing the purpose and the why behind learning (Chametzky,

2018; Knowles et al., 2020; Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Knowles's adult learning theory is based on several assumptions. Adult learning centers on solving problems through self-directed learning as the adult relies on prior experiences. In addition, adults are motivated and ready to learn, especially during a life-centered event (Chametzky, 2018; Knowles et al., 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Mews, 2020).

In adult learning theory, learning involves specialized knowledge of facts and ideas that lead to solving complex problems (Machynska & Boiko, 2020). Thus, allowing adults to identify the essence of their problems (Knowles et al., 2020) and manage their own learning needs (Chametzky, 2018). When managing learning needs, adults can apply their educational training and knowledge to real-life situations (Knowles et al., 2020; Mews, 2020). Therefore, adult learning brings satisfaction to the adult by allowing them to gain an answer to everyday problems by connecting the learning experience to a solution (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

According to adult learning theory, adults take responsibility for controlling their learning (Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Mews, 2020) by managing their needs and using self-directed strategies (Knowles et al., 2020; Mews, 2020). Self-direction shifts the learning responsibility to the adult by allowing them to develop self-concept and have an active voice in their learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). When adults participate in their learning, they gain personal satisfaction conducive to controlling their own experiences (Machynska & Boiko, 2020) and discovering the practical side of learning (Chametzky, 2018).

The practical side of learning enables adults to attach their prior experiences to new learning (Knowles et al., 2020). Experiences make each person distinct by allowing them to understand their capabilities while acquiring new knowledge during the learning process (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Adults' experiences bring invaluable resources that provide an

understanding of new ideas (Mews, 2020) by continuing to develop upon what they know (Machynska & Boiko, 2020). However, new experiences could have a negative aspect because adults might assume new knowledge is unnecessary, as the old ways of doing things have always worked (Knowles et al., 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Thus, according to adult learning theory, adult education must demonstrate how previous experiences can be applied to new learning (Knowles et al., 2020), especially learning related to everyday needs and problems (Chametzky, 2018).

Adult learning theory assumes adults have a readiness to learn (Knowles et al., 2020). Adult readiness is based on how the learning will benefit the adult now and how relevant it is to their current life situation (Chametzky, 2018). When a new life circumstance charges adults with a task, learning becomes intrinsically motivating to the adult learner (Knowles et al., 2020) by creating an application for solving a problem (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Therefore, pairing the adult's readiness to learn with clear course expectations and content will lead to relevant learning (Knowles et al., 2020; Mews, 2020).

According to adult learning theory, adult learning needs to be life-centered (Knowles et al., 2020) and relevant (Machynska & Boiko, 2020). Adult learners want courses with real-life examples and context outlined with a clear purpose from beginning to end (Knowles et al., 2020) because adult learners are motivated by understanding the whole picture and having a clear image of the end in mind (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Applying the new learning outside the learning environment to an actual situation builds enthusiasm and meaning to continue learning new content (Chametzky, 2018).

In adult learning theory, adults' internal motivation is a driving focus of learning (Knowles et al., 2020). An internal motivation for learning influences adults, leading to self-

satisfaction, which can lead to greater job satisfaction and increased well-being (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Mews, 2020). The motivation to learn increases when course content is paired with the learner's interest (Chametzky, 2018).

Furthermore, adult learning theory principles can be applied to the online learning environment (Chametzky, 2018; Knowles et al., 2020). Online content can allow the digital age to positively impact not only the learning but the motivation of the adult learner (Chametzky, 2018). When paired with the andragogical principles of Knowles's adult learning theory, an online learning environment can lead to an atmosphere that focuses on collaboration and positive engagement for both the facilitator and the learner alike (Knowles et al., 2020).

Related Literature

Comprehending text on a page requires knowledgeable teachers who can teach students to build the necessary foundational literacy skills through interaction and language (Paige et al., 2021). Hence, the focus of related literature begins by providing information on effectively training teachers through professional development. Then the review provides information behind the science of reading and the foundational components of reading, as well as related literature on the essence of language comprehension with the underpinnings of oral language. In closing, research-related instructional practices for students with disabilities will be discussed, which includes emergent bilingual/English learners with disabilities. The review outlines the research to practice components and instructional practices needed in effective reading instruction, which are a significant part of the Texas Reading Academies, an intensive professional development that provides participants with the knowledge of the science of reading, focusing on students learning to read. Examining the literature on professional development and reading will illustrate how the Texas Reading Academies mandate is an adult-

centered learning approach to solve the everyday problem of teachers' lack of knowledge on reading instruction based on research, especially for students with disabilities.

Training Teachers' Through Professional Development

A bridge of support must be built between research and practice to achieve valuable reading outcomes for students (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Gentry & Ouellette, 2019; Henry & Solari, 2020; Woulfin & Gabriel, 2020). Scholars have reported the value of teachers learning the research behind the science of reading to implement effective reading instruction (Gentry & Ouellette, 2019; Silverman et al., 2020). Since learning to read is a multifaceted skill (Compton-Lilly et al., 2020), teachers need to have this foundational knowledge behind reading acquisition to improve student outcomes (Woulfin & Gabriel, 2020). However, there is a disparity between research and instructional practices. This gap can be closed by teachers knowing the research regarding the skill of effective instructional practices (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Pittman et al., 2020; Solari et al., 2020), especially in reading (Elleman & Oslund, 2019) and language comprehension (Silverman et al., 2020).

School leaders can provide teachers with the tools through professional development to make effective reading instructional practices a reality in the classrooms (Compton-Lilly et al., 2020), as quality professional development positively affects student reading performance (Fischer et al., 2018; Greenleaf et al., 2018; Swanson et al., 2021). Quality professional development incorporates intensity, relevance, and participation elements into the training (Didion et al., 2020) and focuses on specific instructional content (Lindvall et al., 2018). Teachers have the motivation to participate in reading-focused instructional content training; however, their time is limited (Henry & Solari, 2020).

Even though teachers' time is limited, school leaders can build on teachers' motivation to learn by effectively providing professional development that allows teachers to learn new skills within an attainable amount of time (Henry & Solari, 2020). Thus, for teachers to acquire knowledge that leads to effective outcomes, scholars have advised rethinking professional development (Basma & Savage, 2018; Hudson et al., 2021; Wetzel et al., 2020). Training that targets one specific skill at a time and then allows teachers to immediately apply the new knowledge in the classroom can be a successful method to implement effective literacy practices in the classroom (Hudson et al., 2021). This method permits training to be spread out over time, thus allowing teachers to build their instructional knowledge and skills on an ongoing basis (Cavazos et al., 2018; Swanson et al., 2021). Empirical research has demonstrated that this training method positively affects all students' reading outcomes, those with disabilities and those without disabilities (Swanson et al., 2021).

Consequently, when teachers learn one instructional skill at a time, a collaborative community between educators, teachers, and students can form, thus allowing a creative classroom environment that encourages effective instructional practices (Hudson et al., 2021; Wetzel et al., 2020). As teachers continue to gain instructional knowledge, coaching opportunities can be provided, which allows for mastering "the art of teaching" (Paige et al., 2021, p. S346) to improve student outcomes (Basma & Savage, 2018). For teachers who instruct students with disabilities, effective professional development (Collins et al., 2018) and collaboration (Hester et al., 2020) are critical, as it results in positive learning outcomes for students with disabilities (Swanson et al., 2021) and reducing burnout (Hester et al., 2020). This burnout reduction through effective training starts with a supportive administrator (Hester et al., 2020) and collaboration between administrators, teachers, and students (Donohoo et al., 2018).

Collaboration to support training teachers has shifted toward online professional development opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Bragg et al., 2021). Online professional development supports an effective environment (Wagner, 2021), allowing teachers access to quality training applicable in today's technological educational environment (Bragg et al., 2021; Philipsen et al., 2019; Powell & Bodur, 2019; Wagner, 2021). Teachers highly value the online format (Parsons et al., 2019), as it leads to quality professional development, which is essential in the teaching-learning cycle (Powell & Bodur, 2019). Online professional development can potentially improve today's teachers' daily face-to-face instructional practices (Bragg et al., 2021) with the positive aspect that online material is self-paced and available at any time (Parsons et al., 2019). There is evidence that online professional development improves teachers' expertise, attitudes, self-research efficacy, and methods (Bragg et al., 2021). This online format can also provide a positive learning experience (Nese et al., 2020) by matching individual teachers' learning needs through content accommodations (Bragg et al., 2021). Additional research concluded that teachers were positively engaged with relevant online learning (Powell & Bodur, 2019; Zhang & Liu, 2019), with motivation and self-efficacy playing a part in this learning process (Zhang & Liu, 2019).

However, learning through an online professional development platform does have a downside, as teachers cannot interact in a face-to-face collaborative learning environment (Powell & Bodur, 2019). Research has shown that some characteristics reduce the negative side of online learning, such as direct feedback and coaching on assignments from the facilitator (Philipsen et al., 2019), and collaboration between the stakeholders of developers, facilitators, and participants (Powell & Bodur, 2019). Elements of a positive online learning environment include developers being aware of teachers' experiences, making the design engaging, and

providing teachers with feedback during the course (Qian et al., 2018). In addition, online professional development should require a focus on instructional relevance for teachers' day-to-day practice (Powell & Bodur, 2019).

Science of Reading: Research to Instructional Practices

Examining the instructional relevance of historical and current reading practices can lead to building student literacy skills (Basma & Savage, 2018; Didion et al., 2020; Greenleaf et al., 2018; Swanson et al., 2021). Kilpatrick's (2015) seminal work on reading provides educators with a historical foundation on the importance of teachers' research to practice knowledge to improve student literacy. In building student literacy skills, educators historically have been trained to use one of these classical methods to teach reading: whole word, phonics, and whole language. In 1967, two seminal works were published for the educational community; Chall's (1967) work emphasized phonics as the critical component of reading instruction, and Goodman's (1967) work emphasized a whole-language methodology to reading. Therefore, during the 20th century, educators were trained to teach phonics-based or a whole language-based reading curriculum, with phonics focusing on explicit instruction and whole language focusing on implicit instruction (Wolf, 2018). These two methodologies (Seidenberg et al., 2020) have resulted in an ongoing conflict and debate on how best to train teachers in reading instruction (Castles et al., 2018; Petscher et al., 2020; Semingson & Kerns, 2021).

In the early 2000s, a shift began with the research publication of the National Reading Panel (NRP) (NRP, 2000) and the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) (NELP, 2008). These meta-analytic reviews concluded that phonics had greater benefits over a whole language methodology (NELP, 2008; NRP, 2000). However, scholars advocate for a learning-to-read curriculum built on various strategies (Seidenberg et al., 2020) and not just phonics, as

instruction in beginning reading goes beyond decoding as reported by the NELP study (Paris &
Luo, 2010). Reading practices must include instruction in oral language, decoding, and
comprehension to motivate students to develop an enthusiasm for learning how to comprehend
written text (Duke et al., 2021; Oakhill et al., 2019). Thus, the shift allows educators to combine
all evidence-based reading practices (Paige et al., 2021; Shanahan, 2020c) with the skill of
teaching (Paige et al., 2021).

Evidence-based practices are instructional methods that have been shown through
research to improve student learning by providing teachers with research to practice knowledge
(Cook et al., 2020). The evidence-based practice that details how one acquires the skill of
reading and the best methods of instruction in reading is called the science of reading (Gentry &
Ouellette, 2019; Petscher et al., 2020). Bringing together the various evidence-based practices of
teaching reading under the umbrellas of the science of reading is a way to build educators'
reading research instructional knowledge (Petscher et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2020c) and end the
conflict of instructional reading practices (Seidenberg et al., 2020).

When teachers understand the instructional tools that reading research has uncovered, it
allows for identifying everyday reading practices that comprise quality teaching (Fletcher et al.,
2019; Hoover & Tunmer, 2020). Thus, students' reading proficiency (Seidenberg &
Borkenhagen, 2020) becomes a priority for the teacher through evidence-based practices
(Seidenberg et al., 2020). Therefore, the science of reading provides educators with the
knowledge of research instructional practices that will work best to maximize student
achievement and ensure students gain meaning from written text (Lonigan et al., 2018).

Maximizing student reading achievement is significant, as reading is an essential life skill
(Castles et al., 2018). Knowing how to read is critical to functioning successfully in today's print-

rich environment, both vocationally and academically (Henry & Solari, 2020; Miller & McCardle, 2019), as literacy is essential in developing one's knowledge (Miller & McCardle, 2019). Literacy knowledge broadens one's learning and education, as well as having the ability to do required everyday tasks, such as emails, texting, and Web applications (Oakhill et al., 2019). However, this essential skill is complex and must be explicitly taught (Seidenberg et al., 2020) through various evidence-based reading practices (Compton-Lilly et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2020c).

However, there is a gap that teachers face daily in understanding the research behind evidence-based practices, as scholars have found that reading research is not always being adopted in practice (Gentry & Ouellette, 2019; Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020). Without adequate training on the components of research to practice, teachers may not have the knowledge base to accurately apply the complex science of reading research in the classroom, especially for teachers new to the field (Hindman et al., 2020). Consequently, educators need direction on bridging the science of reading research to everyday reading practices (Hindman et al., 2020; Semingson & Kerns, 2021), as connecting research to practice allows teachers to immerse their students in effective reading instruction (Paige et al., 2021).

Texas Reading Academies

The objective of the Texas Reading Academies is to allow teachers in Texas to connect the research of the science of reading to instructional practices to affect student reading outcomes positively. The Texas Reading Academies is a requirement from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) that all kindergarten through third-grade teachers and principals must complete (TEA, 2020b). In June 2019, the 86th Texas Legislature mandated the Texas Reading Academies as part of House Bill 3 (HB 3) (TEA, 2022d) with the goal "to increase teacher knowledge and

implementation of evidence-based practices to positively impact student literacy achievement"
(TEA, 2020b, p.1).

The mandate of HB 3 Texas Reading Academies was initiated due to the lack of literacy
proficiency for students in Texas, as seen by standardized state and national testing. For Texas
state testing in 2018, only 4 in 10 students met the state's third-grade reading standard on the
State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). In 2019, the National Assessment
of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that 65% of fourth and eighth-graders in Texas scored
below proficiency on the 2019 NAEP Reading Assessment, and Texas students' reading
proficiency declined by five spots to 46th place (TEA, 2022f).

To improve the reading proficiency of Texas students, teachers can have the opportunity
to learn the science of reading through the Texas Reading Academies (TEA, 2020b). In
structuring the Texas Reading Academies, TEA uses the foundation of the simple view of
reading framework that outlines two significant components of reading comprehension: decoding
and language comprehension. Throughout the training modules, language comprehension
practices are emphasized with the underlying importance of oral language in the science of
reading. In addition, there are interventions for students with disabilities embedded in the
training modules (TEA, 2020c).

A Framework of Reading: The Simple View of Reading

Foundational knowledge of the essential components of literacy development and how
these components interlock is vital for classroom reading teachers, thus giving them a framework
and a structure for the teaching process (Hoover & Tunmer, 2020). A framework is "an analytic
tool that supports the understanding of a concept" (Hoover & Tunmer, 2020, p. 13). A
foundational framework for reading acquisition is the simple view of reading (Gough & Tunmer,

1986; Kilpatrick, 2015, 2020; Vaughn et al., 2019). The purpose of Gough and Tunmer's (1986) framework was to settle the debate on the most critical components of reading instruction. Their simple view of reading outlines that "reading equals the product of decoding and comprehension, or R=D X C" (Gough & Tunmer, 1986, p. 7). As decoding alone is not adequate and comprehension alone is not sufficient, a child who reads must be able to decode and comprehend (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Catts, 2018; Goodrich & Namkung, 2019; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Tunmer, 2018; Kilpatrick, 2020; Kim, 2020b; Nation, 2019; Snow, 2018; Vaughn et al., 2019). Decoding is the ability to read actual words and pseudowords, and comprehension relies on linguistic comprehension skills (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Linguistic comprehension covers all areas of oral language, including listening comprehension, which is how one processes and interprets information and sentences (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Tunmer, 2018; Nation, 2019).

The simple view of reading has significant backing from scholarly literature (Kim, 2020b). The model's strength is its simple structure that teaches educators that decoding and language comprehension are essential to reading comprehension (Kim, 2020b). This simple framework has not only been studied in over 100 cases but has practical application for educational practice in the classroom (Kilpatrick, 2015).

For educational practices, instruction needs to focus on reading words and understanding the meaning of a text (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Goodrich & Namkung, 2019; Kilpatrick, 2020). Building students' comprehension of a text requires a focus on knowledge and vocabulary, which leads to word meaning. This instruction should be part of decoding and word identification instruction (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Goodrich & Namkung, 2019; Snow, 2018). Good reading instruction relies on decoding and oral language instruction, as they build off each other and

cannot be mutually insulated separated skills (Foorman et al., 2020; Goodrich & Namkung, 2019). Research studies have found that decoding and oral language abilities in the simple view of reading portray the reading comprehension abilities of children in grades three to five (Hoover & Tunmer, 2018). It has allowed educators to identify reading comprehension difficulties by looking at both the decoding and oral language skills of students, thus positively impacting reading instruction (Catts, 2018).

Oral Language: The Essence of Language Comprehension to Facilitate Reading

In developing reading comprehension, instruction in oral language is critical (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Kim et al., 2020; Lervåg et al., 2018; Parkin, 2018). Oral language must be as important as the decoding side of the simple view of reading, as oral language is foundational to literacy development (Kim et al., 2020; Rand & Morrow, 2021). Building this foundation depends on a rich oral language environment that provides the knowledge needed to learn to read (Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020).

How Oral Language Develops

Oral language is foundational to developing literacy skills for reading (Golinkoff et al., 2019; Seidenberg & Borkenhage, 2020), and this development begins before children enter school (Reed & Lee, 2020; Visser-Bochane et al., 2020). From birth, children's interactions with their surroundings facilitate language acquisition. Typical home environments promote active language experiences, allowing most children to gain receptive and expressive language skills with minimal difficulty during their early developmental years (Golinkoff et al., 2019; Tunmer & Hoover, 2019). During these years, the social interaction of play is essential to promote language development because play allows children to engage actively with their environment, thus acquiring language (Rand & Morrow, 2021). Engaging in active conversational language experiences with family, peers, and teachers allows children in their early years to gain the

foundational language skills needed for academic success, especially in reading (Golinkoff et al., 2019; Pyle et al., 2018; Rand & Morrow, 2021; Reed & Lee, 2020; Visser-Bochane et al., 2020).

Supporting reading skills starts with a solid oral language foundation (Reed & Lee, 2020), which begins with the two-way active and meaningful interaction between adults and children. Adults must not only talk to children but also listen and encourage their expressive language development. Playful early expressive language experiences, such as role-playing and acting out stories with adults, allow children to develop their oral language and vocabulary (Reed & Lee, 2020; Toub et al., 2018).

For young children, play is beneficial not only at home but also in the school environment, as scaffolding play experiences in the school environment allow children to have interactive experiences with a knowledgeable adult, thus building on literacy skills needed for academic success (Pyle et al., 2018). For example, when there is a focus on play-based activities in kindergarten classrooms, students display higher engagement with literacy activities. Furthermore, alongside play-based activities, interactive storytelling using oral and digital methods can also be paired to promote the development of literacy skills (Maureen et al., 2020).

Besides play experiences, teachers can encourage spoken interaction between themselves and students, leading to a deep oral language development that facilitates reading acquisition (Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020). A rich oral language environment permits implicit learning of vocabulary knowledge; this implicit learning is foundational to learning vocabulary needed for reading. Vocabulary development can flourish through a social environment built on experiences. Experiences in oral language with adults can be a bridge for children to acquire higher-order literacy skills allowing for vocabulary development to be acquired early and continued through elementary on to middle school (Phillips Galloway et al., 2020).

The experience of teachers interactively reading books aloud to students permits the maturity of oral language and literacy skills in students (Grøver et al., 2020; Hadley et al., 2019; Kim, 2020b). A deep oral language vocabulary growth for preschool children can develop through teachers reading aloud to students and then extending the reading through guided play (Hadley et al., 2019). For preschool bilingual students, there is an added benefit when teachers read aloud as it facilitates the young child's ability to engage in conversations in their second language, thus improving overall oral language development (Grøver et al., 2020). Moving from early education, teachers can provide effective instructional strategies by reading aloud to grade school students. This interaction between teacher and students builds the oral language skills needed for reading comprehension, especially for young readers (Kim, 2020b).

Not only is reading aloud by teachers in a school setting beneficial for developing children's oral language skills, but adults reading aloud at home and in a childcare setting is also beneficial (Fitzgerald et al., 2018; Golinkoff et al., 2019; Grolig, 2020; Reed & Lee, 2020). Studies examining the oral language skills of young children who participated in shared reading with adults found positive impacts on literacy, oral language, and communication (Fitzgerald et al., 2018; Golinkoff et al., 2019; Grolig, 2020). Listening to adults read aloud is fun for a young child, but it also allows the adult to facilitate building the child's background knowledge, vocabulary, and conversation skills (Reed & Lee, 2020). Family members and caregivers of young children can significantly impact oral language development to build literacy skills by reading aloud and interacting with meaningful conversations (Golinkoff et al., 2019).

Besides reading aloud, language can be developed through play, allowing vocabulary, descriptive language, and oral narrative skills in the early grades to materialize (Rand & Morrow, 2021). This development can be enhanced through direct guidance from adults as children play.

Additionally, teachers must facilitate an environment that encourages active student participation both verbally and non-verbally to facilitate early literacy growth (Connor et al., 2020), leading to a solid oral language foundation of both receptive and expressive language knowledge and vocabulary (Hirsch, 2019).

The Importance of Oral Language Instruction

To build reading skills, instruction in oral language (Goodrich & Namkung, 2019; Spencer et al., 2020) or language comprehension (Silverman et al., 2020), especially in the early grades, needs to be a priority (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Rand & Morrow, 2021). A growing body of literature has investigated the relationship oral language has on the reading skills of decoding and comprehension. Research has shown that oral language influences students' reading ability in both decoding and comprehension (Henry & Solari, 2020; Lonigan et al., 2018; Spencer & Wagner, 2018; Wagner et al., 2021), thus aligning with the simple view of reading (Hjetland et al., 2019; Lonigan et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2021). The research found that linguistic comprehension and decoding both influence reading comprehension (Lonigan et al., 2018). High listening comprehension skills positively affect decoding (Wagner et al., 2021), and early language skill development influences decoding and reading comprehension (Hjetland et al., 2019).

However, the lack of oral language skills can affect students with disabilities. A meta-analysis study found that monolingual and bilingual students with specific reading comprehension deficits also had low oral language skills (Spencer & Wagner, 2018). For students with an autism spectrum disorder, it was determined that intensive oral language intervention has a positive effect on improving literacy skills (Henry & Solari, 2020). Academic language has been shown to improve through oral interaction between teacher and student that

emphasizes explanations, questions (Goodwin et al., 2021), and problem-solving (Jones et al., 2019).

Building students' oral language literacy skills are essential, as research has demonstrated a longitudinal link between oral language and reading comprehension (Language and Reading Research Consortium & Chiu, 2018; Stanley et al., 2018; Suggate et al., 2018). Children who have developed solid oral language and literacy skills before kindergarten have been found to positively affect their reading skills in third grade (Language and Reading Consortium & Chiu, 2018) and high school (Stanley et al., 2018; Suggate et al., 2018). Thus, scholarly literature has shown a positive longitudinal link between early linguistic skills and later reading comprehension (Hjetland et al., 2020). In addition, research has demonstrated that elementary students with limited vocabulary knowledge were at risk for difficulty with reading comprehension in high school (Petscher et al., 2019). Educators should make instruction in oral language a significant component of the early reading curriculum (Language and Reading Consortium & Chiu, 2018), with specific instruction in vocabulary development (Hjetland et al., 2020; Petscher et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2018; Suggate et al., 2018).

Building Oral Language: Instruction in Knowledge and Vocabulary

Children's oral language skills of knowledge and vocabulary have a positive effect on word reading and reading comprehension (Kim et al., 2020). Oral language has been found to positively influence reading comprehension (Lervåg et al., 2018; Parkin, 2018) and word decoding (Parkin, 2018). Therefore, background knowledge and vocabulary give readers the information to refer to, allowing for comprehension (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Stanley et al., 2018; Suggate et al., 2018). Early intervention in the oral language components of background knowledge and vocabulary should be integral to early reading instruction (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Kim, 2020b), ensuring students gain the needed skills to learn how to read.

Background knowledge is an essential component of the science of reading (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Hattan & Lupo, 2020; Kaefer, 2020). As experiences and knowledge allow for greater comprehension because, to gain meaning from print, the reader needs to pair what they are reading with existing knowledge (Kaefer, 2018; Shanahan, 2019). Building this knowledge should be essential to the classroom curriculum (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2019; Shanahan, 2019). When children have the underlying knowledge presented in text, their reading comprehension becomes more robust; thus, building knowledge into the everyday life of the classroom is essential (Hattan & Lupo, 2020; Hirsch, 2019). Therefore, research evidence demonstrates that familiarity with the topic, even if just minimal, is vital for comprehending what one reads (O'Reilly et al., 2019). Educators must incorporate students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and experiences when building students' knowledge while working through instructional text (Hattan & Lupo, 2020). Students' knowledge and experiences are critical to reading comprehension, as the two cannot be separated (Lawrence et al., 2019). The more experience a student has, the more knowledge they have to comprehend text.

Providing students with instruction in domain knowledge of all content subjects (Hwang, 2019; Kim et al., 2021) and instruction in inferencing (Oakhill et al., 2019) builds reading comprehension skills. Engaging lessons allow students to deepen their understanding to enrich prior knowledge (Kaefer, 2020; Wei et al., 2021). Teachers activating well-established background knowledge has led to an increase in students' ability to pick out relevant information in the text (Kaefer, 2020). Thus, knowledge is crucial, as it allows for vocabulary growth, with the two being interconnected (Hirsch, 2019).

Building vocabulary knowledge should be ongoing, especially in the early elementary years, because, without consistent instruction, vocabulary growth stagnates and fades (Hirsch,

2019), especially for at-risk students (Graves et al., 2018; Hirsch, 2019). Solid vocabulary gives students lifelong skills to comprehend text (Graves et al., 2018) and build word reading skills (Hoover & Tunmer, 2020). This environment starts with high-quality direct instruction in vocabulary, as students in a well-developed language environment are at an advantage in comprehending written text (McKeown, 2019). The teacher is the key to a well-developed rich classroom environment full of exciting literacy activities, such as high-level reading opportunities that build deep vocabulary (Shanahan, 2020a). Nevertheless, teachers spend only a minimal amount of time building vocabulary knowledge due to the emphasis on teaching students test strategies, with the expectation of higher standardized test scores (Hirsch, 2019).

However, instruction focusing on developing a rich and broad vocabulary for each student will allow for higher scores on standardized testing (Hirsch, 2019). Intense vocabulary instruction focuses on assisting students with understanding text in relation to the context of the passage by using expressive and receptive oral language strategies (Alber-Morgan et al., 2019). Students need to be exposed to rich vocabulary by allowing them to read, with teacher support, text beyond their instructional level to aid in language development (Shanahan, 2020a). The more students read, the stronger their vocabulary becomes, and the stronger their vocabulary, the stronger their reading skills (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Hoover & Tunmer, 2020). Research indicated that exposing students to only books at their independent level restricts students' opportunity to be immersed in a rich language environment (Shanahan, 2020a).

A language environment that leads to literacy development and academic success in reading comprehension centers on having a high level of vocabulary knowledge (Coyne et al., 2019; McKeown, 2019). There is an interconnected relationship between academic vocabulary and reading comprehension (Lawrence et al., 2019; Lonigan et al., 2018; Oakhill et al., 2019).

Instruction in oral language must continue through adolescence to facilitate reading achievement (Ricketts et al., 2020).

Facilitating students' reading skills requires teachers to use multiple methods of instruction (Duke et al., 2021; Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020; Wolf, 2018), with an emphasis on oral language, as oral language is intertwined with both decoding (Foorman et al., 2020) and comprehension (Stanley et al., 2018). Thus, learning to read is an interactive practice in a constructive learning environment (Wetzel et al., 2020) that builds students' reading comprehension knowledge (Phillips Galloway et al., 2020).

Instruction for Students with Disabilities

Reading skills instruction for students with disabilities begins with educators understanding the need to reduce the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Gilmour et al., 2019). To reduce this achievement gap, students with disabilities need access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment by providing support that focuses on intensive individualization and access to effective practices (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Gilmour et al., 2019; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018). Implementing practices with the goal of high educational outcomes for students with disabilities is a focus in Texas classrooms (TEA, 2018a). For the 605,043 (11.3% of the total student population) students being served in special education in Texas (TEA, 2021a), this implementation of research practices is vital to reducing the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (TEA, 2018a). For spring 2021, STAAR accountability testing in Texas, in reading for all grade levels, 35% of students in special education scored at approaches grade level compared to 68% for all students (TEA, 2021a). Therefore, for success to be obtained by students with disabilities, especially in reading, early explicit instruction is a necessity (Austin &

Vaughn, 2019). This support is even more imperative for English language learners with disabilities, as they need extra support in both areas (Ortiz & Robertson, 2018). Teachers must understand the needs of their students and learn how to provide intensive intervention for students with disabilities. Intensive intervention is critical for students with disabilities, as highly effective practices can build students' foundational knowledge and maximize educational growth (Collins et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2019). Thus, the Texas Reading Academies provides teachers with reading research knowledge to meet all students' instructional needs through effective reading practices (TEA, 2020b).

How Students with Disabilities Learn Through Intensive Intervention

For students with disabilities, effective practices must be foundational (McLeskey et al., 2019). Students with a high-incidence disability, such as a learning disability, and students at risk for a learning disability need intensive instruction, especially in reading (Kearns et al., 2019). Data revealed that students with a learning disability struggle to keep pace with grade-level content and are usually at least three grade levels or more behind their peers by the time they reach high school (Kearns et al., 2019). With early intensive small group instruction (Grigorenko et al., 2020) focusing on fundamental skills, students with a learning disability gain positive academic outcomes (Kearns et al., 2019; Petscher et al., 2019).

To examine building positive academic literacy outcomes, two main theoretical thoughts guide educators: cognitive science and sociocultural perspective (Stone & Learned, 2016). Educators who adhere to the cognitive science perspective believe student learning is based on the process of acquiring knowledge through a complex set of rules (Schunk, 2016; Stone & Learned, 2016). They view children with disabilities through a quantitative perspective and analyze students' deficits based on specific skills that the student should know (Stone & Learned, 2016). In contrast, the sociocultural perspective looks through a qualitative lens, believing

students' learning is based on socialization and engagement (Englert & Mariage, 2014; Stone & Learned, 2016). Therefore, the cognitive approach focuses on remediation, whereas the sociocultural approach focuses on strength building (Stone & Learned, 2016).

Both cognitive science and sociocultural approaches agree that literacy development requires students to gain knowledge of the cultural language, with cognitive educators concentrating on skills and processes while sociocultural educators concentrate on authentic social interaction (Englert & Mariage, 2014; Schunk, 2016; Stone & Learned, 2016). The key is to build on what the student can accomplish through motivation to increase their development (Englert & Mariage, 2014; Stone & Learned, 2016) so that learning is intertwined with language in an interactive classroom (Englert & Mariage, 2014; Panhwar et al., 2016). Merging these ideas (Stone & Learned, 2016) and collaborating with colleagues (Friend & Barron, 2019) can allow educators to support foundational learning for students with disabilities (Billingsley et al., 2019; Lindström & Lemons, 2021; Newman & Latifi, 2021) based on each student's needs (Billingsley et al., 2019; Collins et al., 2018; Friend & Barron, 2019).

Collaboration among colleagues supports high-leverage practices (Billingsley et al., 2019; Friend & Barron, 2019). Thus high-leverage practices collaboration gives teachers who instruct students with disabilities a framework to guide their instruction (Billingsley et al., 2019; Collins et al., 2018; Friend & Barron, 2019) on what to teach and how to teach to ensure academic progress (Billingsley et al., 2019). The instructional component of high-leverage practices provides students with disabilities scaffolding support, explicit and intensive instruction, active engagement activities, and support in maintaining new learning over time. Selecting these practices will allow teachers to meet the specific learning needs of their students with disabilities (Collins et al., 2018). Three crucial elements for teachers when choosing

intensive instructional practices includes needing to be based on research, needing to be explicit and systematic, and needing to concentrate on essential academic skills (Kearns et al., 2019).

In meeting the instructional needs of students with disabilities, teachers must be able to identify students' strengths, weaknesses, interests, and background experiences to facilitate academic growth (Benedict et al., 2019). This knowledge provides teachers with a framework to deliver intensive (Kearns et al., 2019) and explicit (Fletcher et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2019) instruction to close the gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Kearns et al., 2019). Explicit instruction involves teachers identifying the most prevalent academic skills to deliver with a focus that allows students to be engaged in the learning process with follow-up practice to ensure progress (Hughes et al., 2019). Ensuring progress for students with disabilities requires teachers to implement progress monitoring that regularly assesses students' academic progress at specific intervals (Fletcher et al., 2019; Kearns et al., 2019).

Putting the learning together involves progress monitoring of explicit instructional intervention (Fletcher et al., 2019). Monitoring progress at specific intervals allows teachers to plan needed instructional interventions for students with disabilities (Fletcher et al., 2019; Kearns et al., 2019). Needed instruction involves several elements, such as extended time on task, periodic reviews, fluency practice (Fletcher et al., 2019), and explicit instruction in developing students' background knowledge (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Hirsch, 2019; Kaefer, 2020; Tunmer & Hoover, 2019). Having students bridge background knowledge to new learning allows teachers to assist students in connecting their experiences (Konrad et al., 2019), consequently providing explicit interventions.

Explicit instruction to improve reading for students with disabilities can take shape in various methods. One method is intensive vocabulary intervention (Fletcher et al., 2019) and

interventions in both decoding and oral language, such as background knowledge (Capin et al.,

2021). Other intervention methods of building literacy skills are collaboration or shared reading,

as this intervention builds expressive and receptive communication (Boyle et al., 2019) and

reading comprehension (Kim et al., 2018). When students with reading difficulties were given

accelerated intervention during the school year, it allowed them not to have a learning loss over

the summer (Wanzek et al., 2019). Lastly, interventions for students with a significant learning

disability must be intensive and provided over several years (Vaughn et al., 2019).

Building motivation for students with a learning disability can enhance the intervention

process (Fletcher et al., 2019), especially for reading achievement (Wei et al., 2021). Making

motivation part of the intervention process, such as tangible rewards, can provide students with

disabilities the incentive not to give up, as repeated failure can take an emotional toll on students

with disabilities' capacity to make progress (Fletcher et al., 2019). Thus, pairing effective

interventions with motivation strategies allows students with disabilities to build their literacy

skills because having the motivation to read, even for a poor reader, can make an educational

impact (Wei et al., 2021). Building intervention support by allowing students to be exposed to

challenging text through scaffolding support can be motivational for students who struggle with

reading (Shanahan, 2019). In addition, motivation can be improved through hands-on

interventions that enhance students' background knowledge (Wei et al., 2021).

Gaining Access to the General Education Curriculum

Besides needing intensive interventions, students with disabilities must have access to the

general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2019). This access is

typically in an inclusive general education setting that aids not only students with disabilities but

also benefits the students without disabilities. Research has shown that focused instruction

provided in the general education setting for students with disabilities also benefits students

without disabilities (Kerch et al., 2020). Being with their non-disabled peers also means that their access to the general education curriculum is not limited to lower-level materials. Students with disabilities need to have the opportunity to read challenging text through scaffolding support, as exposure to challenges with support has the benefit of bridging the achievement gap for students with disabilities (Shanahan, 2019). Bridging the gap requires both general and special education collaboration by providing multiple pathways that focus on high-quality instruction (Swanson et al., 2021) to ensure students with disabilities are instructed in the least restrictive environment (Fletcher et al., 2019).

Over the years, students with disabilities are gaining more opportunities to be served in the general education classroom, as seen by the recent increase. In 2000, 47% of students spent 80% of their day in the general education classroom (McFarland et al., 2019). Currently, 66.17% of students spend 80% of their day in the general education classroom, and then 16.38% spend 40-79% of their day in the general education classroom (IDEA, 2022c). Therefore, a significant amount of the instruction for students with disabilities is with general education teachers, as this inclusive practice is supported by IDEA (Gilmour, 2018). The key behind this legislation is the belief that the more time students with disabilities spend in the general education classroom, the more exposed to grade-level instructional content, resulting in positive academic growth.

Research has demonstrated positive academic achievement for students with disabilities who spend most of their day in general education (Gilmour, 2018). For students to get the most out of this setting, however, research demonstrates that they still need intensive intervention with a special education teacher (Fletcher et al., 2019; Gilmour, 2018; Kearns et al., 2019). The intensive instructional intervention allows for a bridge to be built for students to access and comprehend the general education curriculum for the purpose of academic growth (Kearns et al.,

2019). If students are not progressing solely in the general education classroom, do they truly have access to the general education curriculum (Gilmour, 2018)? Intensive intervention can be the solution for students with a learning disability who are not making sufficient progress in the general education setting (Fletcher et al., 2019). General and special education teachers building a collaborative learning environment for students with disabilities should include intensive instructional interventions and co-teaching (Friend & Barron, 2019), as teaching students with disabilities is a responsibility shared by both general and special education (Fletcher et al., 2019). Since instructing students with disabilities is a shared responsibility, general education teachers also need training, thus leading to the success of inclusion for students with disabilities (Gilmour, 2018).

Students with Disabilities who are English Learners

When examining instruction for students with disabilities, educators must also consider the learning needs of students with disabilities that are English learners (Ortiz & Robertson, 2018). The population of English learners in the United States is growing yearly (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2018; Goodrich & Namkung, 2019; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018), with a recent enrollment of English learners being 10% of the United States student population (Irwin et al., 2021) and 20.9% of the Texas student population (TEA, 2021a). The Office of Special Education reports a growing number of dually identified English learners with a disability. Currently, of all students in the United States with a disability served in special education, 11.78% are dually identified English learners, up from 9.07% in 2012 (IDEA, 2022b). The numbers in Texas are also growing; currently, for all students with a disability served in special education, 20% are dually identified English learners (TEA, 2021a, 2021c), up from 14% in 2012 (TEA, 2013a, 2013b).

Therefore, all educators sometime in their careers will most likely be instructing an English language learner with a disability (Ortiz & Robertson, 2018). Thus, teachers must know

how to meet the educational needs of English language learners through practices that foster linguistical and cultural respect, requiring educators to be highly trained through various instructional methods (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2018; Cavazos et al., 2018). The methods should foster students' oral language and literacy skills through interventions that promote both languages (Cavazos & Ortiz, 2020; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018). Understanding how oral language plays a part in English language learners' academic growth, teachers must ensure that interventions address oral language and reading achievement together (Cavazos & Ortiz, 2020; Vargas et al., 2021).

In building this literacy knowledge for English language learners, foundational oral language and vocabulary skills must be taught to bridge a student's native language to English (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2018; Hall et al., 2019; Ortiz et al., 2021; Petscher et al., 2019). Research has affirmed the positive relationship between the oral language components of listening comprehension, vocabulary, morphological awareness, and syntactic knowledge to reading comprehension in English language learners (Gottardo et al., 2018). Building general oral language and vocabulary knowledge are essential (Goodrich & Namkung, 2019; Petscher et al., 2019). It is also essential to build content background knowledge (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2019; Hwang, 2020; Hwang & Duke, 2020). These linguistic skills foster growth in reading comprehension based on the science of reading (Vargas et al., 2021). Therefore, oral language is highly correlated to reading achievement, and interventions must be tailored to the learning needs of English language learners with a disability (Cho et al., 2019; Ortiz et al., 2021; Taboada Barber et al., 2020; Vaughn et al., 2019).

Tailoring the intervention can start by drawing on the student's rich native language background knowledge (August, 2018; Cervetti & Hiebert, 2019). One way to draw on the native

language is through translanguage, where academic skills are built using the multiple languages of the student (Beatty et al., 2021; Noguerón-Liu, 2020). For students with disabilities, translanguage is especially important, as it allows for the connection between home and school to be built and the student with disability not to be isolated in an English-only special education classroom (Beatty et al., 2021). Therefore, special education and general education must collaborate to allow students' native language to be part of the learning process (Kangas, 2018a, 2018b; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018; Ortiz et al., 2020). Besides educators collaborating, collaboration needs to happen with the families to bring the native language into the learning process (Benedict et al., 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2021; Ko et al., 2021; Noguerón-Liu, 2020). Emergent bilingual students' reading instruction can be enhanced by drawing on the native language (Noguerón-Liu, 2020) and family collaboration (Benedict et al., 2019; Ko et al., 2021) to ensure literacy growth, with teachers understanding the unique needs of English language learners with disabilities (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Ortiz et al., 2020).

Understanding the unique needs of English language learners with disabilities requires teachers to be knowledgeable in literacy development interventions (August, 2018; Freeman-Green et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2021) and to be aware that interventions look different (Hall et al., 2019). Interventions in phonological awareness and phonics, including interventions in oral language and vocabulary (Hall et al., 2019), such as teacher read-aloud that focuses on interactive conversations (Grøver et al., 2020), are essential for academic growth (Grøver et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2019). Other effective interventions for academic growth are the need for access to grade-level content, support in content areas through visual and verbal aids, development in academic oral language, and knowledge development by drawing on students' native language (August, 2018). Therefore, to develop literacy skills, evidence-based

instructional supports need to be embedded into the curriculum for English language learners (Freeman-Green et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2021).

Literacy skills can be developed for English language learners by applying the simple view of the reading framework (Goldenberg, 2020; Goodrich & Namkung, 2019; Gottardo et al., 2018; Taboada Barber et al., 2021; Vargas et al., 2021). Research evidence has revealed that listening comprehension skills are just as crucial to decoding as reading comprehension (Taboada Barber et al., 2021). English language learners can draw on both languages using the simple view of reading to build their reading skills (Goodrich & Namkung, 2019). Oral language instruction is critical when examining the big picture of reading, not only through the lens of the simple view of reading but also through the lens of the science of reading (Goldenberg, 2020; Vargas et al., 2021). English language learners need the same reading foundational skills as English-only students; however, their support must look different by providing even more enhanced academic oral language instruction (Goldenberg, 2020; Kangas, 2018a).

Effectiveness of Teachers who Instruct Students with Disabilities

Providing support, especially to new special education teachers, is essential to special education teacher retention (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). It is reported by the US Department of Education that there is a lack of a sufficient number of special education teachers (Hester et al., 2020). This shortage can be attributed to teacher burnout, stress, lack of administrative support, lack of skill, and a poor working environment (Hagaman & Casey, 2018). The challenges to improving teacher retention rate can be addressed through specific administrative support, such as providing a reasonable caseload of students with disabilities, specialized professional development on instruction and special education paperwork, and experienced teachers as mentors beyond the first year. Administrators must provide relevant professional development design to support special education teaching in a collaborative environment to ease the stress

(Hester et al., 2020). Besides providing support to special education teachers, training support to general education teachers provides the inclusion teachers with the knowledge to assist students with disabilities (Gilmour, 2018), leading to better student academic outcomes (Hester et al., 2020; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Podolsky et al., 2019) by reducing teacher burnout (Robinson et al., 2019).

Since most students with disabilities spend a significant part of their day in the general education classroom, preparation and support must be extended to teachers to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting (Gilmour, 2018). Preparation begins with teacher training programs collaborating with schools to empower teachers with the knowledge and ability to instruct students with disabilities (Hagaman & Casey, 2018; Moore et al., 2014). To extend teacher training programs, collaborative cohort support of new teachers and their former professors allows teachers the opportunity to grow in confidence as they gain the experience of putting their knowledge into everyday practice (Gee & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2018). Thus, cooperative partnerships between stakeholders enable teachers to gain confidence in their ability, as there is a positive connection between educator collaboration and student learning (Donohoo et al., 2018).

Teachers' confidence in their ability substantially impacts the education of students with disabilities (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). Teachers' beliefs in their abilities will form quality instructional practices in the classroom (Moore et al., 2014), as it allows teachers to create a supportive bridge to assist students in learning (Altan & Lane, 2018). Research demonstrates that, as teachers gain confidence through experience and collaborate with colleagues, the results lead to significant academic achievement growth for students and a more robust school climate (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Podolsky et al., 2019). Academic outcomes for students with

disabilities in an inclusion classroom are significant when teachers have supportive attitudes, essential training, and sufficient experience (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). Thus, teachers feeling supported increases satisfaction, leading to greater student learning (Robinson et al., 2019). Therefore, the Texas Reading Academies seek to give teachers instructional knowledge through effective training to support their learning to implement reading research into everyday classroom practice.

Summary

Chapter two provides details regarding the Texas Reading Academies and language comprehension components of the science of reading while explaining the underlying theoretical framework. Knowles et al.'s (2020) adult learning theory will give the theoretical framework for this study. Motivated by experiences, adults are self-directed learners who seek to learn to solve problems (Knowles et al., 2020). Ultimately, the Texas Reading Academies were developed to allow teachers to learn the science of reading to improve student reading skills. In order for teachers to improve the reading skills of their students they must be trained on evidence-based reading practices (TEA, 2020b).

The related literature of this chapter explains the underpinnings of the Texas Reading Academies, which include professional development, the science of reading, the simple view of reading, and oral language. In addition, the chapter provides information on instructing students with disabilities. Effective instruction for students starts with teachers bringing "the art of teaching" (Paige et al., 2021, p.S346) to the classroom (Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020), while students bring their language experiences (Phillips Galloway et al., 2020). Thus, perfecting instructional reading practices depends on bringing together "the art of teaching" (Paige et al., 2021, p.S346) and the science of reading. Therefore, there needs to be more research on how the

science of reading and teaching come together in instructional practices (Paige et al., 2021; Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020), including how best to train teachers in this practice (Basma & Savage, 2018). There is little to no qualitative literature on teachers' perceptions of implementing literacy instruction in the classroom (Hudson et al., 2021). In addition, there is minimal research on teachers' experiences with online professional development and how this kind of training builds effective teaching practices (Parsons et al., 2019; Powell & Bodur, 2019) that leads to positive student academic growth (Powell & Bodur, 2019). This study sought to demonstrate how Knowles' adult learning theory relates to the experiences Texas teachers had with learning and incorporating the language comprehension components of the Texas Reading Academies.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS
Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension by teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas. This chapter includes a description of the study details, including the research design and rationale, the research questions, the setting, and the participants. Next, the chapter intertwines the motivation for the study with my interpretive framework and philosophical assumptions. The chapter continues with the parameters for collecting and analyzing data. Last, the chapter closes out by explaining the elements of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and chapter summary.

Research Design

Qualitative research investigates everyday life's meanings by seeking the inquiry's application in a natural relevant setting (Erickson, 2018) that reveals a phenomenon in visible descriptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, investigating teachers' experiences of learning and incorporating reading research using a qualitative method allows educators to bridge the gap in understanding how teachers implement research to practice in the classroom setting (Hudson et al., 2021). For implementing practice in the classroom for students with disabilities, Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) seminal work described the importance of using qualitative research to improve practices for students with disabilities. Qualitative research allows educators to understand the evidence-based practices that do or do not work for students with disabilities (Leko et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2014), leading to an understanding of the specific instructional needs of students with disabilities (Brantlinger et al., 2005), especially in reading instructional practices (Leko et al., 2021). Besides examining classroom practices with qualitative research,

qualitative research can provide educators with knowledge on the relevance of professional development as seen through teachers' experiences (Yee, 2019).

For this qualitative study, a phenomenology research design was chosen to capture the essence (Moustakas, 1994) of teachers' experiences. Phenomenology seeks to understand the experiences and how one creates meaning from experiences, such as applying new knowledge and practice. In examining the essence, phenomenological research is a systematic process that explores the phenom from different viewpoints to seek the noema, the external perception, and the noesis, the internal perception; thus, allowing for the collective description of what teachers experienced in the learning and incorporating the reading research from the Texas Reading Academies.

The origins of phenomenology started with Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher (Patton, 2015). Husserl advocated for research to examine the essence as they are seen, thus the actual experiences of people (Moustakas, 1994). As Husserl believed that research with human subjects could not be separated from their lived experiences, as this allows for the revealing of the essence of the phenom. Expanding on Husserl's idea of understanding the essence of the phenom through descriptions of the experiences (Patton, 2015), Moustakas guided this idea of phenomenology into a social science research framework (Moustakas, 1994).

The phenomenological research type for this study is transcendental. Transcendental phenomenology research requires the researcher to examine everyone's experiences as separate and distinguished experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, the researcher illustrates the experiences of each individual through intentional descriptions (Yee, 2019) by bracketing out their own experiences and interpretation of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). By bracketing their experiences, the researcher allows for the concept of e*poché*. *Epoché* is the cornerstone of

transcendental design, as it allows for seeing the experience of each individual as new without bias. Seeing all experiences as new makes each experience valued, thus allowing for the combination of all experiences into a whole to determine the phenomenon's essence. Therefore, a transcendental design allowed each teacher's experiences with learning and incorporating the reading research to be reported collectively, giving credibility to the research design.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study focused on the experiences teachers who instruct students with disabilities had on learning and incorporating the language comprehension components of the science of reading.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of teachers who instruct students with disabilities with learning and incorporating the language comprehension elements after completing the Texas Reading Academies' training?

Sub-Question One

What are teachers', who instruct students with disabilities, prior experiences and knowledge factors that contributed to learning the elements of the Texas Reading Academies?

Sub-Question Two

What are teachers', who instruct students with disabilities, motivational self-directive learning factors that contributed to learning the elements of the Texas Reading Academies?

Sub-Question Three

What language comprehension elements, as outlined in the Texas Reading Academies, did teachers, who instruct students with disabilities, incorporate into everyday reading instructional practices?

Setting and Participants

A transcendental phenomenology research design strives to examine the questions by collecting data from participants who experience the phenomenon firsthand (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, the rich data can emerge and be studied through the participants' or co-researchers' (Moustakas, 1994) experiences. The site and participants were purposely chosen because the demographics of teachers at the support center are typical of the teacher demographics in Texas.

Site

In Texas, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) divides local school districts across the state into sections. Each section has a central support center that provides professional development, technical assistance, and disseminating guidance from the state agency. An executive director leads these centers, with assistant executive directors managing the significant departments. Then each department is staffed with specialists led by a department director. Thus, the twenty support centers in Texas are the intermediary between TEA and the local school districts.

Therefore, the support centers are providing the House Bill 3 (HB 3) Texas Reading Academies training to local school districts. The purpose of the Texas Reading Academies is to train all kindergarten through third-grade teachers and principals by the end of the 2022-2023 school year in the science of teaching reading (TEA, 2022d). For this research study, the site was one of the support centers in the state, with the implementation under the curriculum department. The curriculum department has six specialists charged with facilitating the Texas Reading Academies, which has two options: comprehensive in-person training and online asynchronous training.

Demographic makeup and student data for this support center are similar to the fifteen

support centers of their size, with the other five support centers primarily serving the large

metropolitan urban areas of Texas. The 2021 Texas Academic Performance Report provides the

demographic and academic data description for this support center (TEA, 2021a). The support

center has 55 non-chartered public school districts with approximately 205,000 students ranging

from districts with a student population of 170 to 65,000, with districts representing rural areas,

suburban areas, and small urban areas. The ethical breakdown of the total student population is

as follows: 45.9% white, 37.6% Hispanic, 10.6% African American, and 5.9% Asian, Pacific

islander, and two or more ethnicities. Approximately 107,000 students are considered

economically disadvantaged, and approximately 21,600 students are served in special education.

There are a total of 13,606 teachers, with an average of 11.2 years of experience. In examining

the elementary reading proficiency for fourth-grade students whose school districts are in this

educational support center area, STAAR reading scores in 2019, 76% were approaching grade-

level standards, and, in 2021, 67% were approaching grade-level standards. Regarding students

being served in special education, in 2019, 42% were approaching grade-level standards, and in

2021, 36% were approaching grade-level standards. The 2020 data was not reported due to

COVID-19 protocols.

Participants

For this research study, a purposeful criterion sample was used to gain a holistic picture

(Moustakas, 1994) of the experiences of teachers who participated in the Texas Reading

Academies. Participants in the study were elementary language arts, reading, or special

education teachers who teach students with a disability in an inclusive general education setting

or in a pull-out setting. The teachers completed the online asynchronous Texas Reading

Academies with the educational support center during the 2021-2022 school year. To gain a

complete perspective of teachers who instruct students with disabilities, the sample of participants varied in school size and experience. The participants would include teachers from rural suburban and small urban schools, including teachers with experiences ranging from novice to seasoned. For the 2021-2022 school year, 784 teachers completed the online asynchronous Texas Reading Academies with the educational support center. Therefore, the participants for this study came from a pool of 784 teachers.

Researcher Positionality

A transcendental phenomenology design allowed me to see the phenomenon with a new lens by describing the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the study allowed me to connect my interest with the Texas Reading Academies by seeing the experiences through the eyes of elementary teachers who instruct students with disabilities. I completed the online asynchronous Texas Reading Academies in the spring of 2022 to grow my own knowledge of the science of reading. My goal of completing the Texas Reading Academies and conducting this research study originates from my interest in the early literacy development and reading acquisition for students with disabilities, especially in oral language comprehension and in educator professional development. Therefore, the study allowed me to further my interest in these areas by studying the experiences of today's elementary reading teachers who instruct students with disabilities. As a special education specialist, I sought to understand the connection between teachers' experiences with professional development and with classroom instructional practices. This section described the study's interpretive framework, philosophical assumptions, and my role as the researcher.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism is the interpretive framework for my study. With the social

constructivism worldview, people shape their views of life from their lived experiences that are combined through social interaction (Holstein, 2018; Patton, 2015). The social interaction of life's day-to-day events leads one to create meaning of their world and put into practice what they believe (Holstein, 2018). Social constructivism takes life beyond specific rote learning and allows experiences to shape one's knowledge, as learning is best achieved when interacting with others (Oldfather et al., 1999a; Patton, 2015). My experience in the social world allows me to construct meaning and create opportunities to learn. Therefore, a social constructivism framework provided me with a guiding point to answer the research questions through the lens of teachers' experiences with the Texas Reading Academies.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions are the beliefs and values as a researcher that I bring to the table; it is how I view the world through my experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Therefore, my assumptions affect my decision on what to study, what questions to ask, and what data to gather. Assumptions provide me with directions on gaining answers to the questions, assumptions are created by training and experiences, and assumptions can be the basis for the evaluation of research (Huff, 2009). Three assumptions for qualitative research are ontology (one's reality), epistemology (one's knowledge), and axiological (one's values) (Lincoln et al., 2018).

Ontological Assumption

The first assumption that guides my study is an ontological assumption. Ontology is the concept of reality as we interact socially through our experiences (Lincoln et al., 2018). One's experiences can shape reality; thus, the same event can be experienced differently by different people, creating different realities. In phenomenological research, participants' different experiences are reported, thus gaining knowledge from various perspectives (Moustakas, 1994).

My ontological assumption is derived from my experiences. Therefore, I see reality through the lens of social experiences that have shaped my life. As an educator, my experiences teaching in diverse communities have shaped my belief that reality comes from the collective nature of a diverse community. This diversity allows each person to bring their experiences to the community, thus creating multiple realities. I believe that educators and students can gain meaning in life by learning from each other's experiences.

As a special education specialist, I believe that all children have meaning in life and can learn through effective instruction. I believe that teachers should be provided with effective training to facilitate the creation of positive educational experiences for all students. However, in reality, teachers may have experienced training differently, thus leading to different instructional outcomes for students.

I believe adult learners build on their experiences as individuals. Then, collectively bring their individual strengths to the group to form multiple realities. Therefore, I understand the reality of adulting learning through a lens of experiences.

Epistemological Assumption

The second assumption that guides this study is an epistemological assumption. Epistemology is concerned with what one knows and how one knows it. To understand epistemological assumption is to understand that I am not separate from what I know to be true and how I know it to be true (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Therefore, my knowledge and interaction are connected to the research (Lincoln et al., 2018). Understanding my knowledge, as I interact with the research participants, will permit the knowledge of the participants to be revealed through their experiences.

As an educator, my knowledge has come from experiences with teaching children and adults by building an authentic and trustworthy environment. I know my education knowledge to

be real by examining the results of my interactions and learning and teaching experiences. Thus, seeing the results of learning realistically.

The knowledge of learning to me is a social process provided through multiple methods, as education should not be limited to one methodology. Thus, studying topics from different perspectives through active engagement allows me to know what I know and how I know it. This active engagement allows me to pursue truthful knowledge. Therefore, I used active engagement to pair my knowledge with the participants' knowledge to reveal their experiences.

Axiological Assumption

The final assumption that guides this study is an axiological assumption. Axiological is concerned with what the researcher values and what role that plays in the research (Lincoln et al., 2018). My role as a researcher is to bring value to the research by listening to my participants and bracketing my beliefs through e*poché* (Moustakas, 1994). This idea will allow me to gain awareness from the participants' perspectives (Lincoln et al., 2018) and understand the values I bring to the research.

As an educator, I value the importance of teachers being provided with effective professional development to build their instructional knowledge and skills, ultimately making a difference in the academic progress of the students they teach, especially in reading. I believe all students should have a solid foundation in literacy skills, especially students with disabilities. Education for students with disabilities should focus on developing their skills through positive evidence-based practices in an interactive environment. Each student is unique and should be given a supportive learning environment through a knowledgeable teacher.

The value of my research is listening to the experience of teachers who instruct students with disabilities who participated in the Texas Reading Academies. The intent of the Texas Reading Academies is to build teacher knowledge, and my study aims to understand teachers'

experiences with building their knowledge. Therefore, I value the importance of professional development to build teachers' knowledge and skills.

Researcher's Role

My calling as an educator came from my love of reading and wanting to share that love with the next generation. The highlight of my years teaching kindergarteners, first-graders, and English Learners was reading aloud to my students and having in-depth conversations. Then, as I moved on from being in the classroom to being an educational diagnostician, I saw how vital early foundational literacy and language comprehension skills were, especially for students with disabilities. Therefore, I have seen firsthand the importance of early oral language skills, as language comprehension is foundational in learning to read and write. My research focuses on the importance of teachers knowing the science of reading, especially in language comprehension. My area of interest comes at a perfect time, as in June of 2019, the 86th Texas Legislature passed HB 3, which included requirements for all kindergarten thru third-grade teachers and principals to attend the Texas Reading Academies by the end of the 2022-2023 school year. The Texas Reading Academies focuses on literacy achievement as outlined in the science of teaching reading (TEA, 2020b).

In this transcendental phenomenological study, my framework and philosophical assumptions guided me in collecting and analyzing the data. In data collection, I was the instrument of collection, thus being the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My interaction with the participants were through individual interviews, examination of journal entries, and focus groups. To ensure limited influences and biases between myself and my participants, I sought to monitor my understanding and experiences through the concept of e*poché*. E*poché* is the idea of setting aside my assumptions by listening to the participants from

an unbiased perspective. Thus, allowing me to see the experiences of each teacher in a new way (Moustakas, 1994).

At the educational support center, I am the evaluation and transition special education specialist. I provide professional development and technical assistance to district special education personnel in two areas: evaluating students for an IDEA disability condition and providing transition services as outlined in IDEA. I do not serve elementary education teachers as other specialists at the support center serve in that role. Therefore, I do not supervise any participants in this research study.

Being familiar with the research site and being a former elementary teacher, I can add value to the research, as I have background knowledge in reading acquisition, elementary education, and professional development implementation that will add to the meaningfulness of the research (Hanson, 1994). This familiarity also allowed me to work with my colleague at the site to gain study participants. Even though I have familiarity with the research site, I put aside any bias during the study.

Procedures

There are steps in the procedure process to ensure the ethical integrity of the research study (Gall et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994). First, formal approval was obtained and then followed by the recruitment of participants. Therefore, this section outlined the process of approval, recruitment, and continues with data collection.

Permissions

Gaining approval is necessary to ensure standards of ethics and the protection of the participants in the research (Moustakas, 1994); therefore, before recruiting participants and collecting data for the study, formal approval was sought. First, the executive administration of

the educational support center granted me formal approval to conduct my study with teachers who have completed the Texas Reading Academies online asynchronous training through the educational support center (see Appendix B). Then, formal approval was secured from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A).

Recruitment

In choosing the participants for this transcendental phenomenological study, I sought to include those who could best answer the research questions. Thus, it was essential to narrow the sample of participants through the process of purposeful sampling to those individuals who understand the central research problem and could best provide a clear perspective on the questions to be answered. In a purposeful sample, a specific criterion is used to ensure study participants have a rich firsthand experience (Patton, 2015).

The specific criterion will allow for transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and thick descriptions of teachers' experiences to emerge in the data collection phase (Moustakas, 1994). The goal of qualitative research is to collect data from participants until a point of saturation of the essence of the experience develops. The idea of saturation is that I will continue to interview participants until there is no longer any new information gained from the interviews (Patton, 2015). In this study, the participants will not be referred to as co-researchers, as stated by Moustakas (1994) but will be referred to as participants.

My study sought to recruit 10-15 participants who instruct students with disabilities in reading from a variety of district sizes and a variety of experience levels. This recruitment allowed for saturation (Patton, 2015) with relevant participants (Moustakas, 1994), to gain a holistic picture of the experience elementary teachers who instruct students with disabilities had with learning and incorporating the language comprehension component of the Texas Reading

Academies.

The recruitment process did not begin until all necessary approvals were obtained. Once approved, I worked with the Texas Reading Academies' lead site facilitator at the educational support center to obtain the list of teachers' names and email addresses who completed the training during the 2021-2022 school year. I then sent out invitation emails (see Appendix C) to all 784 teachers who had completed the training, giving them the opportunity to volunteer by completing a short survey (see Appendix D).

The survey permitted me to gain background knowledge on the participants so that I could have elementary teachers who teach reading with a variety of years of experience, various school sizes, and various experiences with instructing students with disabilities. The survey closed by asking the participants to reflect on the benefits and challenges of the Texas Reading Academies. Thus, I could narrow down the participants that were invited to complete the research study.

After surveys were received, I selected 67 eligible teachers to invite to the study to obtain rich data (see Appendix E). Once invited participants accepted, a Zoom meeting was scheduled to confirm their participation, explain the study procedures, answer questions, and obtain informed consent (see Appendix F). Saturation was achieved with 11 participants signing consent and completing the study.

Data Collection Plan

Qualitative research focuses on rich descriptions that combine multiple data sources to obtain meaning from participants (Miles et al., 2020; Patton, 2015). This transcendental phenomenological research draws from the experiences with the Texas Reading Academies of teachers who instruct students with disabilities by gathering multiple sources of data to

collectively obtain the essence of their experiences (Miles et al., 2020; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Since the Texas Reading Academies are based on the science of reading, the fundamental ideas of the science of reading was used to underpin the development of the data collection plan. The science of reading focuses on critical instructional practices for students to acquire reading comprehension skills (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Lervåg et al., 2018; Parkin, 2018; Seidenberg et al., 2020). This study focused on the critical practice of language comprehension skills (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Tunmer, 2020), as research has shown a positive link between language comprehension and reading comprehension (Lervåg et al., 2018; Parkin, 2018).

The data sources used in this study were individual interviews, journal entries, and focus groups. Taking the participants' point of view from these three data sources allowed for their experiences to be expressed in different ways, thus allowing for data synthesis through triangulation (Flick, 2018; Miles et al., 2020) to achieve the essence of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Therefore, as the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I sequenced my data collection with individual interviews, journal entries, and focus groups. Data collection did not begin until I received formal site approval, IRB approval from the research institution, and informed consent from the research participants.

Individual Interviews

In qualitative research, interviewing allows for interaction between the participants and the researcher, with the purpose of the participants' experiences to be clearly articulated (Brinkmann, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015), thus gaining the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). To ensure the evidence comes forth, questions for the interview were designed in an open-ended or semi-structured format (Brinkmann, 2018;

Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015) as I, the researcher bracketed (Moustakas, 1994) my own experiences. The individual interview questions were structured so that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences, thus obtaining critical data from teachers who instruct students with disabilities. Prior to the IRB approval, interview questions were developed and reviewed by experts in the field.

Once the IRB approval was granted, and informed consent was obtained from the invited participants, I started the data collection through the interview process. The interviews were conducted using a Zoom platform. Each interview was recorded through Zoom to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcription.

Individual Interview Questions

The interview questions (see Appendix G) were guided by Knowles (2020) adult learning theory to gain essence into the teachers' experiences. According to the adult learning theory, adults are self-directed learners who bring internal motivational and prior experience factors into learning. Adults use these factors to be life-centered learners who understand the reason and why behind new learning. Thus, adults are motivated to learn for internal reasons by drawing on their prior experiences (Knowles et al., 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

To gain teachers' experiences, each interview session was divided into four sections: opening, prior experiences, motivational factors, and incorporating practices for students with disabilities. The opening question allowed the participants to share information about their educational training to become a teacher, their philosophy of teaching, and their current job duties. The first three sections of questions focused on the experiences with navigating and learning the material of the Texas Reading Academies. Then, the fourth section gathered information on the incorporation of the language comprehension components of the Texas Reading Academies in their instructional practices for students with disabilities.

Table 1

Open-Ended Interview Questions

Opening: Central Research Question-CRQ

1. Please introduce yourself by telling me your educational background/training, your experiences as a teacher, and your current position.

2. What helped you succeed in learning, completing, and implementing the Texas Reading Academies?

3. Describe the positive and negative aspects of your experience with completing the Texas Reading Academies through the online asynchronous platform.

4. How did the Texas Reading Academies provide a bridge between the science of reading and actual reading instructional practices in your classroom?

Prior experiences and knowledge: Sub-Question One-RQ1

5. Describe your prior experiences and background knowledge that helped you learn the material of the Texas Reading Academies.

6. Please describe the trends you have seen in reading instruction in listening comprehension, and what practices do you feel are most beneficial for students with disabilities?

7. Describe your collaboration with peers before taking the Texas Reading Academies regarding reading instruction, especially in language comprehension.

8. Describe how you viewed language comprehension instruction for students with disabilities before taking the Texas Reading Academies.

Motivational factors: Sub-Question Two-RQ2

9. Think back; what were your thoughts when you were told you had to take the Texas Reading Academies?

10. Describe the required expectations for the training from your school leadership and from yourself.

11. Describe the time commitment of completing the Texas Reading Academies.

12. How did you balance your teaching duties, the Texas Reading Academies, and personal responsibilities?

13. Discuss the interactive activities or assignments that assisted you with learning the material of the Texas Reading Academies.

14. What advice would you give teachers who instruct students with disabilities who are currently going through the program?

Instructional practices for students with disabilities: Sub-Question Three-RQ3

15. Describe how the Texas Reading Academies benefited you as a teacher in language comprehension instruction for students who have disabilities.

16. Using your experiences from the Texas Reading Academies, how would you describe the science of reading and the instructional implementation of language comprehension to a first-year teacher who instructs students with disabilities?

17. Describe your successes and challenges regarding implementing the language comprehension strategies for students with disabilities?

18. How do you monitor progress for students with disabilities to determine the need for language comprehension interventions that will facilitate closing reading skill deficits?

19. Provide at least two examples of new language comprehension instructional practices that you found most beneficial in building the reading skills for your students with disabilities.

20. What have you implemented or changed in your reading instructional practices for students with disabilities after completing the Texas Reading Academies?

Closing:

21. Describe the effectiveness of the Texas Reading Academies' online asynchronous training.

22. In closing, share any additional information about the implication and implementation of the training.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Once the interviews were completed, transcription and member-checking occurred. The interviews were digitally recorded through a Zoom platform, and then, using the recording, the interviews were transcribed to a Word document through the transcription feature on Office 365 Word. After the software transcription, I manually ensured that the transcription was accurate in each Word document. Then, to ensure accuracy, I employed the idea of member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by having the participants check the transcribed interview document (see Appendix J).

The interview data collection employed the ideas of transcendental phenomenology as outlined by Moustakas (1994) and was supplemented by the coding strategies of Saldana (2021). To complete the first step, e*poché*, I set aside my ideas and biases to see the data from a clean slate (Moustakas, 1994) by memoing during the interviews and creating reflexivity journal entries before reading the member-checked transcriptions. The next step was to employ phenomenological reduction, as I bracketed the transcriptions' textural descriptions by identifying the statements' value through horizontalization, allowing the participants' voices to be heard. Thus, all unnecessary or repetitive information was taken out and the statements left were

the horizons or statements related to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation

was the next step, as I clustered relevant ideas together through codes (Saldana, 2021) and then

integrated them to develop the major themes and sub-themes. Thus, this step allowed for

illustrating the participants' experiences through rich textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

This process was captured using an Excel spreadsheet that included the interview data, codes,

and themes.

Journal Prompts

For the next data source for this research study, I used journal prompts. Multiple

distinctly different data sources allowed for a complete description of the phenomenon (Patton,

2015). The journal prompts reflected on teachers' knowledge and instructional practices of the

language comprehension components from the Texas Reading Academies, thus illustrating how

teachers built a literacy-rich classroom community using language comprehension strategies

after completing the Texas Reading Academies. To gain knowledge from the participant's

experience with the Texas Reading Academies, the participants answered four prompts in either

narrative or outline format in no more than a standard page of text. The four prompts covered

identifying language comprehension instructional strategies used in the classroom with students

with a disability and the instructional results (see Appendix H).

Table 2

Journal Prompts

Journal Prompts:

1. Using the information you learned from the Texas Reading Academies, define language
   comprehension and its relevance to student reading development.

2. Using the information you learned from the Texas Reading Academies, how do you develop an overall classroom community that fosters language comprehension, especially for students with disabilities?

3. Describe language comprehension lessons/activities you have implemented with your students with disabilities.

4. Provide feedback on the outcome of the implementation of those lessons/activities for students with disabilities.

Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan

For the journal prompts, I employed the same transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) strategies outlined in the interview data analysis plan. First, I engaged in e*poché* by ensuring I set aside my ideas through reflexivity journaling, thus looking at the prompts from a clear perspective. Then, I confirmed that each journal was in a Word document format as I read each journal prompt. Phenomenological reduction was the next step, as I examined the data through bracketing and horizontalization, developing composite textural descriptions. After phenomenological reduction, I used imaginative variation to see the participants' viewpoints and look for specific codes (Saldana, 2021). Last, I synthesized the codes into themes to develop the phenomenon's essence (Moustakas, 1994). As in the interview data analysis, the Excel spreadsheet was used to capture the journal prompts, codes, and themes.

Focus Groups

Focus groups was the last data collection element for this research study, as the group discussion provided research data to confirm emerging research themes (Patton, 2015), which lead to thick-rich descriptions (Gall et al., 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participation in a focus

group allowed for diverse interaction among the participants (Patton, 2015) in a collaborative group setting, which permitted them to hear others' experiences and follow up with their insights (Kamberelis et al., 2018; Patton, 2015). In addition, the focus groups increased the study's credibility by allowing for an additional method of member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Focus groups are ideal in gaining knowledge from a small group of participants (Patton, 2015). Therefore, I had two focus groups comprised of four participants, with participants from various teaching experiences and school sizes. Questions were open-ended, derived from interview and journal responses, and then reviewed by an expert in the field. Question formatting was similar to the interviews with opening questions, questions about the learning experiences, and questions about language comprehension implication practices for students with disabilities. After scheduling participants, the focus groups occurred via Zoom.

Focus Group Questions

As with the interviews, questions were guided through the lens of adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014) and the science of reading. Adult learners focus on the why, the what, and the how of learning through internal motivation (Knowles et al., 2020). Research has shown a direct link between students' language comprehension ability and their reading comprehension ability (Language and Reading Research Consortium & Chiu, 2018; Stanley et al., 2018; Suggate et al., 2018). Therefore, the theme of the focus group was to gain insight into teachers' why, what, and how of learning and incorporating language comprehension components of the Texas Reading Academies (see Appendix I).

Table 3

Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

Opening: Central Research Question-CRQ

1. Please introduce yourself – name, job title-role, school/school district, and years of experience in the educational field.

2. Finish this sentence – The Texas Reading Academies was...

Prior experiences and knowledge: Sub-Question One-RQ1

3. What are your experiences with teaching reading to students with disabilities?

4. Before taking the Texas Reading Academies, what literacy strategies did you use in building students with disabilities' language comprehension skills?

Motivational factors: Sub-Question Two-RQ2

5. Discuss the support from your teaching peers, school leadership, and the educational support center that facilitated your learning.

6. If you had five minutes to talk to the Texas Reading Academies developers, what insight for improving the learning experience would you suggest to them?

Instructional practices for students with disabilities: Sub-Question Three-RQ3

7. What instructional literacy strategies that build language comprehension were most insightful to you, and how did you implement them?

8. For students with disabilities who have a deficit in reading comprehension, describe the research behind language comprehension strategies that would help facilitate their reading comprehension skills.

9. Discuss strategies teachers and schools can implement to build rich literacy communities for students with disabilities that focus on language comprehension.

Closing:

10. In closing, describe the effectiveness of the Texas Reading Academies' online asynchronous training and any additional insight about the training.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

To facilitate the focus group data analysis, I employed the same transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) strategies I used for the interview data analysis plan. After transcribing the focus sessions into a Word document using the Zoom audio recording and the transcription feature of Office 365, I conducted member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) (see Appendix K). Once the transcription and member-checking were complete, I moved through the data analysis process. First, by ensuring my ideas were set aside through e*poché* (Moustakas, 1994), I applied memoing during the focus groups and created reflexivity journal entries before reading the member-checked transcriptions. Next, phenomenological reduction occurred through bracketing and horizontalization of the data to develop composite textural descriptions. Once textual descriptions were established, I clustered them through imaginative variation by identifying codes (Saldana, 2021) and linking them to specific themes and sub-themes. Thus, the themes identified the phenomenon's essence (Moustakas, 1994). As in the interview and journal prompt data analysis, the Excel spreadsheet was used to capture the data, codes, and themes.

Data Synthesis

In qualitative phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994), the phenomenon's essence is concluded by combining the data. To allow the essence to emerge to its fullest, it is important to have multiple data sources (Patton, 2015). There needs to be a minimum of two sources (Flick, 2018). However, at least three is the ideal model (Miles et al., 2020), as three data sources can be combined through the process of triangulation to support and confirm the significant themes of the research (Flick, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2020; Patton, 2015).

Triangulation allows for the collection of information to ensure the data themes are cross-checked to allow the phenomena of the qualitative study to emerge (Patton, 2015).

In using triangulation to analyze all three data sources together, I used the same transcendental phenomenological (Moustakas, 1994) process as I did with the individual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. As I combined all three data sources in the Excel spreadsheet, I employed peer-debriefing to look over the data analysis, as it allowed me to see the study in a new light through the insight of a knowledgeable peer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing gave me insight to set aside my bias, thus achieving the first step in the process, e*poché*. Next, combining all data sources through triangulation, I conducted phenomenological reduction and allowed for the essence of the participants' experiences through horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). After phenomenological reduction, the codes (Saldana, 2021) and themes of the data sources were combined through imaginative variation. Lastly, all themes and sub-themes were analyzed through the synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions, thus allowing for the combining of the themes through triangulation of the data to answer the research questions (Moustakas, 1994). The last step allowed for the identification of the phenomenon as it describes the essence of teachers' lived experiences with completing and incorporating the language comprehension components of the Texas Reading Academies.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is the convergence of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness gives qualitative research its validity and reliability, therefore, providing the accuracy and consistency that makes the study relevant to the reader. To build trustworthiness in the study, rigor becomes entwined so that the reader clearly understands the research goal (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2018). Thus, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability will be outlined, along with the ethical considerations.

Credibility

The credibility of research provides the reader with the accuracy or truth of the study (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several methods bring credibility to the research study to allow the researcher to describe the data accurately (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation were the methods I used to bring credibility to my study.

Member checking allows for the confirmation of informational data shared by the participants in the interviews and focus groups, thus allowing for any errors to be corrected and for the intent of the participants' voices to come through in the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, I had participants check the transcription of the interviews and focus groups for accuracy before analyzing any data to ensure the study's credibility (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994).

Peer debriefing is another method I employed to achieve credibility, as it allowed a knowledgeable colleague to provide insight into the study by reviewing the data and analyses of data (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I worked with a colleague whose interest in the study was neutral but had insight into the Texas Reading Academies to gain credible feedback on my research data and data analysis. This review provided me with a critical assessment, thus giving me vital feedback on the research process.

The last method of credibility I incorporated into my study was triangulation. Triangulation allows multiple data sources to be synthesized to identify the common themes in the data leading to accurate conclusions of one's research (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Lincoln &

Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2020; Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2021). Therefore, synthesizing the interviews, journal prompts, and focus group data to explore and identify common themes of the research (Miles et al., 2020; Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2021) allowed for credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research allows for the relevance and generalization of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For transferability to be achieved, the research needs to be applied to other contexts through generalization. I achieved this generalization through descriptions of the multiple data sources found in the research. Using multiple data sources of inquiry allowed me to report the experiences of the study participants with deep descriptions. This deep rich description permitted the research study to hold the reader's interest, thus making connections to another context (Gall et al., 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), allowing for transferability in reading professional development, especially in language comprehension. Even though I am creating the condition for generalization, I cannot presume transferability by the reader.

Dependability

The idea of dependability is that the study was designed to be repeated with similar results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure dependability, I employed a research log and an audit trail, allowing for the documentation of my research process through a chain of evidence. During my study, I kept a weekly research log of the specific activities and outcomes of the research study. To confirm the data collection, analysis, and reporting details, an audit trail was used. The research process was retraceable, bridging the research questions to the research findings by keeping detailed records of the research process, data, and findings, which included the research

log, member checking, and a detailed description of the themes that emerged from the study. The research log and audit trail provided a chain of evidence to ensure an external review could identify the details and process of my study, thus ensuring dependability.

Confirmability

The purpose of confirmability in qualitative research is to reduce the research bias by remaining neutral during the study, as the findings should come from the research data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transcendental phenomenology seeks to view the experience with newness by researchers setting aside their beliefs to achieve e*poché* (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, I used memoing, reflexivity journaling, and an external auditor to reduce my bias and options to ensure confirmability. During the interviews and focus groups, I employed memoing by recording my thoughts (Miles et al., 2020); therefore, separating any bias from the data (Charmaz et al., 2018). Then, after each data collection session, I recorded my insights and personal reflection in a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, reflexive journaling permitted me to reflect on my insights into the study, which provided awareness of myself as a researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Besides memoing and reflexivity journaling, the audit trail evidence reviewed by an expert in qualitative research provided an additional approach of confirmability of my study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were an integral part of my study. It creates rigor for the study by bringing together my ability as a researcher to be accountable to the participants and the data I gather (Davies & Dodd, 2002). Ethical consideration for this study was adopted in three fundamental areas: all needed approvals, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring confidentiality. Formal approval from the research site was granted before my proposal defense. Once I completed the defense, formal approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review

Board (IRB) was obtained. Once the IRB approval was granted, recruitment and obtaining informed consent from participants began. Participants were given clear understanding of all aspects of the study, including risks and benefits, as well as their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time (Miles et al., 2020; Moustakas, 1994). This solid consent process allowed for the gathering of quality data (Miles et al., 2020).

Confidentiality of the participants and data gathered was also of utmost importance. As the researcher, I wanted to take all the necessary steps to ensure the privacy of my participants and the privacy of my research data (Miles et al., 2020). The site and participants' names are pseudonyms. Then, all electronic data was on a face-recognized password-protected computer, and the hard copy data kept in a locked cabinet at my home. After three years, all electronic data will be deleted, and all hard copy data will be shredded.

Summary

This methods section provides an overview of this transcendental phenomenological research study. This study examines the experiences that elementary education teachers who instruct students with disabilities had after completing the Texas Reading Academies. The setting and participants for this study were from one of the educational support centers in Texas. This chapter discussed my role and interest as a researcher, then moved on to discuss the procedures and research plan, including individual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. The data analysis and trustworthiness of the study were also discussed, with ethical considerations being addressed at the end.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension by teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas. Using a qualitative method permitted a deep understanding of evidence-based practices that can benefit students with disabilities (Leko et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2014). A transcendental phenomenological design allowed the essence (Moustakas, 1994) of the teachers' experiences with learning and incorporating the elements from the Texas Reading Academies to be obtained. Knowles' adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 2020) was the theoretical framework applied to answer the central research question and sub-questions.

Thus, chapter four's purpose is to provide a description of the participants and an in-depth explanation of the research data and significant findings. Using a purposeful criterion sample, research participants were recruited from a pool of teachers who completed the Texas Reading Academies online asynchronous training during the 2021-2022 school year. Research data for the study was collected through individual interviews, journal prompts, and focus group interviews. All three data sets were analyzed through triangulation to allow for rich, thick descriptions and themes (Moustakas, 1994) to emerge, thus answering the research questions. Therefore, chapter four will include participant description, data themes, outlier data, as well as the responses that answer the research questions.

Participants

For the research study, 11 certified special education or general education elementary teachers who instruct students with disabilities participated. Participants were recruited using a

purposeful sampling process from a pool of 784 teachers who completed the online asynchronous training through an educational support center in Texas. Of the 784 teachers, 67 were invited to the study, and saturation was achieved with 11 participants completing the study. To ensure that the participants' confidentiality was not compromised, pseudonyms were given to each participant.

The participants (see Table 4 and Appendix L) in the study varied in years of experience, teaching role, and school size, with all teachers instructing students with disabilities in reading. The teaching experience ranged from five to 33 years, with the average being 16 years. Regarding teaching roles, there were three classroom teachers, four special education teachers, and four reading specialists. The 11 participants came from various district sizes, with three from small urban districts, three from rural districts, and five from suburban districts. Regarding reading instruction for students with disabilities, the number ranged from two to 19 students; classroom teachers have a range of two to six students; special education teachers have a range of 10 to 19 students; and reading specialist teachers have a range of two to 17. The participants had various backgrounds; however, all participants shared their love for teaching reading and the importance of providing elementary students with a solid literacy foundation.

Table 4

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Teaching Position	Grade Level	Number of Students With Disabilities
Cynthia	16	Masters	Reading Interventionist (Small Urban)	K-4	12
Becky	33	Bachelors	Special Education Resource and Inclusion (Rural)	Pre-K-5	19
Judy	25	Masters	Special Education Self-Contained (Suburban)	K-3; 5	14
Julia	7	Bachelors	Emergent Bilingual Special Education and Dyslexia (Suburban)	Pre-K-4	10
Lisa	16	Bachelors	Dyslexia Specialist (Suburban)	K-5	17
Megan	8	Masters	Reading Instructional Coach (Rural)	Pre-K-4	2
Nancy	25	Bachelors	Second Grade Classroom Teacher (Small Urban)	2	5
Rachel	16	Masters	Reading Interventionist (Suburban)	K-4	5
Sarah	5	Bachelors	Second Grade Classroom Teacher (Suburban)	2	6
Susan	18	Masters	Special Education Reading Resource (Rural)	Pre-K-5	12
Tiffany	14	Masters	Second and Third Grade Classroom Teacher (Small Urban)	2-3	2

Cynthia

Cynthia is a reading interventionist serving kindergarten to fourth-grade students in a small urban school district. She instructs both general and special education students who need specialized reading intervention. At the time of this study, she had 12 students with disabilities for whom she provided services. Cynthia has a master's in curriculum and instruction and has a variety of experiences instructing students in first thru fifth grade over her 16 years of teaching. In addition, being a military wife, she is certified in nine states and has obtained a vast amont of training. Due to her experience and background in English language arts and reading, her principal invited her to serve as the reading interventionist to build the reading skills of the school's struggling students. Cynthia's heart lies with special education, as she has a child with significant special needs.

Becky

Becky is an experienced special education teacher with 33 years of teaching experience in public and private schools. Her bachelor's degree is in early childhood general education and in special education at all levels. She has taught Early Childhood Special Education to fifth grade, as well as, served as an adaptive PE and Special Olympics coach. At the time of this study, she served 19 students as a resource inclusion special education teacher for grades prekindergarten thru fifth grade, teaching language arts, social studies, science, and math in a rural district. Becky reported she is "blessed to work with a great group of people, with her paraprofessional telling her nobody loves the kids like you do."

Judy

Judy has a diverse background of teaching experience, as she has 25 years of teaching experience that includes teaching self-contained special education, inclusion special education, resource special education, and Early Childhood Special Education. In addition, she has taught

kindergarten and fifth grade and served as a developmental specialist for birth to five-year old's

on a Native American Indian Reservation. Her 25 years of teaching have mostly been at a title

one school or an economically disadvantaged setting. Currently, she is a suburban special

education self-contained teacher for 14 students with low incident disabilities; thus, she teaches

all subject areas. She has two master's degrees, one in early childhood special education and the

other in literacy.

Julia

Julia has a unique skill set as she is a certified bilingual teacher; along with having a

special education teacher's certification. Therefore, she teaches students with disabilities who are

emergent bilingual or English learners who need specialized instruction in reading. At the time

of this study, she served 10 students from prekindergarten through fourth grade, who were

English learners with a disability, as a special education and dyslexia teacher in a suburban

school district. Her teaching experiences have also included being a general education bilingual

classroom teacher, with the study year being her seventh-year of teaching. In looking at her

teaching experiences, she connects to her students, as she was once a bilingual student in the

public school system.

Lisa

Lisa started her career in education as a paraprofessional; however, she enjoyed the

teaching aspect and decided to complete her bachelor's degree to become a certified teacher. She

started teaching 16 years ago as a special education teacher. When she began teaching, Lisa "was

shocked at how hard and difficult it was to teach students to read." Thus, she started focusing on

reading instruction, with assistance from the campus dyslexia specialist. Her passion for teaching

students how to read allowed her to make the switch to being a campus dyslexia specialist

herself, after 10 years in the classroom. Therefore, she is a dyslexia specialist in a suburban district serving kindergarten to fifth graders who need specialized instruction in reading. She has 17 students with disabilities that she instructs.

Megan

Megan is an educator with a bachelor's degree and then a master's degree in administration, who is from a rural area, thus bringing various experiences to the study. She had eight years of experience at the time of this study, being a reading instructional coach for prekindergarten to fourth-grade teachers. Being a reading instructional coach allows her to instruct and coach in the science of reading to all teachers at her campus with the goal of training teachers to close the reading gap for struggling students. However, she directly served two students with disabilities. Before becoming a reading instructional coach, Megan had experience teaching kindergarten, teaching third-grade math, and serving as an administrator. However, the preceding year while completing the Texas Reading Academies, she realized her love for reading and "learning the why behind the science of reading." Thus, allowing her to make the transition to a reading instructional coach.

Nancy

Nancy has 25 years of experience as a classroom teacher in various elementary grade levels; however, second grade is her passion and what she "absolutely adores." Therefore, she was a second-grade English language arts teacher in a small urban district, with five students with disabilities in her classroom during this study. Her educational career began as a physical education teacher, as her bachelor's degree was in recreational administration. However, because of her love of teaching, she completed the coursework to become a certified teacher. In addition, throughout her years of experience, she has worked closely with bilingual and special education

resource teachers and received training in the areas of gifted and talented and English as a Second Language, thus allowing her to meet the diverse needs of her students.

Rachel

Rachel had worked in education for 16 years with a variety of experiences, when she chose to be a part of this study. She has taught third to fifth grade, middle school language arts, and served as an interventionist for grades one to 12 at a private school in the areas of reading, English as a Second Language, and math. At the time of this study, she was in her second year as a reading interventionist for a suburban school district serving kindergarten to fourth grade, with five of her students being students with a disability. To add to her general education certification, she is also certified in special education and certified as a reading specialist. In addition, she completed her master's degree in advanced literacy in April of 2021. Therefore, the Texas Reading Academies training was "a great compliment" to her master's degree.

Sarah

Sarah's path to teaching began in children's ministry, as she was a children's pastor for her church for ten years before moving to Texas. Once moving to Texas, she earned her Texas teaching certification since she already had a bachelor's degree. Because her bachelor's degree was not in education, but in psychology, Sarah felt the training from the Texas Reading Academies provided reinforcement that she was on the right track with her classroom instruction in reading. She had five years of experience teaching general education second graders in a suburban school district in reading, writing, and social studies at the time of this study. In her classroom, she had six students with disabilities.

Susan

Susan is a special education reading resource teacher in a rural area with 18 years of experience. She serves on a campus that includes prekindergarten to fifth grade and provides special education services to 12 students. Her assignment includes teaching the entire reading block for her resource students and then push in support for her inclusion students. In addition, she has prior experience teaching special education self-contained and teaching general education in a private school setting. To further her education, she earned a master's degree in reading curriculum and instruction, which complemented her bachelor's degree specialization in reading. Therefore, the Texas Reading Academies allowed her to be reminded of good reading practices.

Tiffany

Tiffany had 14 years of teaching experience at the time of this study, and, she was a second and third-grade classroom reading and language arts teacher in a small urban school. She has two students with disabilities that are in her classroom. Since her school is small, she can collaborate with her teammate to ensure the students with disabilities receive effective reading instruction. Her past experience has included teaching in various grade levels from kindergarten to fifth grade and in special education. To further her education beyond her bachelor's degree in elementary education, she has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. The Texas Reading Academies provided her with an understanding of the "why behind the foundation of reading."

<div align="center">

Results

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To achieve the thematic results for this study, data was collected from individual interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups. The data collection method allowed for the description of the experiences with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading

Academies, with a focus on language comprehension by teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas. The individual interviews and focus groups were conducted through a Zoom platform, and participants submitted the journal prompts once the individual interviews were conducted. To ensure accurate data, the interviews and focus groups were digitally transcribed into a Word document using the Zoom audio recording and Office 365 transcription, and then member-checking was conducted. All digital data was stored on a face-recognized password-protected computer, and all hard copies were stored in a locked cabinet.

Data analysis was conducted by inputting all information into an Excel spreadsheet, thus allowing for the triangulation of the research data to identify themes that ultimately answer the research questions. For the thematic analyzation, Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological method was primarily used; however, the idea of coding (Saldana, 2021) was used to supplement the data analysis. The results of the data analysis process of the teachers' experiences resulted in four major themes, 11 sub-themes, and one outlier, with the results summarized below (see Table 5 and Appendices M and N).

Table 5

Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Focus on Learning		
	Background	interest, experiences
	Dedication	conscientious, grit-determination, time management
	Adaptability	flexibility, new knowledge
Factors that Impacted Learning		

	Positive	teammates, timeline, appreciated, expectations, interactive
	Negative	overwhelming, ineffective, lack of value, timeline
Implementation of Reading Instruction		
	Unstructured	lack of structure
	Structured	science of reading (SOR)-systematic, SOR-practice, SOR-simple view of reading
	Language Activities	reading methods, vocabulary/background, conversation, visualization
Maximizing Strengths for Students with Disabilities		
	Building Instruction	practice, repetition, technology, visual supports, materials, safe
	Instructional Practices	background, verbal, strategies, small group, segment
	Monitoring	assessing learning, challenges of assessing

Teachers' Focus on Learning

In this study, teachers identified three factors that contributed to their successful completion of the Texas Reading Academies: background knowledge, dedication, and ability to adapt. Teachers elaborated about their experiences and interests that allow them to connect to new learning. Matching their experience with their attitude of hard work and flexibility allowed the teachers to gain new knowledge in instructional practices of reading, which was articulated by the teachers.

Teachers' Background Knowledge

All participants described how their interests and experiences contributed to having the background knowledge that allowed for the training to be completed successfully. The participants desired to continue being lifelong learners, as several noted their excitement when they heard that they would be taking the Texas Reading Academies training. Cynthia said, "It was what I was doing all day, every day, and so I was extremely interest in it." When teaching kindergarten, Megan had experience in teaching young children how to read; however, she had moved up to third-grade math during the year she took the training. While taking the training, she realized that she had a passion for teaching students how to read in the early grade levels and wanted to focus her career on teaching kindergarten through second-grade students how to read.

Teachers reported that having the foundation and experience of teaching students to read gave them the needed background knowledge to thrive during the training. Tiffany expressed that her 14 years of teaching allowed a great deal of training to be a refresher of what she already knew. Then, Becky shared that her experience teaching struggling students and English learners to read allowed her to connect her teaching experiences to the training. Several participants stated that the course was a validation, a "refresher," and an "affirmation" of good reading instruction that they had built into their everyday practice. Sarah shared that it was "reinforcing that we were doing things correctly."

In addition, to years of teaching experiences, the teachers reported other educational experiences and training that facilitated their gaining knowledge from the Texas Reading Academies. Six participants had earned master's degrees in curriculum and instruction, advanced literacy, or reading. Megan had a master's in administration. Even though Lisa did not have a master's degree, she had received in-depth dyslexia reading training. Cynthia and Lisa discussed that they could draw on their knowledge from their extensive Orton Gillingham training, as well

as numerous other reading professional development that they had participated in during their teaching tenure. Susan confirmed that the Texas Reading Academies allowed her to remember and reintroduce reading practices that she had learned during her master's degree that she had forgotten. Rachel expressed that the Texas Reading Academies "was a great compliment having just finished my master's in advanced literacy" and "they really went hand in hand, and it was amazing." In addition, Julia shared that not only did her past training and teaching experiences assist her, but her experience of growing "up as a bilingual student" allowed her to make connections during the training.

Teachers' Dedication

Participants noted that a sense of dedication was also a factor in completing the Texas Reading Academies. The training was divided into 12 modules with two artifacts to complete, having an estimated completion of 60 hours over ten months. However, ten out of the 11 participants stated that the time to complete the training was two to three times longer, resulting in the participants spending anywhere from 120 to 180 hours to complete all 12 modules and the two artifacts. Judy's words were, "they said 60 hours. It took me closer to 180 hours. They need to be honest, it's not a 60-hour program. It is a 120 to 180 program. For sure, it definitely takes two to three times longer."

Therefore, considering the length of the training, teachers articulated that their level of grit and determination increased. Nancy shared that it was like having two jobs, and she did not get much sleep. Becky expressed that, at first she wanted to make an A on all the quizzes, as she had high expectations for herself; however, by the end, she was fine with making a B due to the confusing nature of the quizzes, as "they would rename concepts." Several participants stated that, at times, they were clicking on things repeatedly to the point that they just wanted to click and get that part completed. It was expressed that it would have been better to have a few clicks

with all the information on one page instead of clicking so many times to get the information, as it was tedious. Besides completing the tedious training, teachers reported they had to continue their teaching responsibilities; therefore, they were glad it was asynchronous and could be completed at various hours, as this was a huge benefit. However, participants shared that this benefit also made for working late evenings, early mornings, and weekends on their own time.

Having to employ time management skills was mentioned by the teachers. Several participants were thankful that their children were grown, making it easier to manage working late evenings and on weekends. However, Sarah expressed that "she would get up at 3:00 or 4:00 am to work on it" to find a balance between meeting the training deadlines and taking care of her family, as she had four young children. Some districts did give the teachers time to complete the training during professional development days. Nevertheless, even with those days, participants still had to work evenings, weekends, and even during holiday breaks. Two participants got COVID and were able to work on the training as they were sitting at home and could not be at school. Even though having COVID was a negative, they stated they were thankful for the time they had, as it allowed them to get ahead. Cynthia, Julia, and Megan shared that they would devote a regularly scheduled time each day or each week to get it done, as chunking the training up helped them succeed. Since Rachel had just completed her master's degree, she mentioned she continued as if taking a graduate college course.

Teachers voiced their dedication. Several shared that their expectations for themselves were to get a 100 on the quizzes, and if they did not make a 100, they would continually retake the quizzes until they made the 100, as retaking the quizzes allowed them to learn and see areas of improvement. Nancy shared that she realized how much she was learning that would benefit her students. Rachel, Megan, and Judy also agreed, as they found great resources. However, Judy

stated that many teachers had the attitude of clicking through it to get it done and never saw the benefit of the training. As Rachel mentioned, the training information for those who took the time to study the material would have found great resources to support struggling readers, especially those with disabilities.

Adaptability of Teachers

Being flexible and being able to adapt was expressed by the participants. With the course being asynchronous, teachers shared they had to be flexible as they did not have an instructor right there with them as they would with an in-person training. Therefore, when the participants had a question, they had two options. First, they could hold on to their question until they met in person or by Zoom with their Texas Reading Academies facilitator/coach, or they could email them and then wait for a response. Therefore, as Judy expressed, it was a downside that you did not have your facilitator right there with you like in a regular class. In addition, as Susan stated, you could not ask clarifying questions immediately. Tiffany expressed "that not only could you not ask questions, but you also missed out on being with people and learning with peers." Then Becky shared she had to be flexible about technology because if they had a technology issue, they also had to wait until their facilitator could assist them, as there was no technology support for the course. In addition, it was mentioned by Judy they had to print out their own participant notetaking guides and any resource materials from the training. Lisa stated that these materials were helpful during the training and in the future.

The teachers also reported positive elements. Since the course was online, they expressed they could reread and complete a little at a time. Nancy stated that if you were at a training in person, you may miss something and only get a piece of it. However, with the Texas Reading Academies, she stated she could reread to ensure she had the whole concept. Then Judy

expressed that having the training as an online course allowed participants to break the learning into smaller chunks, as completing one module in a day would be challenging.

Participants articulated that the trainings' flexible nature allowed them to gain new knowledge. As Rachel expressed, having the information downloaded has allowed her to create presentations that have foundational skills for teaching reading that she has been able to share with other teachers. Cynthia shared that the Texas Reading Academies have enabled her to continue learning by allowing her to keep "adding things" to her reading instruction. Nancy also agreed that she had gained new knowledge, adding "some tools" to her reading curriculum. Therefore, she stated, "It gave me a blueprint and a plan to navigate" instruction for her students. Even though the training had given teachers new knowledge, Cynthia was concerned that not all teachers were on board, and some were just going through the motion and "did not see the importance of it."

Factors that Impacted Teachers' Learning

Several areas that made an impact on their learning was mentioned by the teachers. These areas can be examined through a lens of positive and negative aspects. Participants discussed that the support and the lack of support played a role in their ability to complete the training.

Positive Aspects

A major contributor to completing the Texas Reading Academies, as voiced by the teachers, was the developed connections and interaction between coworkers. Becky shared that it was her teammates that got her through the training "because it was a lot to ingest. I don't know how anybody could make it without having a team. Without my teammates, I could not have accomplished this." Lisa agreed that her teammates' encouragement and collaboration were a huge boost because of the number of hours required to complete the training. Nancy affirmed the importance of support from teammates, as she explained that the training allowed for a bond to

form with her team as they supported each other through sharing ideas and commiserating at times. However, she felt concerned about a new colleague with no one to collaborate with because the colleague must take it alone the year of the study.

Teachers reported that some kind of collaboration was always a part of their team dynamics; however, since the training, collaboration had become stronger. Several participants noted that, since the training, collaboration has increased, as during the training, they always seemed to find ways to get together and share ideas. Julia stated that the Texas Reading Academies had assisted with implementing interventions, as their teams can now understand interventions "a little bit faster and easier." Sarah also agreed that the training assisted with team collaboration and incorporating the new knowledge learned from the Texas Reading Academies into everyday practices.

Besides collaboration with teammates, teachers mentioned that their district's expectations contributed to the training's completion. Participants articulated that the pacing calendar required by their school district led to specific timelines to finish each module. As Becky shared, if someone fell behind on the pacing calendar, they received an email reminder from their administrator, and "no one wanted their name on the naughty list." Megan, Rachel, Susan, and Tiffany said their district expected them to meet each checkpoint deadline, and reminders were sent out. However, other participants stated that their district did more than send reminders, their districts gave professional development days to complete the training, and three districts gave stipends. Cynthia stated that the district days allowed her to only have "two to three hours on her own instead of the whole 12 hours needed to complete a module." Judy, Lisa, and Sarah stated that their district also gave some time to teachers to complete the training. Nancy's district provided time, and she stated, "Our district was really nice; I liked that we got more time

than most of my friends and other districts across Texas." In addition, Julia, Sarah, Nancy, and Cynthia shared that they had coaches/facilitators that would come into the school occasionally to provide support and answer questions. Cynthia shared that she "felt like they (district) were valuing my time."

To assist with staying on the timeline, participants shared that the interactive nature of the training allowed them to engage with the result of successful completion. Megan stated, "I liked the hands-on interactive pieces of it." There were drag and drop, knowledge quick check questions, participant guides, videos, and discussion posts. As Lisa shared, "It wasn't boring."

One beneficial element that stood out among all 11 participants was the interactive nature of the videos, as the videos provided models of actual classroom instruction. Nancy said, "It was legitimate people who had been in the classroom." Then Tiffany shared, "Being able to see the examples of the teachers in the classroom" was helpful because "it made me think about students in my class or how would this work in my class." Seven participants agreed that demonstration videos that gave "real life scenarios" were excellent; therefore, they stated it would have been nice to have more classroom instruction videos.

Besides the videos, there were additional aspects that assisted the participants. "The assessments actually helped me because you could go back and see the correct answers. That's how I learn a lot of times is from the mistakes that I made" was shared by Sarah. Then Megan expressed that having assistance from the facilitator regarding feedback on the assigned artifact was very valuable. Judy explained that the great downloadable resources allowed her to "actually implement what she had learned" from the training.

Flexibility in the timeline to complete the training was a positive element reported. Allowing them to pace and work on the asynchronous training on their schedule was shared by

five participants, as they could work on the training around their work and home responsibilities. Rachel stated, "I much prefer it (asynchronous training) that way because it is on my schedule." Susan expressed not having to miss a day of work to attend an in-person training as an additional benefit to the asynchronous model.

Negative Aspects

Besides sharing the positive aspects of the Texas Reading Academies, all eleven participants shared the negative elements that impacted their learning. These sentiments: "information overload, time constraints, it was long, like taking a college course, a lot of work, big undertaking, I didn't realize how much time it would take, time-consuming, tough, overwhelming, challenging, and long." Julia expressed that, "It was just thrown at me two weeks before school started," and it was "awful trying to handle school lesson planning and then home life." Others shared that it had a negative impact on their home life. Those with older children shared that they were glad they did not have very young children at home and wondered how the teachers who did have young children managed. Due to the lengthy nature of the training, Brenda suggested it would have been much easier if the training had been broken up into smaller chunks to facilitate learning.

Teachers expressed that the overwhelming nature of the training led to ineffective learning at times. As Becky communicated, there was substantial material to digest, and she would have to reread various sections to gain meaning. To combat the issue, Megan expressed that it would have been nice to have a reading checklist for teachers to assist them with instruction. In addition, the course was only available to the teachers last year while taking the training; however, participants articulated they would have liked to have access this year to ensure effective implementation of what they learned.

Besides having access for a longer time, participants shared other ideas to reduce the negative aspects. Several participants suggested that the training be broken up into more manageable modules. As Becky shared, the training could take upwards of "three to four times to really be able to take in all of the knowledge" that was presented. Therefore, all participants expressed that the training needed to start in the summer and not at the beginning of the school year, giving teachers the opportunity to "front load as much as possible and get ahead," as expressed by Megan and summed up the sentiments of all 11 participants.

In addition to wishing the start date was sooner, four participants voiced their frustration with their districts' policy concerning the training that impacted the learning. Two participants voiced that their school district "promised them they could have the whole in-service days" to work on the Texas Reading Academies; however, "they would change their mind and have other expectations for the day." Therefore, "I don't feel like my district supported me like they should have and like they told us they would." Tiffany was concerned that their district pushed them to finish the Texas Reading Academies last year, and nothing has been said this year. They are not asking, "how are you implementing it in the class now?" Rachel had the same sentiment, as she felt her "district dropped the ball because it was such rich good material and so coming out on the other side of it, we should have grasped more to implement within the district."

Implementation of Reading Instruction

The purpose of the Texas Reading Academies was to train teachers in the science of reading to improve reading instruction in Texas. Thus, the teachers shared details concerning the reading instruction they learned from the training. These elements involved structured and unstructured components of reading and language.

Unstructured Aspects of Reading Instruction

Participants communicated the changes they had seen in reading instruction over the years and feel that the science of reading is moving in the right direction in providing students with effective reading instruction. Lisa shared why it was so important for educators to have an in-depth knowledge of the science of reading because when students cannot read, they will stay at the bottom level, affecting their whole life. When she started teaching reading, she stated, "I was so shocked at how hard and how difficult it was to teach them to read." Then she was told to "just pick a little bit from here and a little bit from there and put it together." Cynthia shared she also ran into the same ideology when she started teaching, as whole language was in at the time. She stated, "I always felt like this is so loosey-goosey; there needs to be more structure."

Structured Aspects of Reading Instruction

As participants shared, the science of reading allows structure and fidelity to be part of everyday reading instructional practices. Nancy articulated that the Texas Reading Academies assisted her district in the push to adopt a very structured, step-by-step reading program. The background of reading is like a puzzle, as students must be able to see how all the pieces fit together, was stated by Susan. Before taking the Texas Reading Academies, Rachel felt that teachers were lacking in the understanding of what students needed in order to learn to read. She mentioned, being provided the knowledge to teach reading is important because teachers are not taught in-depth the methods of reading instruction in their bachelor programs. The training not only provided knowledge of reading instructional practices, but Tiffany expressed that she now understands the big picture and the why behind the science of reading.

Besides understanding the why behind the science of reading, teachers reported that there must be opportunities to practice the strategies. As Nancy shared, "I don't care if you took a class in college, you're not going to get as much out of it if you're not using it in practice." Therefore,

for Rachel, the Texas Reading Academies allowed her to apply what she was learning in her classroom. For instance, seeing the modeling of the alphabet arc lessons allowed her to implement new instruction into her reading intervention using the alphabet arc. Tiffany shared she also employed interventions learned from the training in her classroom, as the training provided her with a framework to understand the why behind students' reading difficulties.

Thus, the simple view of reading framework was articulated by the teachers. As Cynthia shared, language comprehension plus decoding equals reading comprehension. She continued, "If a student lacks language comprehension/vocabulary development, the student will not have the depth of reading comprehension as a student with a rich language development and the same decoding skill." Rachel also expressed the importance of language comprehension being highly relevant to student reading development. The participants communicated that language comprehension provides students with the basis for comprehension, which aids in processing information and building background knowledge. Rachel expressed that English learners struggle with this development; therefore, it is vital to provide oral language interventions.

Language Activities of Reading Instruction

The participants articulated their view of language comprehension. Judy shared that when she first started teaching, there were two camps regarding reading instruction, whole language, and phonics; "neither two shall meet, and you didn't mix the two." It did not make sense because "you really have to have both" or "you're going to have gaps in their learning, and that's not fair to those kids." The idea of building language was echoed by other teachers. Cynthia reported that her students did not "have a wide variety of background experiences." Therefore, building background knowledge by reading nonfiction and having students make connections through discussions about their own life were all part of her reading interventions. Megan shared that kindergarteners were now listening to books "about realistic people or concepts," and Nancy

echoed that, as she strives to find material that students "can sink their teeth in and answer inferencing questions," that allows for the building of background knowledge. Six participants articulated the importance of building students' vocabulary and background knowledge by providing them with explicit vocabulary lessons, especially before reading a new text, as this allows for building their understanding of language. In addition, Megan discussed the importance of "having conversation, talking out what you're doing in a small group setting" to set the stage for reading comprehension.

Having conversations leads to employing questioning strategies was mentioned by the teachers. Nancy expressed that she had been having students answer *why* questions, such as "Why did that book make me laugh." Then Susan encouraged her "students to ask questions when they don't understand what they are reading." Five participants described the use of conversations after they read aloud to their students in order to build their students' comprehension and independent reading abilities.

In addition, to assist with building students' language comprehension, participants shared that visualization strategies and visuals played a significant role in their reading instructional practices. Several teachers expressed the use of visual charts, graphic organizers, and visual pictures, as it allowed for meaningful connections. Students also make meaningful connections using sentence stems, as shared by Nancy. In addition, Becky, Lisa, and Sarah all expressed the importance of having a word wall with pictures to allow students to build their vocabulary and language comprehension skills through visuals.

Maximizing Strengths for Students with Disabilities

The teachers voiced their instruction of students with disabilities is about building students' strengths and stretching them with the goal of positive academic achievement. Thus,

teachers explained the use of various hands-on instructional and monitoring strategies from the

Reading Academies that facilitated their instructional practices for their students with

disabilities. In addition, they communicated several specific ideas on how to maximize their

students' strengths.

Building Instruction for Students with Disabilities

To maximize their students with disabilities' strengths, the teachers articulated that it was

important for them, as teachers, to grow in their knowledge of successful instructional practices,

which the Texas Reading Academies training provided. Susan shared, teaching students with

disabilities to read is challenging because the general education curriculum does not always meet

their needs. However, when students' needs are met, and they grow as a reader, their confidence

grows as they become more eager to learn and apply their skills, was expressed by both Susan

and Rachel. Tiffany shared that, before the training, she would sometimes get ideas that looked

"cool on Instagram" to use in the classroom and began to realize what instructional practices

were best for her students. Judy empathized that many students need to be immersed at school

with resources that the students do not have access to at home to build language skills and

facilitate reading. Creating "a classroom library of diverse books" allows students to have access

to a variety of resources was shared by Julia.

Julia explained the resources of the training assisted her with remembering "the

importance of language and how it affects their comprehension, and they still need to practice"

those skills. She continued that language development starts young, as children need to hear and

understand rhythm, rhymes, and music to build the basics of language. Thus, Nancy expressed

that, "You've got to start where they're at to get them where you want them to go," which may

mean needing to start back at the basics, build on language, and then go beyond through

challenging activities. Cynthia shared that it takes time to build students' language

comprehension and background knowledge; therefore, teachers need to make learning fun with hands-on activities. Thus, Tiffany communicated, "It requires finding the time for students to practice. However, the time is worth it." She stated the success for her is "seeing them using what they've learned."

Participants shared that repetition is a significant factor in their reading instructional practices. Lisa shared, "Everything builds on everything else. Start with the easiest and then go to the most difficult" and then employ "repetition of circle back and relearn." She also stated that she had many students who were students with ADHD or with dyslexia; therefore, she used the illustration of a Teflon frying pan. "You put in the information in (brain), and it just slides right off, so you have to do a lot of repeat, repeat, repeat, and then gradually release." Becky concurred, as she discussed that she would run out of time, and the next day, "It is starting over at ground zero," which is "so painstaking for some of our students." Then, Julia shared that to build vocabulary skills, she must carry out "lots of explicit instruction, re-teaching, and much repetition in small group," as this method seemed to help her students with disabilities. However, she also emphasized that repetition is imperative to ensure that students truly understand the concept; as a special education teacher, you cannot teach it one day and say, "you got it; let's move on."

Participants mentioned that, to supplement the instructional strategy of repetition, visual supports were a crucial ingredient in instruction for students with disabilities. As Julia shared, visuals assist students in retrieving the information they have learned. Therefore, seven participants echoed the sentiment that, for students with disabilities, initial learning and retaining required visual support. The teachers mentioned graphic organizers to facilitate sequencing, flash cards to activate background knowledge, pre-teaching vocabulary, charts to assist with daily

schedules, and pictures from the text to make connections while reading. In addition, visuals assist students with creating a motion picture in their head to facilitate comprehension was shared by Becky.

The teachers reported that building students with disabilities' ability to discuss and grow their language comprehension requires students to feel safe in the learning environment. Megan shared that she made her

> classroom a safe space to communicate. My students built each other up, and the sharing of ideas or thoughts became common and normal, even if they were wrong. We viewed that as a learning opportunity. Students who felt comfortable in sharing their learning processes with me or their peers began to increase their participation and their understanding of the material. They began to teach each other and began to ask questions about what learning was taking place instead of just focusing on the answers.

Nancy, Cynthia, and Judy echoed that when their students felt safe, it allowed for challenging classroom discussions. Thus, allowing their students to know it was permitted to take risks to build their language ability. Additionally, Cynthia shared, "We work a lot on building communities, so kids feel safe, and they feel like they can make a mistake and no one is going to laugh. They're going to be cheered on by their classmates and the teachers." Even with a safe environment, Sarah and Becky expressed that it was a struggle to build students with disabilities' confidence and keep them motivated. Becky felt that the education system puts much pressure on students to achieve at or above grade level. As students with disabilities get older, they realize they struggle, and it affects them negatively. She said, "I wish there was a better way to help them" achieve.

Instructional Practices for Students with Disabilities

Participants shared various Texas Reading Academies language comprehension instructional practices that they found most effective when instructing their students with disabilities. One practice was for teachers to build students' background knowledge by using synonyms and antonyms to build comprehension skills. Comprehension could be built by using pictures or objects to build vocabulary, as it helps to activate their prior knowledge was also shared. Six participants mentioned that allowing students to take ownership of their learning was a key instructional component. Employing the strategy of *think about it*, *write about it*, and, or the idea of *I do/we do/you do* led to literacy development gains, as Nancy noted. Tiffany specifically discussed that her students loved building their vocabulary by playing charades and using emojis. Students also improved their verbal fluency in her classroom by timing each other as they talked and listened. Lisa also built time in her classroom routine for students to discuss what they were reading and then relate it to their own experiences by using pictures they created.

For their students with disabilities, teachers reported that oral discussion allowed for questions to be asked verbally instead of relying only on print. As Tiffany shared, asking questions orally allowed students to stay involved in learning. Megan echoed this sentiment, as teaching students how to answer "the why seems to help my students with disabilities." With her students, she worked on summarizing, making predictions, inferencing, creating questions, and discussing what happens next.

Besides using conversational questioning instructional strategies, the participants shared other strategies from the training that made a difference for their students with disabilities. One was the use of academic vocabulary in the classroom's day-to-day routines, as shared by Becky. For instance, ask the students to *distribute* the papers instead of *passing out* the papers. At first, she thought, "That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard of in my life. But if all the tests they're

going to be taking use the academic vocabulary, then I see the need." Another idea shared by Julia was "giving direct feedback," thus, being very specific with the student about what is expected. Cynthia and Nancy revealed that using sentence stems as conversation starters was a way to assist students with collecting their thoughts and with building their confidence to engage in reading assignments. Another way to engage the students was to select reading material that they can relate to and are interesting was shared by Sarah. Another item from the training that Sarah also discussed, as well as Megan, that providing instructional support for students with disabilities in a small group setting, such as one-on-one or two-on-one, allowed for students' instruction to be targeted to the areas of academic need. Concerning academic needs, Cynthia found it was best to choose two or three strategies to incorporate into daily lessons and use them consistently. She stated, "Don't just try it one time and say, oh well." She found that it takes up to a week or more for the strategy to be learned well enough by the students to meet their academic needs.

With academic needs, the teachers mentioned that involving the families and parents was vital. Nancy shared the training emphasized, to not forget about the family's contribution to language development, as learning is "not just what happens during the school day," Lisa shared, "Let your students talk about what they know and how they can relate to something based on their experiences and their family." Then, Tiffany echoed that it was essential to get the parents involved.

Monitoring the Learning for Students with Disabilities

All 11 participants discussed the formal and informal measures used in their district for all students, including students with disabilities. These measures were also discussed in the Reading Academies as shared by the participants. Running records and weekly quizzes were mentioned, but all schools employed formal monitoring through curriculum-based assessments

that were given at the beginning of the year (BOY), middle of the year (MOY), and end of the

year (EOY). Informal measures included using turn talks, sentence stems, checkpoints,

observations, discussions, checklists, and questioning techniques. A significant informal measure

discussed by several participants was the daily exit ticket. Becky explained that the exit ticket

provided a way to see if her students understood the concept being taught that day. Sarah shared

that she employed informal conversations to monitor progress, as "it's a clearer view of what

they know and what they don't know when they can express it verbally instead of it written

down." Regarding monitoring, Julia raised that, one challenge was that not all instruction and

monitoring fits all students, as "one strategy does not fit all." However, even if one strategy does

not fit all, Lisa emphasized that one monitoring aspect must be completed for all students with

disabilities: monitoring their progress on their Individual Education Program goals.

Table 6

Outlier

Outlier	Phonemic Awareness

Outlier Data and Findings

A significant component of the science of reading is the simple view of reading which

stated that decoding times language comprehension equals reading comprehension (Gough &

Tunmer, 1986). Furthermore, one of the building blocks or essential components of decoding

according to scholars is phonological and phonemic awareness (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Hoover

& Tunmer, 2020). Phonemic awareness is the ability to blend, segment, and manipulate syllables

and individual sounds in words, which is a necessary skill in word decoding instruction (Austin

& Vaughn, 2019). The participants expressed that building students' phonemic awareness was part of both their word reading and language comprehension instruction.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

In analyzing the research data, one unique data element emerged as an outlier. Even though the research focused on the language comprehension component of reading, participants continually shared the importance of phonological and phonemic awareness in reading instruction. Participants felt that phonological and phonemic awareness instruction aligned with both language and decoding in the daily practice of reading instruction.

Expressing the significance of phonemic awareness instruction was expressed by six participants. As Megan stated, phonemic awareness is a foundational skill all students need to be successful readers. She and Rachel discussed the uses of oral language activities and visual supports to assist students with the development of phonemic awareness. Judy expressed the importance of phonemic awareness instruction for older students with disabilities, "You have to develop those phonemic awareness skills. If you have a third grader who's struggling with reading, go back to those foundational skills and give them phonemic awareness" instruction.

Research Question Responses

Research questions are foundational to a qualitative study, as the questions allow for the essence of the phenomenon to emerge. Therefore, a central research question and three sub-questions were used to gather data to understand the experiences with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension by teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas. The research questions are answered from the thematic data that emerged from the study.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of teachers who instruct students with disabilities with learning and incorporating the language comprehension elements after completing the Texas Reading Academies' training?

Four significant themes from the data analysis described teachers' experiences: a focus on learning, factors that impacted learning, implementation of reading instruction, and maximizing strengths for students with disabilities. Lisa communicated, "I was excited about learning" and was "looking forward to it." Then participants expressed that their years of classroom teaching allowed them to make positive learning connections. Regarding positive learning connections, seven participants voiced that their prior in-depth learning experiences assisted with learning the material of the training. These experiences included earning masters' degrees in reading, literacy, and curriculum and instruction and earning certification in Orton Gillingham reading methods. Judy shared that the Texas Reading Academies validated what she had learned in her master's classes and reinforced her expertise of reading instruction.

In completing the Texas Reading Academies training, the participants shared the amount of time they spent on completing all modules, which impacted their learning. Even though the estimated time to complete the training was 60 hours, all but one participant said the time commitment for completing the training was closer to 120 to 180 hours. Cynthia expressed that it was "way more than 60 hours; I spent 120 hours on it." Then, Becky shared that the training was "overwhelming with a lot of information and not enough time to consume it properly."

Although the training was long, Tiffany expressed that it gave her the knowledge to understand why her students had difficulty reading and what she could do to address their issues. She stated that addressing these issues before the training was sometimes done in isolation; however, Becky shared that the training had increased collaboration, resulting in brainstorming

ways to improve students reading achievement. Thus, improving reading instruction was a key component of the training, as Lisa shared that the training provided teachers with the core reading instructional knowledge to be stronger teachers. Sarah agreed, as she felt that the training gave her the background knowledge in reading instruction that she did not get from her teacher certification training.

Thus, teachers reported that they gained reading instructional knowledge from the training that allowed them to provide effective reading instruction to their students with disabilities. Nancy shared that the training assisted her in being "more focused on what the kids need." Then Julia expressed that the training allowed her to see the need for instruction that focuses on improving students' language skills, as language comprehension is important for reading comprehension. All 11 participants communicated several language comprehension instructional strategies from the training that they had been able to implement in their reading instruction practices. Some strategies were building background knowledge using nonfiction books, *why* questioning strategies, and visual supports. Judy expressed that students with disabilities need a great deal of visual support to improve their language comprehension skills. "If you give them a picture to go with it, it helps to make that connection between what they're hearing and what they're saying."

Knowledge of new instructional strategies from the training allowed teachers to grow professionally was echoed by the teachers. Becky shared, "I feel like I am a stronger teacher" because of the Texas Reading Academies, especially with English language learners with disabilities. Then Nancy conveyed how she felt about the training, "The Texas Reading Academies was time-consuming but very valuable in the end because my students, I think, have got a better writing program and reading program in my classroom."

Sub-Question One

What are teachers', who instruct students with disabilities, prior experiences, and knowledge factors that contributed to learning the elements of the Texas Reading Academies?

Teachers' prior experiences and knowledge factors that assisted with learning the training elements were revealed through the sub-theme of teachers' background knowledge. Eight participants shared that their classroom teaching experiences allowed a bridge to form between their current knowledge and the new learning of the training. Thus, in some ways making the training a review was mentioned by Susan. Becky shared that her years of experience teaching diverse learners allowed her to make learning connections. Nancy expressed that her years of experience made the training more beneficial, as she could pull from her background knowledge, gain new knowledge from the training, and then apply that knowledge right then and there in the classroom.

Besides teaching experiences, participants reported that their higher education experiences and intensive reading training contributed to their success with the training. Earning master's degrees, graduate education hours, and intensive reading intervention professional development credits provided the teachers with a foundational knowledge of reading instruction was expressed by eight teachers. Thus, they reported that the Texas Reading Academies allowed their reading instructional knowledge to be reinforced and extended. As Judy shared,

> I had that foundation already to build upon, and so that was nice to have that. I couldn't imagine someone who didn't already have that background, how overwhelming it could have been for them, and probably is for a lot of teachers who don't have that background.

Sub-Question Two

What are teachers', who instruct students with disabilities, motivational self-directive learning factors that contributed to learning the elements of the Texas Reading Academies?

The participants identified several motivational and self-directive learning factors. These factors were addressed through the sub-themes of teachers' dedication, adaptability of teachers, and positive aspects. Being motivated to be successful was reported by the teachers. Cynthia and Judy shared that if they did not make a 100 on the quiz, they would continually retake it until they made 100. In addition, Nancy discussed that it was like having another job. To complete the training, all 11 of the participants had to work late evenings, early mornings, weekends, or holidays, as well as create a routine of regularly scheduled times to work on the training.

Since the training was on the participant's schedule, they noted that it gave them the time to be motivated to reread material to insure they grasped it. As Nancy stated, "I got to reread everything. I needed to reread when there was a question being asked. It forced me to go back and find it like I do my children." Tiffany shared that she could "work on completing a module when she was ready, even late at night," and then it allowed her to seek clarification by going back in and reviewing items.

Factors that the teachers expressed that assisted them in learning the material was supportive teammates and district. All 11 teachers voiced appreciation of their teammates' collaborative nature, as Becky noted that her teammates were "absolutely wonderful." In addition, nine participants were provided with time to work on the Texas Reading Academies training during contract hours, with two participants receiving significant number of professional development days throughout the year. Five of the nine were provided stipends. Susan shared she had a sense of accomplishment once she completed the training:

It was a lot of willpower to get it done. As soon as I got it done and got my certificate, I

told my administrator: I'm going to frame this and put it on my wall. It was such an

accomplishment to get it done. So, I'm thankful for it, but it was a big undertaking.

Sub-Question Three

What language comprehension elements, as outlined in the Texas Reading Academies,

did teachers, who instruct students with disabilities, incorporate into everyday reading

instructional practices?

Participants revealed how the Texas Reading Academies training provided them with

ways to improve their reading instructional practices for students with disabilities, especially in

language comprehension. Becky expressed that "a lot of what the Texas Reading Academies is

trying to teach us is that depending where a child comes from, and their background knowledge,

depends on how we can help them" as teachers. Therefore, to answer the question of what

language comprehension elements did teachers incorporate into their instructional practices was

answered by the sub-themes of language activities of reading instruction, building instruction for

students with disabilities, instructional practices for students with disabilities, and monitoring the

learning for students with disabilities.

Ways to build students' background knowledge and vocabulary were expressed by all 11

participants. They described ways to improve the background knowledge and vocabulary for

their students with disabilities. Some instructional practices that were mentioned from the

participants were using inferencing questions, asking why questions, using flash cards, pre-

teaching vocabulary, and using pictures and objects. Nancy expressed

using the higher-level thinking, questioning strategies actually helped some of my

lower kids, as it enhanced the classroom conversations. Pushing those higher-level kids

pushed my whole class by using inferencing and figurative language, things that I

probably wouldn't have done before.

In addition, Nancy added that using "less words and more pictures" actually increased students'

language ability resulting in increased use of new vocabulary words and improved background

knowledge.

Participants mentioned other elements from the training to increase students' language

comprehension, such as visual charts, graphic organizers, word walls with pictures, using

academic vocabulary in classroom conversations, using sentence starters, and applying daily exit

tickets. Becky expressed how she viewed students' ability to comprehend language:

I want it to be like a little movie going off in their head where they can see almost smell,

feel like they could taste it. If I was describing something, and I would think that's what

Texas Reading Academies wants for our students to be able to embrace the story or the

words or whatever so that they know it. They can visualize it, and they can experience it.

Besides building background knowledge and using visualization strategies, seven participants

expressed the importance of students feeling safe in the learning environment. Nancy conveyed

that "you can push them a lot harder" when you set up a safe environment where students do not

have to worry about being wrong, which resulted in her students with disabilities making

positive connections in comprehension. With feeling safe, teachers mentioned students must

have time to share their family experiences. Nancy, Lisa, and Tiffany all expressed that getting

the family involved helps to build language comprehension. Then to assist with monitoring

students with disabilities progress in language comprehension, three teachers described the use

of daily exit tickets, which allowed students to show what they had learned that day.

Summary

The purpose of chapter four was to share the thematic findings of the experiences of teachers with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension by teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas. To allow the thematic findings to emerge, the research data was analyzed using a transcendental phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994). Four major themes were revealed that described the essence of the teachers' experiences: teachers' focus on learning, factors that impacted teachers' learning, implementation of reading instruction, and maximizing strengths for students with disabilities.

All four themes had sub-themes that emerged when analyzing the data. Teachers acknowledged that their background knowledge, dedication to providing quality instruction, and ability to adapt to gain new knowledge allowed them to focus on learning the content of the training. Then the positive elements of the learning experiences, such as support from teammates and district leaders, and the negative element, such as the overwhelming nature of the training, were reported by the participants as factors that impacted their learning. Also, the teachers described ways to improve reading instruction with specific activities that build language comprehension. Then, to maximize the language comprehension abilities of their students with disabilities, the participants expressed that the training provided them with various instructional practices and monitoring strategies. Thus, these thematic conclusions answered the central research question and sub-questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension by teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas. Chapter five offers an in-depth review of the research findings focusing on application. Therefore, an interpretation of the findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research will be discussed in this chapter. Chapter five will then conclude with a final summary of the research study.

Discussion

The findings from the research study were based on a transcendental phenomenological research design as outlined by Moustakas (1994), with Knowles's adult learning theory (1968) being the underlying theoretical framework. Using the ideas from Moustakas and Knowles, a practical application of the research thematic findings will be discussed. Thus, the discussion section provides an interpretation of findings, an implication for policy and practice, a theoretical and empirical implication, a description of limitations and delimitations, and concludes with recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

The study aimed to understand teachers who instruct students with disabilities lived experiences with completing the Texas Reading Academies. Thus, interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups were utilized to capture the teachers' experiences. To capture their experiences and reach data saturation, 11 participants were recruited using a purposeful criterion sample.

After data was collected, data was analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological model with coding concept from Saldana (2021). Data analysis revealed four major themes and 11 sub-themes, with the four major themes being teachers' focus on learning, factors that impacted teachers' learning, implementation of reading instruction, and maximizing strengths for students with disabilities. The sub-themes were teachers' background knowledge, teachers' dedication, adaptability of teachers, positive aspects, negative aspects, unstructured aspects of reading instruction, structured aspects of reading instruction, language activities of reading instruction, building instruction for students with disabilities, instructional practices for students with disabilities, and monitoring the learning for students with disabilities. After data analyzation, three significant findings emerged within the themes and sub-themes. These findings expressed by the teachers were being overwhelmed, participating through interaction, and gaining new knowledge.

Summary of Thematic Findings

For the study, 11 teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas described their experiences with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension. Their experience revealed four major themes, with the first two focusing on teacher learning. Therefore, teachers' background knowledge, dedication, and adaptability described the teachers' focus on learning, which led to the successful completion of the Texas Reading Academies training. While completing the training, teachers described positive and negative aspects that impacted their learning, such as peer collaboration, the positive nature of online learning, and then a lack of district support during the training.

The last two themes focused on the instructional practices for students with disabilities that teachers described from the training. When implementing reading instruction, unstructured

and structured aspects of reading practices and language activities were essential to the teachers. Then teachers expressed the importance of maximizing students with disabilities' strengths by building and implementing instructional practices, as well as monitoring student progress.

Within these four major themes and 11 sub-themes, the teachers consistently discussed being overwhelmed with the training, participating through interaction, and gaining new knowledge. Due to the length and time requirements to complete the training, the teachers described being overwhelmed. Even though the training was overwhelming, their interactive experiences during the training led to them growing professionally by gaining new knowledge.

Being Overwhelmed. When looking at the research data, the top idea teachers expressed during the interviews and the focus groups was the intense nature of the training, which led to teachers being overwhelmed. Thus, teachers felt they had two jobs, teaching and completing the training, because the training took two to three times longer than the recommended allotted time. The recommended allotted time was 60 hours; however, the majority of teachers reported that it took between 120 to 180 hours to complete. In addition to the substantial number of hours, actions by one district also contributed to teachers' sense of being overwhelmed. The district promised staff development time to their teachers. It then took the time away, leading teachers to wonder if their district even appreciated the hard work they put into the training. Also, there were considerable pages in the training that required clicking numerous times to actually get to the material content, which also contributed to teachers' feeling overwhelmed.

Even though the participants were overwhelmed, they were able to overcome and complete the learning tasks of the training to meet the completion deadline. The teachers managed the learning tasks through dedication by employing time management skills, grit, and determination. The teachers shared that they scheduled specific times, including workdays, early

mornings, evenings, weekends, and holidays to work on the training. Additionally, their conscientious nature allowed their grit and determination to complete the training with fidelity by spending two to three times the amount of time required. Even though participants were overwhelmed, their time and effort made them grow professionally in the area of reading instruction, as they noted that they are stronger teachers because of the Texas Reading Academies training.

Participating Through Interaction. To facilitate professional growth, teachers reported participating in the training through various interactive content and activities. Thus, the interactive nature contributed to the successful completion of the training. One significant activity was collaborating with their colleagues during the training. Having the support of colleagues was a major inspiring factor that assisted teachers with completing the training. The participants found that the encouragement shared among peers led to improved collaboration, as the new bond of teamwork resulted in teachers incorporating new interventions into the reading curriculum. Besides team collaboration, the teachers were able to interactively engage with their facilitator through emails, virtual sessions, and in-person sessions, which then provided teachers with additional support in learning the material. Thus, the training allowed for successful collaborative interaction that assisted teachers with learning and implementing effective instructional practices.

Besides the collaboration, the actual interactive elements of the training also facilitated participants' engagement in learning the material. The elements embedded in the training that assisted with a positive learning experience were participant guides, drag-and-drop activities, knowledge checks, discussion posts, and videos. Videos that were actual classroom instructional lessons provided the teachers with realistic examples of effective reading instruction. In addition,

the teachers could pace themselves based on their schedule, as the training was an asynchronous online course. Thus, it allowed them to reread or rewatch the material multiple times to ensure their understanding of the concepts. An additional interactive element was the ability for the teachers to retake quizzes. Retaking the quizzes allowed the teachers to increase their knowledge, as they could identify their weak areas and then actively go back into the material for clarification.

The active engagement of the content led to teachers enthusiastically applying their new knowledge to everyday reading practices, as everyday reading practices are like a puzzle with many pieces that fit together, leading to a framework, such as the simple view of reading. Therefore, teachers shared that the training established a way to systematically implement reading instruction with fidelity, allowing them to build their framework of reading practices by gaining knowledge in the science of reading. As a result, teachers were able to gain this knowledge due to being highly engaged in the interactive nature of the online training.

Gaining New Knowledge. Besides the interactive nature of the training, other factors contributed to the learning process, allowing the teachers to gain new knowledge. Teachers' backgrounds, dedication, and adaptability allowed teachers to focus on learning, which led to the successful completion of the Texas Reading Academies training. Participants' teaching experiences and education gave them background knowledge that provided a solid foundation. Thus, the participants recognized that their years of teaching students to read allowed connections to be made, which led to their gaining new skills in the science of reading. Not only did their teaching experience provide a bridge to learning, but the teachers' previous education and reading training also supported the learning experience with the training. Previous in-depth learning experiences, such as earning master's degrees in reading, literacy, and curriculum and

instruction and earning certification in Orton Gillingham reading methods, provided participants with prior knowledge that led to positive connections. Therefore, the experiences in teaching and higher education coursework gave the participants dedication to complete the training with fidelity.

The teachers' dedication was also evident in their enthusiasm and excitement about acquiring understanding in the area of the science of reading. The teachers expressed their joy in teaching students to read, as they were committed to providing them with effective reading instruction. During their teaching tenure, several teachers shared that knowing effective reading practices was not always the case. Before the science of reading, teachers expressed that there was no clear guidance regarding reading instruction. Teachers were instructed to pick a little from here and a little from there, which led to no one reading program being implemented with fidelity. In addition, teachers expressed that the whole language methodology was a past instructional practice that did not provide students with a solid foundation in reading.

Therefore, the teachers were thankful that the training allowed them to grow their knowledge of effective instructional practices. Effective practices are essential, as the teachers shared, because teaching students with disabilities to read is challenging. Thus, the teachers emphasized how the training allowed them to see not only decoding as critical but also language as a critical piece of the reading puzzle for students with disabilities.

To improve students with disabilities' reading skills, teachers shared there must be time to practice and provide explicit language comprehension instruction repeatedly. Language activities reported by the teachers to facilitate reading comprehension start with conversations and questioning strategies and then moves on to using sentence stems and visualization strategies. Therefore, teachers employed the use of pictures and objects, think about it/write about it/discuss

it, oral discussions and questioning strategies, sentence stems, and using academic vocabulary daily, as well as small group instruction and the use of daily exit tickets. The exit tickets provided teachers with a tangible way to access the daily progress of their students with disabilities.

In addition to specific activities, teachers noticed that using two to three new strategies consistently was a considerable advantage to students' learning process and academic achievement for students with disabilities. However, teachers learned that they had to also focus on ensuring their classroom was a safe learning environment where students were not afraid to take risks in classroom discussions and learning activities. Thus, participants gained valuable knowledge of how to create an effective learning environment to improve their reading instructional practices for all students, but especially for their students with disabilities.

Implications for Policy or Practice

In examining this phenomenological study's research data, various recommendations were made to enhance policies and practices in the area of reading professional development, with an ultimate focus on improving reading instructional practices for students with disabilities. To improve reading instructional practices, it is imperative that teachers have a knowledge base of the science of reading (reading research) and how to implement the knowledge successfully in the classroom (Hudson et al., 2021; Seidenberg & Borkenhagen, 2020; Shanahan, 2020b). Teachers in this study articulated that they had become better teachers after gaining an understanding of the science of reading. Therefore, the following recommendations may assist educational policymakers, educational specialists, and school leaders in the development and implementation of reading professional development to improve teachers' knowledge and ability to implement effective reading instruction practices for all students successfully (Brion, 2020;

Greenleaf et al., 2018; Pittman et al., 2020), but especially for students with disabilities (Swanson et al., 2021; Zipke & Hauerwas, 2018).

Implications for Policy

In Texas, educational policies directly result from requirements mandated by the Texas legislature and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The mandate of House Bill 3 (HB 3) in June of 2019 required TEA to implement the Texas Reading Academies to ensure all pre-kindergarten thru third-grade teachers and principals gain the knowledge of the science of reading to improve student reading achievement (TEA, 2020b; TEA, 2022d). Therefore, research data from the participating teachers in this study could provide policymakers with suggestions on improving policies regarding the Texas Reading Academies initiative.

To improve student reading proficiency, teachers must have the knowledge and skills to implement the science of reading practices in their classrooms (Cook et al., 2020; Gentry & Ouellette, 2019; Petscher et al., 2020). Therefore, TEA could update the Texas Reading Academies training in several ways to allow for an improved learning experience with the online course. In improving the course, the following are possible suggestions: eliminate repetitive information, improve the content by having the material on one page without numerous clicks to get to the information, break the more extended modules into multiple modules, and pare down the discussion board post. Next, allow teachers to begin the training in June instead of late August when school begins. Starting earlier would allow teachers ample time to implement the content into their everyday reading practices during the school year and reduce teacher stress of starting the training at the beginning of a school year. Also, provide teachers with access to the course for one school year after completion to assist with continual learning and implementing of the material.

While teachers are initially completing the course, there could be a legislative mandate that all teachers must be provided with state-funded stipends and professional development days. Several school districts provided teachers with stipends and professional development days; however, those school districts had to use local funding. Therefore, to be consistent across the state, the state legislation and TEA could provide funding to districts for all teachers to receive stipends and professional development days with the purpose of teachers successfully completing the Texas Reading Academies training.

To continue building teachers' knowledge after the successful completion of the training, TEA could build additional supplemental modules for the Texas Reading Academies. Possible module topics could be updating the material to ensure current research on the science of reading. Another idea is to create a module with intensive instructional practices in oral language and language comprehension, as research has demonstrated that students' academic oral language ability impacts both their decoding and comprehension skills (Henry & Solari, 2020; Lonigan et al., 2018; Spencer & Wagner, 2018; Wagner et al., 2021).

Students with disabilities require intensive instruction (Kearns et al., 2019) that is based on effective practices (McLeskey et al., 2019) to make positive academic gains (Kearns et al., 2019; Petscher et al., 2019). Therefore, a final suggestion for TEA is to create a specific module that focuses on building the reading skills for students with high incident disabilities, such as students with a specific learning disability in reading or students with an Other Health Impairment. Then, as part of the module, include practices for English learners with disabilities.

Implications for Practice

In examining the experiences of teachers who participated in this study, several important implications for practice at the educational support center were revealed from the research data.

These findings may also be effective for other educational support centers and individual districts across Texas. These suggestions involve the practice of professional development, coaching, and collaboration.

To extend the Texas Reading Academies training, the educational support center could create professional development sessions to supplement the training, as ongoing training in the science of reading facilitates teachers' instructional knowledge on effective reading practices (Cook et al., 2020). First, create in-person and synchronous trainings to supplement the highlights of the science of reading, with participant discussion time on how they are implementing the main components of the training. Second, provide professional development sessions that foster the implementation of the science of reading for students with disabilities, emphasizing language comprehension. In extending the professional development sessions, created resources would be beneficial. Two suggestions were made by the teachers in this research study: create a reading instructional checklist and a document with all the Texas Reading Academies resources in one place. Also, create monitoring templates to track the language comprehension and reading progress of students with disabilities to specifically support teachers who instruct students with disabilities.

In addition, to professional development and resources, the educational support center could provide additional coaching support by the facilitators to supplement the online asynchronous training. A positive area that the study's teachers emphasized was the support they received from their facilitator during the training. Therefore, extending the facilitator's role to involve more on-site coaching is a possible implementation to practice, as coaching provides teachers with intensive support (Philipsen et al., 2019) to improve their instructional practices (Paige et al., 2021). Coaching can also be extended by having mentors during the training for

teachers with less than three years of teaching experience, scheduling purposeful coaching sessions to assist these new teachers, and then continuing the support the following year.

Furthermore, there are practices that individual districts could implement. First, school leadership could guide teachers in understanding the importance of the science of reading; as the participants in the study shared, it was disheartening to see teachers just clicking the buttons and not taking the training seriously. In addition, the collaboration between school leaders and teachers creates positive classroom environments that lead to effective instructional practices (Hudson et al., 2021; Wetzel et al., 2020). Therefore, district leaders could provide time for teachers to collaborate, especially between general education and special education teachers (Hester et al., 2020).

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension by teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas. The research data from teachers who instruct students with disabilities experiences aligned with Knowles's adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 2020). In addition to the theoretical alignment of the research data, there were implications between the research findings and the empirical literature of the study.

Theoretical Implications

Knowles' adult learning theory is based on the idea that adults learn to solve everyday problems (Knowles et al., 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Adult learners draw on their prior knowledge and motivation to gain and apply new knowledge. Therefore, adult learning theory was the theoretical underpinning for this study, as the Texas Reading Academies is based on a problem-centered solution that focuses on teachers learning and incorporating the science of

reading with the purpose of improving instructional reading practices. Thus, Knowles's adult learning theory elements emerged within the thematic findings of the research data.

Solving Complex Problems. Adults learn for the purpose of solving complex problems (Machynska & Boiko, 2020) is a key assumption in Knowles's adult learning theory (2020). Participants of the study reported that there was no consistency in implementing reading instruction effectively before the training. Thus, overall, teachers lacked in-depth knowledge of the science of reading. However, the training provided teachers with the understanding of how to effectively implement reading instruction with fidelity, especially for their students with disabilities.

Not only understanding the new learning, but adult learners' learn to apply the learning to a real-life situation (Knowles et al., 2020; Mews, 2020). The teachers reported that the training allowed them to understand why their students were having difficulty and what instructional strategies needed to be implemented. In addition, teachers improved their collaboration, which in turn facilitated the implementation of effective reading interventions.

Self-directed Learning. Another assumption in adult learning theory is that adults manage their learning (Knowles et al., 2020; Mews, 2020) by taking responsibility for the learning process (Machynska & Boiko, 2020; Mews, 2020). Teachers shared their determination to complete the training as they had to employ time management strategies that required them to pace themselves by setting aside specific times to work on the training. Also, teachers had to take the responsibility of printing the participant note-taking guide and emailing their facilitator with any questions during the duration of the training. Additionally, teachers shared that they would repeatedly retake quizzes until they made 100 to assess and improve their knowledge of the material.

Attach Prior Experiences to New Learning. Prior experience and knowledge permit adults to bridge prior learning to new learning (Knowles et al., 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014); therefore, allowing solutions to everyday needs and problems to emerge (Chametzky, 2018). Having numerous years of teaching experience was a significant factor that the teachers reported that assisted them with learning the material in the training. It allowed for a bridge to form as they were learning. They could relate to the instructional needs of previous and current students. In addition to teaching experiences, the teachers shared that their master's degrees in reading, literacy, and curriculum and instruction allowed connections to be made with the course material. One teacher shared that her experience of being a bilingual student growing up assisted her with relating the material to her students' instructional needs.

However, there can be a negative aspect to bridging prior experiences to new learning, as adults may decide that the old ways are just fine and there is no need to gain new knowledge (Knowles et al., 2020; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Participants reported that many of their colleagues believed the training was a waste of time with little benefit. The attitude was a concern, as the participants shared that, for teachers who took the time, there were great intervention ideas for struggling readers.

Readiness to Learn. Learning for the adult is centered on the idea that learning must be relevant to everyday life situations (Chametzky, 2018; Knowles et al., 2020; Mews, 2020). Then, the relevance brings about a readiness to engage in the learning process (Knowles et al., 2020). For the reading specialists and special education teachers in the study, learning the material in the Texas Reading Academy was very relevant to their everyday life, as teaching reading was what they did every day. Thus, their enthusiasm gave them the readiness to continue learning effective reading instruction practices. Teachers shared that the training allowed them to add new

concepts to their reading curriculum. Besides adding new concepts, teachers were able to identify areas of their reading instruction that matched the information in the training.

Life-centered. Adults seek life-centered learning opportunities that provide real life-examples (Knowles et al., 2020) that can be applied to actual situations and not just in the learning environment (Chametzky, 2018). For teachers, their reading instructional practices are where they applied the new knowledge gained from the Texas Reading Academies. They shared that it provided them with a blueprint and framework to understand the overall picture of effective reading practices. They reported that they were able to incorporate ideas and resources from the training that benefited their students. These ideas and resources were added to their collaborative practices and daily reading lessons.

Several new ideas were added by the teachers that related to language comprehension. Teachers shared that, to improve students' background knowledge, they used pictures, prior knowledge activities, student experience discussions, and the idea of I do/we do/they do, as well as monitoring their students with disabilities' progress. Applying these strategies increased students' language comprehension ability, as stated by the teachers, as it allowed them to apply their new learning to their everyday practices, resulting in their professional growth and the growth of their students.

Internally Motivated. According to adult learning theory, adults are driven to learn by their internal motivation (Knowles et al., 2020), which, when paired with their interests (Chametzky, 2018), can lead to career satisfaction (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Mews, 2020). Participants in the study shared that they were excited about the training, as they found joy in teaching children to read. This passion allowed teachers to be internally motivated to complete the time-consuming training. In addition, teachers had high expectations for themselves as they

shared that it was important to them to make a 100 on the quizzes. As well as seeking to achieve 100 on the quizzes, teachers reported they liked having the opportunity to reread for clarity when they came across unfamiliar concepts. Thus, the participants expressed that learning the concepts in the Texas Reading Academies gave them a sense of satisfaction.

Online Learning. Adult learning theory can also be applied to the online learning environment (Chametzky, 2018; Knowles et al., 2020). In today's technology-rich environment, online learning opportunities can positively motivate adult learners (Chametzky, 2018). Teachers expressed several factors that were motivating to them as they completed the training. The training was interactive, with videos, discussion posts, drag and drop items, knowledge checks, and participant guides. In addition, teachers shared that they could reread sections for clarification and even go back to ensure they understood the concept as a whole. Thus, the teachers articulated that the asynchronous model allowed them to understand the concepts better because they controlled when and how they learned the material.

Even though the training was online, teachers shared that they could still build collaboration with their teammates. The participants expressed that team discussions and positive encouragement concerning the training content were motivational. They could share what they were learning with each other, thus leading to better reading instructional interventions for their students.

Empirical Implications

The empirical literature focuses on the importance of teachers understanding the science of reading to improve the reading skills of today's students (Gentry & Ouellette, 2019; Petscher et al., 2020; Shanahan, 2020c). Therefore, TEA implemented the Texas Reading Academies to train all kindergarten to third-grade teachers and principals in the science of reading to improve

reading instructional practices with the ultimate goal of improving student literacy (TEA, 2022d). Therefore, this study contributed to filling the gap in qualitative literature concerning understanding how teachers learn and incorporate effective reading practices (Hudson et al., 2021), especially for students with disabilities. Qualitative research methods were used in this study to understand the experiences of teachers who instruct students with disabilities in learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension.

Training Teachers Through Professional Development. The literature has conveyed that teachers' knowledge of effective instructional practices has not kept pace with the current research (Dewitz & Graves, 2021; Pittman et al., 2020; Solari et al., 2020). Therefore, teachers need to be provided with training to instill a working knowledge of the science of reading (Gentry & Ouellette, 2019; Silverman et al., 2020), as quality professional development can have a positive effect on reading achievement (Fischer et al., 2018; Greenleaf et al., 2018; Swanson et al., 2021). The Texas Reading Academies provide teachers with the elements of effective reading practices instead of teachers having to guess what might be best for their students. Teachers reported that it gave them tools to implement quality reading instruction and allowed them to grow professionally.

Professional development that is intense, participatory, and relevant (Didion et al., 2020) can assist teachers in growing professionally. The participants' experience with the Texas Reading Academies demonstrated that it was an intense participatory program requiring 120 to 180 hours of work with extensive interactive elements in the training. In addition, the training was relevant, as it taught them how to incorporate effective reading instruction into their classroom daily.

In addition, to intense, participatory, and relevant, scholars advocate that professional development needs to focus on collaboration (Donohoo et al., 2018) and follow-up coaching (Paige et al., 2021), and these elements can be completed through online training (Wagner, 2021). The online nature of the Texas Reading Academies was positive, as teachers shared that it gave them the flexibility to grasp the concepts of the science of reading over time on their schedule. Then to assist them with applying their new knowledge, teachers had the support of facilitators/coaches. In addition, teachers shared that supportive interaction with their peers during the training led to improved instructional collaboration. Having facilitators (Philipsen et al., 2019) and collaborative communities allows online learning to negate the lack of face-to-face interaction of in-person learning (Powell & Bodur, 2019).

Science of Reading: Research to Instructional Practices. Historically, teachers were trained during the 20th century in one of two methods of reading instruction: whole language or phonics (Seidenberg et al., 2020), and, as the teachers in the study reported, teachers did not mix the two. You either taught one or the other. However, this philosophy of reading instruction led to conflicts on how to train teachers (Castles et al., 2018; Petscher et al., 2020; Semingson & Kerns, 2021). However, due to evidence-based research in the 21st century, reading instructional practices have become based on effective practices that include oral language, decoding, and comprehension (Duke et al., 2021; Oakhill et al., 2019; Paige et al., 2021; Shanahan, 2020c). The evidence-based practices are based on the science of reading research (Gentry & Ouellette, 2019; Petscher et al., 2020) and has ended the conflict of reading instructional practices (Seidenberg et al., 2020). Therefore, the teachers of the study shared that the training gave them knowledge in the science of reading, which provided them with a framework for effective reading practices.

The training allowed teachers to link research to effective practices (Paige et al., 2021); as the teachers shared, they understood better how to assist their students who struggle with reading. For all students, but especially those that struggle to learn to read, it is a skill that must be explicitly taught (Seidenberg et al., 2020). The ability to read is critical (Miller & McCardle, 2019); as the teachers shared when students have difficulty with reading, it negatively affects their whole life, academically and later in a career. However, teachers employing the effective practices of the science of reading does have a positive effect on students' reading skills (Lonigan et al., 2018), and teachers of the study shared that they could see a difference when they used elements from the training with their students that struggled in reading.

Texas Reading Academies. Connecting the research of the science of reading to teachers' daily reading instructional practices to improve student literacy is the goal of the Texas Reading Academies. The training allowed teachers to gain in-depth knowledge of the science of reading (TEA, 2020b). Teachers shared that, even though the training was extremely overwhelming, it gave them a strong knowledge of the science of reading, thus, allowing them to grow professionally in effective reading instruction. In addition, they expressed that it allowed a better reading and writing program in their classroom, which was beneficial for their students with disabilities. The teachers of the study expressed that they were thankful for the opportunity, even though it was extremely time-consuming, because it allowed them to grow professionally and become better reading instructors.

A Framework of Reading: The Simple View of Reading. The simple view of reading was the science of reading framework for the Texas Reading Academies. Gough and Tunmer (1986) developed the simple view of reading with the premise that decoding times language comprehension equals reading comprehension. The two cannot be separated, as effective reading

instruction requires both decoding and comprehension (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Catts, 2018; Goodrich & Namkung, 2019; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Tunmer, 2018; Kilpatrick, 2020; Kim, 2020b; Nation, 2019; Snow, 2018; Vaughn et al., 2019). Teachers shared from their experiences that, for students to be proficient readers, they must have skills in both decoding and comprehension, as a strong vocabulary is needed for reading comprehension. In addition to a strong vocabulary, teachers expressed that background knowledge must be integral to reading instruction. Therefore, the participants agreed that effective reading instruction must have both decoding and language comprehension, which includes vocabulary and background knowledge.

Oral Language: The Essence of Language Comprehension to Facilitate Reading. In building students' reading abilities, oral language is critical (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Kim et al., 2020; Lervåg et al., 2018; Parkin, 2018), as students' oral language skills is as important as their decoding skills (Kim et al., 2020; Rand & Morrow, 2021). Students' oral language skills start to develop before they enter school (Reed & Lee, 2020; Visser-Bochane et al., 2020). Teachers shared that the training assisted them with seeing how critical early language development is, as children need to have the foundational ability to manipulate rhymes and sounds before they come to school.

However, other participants shared that, no matter students' abilities, they have to start where they are and build on their skills, which may mean starting with foundational skills that build oral language (Reed & Lee, 2020; Toub et al., 2018). The teachers shared that classroom discussion and read-alouds were oral language-focused activities that they implemented, as these activities build vocabulary and background knowledge (Grøver et al., 2020; Hadley et al., 2019; Kim, 2020b). Teachers expressed that building oral language vocabulary and background knowledge takes time and practice. Time and practice allow for an active environment that

builds early literacy (Connor et al., 2020). Family activities and interaction are crucial to oral language growth (Golinkoff et al., 2019). Teachers expressed that family involvement is essential, as language development is more than just at school.

Schools need to build on the language experiences of the home, as oral language instruction in school is vital (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Rand & Morrow, 2021). Research has demonstrated that oral language skills impact decoding and reading comprehension (Hjetland et al., 2019). Therefore, implementing instruction in the classroom focusing on background knowledge and vocabulary is an essential element in the teachers' reading practice. The training reinforced this practice, emphasizing engaging in active lessons to facilitate language growth. Engaging lessons focusing on rich vocabulary allows for a solid foundation to be built to facilitate reading comprehension (Kaefer, 2020; Wei et al., 2021). Students must be exposed to text with rich vocabulary (Shanahan, 2020a), as teachers expressed the importance of supporting their students to read text that builds higher-level vocabulary skills.

Instruction for Students with Disabilities. Students with disabilities learn best with intensive interventions (Austin & Vaughn, 2019; Gilmour et al., 2019; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018), therefore, needing highly effective instruction (Collins et al., 2018; McLeskey et al., 2019). Needing to incorporate intensive instruction for their students with disabilities was expressed by the teachers, as the training provided them with materials, resources, and video modeling. Teachers shared that they used small group instruction to provide students with explicit instruction and feedback on background knowledge and vocabulary,hus, allowing students to have repeated practice. Repeated practice through explicit instruction (Huges et al., 2019) that builds background knowledge (Austin & Vaughn, 2019) in small group settings (Grigorenko et al., 2020) allows students with disabilities to be engaged in learning. To ensure student progress,

formal or informal assessments must be an integral part of instructing students with disabilities (Fletcher et al., 2019; Kearns et al., 2019). For their students with disabilities, teachers reported using exit tickets (informal daily check for understanding) and curriculum-based assessments (formal) to monitor progress.

Monitoring students' progress and providing specific interventions to their learning needs is essential to assist students with disabilities in gaining access to the general education curriculum (Fletcher et al., 2019; Swanson et al., 2021). Teachers shared that they have seen growth in their students when they support them using challenging text, as it allows students with disabilities to make positive progress (Shanahan, 2019). Besides challenging text, teachers articulated that collaboration between general and special education provided a bridge for students to access the general education curriculum. This bridge of collaboration is an important element of high-leverage practices for students with disabilities (Billingsley et al., 2019).

In providing instruction for students with disabilities, teachers also need to consider English learners who have a disability, as this population of students is growing (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2018). For English learners, oral instruction is vital, as specific instruction in building background knowledge and vocabulary is essential (Gottardo et al., 2018). Teachers in the study shared that it was important to assist their English learners with building and making connections. Making connections for the teachers begins with having a collaborative relationship with the bilingual and English as a Second Language Teachers, including with families. This collaboration is vital for the learning process of English language learners, as educational colleagues (Kangas, 2018a, 2018b; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018; Ortiz et al., 2020) and families (Benedict et al., 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2021; Ko et al., 2021; Noguerón-Liu, 2020) collaboration provides needed support to the English learner, especially those with disabilities.

Building collaborative skills with not only colleagues (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018; Podolsky et al., 2019) and families, but collaboration from the administration can benefit teachers who instruct students with disabilities (Hester et al., 2020). Teachers shared that the support from their colleagues and their administration facilitated completing the training and implementing the material. When teachers feel supported, it leads to job satisfaction, leading to greater student achievement (Robinson et al., 2019).

Limitations and Delimitations

When conducting any research study, limitations and delimitations will impact the study. Limitations describe the challenges faced during the study that could not be controlled. Whereas the delimitations are the areas of the study that are controlled, thus narrowing the study design. Therefore, describing the limitations and delimitations provides an in-depth understanding of the research study.

Limitations

To understand the research study, several limitations can be identified. First, the research data was collected four to six months after teachers completed the Texas Reading Academies. Therefore, the gap between completion and collecting the data led to the challenge of recruiting participants who wanted to revisit their experiences of completing the training. Since the training was in the 21-22 school year, and the research study was the 22-23 school year, participants were no longer engaged in the material on a day-to-day basis. However, for the 22-23 school year, the participants were applying the science of reading research knowledge to their everyday instructional practices.

A second limitation is the ability to draw a causal relationship between the training and

the impact it had on teachers' philosophy of teaching reading. The Texas Reading Academies was a state-mandated requirement that all kindergarten through third-grade teachers had to complete successfully. To complete successfully, all teachers had to successfully complete all 12 training models and submit two artifacts with a passing score of 80. Therefore, the teachers' motivation to complete the training may have been based more on job performance requirements and not solely on the desire to improve their reading instructional practices.

Additionally, logistical concerns may have affected teacher participation in the study. Some prospective participants may not have participated due to limited time to engage in the study or due to insufficient internet. Limited time may have been impacted by job and family obligations. Included were technology issues of having adequate internet at home to participate in the study during non-working hours.

Lastly, there were no kindergarten and first-grade classroom grade-level teachers in the study. The number of students with disabilities is fewer at the lower grade levels due to the fact disabilities, especially specific learning disabilities, are not readily identified at the lower grade levels. When evaluating younger students for a disability, evaluators must ensure that it is indeed a disability and not a developmental concern.

Delimitations

Several delimitation parameters were chosen for this study. First, a purposeful criterion sampling was used. Therefore, the study did not include teachers from large metropolitan urban school districts and only included teachers from one of the twenty educational support centers. Second, the study did not incorporate teacher observations of classroom reading instruction in the data collection. Third, administrators' experiences who were also required to take the Texas Reading Academies were not part of the participation sample. Fourth, the study examined

teachers' experiences who completed the online training and not the face-to-face training, with the focus primarily being on only the language comprehension component of reading. Lastly, the study focused on qualitative data from teachers and did not examine quantitative data on the impact the training had on students' reading achievement scores.

Recommendations for Future Research

To extend the study, several recommendations for future research can be discussed that could impact the reading achievement of students with disabilities. My study examined the experiences of teachers from a phenomenological qualitative design. However, future research could examine the impact and perspective of the Texas Reading Academies from multi-lenses and perspectives,allowing quantitative research and additional qualitative research designs to provide policymakers and educators with information that can assist with developing future reading professional development initiatives for teachers.

This study can be extended using quantitative research. By examining the academic data of students being served in special education, researchers can determine if the Texas Reading Academies training ultimately influenced standardized test scores. State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) statewide, district, and individual schools' test scores before and after the Texas Reading Academies initiative can be statically analyzed to determine if the reading achievement for students with disabilities rose after teachers received the intensive training. An additional quantitative research study is to examine teachers' self-efficacy across the state. Using a self-efficacy survey, did teachers feel their skills in reading instruction, especially for students with disabilities, improved after completing the Texas Reading Academies?

Besides quantitative research, this study can also be extended with additional qualitative research. Using interviews, researchers can examine policymakers' perspectives on legislation

required reading professional development initiatives. Interview data can be gathered from members of the state legislator education committee and state board of education, along with upper leadership of TEA, to assist with the development of future reading professional development initiatives.

In addition to policymakers, qualitative data, such as interviews, can be gathered from various educational perspectives. The perspectives can be examined through the lenses of principals and large metropolitan urban teachers to examine the Texas Reading Academies initiative's impact on these specific school personnel. Regarding principals, qualitative data can provide information on their experiences with completing the training and the impact the training had on the reading curriculum at their school. Then examining the experience of large metropolitan urban teachers can provide insight into the future development of reading initiatives for this specific group of teachers who instruct students with disabilities, as there are five major metropolitan urban areas in Texas.

Next, a qualitative case study design can explore three distinctively different types of school districts, such as rural, suburban, and urban,providing an in-depth understanding of the Texas Reading Academies' impact across distinctly different districts. A case study can provide policymakers and training developers with detailed descriptions to provide specific professional development that meets the needs of each type of school district.

Lastly, a longitudinal study can examine Texas reading teachers who instruct students with disabilities' motivation and confidence to continue applying the science of reading instructional practices in their classroom. Examining this data can assist educational support centers in providing continual science of reading professional development support to elementary reading teachers, especially those who instruct students with disabilities. Questions to

consider are: Was the Texas Reading Academies a one-and-done training, or will it have a lasting effect, and what continual training do teachers need?

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences with learning and incorporating the elements of the Texas Reading Academies with a focus on language comprehension by teachers who instruct students with disabilities in Texas. Using Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological research design and Knowles' adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 2020) allowed teachers' experiences to emerge in the research data. The research data included interviews, journal prompts, and focus groups from 11 research participants.

Data were collected, triangulated, and coded to reveal four major themes and 11 sub-themes. The four major themes were teachers' focus on learning, factors that impacted teachers' learning, implementation of reading instruction, and maximizing strengths for students with disabilities. Within the major themes, the teachers articulated being overwhelmed during the training experience. Even though they were overwhelmed, the interactive nature of the training allowed them to gain valuable knowledge. The teachers shared that the knowledge allowed them to grow professionally by implementing effective reading instructional practices based on the science of reading, which has benefited their students with disabilities' reading development.

To continue developing teachers' knowledge, ideas to improve policies and practices regarding the Texas Reading Academies emerged from the research data. Regarding policy, TEA needs to allow teachers to begin the training in June instead of at the beginning of the school year and needs to allow teachers to have access to the course for at least one year after completion. Regarding practice, the educational support center could provide teachers with additional

professional development sessions and coaching sessions on the science of reading. Then, to extend this study, a longitudinal study could examine teachers' motivation to continue using the science of reading instructional practices in their classrooms for students with disabilities.

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Appendix A: Liberty University IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 11, 2022

Suzanne Jones
Meredith Park

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-340 The Texas Reading Academies and the Expereiences of Teachers Who Instruct Students With Disabilities: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Suzanne Jones, Meredith Park,

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: Research Study Site Approval Letter

February 15, 2022

To: Suzanne Jones, Special Education Evaluation Specialist, ▮▮▮▮▮
From: ▮▮▮▮▮ Associate Executive Director, ▮▮▮▮▮
Re: Approval for Conducting Educational Research

Suzanne,

Given that the research you propose to conduct centers on criterion reflecting the efficacy of certain services and/or state mandated requirements related to Reading Academies, ▮▮ ▮▮▮▮ is excited to extend you approval to move forward as proposed. Your research findings will be invaluable to us as proceed in improving our services related to Reading Academies and how those participating in theses services impact the learning of students across our ▮▮▮.

As I understand your study will proceed under the following outline:

- *Site*: ▮▮▮▮▮▮
- *Participants*: teachers who instruct students with disabilities who have completed the Texas Reading Academies during the 2021-2022 school year, with ▮▮▮
- *ESC Contact*: I will work with ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Reading Academy Project Manager to identify and ultimately invite participants to be part of the study.
  ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
- *Study Design*: Qualitative Phenomenological
- *Purpose*: the gauge the experience teachers had with completing the Texas Reading Academies

Please know that we are pleased to have this research conducted and are looking forward to seeing the results. Should you have any questions moving forward please reach out to me and/or ▮▮▮▮

▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Associate Executive Director

▮▮▮▮▮

Appendix C: Email Invitation to Potential Participants

Dear Former Texas Reading Academy Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education degree. The purpose of my research is to examine the experiences of teachers who instruct students with disabilities when completing the Texas Reading Academies, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study. This study will provide ████████ valuable feedback to facilitate programming for the future.

Participants must be elementary education teachers that teach reading or language arts, instruct students with disabilities that are being served in special education are general education or special education certified, and have completed the online Texas Reading Academies during the 2021-2022 school year with the ████████████████████████████████ If you choose to participate in this study, you would be asked to do the following:

- Participate in a one-hour interview with me, the researcher, either by Zoom or at the Educational Service Center, whichever is most convenient for you.
- Complete four short journal prompts concerning your experience with implementing language comprehension elements of the Texas Reading Academies with students with disabilities. The complete journal will be no more than one page in outline or narrative form.
- Participate in a one-hour focus group with the researcher and other study participants. The focus groups will take place either by Zoom or at the ████████████████████████, whichever is most convenient for the participants.
- Participate in the member-checking process to review for accuracy the information you provide me in the interview and focus group.

To participate in this study, click on the link provided below to complete a brief questionnaire through a Google form. After submitting the Google form, I will reach out to you via the email you provide on the form.

Google form link: Texas Reading Academies - Survey

A consent document will be emailed to you if you meet the study criteria. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to type your name and the date on the consent document and return it to me by email before the interview.

Participants in this study will be compensated with a $100 gift card from Wal-Mart, Target, or Amazon.

If you have any questions, please contact me at ████████████████████████████████████. Your consideration to participate in this study is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Jones
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D: Survey to Select Participants

Name:

Email Address:

Name of your school district:

Number of years of experience teaching:

Current teaching position:

Do you teach reading/language arts?

How many students with disabilities do you instruct who are served in special education?

What were the benefits of completing the Texas Reading Academies? (In two sentences or less)

What were the challenges of completing the Texas Reading Academies? (In two sentences or less)

Texas Reading Academies - Survey

Texas Reading Academies Research Study Interest Form

Name

Short answer text

Short answer

Required

Email address *

Short answer text

Name of your school district *

Short answer text

Number of years of experience teaching *

Short answer text

Current teaching position *

Short answer text

Do you teach reading/language arts? *

○ Yes

○ No

○ Other...

How many students with disabilities do you instruct who are served in special education *

Short answer text

What were the benefits of completing the Texas Reading Academies? (in two sentences or less) *

Long answer text

What were the challenges of completing the Texas Reading Academies? (in two sentences or less) *

Long answer text

Appendix E: Introduction Letter to Consent

Dear Former Participant of the Texas Reading Academies,

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on the experience of teachers who instruct students with disabilities who participated in the Texas Reading Academies during the 2021-2022 school year. I am excited about your participation, as this study will provide ███████ with valuable information regarding the Texas Reading Academies. Each teacher who participates will bring unique ideas to the study, thus allowing for an in-depth description of the experiences teachers faced with completing the Texas Reading Academies. The research model I am using is a qualitative one. Therefore, I am asking for participants' thoughts and descriptions of their experiences. I genuinely appreciate your participation, as your insight will be extremely valuable.

Therefore, once we have gone over the informed consent if you are ready to sign, you can complete the informed consent form and email it back to me at ███████████████████ while we are on the call together. Then we can schedule a convenient time for us to complete the individual interview.

However, if you would like time to process the information before signing you can send the form back within one week. In the meantime, if you have any further questions before signing the informed consent form, please reach out to me at ███████████████████████████ Once I receive the informed consent form signed, I will contact you by email to schedule the individual interview.

 Your time and willingness to participate in my study are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

███████████████

Suzanne Jones
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix F: Inform Consent Form

Title of the Project: The Texas Reading Academies and the Experiences of Teachers who Instruct Students with Disabilities: A Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: Suzanne Jones, M.Ed., Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study. To participate, you must be a certified special education teacher, a certified general education teacher who has completed the online Texas Reading Academies during the 2021-2022 school year, and instruct students with disabilities either in a general education or special education setting. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of this research study is to examine the experiences of teachers who instruct students with disabilities when completing one of the Texas Reading Academies.

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:
- Participate in a one-hour interview with me, the researcher, either by Zoom or at the ████████████████████ whichever is most convenient for you.
- Complete four short journal prompts concerning your experience with implementing language comprehension elements of the Texas Reading Academies with students with disabilities. The complete journal will be no more than one page in outline or narrative form and will take one hour or less to complete.
- Participate in a one-hour focus group with the researcher and other study participants. The focus groups will take place either by Zoom or at the ████████████, whichever is most convenient for the participants.
- Participate in the member-checking process to review for accuracy the information you provide me in the interview and focus group.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include having participants' voices heard regarding their experiences with learning and incorporating the material in the Texas Reading Academies. Feedback about their experiences will provide ████████████████████████ with valuable information to facilitate reading professional development programming for the future.

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. These records will be stored for three years and then destroyed by shredding hard copies and deleting electronic copies.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews and focus group sessions will be conducted where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a face-recognized password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a face-recognized 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 focus group members may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will receive a $100 gift card from either Walmart, Target, or Amazon. The researcher will give the participant a choice of which retailer they would like for their gift card. The participants will receive the compensated gift card within one week after all data has been collected and participants have completed a member checking of the interview and focus group transcripts.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University ███████████████████████████ If you decide to participate, you are free not to 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/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and not included in this study. The 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 Suzanne Jones. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ███████████ or ██████████████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Meredith Park, at ███████████████

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-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix G: Open-Ended Interview Questions

Opening: Central Research Question-CRQ

1.   Please introduce yourself by telling me your educational background/training, your

        experiences as a teacher, and your current position.

2.   What helped you succeed in learning, completing, and implementing the Texas Reading

        Academies?

3.   Describe the positive and negative aspects of your experience with completing the Texas

        Reading Academies through the online asynchronous platform.

4.   How did the Texas Reading Academies provide a bridge between the science of reading

        and actual reading instructional practices in your classroom?

Prior experiences and knowledge: Sub-Question One-RQ1

5.   Describe your prior experiences and background knowledge that helped you learn the

        material of the Texas Reading Academies.

6.   Please describe the trends you have seen in reading instruction in listening

        comprehension, and what practices do you feel are most beneficial for students with

        disabilities?

7.   Describe your collaboration with peers before taking the Texas Reading Academies

        regarding reading instruction, especially in language comprehension.

8.   Describe how you viewed language comprehension instruction for students with

        disabilities before taking the Texas Reading Academies.

Motivational factors: Sub-Question Two-RQ2

9.   Think back; what were your thoughts when you were told you had to take the Texas

         Reading Academies?

10.   Describe the required expectations for the training from your school leadership and from

         yourself.

11.   Describe the time commitment of completing the Texas Reading Academies.

12.   How did you balance your teaching duties, the Texas Reading Academies, and personal

         responsibilities?

13.   Discuss the interactive activities or assignments that assisted you with learning the

         material of the Texas Reading Academies.

14.   What advice would you give teachers who instruct students with disabilities who are

         currently going through the program?

Instructional practices for students with disabilities: Sub-Question Three-RQ3

15.   Describe how the Texas Reading Academies benefited you as a teacher in language

         comprehension instruction for students who have disabilities.

16.   Using your experiences from the Texas Reading Academies, how would you describe the

         science of reading and the instructional implementation of language comprehension to a

         first-year teacher who instructs students with disabilities?

17.   Describe your successes and challenges regarding implementing the language

         comprehension strategies for students with disabilities?

18.   How do you monitor progress for students with disabilities to determine the need for

         language comprehension interventions that will facilitate closing reading skill deficits?

19. Provide at least two examples of new language comprehension instructional practices that you found most beneficial in building the reading skills for your students with disabilities.

20. What have you implemented or changed in your reading instructional practices for students with disabilities after completing the Texas Reading Academies?

Closing:

21. Describe the effectiveness of the Texas Reading Academies' online asynchronous training.

22. In closing, share any additional information about the implication and implementation of the training.

Appendix H: Journal Prompts

Journal Prompts:

1.   Using the information you learned from the Texas Reading Academies, define language

comprehension and its relevance to student reading development.

2.   Using the information you learned from the Texas Reading Academies, how do you

develop an overall classroom community that fosters language comprehension, especially

for students with disabilities?

3.   Describe language comprehension lessons/activities you have implemented with your

students with disabilities.

4.   Provide feedback on the outcome of the implementation of those lessons/activities for

students with disabilities.

Appendix I: Focus Group Questions

Opening: Central Research Question-CRQ

1.   Please introduce yourself – name, job title-role, school/school district, and years of experience in the educational field.

2.   Finish this sentence – The Texas Reading Academies was

Prior experiences and knowledge: Sub-Question One-RQ1

3.   What are your experiences with teaching reading to students with disabilities?

4.   Before taking the Texas Reading Academies, what literacy strategies did you use in building students with disabilities' language comprehension skills?

Motivational factors: Sub-Question Two-RQ2

5.   Discuss the support from your teaching peers, school leadership, and the educational support center that facilitated your learning.

6.   If you had five minutes to talk to the Texas Reading Academies developers, what insight for improving the learning experience would you suggest to them?

Instructional practices for students with disabilities: Sub-Question Three-RQ3

7.   What instructional literacy strategies that build language comprehension were most insightful to you, and how did you implement them?

8.   For students with disabilities who have a deficit in reading comprehension, describe the research behind language comprehension strategies that would help facilitate their reading comprehension skills.

9.   Discuss strategies teachers and schools can implement to build rich literacy communities for students with disabilities that focus on language comprehension.

Closing:

10.   In closing, describe the effectiveness of the Texas Reading Academies' online

asynchronous training and any additional insight about the training.

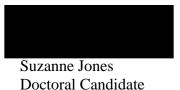**Appendix J: Thank You E-mail and Member Check Request for Interviews**

Dear Participants in the Texas Reading Academies Research Study,

Thank you for meeting with me and completing the interview regarding your experiences with participating in the Texas Reading Academies, as I appreciated your insight and description of your unique experiences.

I have attached a transcript of your interview and ask that you please review the entire document to ensure that your interview has fully captured your experiences with the Texas Reading Academies. After our interview, you may have thought of something you wanted to add. Therefore, using the Track Change feature of Microsoft Word, please feel free to add comments that would add or clarify your experience. Alternatively, you can print, edit, and scan the transcript. Please do not edit the transcript for grammatical corrections, as this is a transcript of your story told in verbal form.

I have greatly valued your participation in this research study and your willingness to share your experiences. I look forward to your participation in our focus group. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to me at █████████████████████████████

Sincerely,

██████████████████

Suzanne Jones
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix K: Thank You E-mail and Member Check Request for Focus Groups

Dear Participants in the Texas Reading Academies Research Study,

Thank you for meeting with me and completing the focus group discussion regarding your experiences with participating in the Texas Reading Academies, as I appreciated your insight and describing your unique experiences.

I have attached a transcript of the focus group discussion and ask that you please review the entire document to ensure that the transcript has fully captured your experiences with the Texas Reading Academies. After the focus group discussion, you may have thought of something you wanted to add. Therefore, using the Track Change feature of Microsoft Word, please feel free to add comments that would add or clarify your experience. Alternatively, you can print, edit, and scan the transcript. Please do not edit the transcript for grammatical corrections, as this is a transcript of your story told in verbal form.

I have greatly valued your participation in this research study and your willingness to share your experiences. I look forward to your participation in our focus group. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to me at ███████████████████████████

Sincerely,

███████████████

Suzanne Jones
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix L: Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Teaching Position	Grade Level	Number of Students With Disabilities
Cynthia	16	Masters	Reading Interventionist (Small Urban)	K-4	12
Becky	33	Bachelors	Special Education Resource and Inclusion (Rural)	Pre-K-5	19
Judy	25	Masters	Special Education Self-Contained (Suburban)	K-3; 5	14
Julia	7	Bachelors	Emergent Bilingual Special Education and Dyslexia (Suburban)	Pre-K-4	10
Lisa	16	Bachelors	Dyslexia Specialist (Suburban)	K-5	17
Megan	8	Masters	Reading Instructional Coach (Rural)	Pre-K-4	2
Nancy	25	Bachelors	Second Grade Classroom Teacher (Small Urban)	2	5
Rachel	16	Masters	Reading Interventionist (Suburban)	K-4	5
Sarah	5	Bachelors	Second Grade Classroom Teacher (Suburban)	2	6
Susan	18	Masters	Special Education Reading Resource (Rural)	Pre-K-5	12
Tiffany	14	Masters	Second and Third Grade Classroom Teacher (Small Urban)	2-3	2

Appendix M: Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Focus on Learning		
	Background	interest, experiences
	Dedication	conscientious, grit-determination, time management
	Adaptability	flexibility, new knowledge
Factors that Impacted Learning		
	Positive	teammates, timeline, appreciated, expectations, interactive
	Negative	overwhelming, ineffective, lack of value, timeline
Implementation of Reading Instruction		
	Unstructured	lack of structure
	Structured	science of reading (SOR)-systematic, SOR-practice, SOR-simple view of reading
	Language Activities	reading methods, vocabulary/background, conversation, visualization
Maximizing Strengths for Students with Disabilities		
	Building Instruction	practice, repetition, technology, visual supports, materials, safe
	Instructional Practices	background, verbal, strategies, small group, segment
	Monitoring	assessing learning, challenges of assessing

Appendix N: Themes and Code Count

Codes	Count of Code
overwhelming	27
new knowledge	26
interactive	25
practice	22
experiences	22
expectations	16
conscientious	16
timeline	15
teammates	15
grit-determination	15
verbal	15
ineffective	13
phonemic awareness	13
time management	13
flexibility	12
vocabulary/background	12
visual supports	11
conversations	11
assessing learning	11
SOR-systematic	11
safe	10
visualizations	10
strategies	9
SOR-practice	9
SOR-SVR	9
reading methods	8
appreciated	7
lack of value	6
background	6
repetition	6
lack of structure	4
challenges of assessing	4
interest	3
small group	2
segment	2
materials	1
technology	1
Total	**418**

Themes	Count of Themes
Factors that Impacted Learning	124
A Focus on Learning	107
Maximizing Strengths for SWD	100
Implementation of Reading Instruction	74
Outlier-Phonological Awareness	13
Total	**418**

Sub-themes	Count of Sub-themes
Positive	67
Negative	55
Building Instruction	50
Dedication	44
Language Activities	41
Adaptability	38
Instructional Practices	35
Structured	29
Background	25
Monitoring	15
Unstructured	4
Total	**403**