EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF IMPLEMENTING THE SPECIALIZED PROGRAM INDIVIDUALIZING READING EXCELLENCE: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

by

Terra Elizabeth Brown Jordan

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Susan Quindag, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Sharon Michael-Chadwell, Ed.D, Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to describe educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of the Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence (SPIRE) as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards at a large suburban school district in Utah. Bandura's self-efficacy theory served as the theoretical framework to guide an inquiry into educators' beliefs and how well they executed the SPIRE intervention to answer the central research question, "How do educators explain their perceptions of the use of SPIRE in the classroom?" This study utilized a multiple-case study design that captured the perception of 12 educators who served in the role of literacy coach, district literacy specialist Title 1 Coordinator, special education teacher, or educational aid. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling to provide rich information about the phenomenon. Data were collected, analyzed, and triangulated through multiple sources: written letters, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The data were coded to formulate important ideas and to identify themes. The themes that emerged were educators' understanding of SPIRE, the practice of SPIRE as an intervention, benefits of SPIRE, barriers to SPIRE, and professional development. Based on the findings, educators perceived that the implementation of SPIRE improved the struggling students' reading scores on state proficiency standards.

Keywords: SPIRE*,* self-efficacy, reading, intervention, struggling reader, instructional practices

Dedication

As a doctoral student, I was told that the dissertation process is a game filled with many twists and turns that would require a new level of discipline, dedication, and perseverance. I was reminded to keep my eyes on the end prize, even though it might seem far away and might take a long time to get there. Along this journey, I have learned that I can overcome obstacles and that the reward is worth it. I can do hard things. Small things add up and eventually grow into big things. Celebrating successes – no matter how small – provides motivation to keep going. And most importantly, the reward of crossing the finish line is worth it!

This dissertation is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and to my family. Many times, I wanted to quit, but the God who sits most high would not allow me to give up on my dream of earning my doctorate. Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV), "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future," has guided me through this journey.

I would also like to dedicate my dissertation to my family: my husband Bryan, son Bryan Jr., and daughter Teaira. Bryan has been my rock who has stood by me, listened to me when I was discouraged or frustrated, and pushed me throughout every part of this journey. His love and compassion served as a tool to keep me driven to complete this journey. Bryan Jr. provided me with loving support, while Teaira provided me with a listening ear. All of my family motivated me with encouraging words.

Next, I dedicate this dissertation to my mom and my guardian angel, my dad, who instilled in me the desire to work hard and the conviction that I can do anything if I put my mind to it. It's also dedicated to my siblings—Lydia, Willena, Cynthia, James (who passed

away), and Angel (who passed away during my doctoral journey)—who influenced me to never give up.

Last, I dedicate this dissertation to my friend Germaine. She supported me in every aspect of this journey and was instrumental in making sure I stayed the course, pushing me to keep moving forward on this dissertation journey.

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First, I would like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His steadfast love toward me and my knowing that "if He brings you 'to it,' He will also bring you 'through it'" provided me with the comfort that I needed to keep moving forward.

I would also like to thank my husband Bryan for his love, continued support, and patience during the countless hours of studying and preparing for this day. I want to thank my children (Bryan Jr. and Teaira) and my extended child (Taylor) for their inspiring words that has been the anchor and steady force throughout this entire journey. Thank you, family, for believing in me and reminding me that all things are possible. I Love Y'all!

I want to express my profound gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Susan Quindag, for her continued prayers, inspiration, and wisdom that assisted me through this journey. My gratitude is also extended to my committee chair member, Dr. Sharon Michael-Chadwell, for her support and feedback during this dissertation process.

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I would also like to acknowledge my sister Cynthia and my friend Germaine for always lending a listening ear when I needed it. Their cards and inspirational texts gave me a calming spirit and allowed me to see that I could do this.

Last, I would like to acknowledge my family and my friends for their prayers and support during this journey.

I am so grateful that God has put these people, and many others, in my path. I could not have accomplished this on my own. "And let us run with endurance the race God has set before

us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2, New Living Translation).

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List of Abbreviations

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)

Intensive Multisensory Reading Intervention with Proven Results (IMRIPR)

Institution Review Board (IRB)

Language Essentials for Teaching of Reading and Spelling (LETRS)

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD)

National Reading Panel (NRP)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence (SPIRE)

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

As education evolves, states and school districts must adopt and implement assessment practices and add new standard, according to the academic environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Consequently, educators must stress the need for students to meet reading standards rather than merely developing an enjoyment of reading, but there is often no time to engage students in refining their reading skills (Barber & Klanda, 2020). As reading requirements change, so does the process of teaching reading. Currently, best practices suggest that teaching reading involves guiding students in developing the skills identified in the report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) in 2000 (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2021); therefore, evidence-based practices diverted through mandated remediation, reading interventions, and literacy integration across subject areas become vital in educating students. In response to these extra demands, the Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence (SPIRE) emerged in schools and districts across the United States to provide a high-quality education for students with reading deficiencies. However, educators' beliefs about implementing SPIRE in their classrooms are unknown. This chapter is an overview of the study and addresses the following topics: background, situation to self, program statement, purpose statement, the significance of the study, research questions, and definitions.

Background

According to Sayeski and Hurford (2022), students require various interventions to learn to read. From a practitioner's perspective, reading interventions are strategies and activities designed to remediate students' reading difficulties and develop their confidence in reading texts so they can achieve reading proficiency (Pao, 2022). For understanding the implementation of

SPIRE as an instructional intervention, it is essential to note the relevance of the historical, social, and theoretical contexts associated with reading interventions in both society and education.

Historical Context

Historical accounts of reading instruction in the United States reveal that interventions focused on the curriculum, materials, and methodology. However, among the first interventions, *Webster's Spelling Book* facilitated teaching reading through phonics (Potter, 2010). The instructional methodology consisted of the word method, the phonics method, and a combination of the word method and phonics (Snowling & Hulme, 2020). With these methods and spellers, teachers taught students letters, syllables, and whole words that involved consistent pronunciation and spelling (Snowling & Hulme, 2020). Monaghan (1983) and Roth (2010) observed that the difference between the two spellers was the way the words were pronounced instead of the way words were spelled. The example according to Monaghan (1983), is other spellers' instruction focused on reading, religion, spelling, and morality, but spellers published by Webster emphasized spelling, essay reading, and grammar, providing a new approach that allowed a description of the sounds represented by different letters in length usage.

As early teaching of beginning reading continued, traditional schools emerged, and Horace Mann endorsed the whole-word method for reading instruction. Edwin Leigh developed a phonetic alphabet that he claimed would allow students to learn to read faster than the conventional reading method did (Roth, 2010). Reading intervention has been a vital part of the general education classroom since the early 1900s (Scammacca et al., 2016). According to Jeanne Chall (1967), during the 1950s and 1960s, a controversy arose over reading instruction. Commonly known as the Great Debate (Baumann et al., 1998; Chall, 1967; Flesch, 1955), this

controversy focused on the appropriateness of phonics versus whole-language reading instruction for struggling readers (Baumann et al., 1998; Chall, 1967). As this debate intensified, Chall (1967) argued that children need direct instruction in phonics to develop reading fluency and word identification efficiency.

Responding to the Great Debate, the U.S. Office of Education issued a report titled *First Grade Studies*, which compared beginning reading programs (Baumann et al., 1998; Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Lohnes & Gray, 1972). The comparison suggested that phonics instruction is vital to ensure that students are successful in decoding and fluency; however, the study noted a need for variation in content and strategies for beginning reading both within and across the curriculum. (Baumann et al., 1998; Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Lohnes & Gray, 1972). The call for variation altered reading noticeably by showing that systematic early coding instruction (phonics, word analysis, decoding, sound-symbol relations) improves students' spelling and comprehension (Baumann et al., 1998; Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Lohnes & Gray, 1972). According to Bond and Dykstra (1967), reading variation resulted in systematic phonics instruction far exceeding the use of straight basal programs in word recognition achievement. This variation occurred within the classroom (Baumann et al., 1998; Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Lohnes & Gray, 1972).

In 1996, President Clinton challenged Americans to read more due to their astounding low achievement in reading (Clinton, 1999). The challenge focused on improving reading by providing tutoring services to struggling readers in preschool through third grade (Clinton, 1999). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002) authorized states to close student achievement gaps by requiring that all children have an equal opportunity to obtain a high-quality education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The NCLB required that all students in

the third through eighth grade take an annual assessment in reading and math. Furthermore, NCLB required research-based findings of reading interventions to solve reading deficits and raise student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Consequently, schools and districts developed the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions were designed to support all areas requiring reading (Texas Education Agency, 2022). Throughout the United States, NCLB provision waivers were obtained, which allowed districts to implement SPIRE to address the growing number of nonreaders in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Social Context

Associated with the historical context of reading interventions, the U.S. Department of Education provides performance results that guide the need for addressing interventions that enhance reading performance. In 1969, the Nation's Report Card was released containing data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a mandated project of the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The Nation's Report Card is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of mathematics, reading, science, and many other subjects. It provides state- and district-level results and comparisons of proficiency standards for different demographic groups (Nation's Report Card, 2019). For example, the average national reading score in fourth grade for white and black students was 230 and 204 respectively in 2019, and both were lower than the scores for the 2017 assessment (White et al., 2021). According to White et al. (2021), the eighth-grade scores in 2019 were also lower than the 2017 scores.

The ability to read has been established as an essential fundamental skill for success in society (NRP, 2000; Snow et al., 2005). It is also a common belief among district and school

personnel that well-grounded reading skills are crucial for the 21st-century educational system (Ningsih et al., 2019). Therefore, the problem in this study applied to the United States society along with teachers, leaders, researchers, and students. Since teachers are responsible for all students' academic performance (Opper, 2019), teachers and students are among the groups who initially may directly benefit from this study.

The effective teaching of beginning reading requires that educators acknowledge differences in students' abilities and that some interventions may not adequately or appropriately address students' reading difficulties (Petscher et al., 2020). Additionally, how best to teach beginning reading continues to be a focus of current reading research (Castles et al., 2018; Moats, 2019; Spear-Swerling, 2019; Treiman, 2018). Advocates attempt to provide different ways of teaching students how to read, with most methods focused on phonics as an essential ingredient (Castles et al., 2018; Ehri, 2020; Snow et al., 2005). Petscher et al. (2020) critically examined reading science and concluded that best practices in reading instruction and interventions should include guidance from evidence-based research. This recommendation is supported by observations of differentiating instruction based on students' needs and abilities (Petscher et al., 2020; Skibbe et al., 2019; Spear-Swerling, 2019). In essence, these studies recognized that the quality of the intervention depends on educators' ability to provide different reading interventions that improve students' reading skills in accordance with the unique diversities of learners.

Learning is perceived as a lifelong process in which reading interventions prepare students to function as members of society, succeed in their future employment, and become lifelong readers (Cassidy et al., 2018; Mississippi College, 2021). In this regard, the role of the teacher in selecting and delivering reading interventions includes continually responding to

students who struggle as readers and their need to learn how to comprehend text in the early years of school. These students are challenged with reading difficulties that often lead to their not graduating from high school or graduating from high school and continuing to higher education but not finishing their collegiate degrees (Mississippi College, 2021). Characteristics of these students who struggle as readers are included in national achievement studies of elementary through secondary students in the United States.

The NAEP progress (Nation's Report Card, 2019) indicated that the 35% of children who scored below essential at the fourth-grade level is approximately equivalent to the 35% of children who did not master letter names before entering kindergarten. According to the Nation's Report Card (2019), while 70% of eighth graders scored at or above the basic level in reading in 2019, only 31% performed at or above proficiency. This means that a large percentage of eighth graders read at a basic level and have only partially mastered the basic reading skills for their grade level. Often the research on students who struggle as readers is focused on the middle school level, where students' reading levels are several grades below their grade placement and dropout rates increase (Nation's Report Card, 2019). The social context of this study included factors that contribute to poor performance that often results in students dropping out of school. Among the factors identified in the literature are readiness and social inequity (Tomaszewska-Pękała et al., 2020); test scores (Rickinson et al., 2018); absenteeism and suspension and lack of school resources, commitment, and support (LiCalsi et al., 2021). However, the need to provide additional support for struggling readers has prompted research on ways to offer support that include providing interventions in a classroom pull-out format to improve literacy skills of children from low socioeconomic status homes (Cook, 2019; Gillon et al., 2019).

Theoretical Context

The theoretical context of this research study was based on Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, which grew out of his social cognitive theory, first proposed during the 1960s and later renamed social learning theory (Bandura, 2000). The premise of social learning theory is that learning operates in a social context influenced by an individual's observations and reciprocal interactions with others (Crothers et al., 2020). Learning is selective with emphasis on the attributes of individuals, as well as the context of the physical and social environment (Crothers et al., 2020). According to Bandura (1977), observations and modeling are avenues for humans to acquire new behaviors through direct experiences. These experiences permit individuals to determine which behaviors to adopt as desirable based on a trial-and-error elimination process (Bandura, 1977; Cherry, 2020). Bandura (1971) concluded that the effects of the selected behaviors are also reinforced through direct verbal and physical engagement with people in the environment.

Researchers have expounded on the premise of the theory by offering various explanations. Bandura's social learning theory has been explained using such terms as *determinism*, *behavior*, *mental*, *another personal factor*, and *environmental events* (Bandura, 1977; Overskeid, 2018). Overskeid (2018) referred to the terms *association* and *reinforcement* to explain learning resulting from direct environmental experiences. Based on Bandura's (1997) reference to learning through modeling, McLeod (2016) proposed that learning is maintained by imitating modeled behavior when responses reinforce the behavior but are not likely to continue when responses punish the behavior. A key factor in social cognitive theory is the belief that environmental influences, many of which affect self-efficacy, are vital to emphasizing the skills,

perceptions, and attitudes that determine a person's motivation and behavior (Crothers et al., 2020). The lenses of this study will connect the performance of special education teachers to self-efficacy theory.

Bandura defined self-efficacy as an "individual's conviction about his or her capabilities to accomplish a task when faced with a challenge" (Troesch & Bauer, 2017, p. 390). Self-efficacy theory focuses on belief in one's ability to perform the required behaviors to accomplish a task or goal effectively. Bandura (1997) identified four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological state.

Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory provided the philosophical assumption for teacher self-efficacy by suggesting that change in humans is influenced by three forms of human agents: personal (one's own actions), proxy (people acting on others' behalf), and collective (people acting together). In this regard, Bandura (1997) theorized that self-efficacy results from one's own feelings of personal capabilities along with the perceptions of others. Bandura (1997) concluded that the perceived collective shared beliefs of a group within the cultural context of individuals help to shape their self-efficacy. These collective beliefs influence individuals' actions, the extent of effort they commit to a task, and other decisions they make. Barni et al. (2019) explained the effects of these agents in relation to teacher self-efficacy, stating that teachers' beliefs in their ability to effectively handle the tasks, obligations, and challenges related to their professional activity play a key role in influencing important academic outcomes.

In school communities, the four self-efficacies are critical to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the teacher's job. For example, in the context of teaching reading in the special education classroom at the elementary level, the theory suggests that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs influence how they feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave during their experiences

teaching reading (Bandura, 1994). Poor self-efficacy resulting in teacher behavior that reflects feelings of inadequacy presents challenges in meeting the students' reading needs. Bandura (2000) concluded that although self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by the three human agents, one's beliefs about personal efficacy are the controlling factor.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was that little is known about educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards (Gallagher, 2019; Saletta, 2018; Stevens et al., 2021). Proficiency is defined as "partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills fundamental for proficient work at each grade" (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020, p. 6). According to research, reading interventions have changed the way educators address reading standards, instruction, and curriculum (Balajthy, 2022; Barber & Klanda, 2020). Each year about one-third of fourth graders and one-fourth of eighth graders do not meet proficiency standards on reading achievement tests (Nation's Report Card, 2019). Although the statistics and literature supporting the existence of the problem are alarming, studies that provide an in-depth understanding of educators' implementation of SPIRE are limited or unknown (Saletta, 2018). However, understanding the educator's perception of reading interventions such as SPIRE can provide information that can address implementation concerns and enhance districts' efforts. Schools and districts throughout the United States are working to incorporate interventions based on the specific academic needs of the student population and accessibility to curriculum, resources, personnel, and professional development (Balajthy, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

The problem has implications for assessing reading instructional strategies and teachers' views with respect to their implementation to determine their effectiveness. Failure to discover the educator's perception about an intervention may result in ineffective strategies being incorporated into instruction with the intention of promoting students' reading capabilities (Hiebert, 2022). In exploring different strategies to assist children in becoming independent and successful readers, researchers have found gaps in reading interventions related to teaching literacy skills (Balajthy, 2022; Hiebert, 2022). Findings revealed that teaching skills in isolation is not an effective way to create readers who can comprehend; thus, that approach can produce long-term struggling readers (Hiebert, 2022). The research shows that students at high risk of failing in school usually score low on tests and are not proficient in reading (Saletta, 2018; White et al., 2021). This deficit is also reflected in the students' writing ability (Saletta, 2018). Ziegler et al. (2020) concluded that students who lack the basic reading skills that should be attained in elementary schools are later hindered in acquiring abilities compared to their more prepared peers. In addition, students who lack exposure to vocabulary and language in the earlier years in their home settings may have reading problems in the school setting (Gillon et al., 2019; Hiebert, 2022). According to Clark-Edmond, SPIRE as a reading intervention can address these issues associated with students who struggle with reading and assist educators by providing a skills-based program that moves from a simple to a more complex concept (EPS School Specialty, 2019).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to describe educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards at a large suburban school district

in Utah. Educators' perception was defined as how individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions to give meaning to their environments (Robbins & Judge, 2021). The concept of the educator's perception is grounded in self-efficacy theory, which guided this study. The research was intended to provide valuable insight into self-efficacy as related to the enthusiasm, commitment, instructional behaviors, and capabilities of the educators, their level of functioning, and their execution of a plan that affects their teaching.

Significance of the Study

The availability of studies that explore instructional interventions for reading and bridging the gap of an epidemic of struggling readers in American schools represents a relatively recent period of research (Donegan et al., 2020; Miciak et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2018). With many schools across America utilizing more aggressive interventions for struggling students, particularly in reading, the question of the effectiveness of those interventions remains (Connor et al., 2018; Donegan et al., 2020; Toste et al., 2019). However, qualitative studies that have been conducted among educators to understand their perception of SPIRE are limited and not current (Wiseman, 2011; Zvoch & Stevens, 2015). Therefore, because of limited investigations of SPIRE, this study added to the literature regarding teachers' perception of this intervention. In this context, it is essential to discuss the empirical, theoretical, and practical significance of this study with respect to educators' perceptions of implementing SPIRE in the classroom.

Theoretical Significance

Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory guided this study, and according to Donohoo (2018), self-efficacy profoundly affects teachers' instructional practice. The theory supported both the study and the teachers' instructional practice related to the idea that positive instructional experiences while implementing SPIRE can increase students' reading achievement

(Williams, 2018). Research findings suggest that self-efficacy affects the educator's belief in executing a plan in a prospective situation (Glazer, 2018). When teachers perceive their teaching experiences with students as successful, their self-efficacy is enhanced, and they succeed well beyond their capabilities (Bandura, 1997; Tassell et al., 2019). If they perceive their teaching experiences with students as failures, their self-efficacy is lowered and they may underperform due to their low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Donohoo, 2018; Tassell et al., 2019). Among contributions from prior studies were conclusions that self-efficacy increases content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and influences educators' effectiveness (Bandura, 1997; Glazer, 2018; Tassell et al., 2019). Therefore, this study contributed to understandings associated with the constructs of the theory that applied to enhancing student performance in reading through examining educators' implementation of SPIRE.

Empirical Significance

The empirical significance of the study using a case study approach added to the existing literature about SPIRE as an intervention for reading. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA), which forced schools and districts to focus on increasing the effectiveness of reading programs for all children (No Child Left Behind, 2002), was important for educators to understand the challenges of implementing SPIRE. Researchers recognize that understanding challenges affect teacher perceptions of interventions and this perception may better prepare other teachers who work in the school community. (Gallagher, 2019; Petscher et al., 2020; Stevens et al., 2021). Many studies have been conducted to explore employing best practices for literacy development and bridging the reading gap for learners (Gillon et al., 2019; Vaughn et al., 2019; White et al., 2021). However, qualitative studies that have been conducted among educators to understand their perception of the SPIRE are minimal and may be outdated

(Wiseman, 2011; Zvoch & Stevens, 2015). Furthermore, few studies focus on implementing components with fidelity that correlate to the outcomes in the educational intervention research and the educators' experiences and practices with implementing SPIRE (Corbin Independent School District, Kentucky, 2022; Gallagher, 2019; EPS School Specialty, 2019). Therefore, this study was crucial for augmenting the empirical literature for educators who teach SPIRE.

Historical Context

The practical significance of this study was in producing data accessible to educators to assist in improving student achievement. Providing information to educators to develop strategies can help children to become independent and successful readers (Williams, 2018). Information may also benefit districts and schools through gaining further insight into factors that hinder struggling readers and ways to improve reading achievement (Hiebert, 2022). This research was essential to schools, districts, curriculum developers, and educators for providing directions to facilitate practical professional training that incorporates curriculum planning and creating innovations and strategies that support educators' practices (Hiebert, 2022; Tassell et al., 2019).

Associated with the social context, school and district administrators and policymakers may also benefit from this study beyond the implications of professional development. Among current instructional practices is a focus on preparing students for standardized testing. Although such preparation is an apparent necessity in a standards-based society, critics claim that districts spend more time preparing students for standardized testing than encouraging them to be lifelong readers (Cassidy et al., 2018; Fletcher et al., 2018). The message implied in the critics' position is that encouraging children to become lifelong readers should be a vital component of every school's curriculum. Yet, many schools in the United States address specific literacy skills rather

than developing students' positive relationship with reading (Barber & Klanda, 2020; Sohn, 2020), including guiding student interest and appreciation for reading, which are also fundamental components of reading comprehension and comprehension strategies (Diallo, 2020; Elleman et al., 2019; National Council on Teacher Quality, 2021; Young et al., 2020). Consequently, the findings of this study may offer recommendations helpful to schools, districts, and policymakers in planning curricula, creating innovations, and selecting innovations that include building student motivation and interest in reading.

Research Questions

The questions posed for the study were based on the theoretical framework of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. Therefore, the framework provided an enhanced knowledge base to facilitate understanding the self-perception of instructional practice, identifying barriers to completing a task successfully, and opportunities for continued professional development to promote effectiveness. The following questions that guided the study were designed to lead educators to ultimately influence students' reading performance.

Central Research Question

What are educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards in a large suburban school district in Utah?

Subquestion 1

How do educators use Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention in the classroom?

Subquestion 2

What are the benefits and barriers educators experience when implementing Specialized Program Individualizing Excellence instructional practice in the classroom?

Subquestion 3

How do educators explain their professional development with using Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence?

Definitions

The following terms were defined as applied in this study. The definitions also provide clarification of terms to enable future researchers to replicate this study.

1. *Educator* – a person who gives intellectual, moral, and social instruction (Yaqubova, 2022)
2. *Implementation* – the act of carrying an intention into effect (Peters et al., 2013)
3. *Instructional practices* – how students achieve learning outcomes (Francisco & Celon, 2020)
4. *Perception* – personal characteristics that affect the person's attitudes, personality, motives, interests, ideas about past experiences, and expectations (Mohammad, 2016)
5. *Qualitative research* – a "means for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups ascribing to a social or human problem" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 19)
6. *Reading* – the process of looking at a series of written symbols and getting meaning from them (Frankel et al., 2016)
7. *Self-efficacy theory* – "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994, p. 71)

8. *Struggling readers* – persons who have difficulty decoding text and comprehending what they read or applying comprehension strategies appropriately, who have poor metacognitive skills, and who suffer from such contributing factors as environmental, undiagnosed reading disabilities and lack of teachers trained in identifying children who are at risk of reading failure and in building oral language and linguistic skills (Diallo, 2020)
9. *Tier 1 readers* – student readers who must have equitable core fluency, comprehension, phonic awareness instruction with grade level expectation (Texas Education Agency, 2022)
10. *Tier 2 readers* –student readers who fall one grade level behind or have difficulty based on progress in fluency, comprehension, and phonic awareness (Texas Education Agency, 2022)
11. *Tier 3 readers*–student readers who fall two or more grade levels behind (possibly evaluated for special education services) or have difficulty based on progress in fluency, comprehension, and phonic awareness (Texas Education Agency, 2022)

Summary

This case study addressed the problem that educators' perceptions concerning implementing Specialized Program Individualized Reading Excellence are not known. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to describe educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards in a large suburban school district in Utah. Educators and researchers agree that 21st-century reading skills are essential for giving students the skills to succeed in this new world (Alsaeedi et al., 2021; Diallo, 2020; Ningsih et al., 2019). However, each year only 35% of fourth-grade

and 34% of eighth-grade students are at or above proficient level in reading achievement (Nation's Report Card, 2019).

Statistical reports show that students who do not reach reading proficiency by the end of third grade are less likely to experience economic or social success (Fielding, 2022). Hence, the integration approach of reading interventions focused on either systematic phonics or balanced literacy skills may be among best practices in addressing the literacy gap in America (Sohn, 2020). The theoretical framework selected for this study was Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory for describing educators' beliefs, experiences, and practices in implementing SPIRE and how these perceptions affect struggling students' reading performance in the classroom. While SPIRE is not supported by enough current qualitative research, the program conveniently uses educators' commitment to the 10-step instruction level of implementation fidelity that focuses on the desired outcomes, and this has changed the way educators deliver reading interventions to students.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards at a large suburban school district in Utah. This chapter presents the theoretical framework, Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. The related literature section focuses on the reading process and salient features of historical developments that influence the teaching of reading. In connection with the research questions, the review presents trends to suggest the need for reading interventions and descriptions of SPIRE.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework selected for this study was Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. According to Carleton et al. (2008), this theoretical framework is derived from the social cognitive premise and provides links that relate to instructional practice, teacher persistence, and student achievement. Bandura's (1977) theory posits that individuals' initiatives are directed by their personal beliefs and self-awareness. Furthermore, self-efficacy provides a link between the development and organization of a required course of action.

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to accomplish or succeed in a given task. The theory evolved from Bandura's social cognitive theory of the 1960s (Bandura, 1977). A key factor in social cognitive theory is the belief that environmental influences, many of which affect self-efficacy, are vital to emphasizing the skills, perceptions, and attitudes that determine a person's motivation and behavior and directly affect performance (Bandura, 1971,1994, 1997; Crothers et al., 2020). The theory was later referred to as the social

learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1994, 2000; Crothers et al., 2020; LaMorte, 2019). According to Crothers et al. (2020), the premise of Bandura's self-efficacy theory is that learning operates in a social context where individuals learn through observing others. The self-efficacy theory emphasizes the reciprocal interaction of individuals and what they bring to the situation, the physical and social environment around the individuals, and the behaviors of the individuals (Crothers et al., 2020).

Major Component of Self-Efficacy

Recognizing that self-efficacy is acquired in different ways, Bandura (1977) identified four major sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional effect (Bandura (1977, 1997). Researchers support the importance of these four primary sources contributing to the overall self-efficacy of educators (Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2014). Bandura (1997) noted that the most influential source of self-efficacy belief is mastery experiences. Mastery experiences are usually derived from the individual's previous accomplishments.

Through feedback, defeat, endurance, and support, an educator can develop resilience and perseverance (Bandura, 1997). These experiences allow the teacher to self-reflect and provide feedback on what went wrong or went well, and the adaptation needed for the activities (Gordon et al., 2022). When an educator's sense of self-efficacy increases, he or she is able to explore and attempt different ways to increase student success—to help students learn new attainable skills or perfect a skill (Bradford & Cullen, 2012). This increase provides the momentum to continue improving upon one's efficacy beliefs for the future (Bradford & Cullen, 2012). This is especially important for the teacher's self-efficacy because this reliable source promotes student learning. However, because of repeated failures, an educator may experience

low self-confidence, and any level of efficacy through mastery experiences gradually decreases (Wang et al., 2017).

Vicarious experience refers to the process of gaining knowledge through observation. Observation is a practice that occurs between veteran and inexperienced teachers (Hoy & Hoy, 2003). Bandura (1977, 1997) underscored that learning through observing models is a vicarious experience that establishes high levels of self-efficacy. The individual observes others' performance skills that they can attempt. These positive effects from modeling are gained when the observer has a high level of respect for the modeler's competence; this is more significant than other individual characteristics of the model (Bandura, 1977). Forms of vicarious experience or modeling are produced through opportunities that include peer conversation, peer observation, professional development, and media influences (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

According to Bandura (1997), social persuasion increases individuals' confidence to produce new strategies that increase job satisfaction and performance. With social persuasion, constructive criticism motivates the individual to persist in the task (Bandura, 1997). When encouragement is reinforced, the likelihood of increasing a positive sense of self-efficacy is gained (Bandura, 1977, 1997). The sources of social persuasion are influenced by feedback from colleagues, administrators, and student engagement. However, social persuasion is only effective if the individual finds the persuasion trustworthy and credible and cannot stand alone as the sole source of self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). When that happens, an accurate assessment of the individual's areas that need growth decreases and may cause the person to have a false sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994, 1997).

The physiological and emotional state is the definitive source of self-efficacy beliefs. Bandura (1997) concluded that an individual's behavior is significant to a person's emotional

state. An individual's sense of competence contributes to physiological cues such as sorrow, anger, and excitement, and body cues and body language are determining factors contributing to the individual's behavior (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996). When a person participates in a stressful situation, the likelihood of the individual engaging in it again decreases. Adverse experiences of educators are stimulants for distressing situations, which lead to a decline in self-efficacy (Pajares, 1996). When individuals have high levels of stress or anxiety in the workplace, they may be overwhelmed with uncertainty, which in turn heightens their stress level, creating a deep cycle of incompetence (Bandura, 1997). Educators who establish a powerful sense of efficacy experience decreased anxiety in their job and are better qualified to conquer the job demands (Bandura, 1997).

Studies Using Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy theory has been included in multiple studies to explore various phenomena (American Psychological Association, 2012; Artino, 2012; Shahzad & Naureen, 2017). Researchers have examined the self-efficacy of teachers and students in school dropout and prevention studies (American Psychological Association, 2012; Brown et al., 2019; Shahzad & Naureen, 2017). Medical studies have focused on modeling as a vicarious experience component of the theory for skill development (Artino, 2012). Additionally, Collins and Stockton (2018) studied the functions of the theory as a conceptual framework. Studies focused on education have shown the importance of self-efficacy in teaching performance (Bruggink et al., 2016; Derrington & Angelle, 2013).

Brown et al. (2019) found that if the teacher's behavior demonstrates a feeling of adequacy, the work is not as daunting. Other researchers have found that there is a relationship between student success and teachers' self-efficacy (Brown et al., 2019; Bruggink et al., 2016;

Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015). Schunk (2016) found that self-efficacy influences persistence, achievement, efforts, and choices. Glazer (2018) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) found that individuals' perception of self-efficacy determines their approaches and task completion. However, individuals with low levels of self-efficacy tend to find themselves inadequate and lack the incentive to acquire the skills that would lead them to success.

Studies Specific to Teacher Self-Efficacy and Perception

Self-efficacy refers to the belief or perception a person has regarding the ability to perform (Bandura, 1997). Applied to teachers, self-efficacy involves the perceived ability that the teacher's performance leads to successful student performance (Sehgal et al., 2017). Successful performance results in positive self-efficacy and motivates teachers to continue efforts to ensure that students advance (Glazer, 2018; Quin, 2017). Teachers' self-efficacy can also be defined as the teachers' judgment in their abilities to help students learn despite complex circumstances (Martin & Mulvihill, 2019; Sehgal et al., 2017). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) reported that educators' effectiveness correlates to the individual teacher's belief in the skill to plan, organize, and carry out the task required to attain the given education goals. The person's approaches and task completion are determined by his or her perception of self-efficacy (Glazer, 2018; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2014).

According to researchers (Ma et al., 2022; Swarnalatha, 2019), teachers' self-efficacy is self-fulfilling; teachers who believe they will succeed are more likely to put forth greater effort when things are difficult. However, researchers agree that research on self-efficacy examines the teacher's perception of professional knowledge and teaching competence while not overestimating and underestimating the teacher's ability being studied (Foorman et al., 2016; Putwain & von der Embse, 2019). Perception involves recognizing the environmental stimuli and

the actions in response to these stimuli (Cherry, 2020). Perception can influence the organization, identification, and interpretation of information (Cherry, 2020). One of the main arguments in Miner's book *Organizational Behavior* is that the human senses must process perception to provide order and meaning in the school environment (Miner, 2015). Research shows that perceptions developed by past experiences establish expectations that affect the person's current perceptions (Cherry, 2020). These set expectations can cause friction when the differences fall into this realm; differences in perception can affect the experiences and state of motivation that will cause conflict in the environment.

Perception is a subjective, active, and creative process through which teachers, for example, assign information to understand themselves and others (Cherry, 2020). Moe et al. (2010) noted that job satisfaction is interconnected with how successful teachers teach and create a conducive learning environment. Research has shown that perceptions of self-actualization are exhibited with high levels of job performance in the classroom (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Consequently, if teachers are satisfied with their job performance, this reflects their commitment to the profession. Perception is essential in understanding the teacher's behavior because every teaching approach is different and presents different teaching perceptions and emotions about its use (Rodrigo-Ruiz, 2016). Also, differences in perceptions and emotions could influence teacher-teacher experiences, teacher-student experiences, and motivation and may cause conflict (Rodrigo-Ruiz, 2016). However, past behaviors regarding teaching approaches and curriculum change that resulted in positive student outcomes influenced positive teacher self-efficacy (Martin & Mulvihill, 2019).

Several environmental factors may influence teacher perception and performance, and thus teacher's self-efficacy. Educators teach courses and provide experiences that prepare

students for life (Postholm, 2018), and according to Megawati et al. (2010), educators benefit from the delivery of meaningful experiences and teaching activities. Therefore, teachers need to focus on and understand how metacognition and knowledge transfer occur in the classroom (Postholm, 2018). Tschannen and Hoy (2001) posited that teachers with high self-efficacy are more open to new ideas and methods to meet student needs.

Teacher engagement in professional development provided through school districts is one factor that may influence high teacher self-efficacy. Professional development assists teachers in providing quality education to their students and encourages teacher interaction (Fullan, 2001). Although Fullan (2001) surmised that school districts offer professional development to encourage teachers' interaction with the curriculum, researchers suggest there is little impact on instruction with teacher's interaction during professional development. As districts evolve, teachers' perspectives and beliefs should be the focal point for impacting the curriculum.

Conditions restricting the teacher's successful performance may lead to low teacher self-efficacy. Research has shown that when people engage in self-perception, they are faced with an inquiry about their attitudes, values, and preferences that will allow them to manage decisions (Brown et al., 2019). Attitudes are impacted by past behaviors and influence future behaviors (Mohammad, 2016). Educators' self-efficacy influences their behavior, and their past behavior influences indirect relationships through a lack of mediating cognitive activity, affecting their self-perception (Barni et al., 2019; Mintz et al., 2020). The NAEP progress (Nation's Report Card, 2019) reported that teachers did not have appropriate time to devote to guided reading instruction with individual students because of the influx of struggling readers. This condition of having to manage added instructional strategies resulted in teachers becoming disgruntled and estranged from the application of guided reading instruction (Nation's Report Card, 2019).

Research reveals that the problematic aspect of attitudes is that individuals form an immediate perspective of the situation rather than delaying forming the attitude (Wang et al., 2017). In a study of the relationship between teachers' values and self-efficacy, Barni et al. (2019) found that the relationship between openness to change and self-efficacy was stronger for teachers who perceived that they experienced less external pressure and felt self-determined (autonomously motivated) toward teaching. Such factors were motivation for high teacher self-efficacy (Barni et al., 2019). Supportive of Barni et al.'s findings, Chen and Mathies (2016) observed that of five emotions (joy, love, sadness, anger, and fear) most present in 250 teachers performing their professional responsibilities, joy by a significant margin was the emotion teachers exhibited. Applying this finding to Barni et al.'s association of strong self-efficacy with autonomous motivation suggests that joy in teaching is an observable behavior reflective of high teacher self-efficacy; researchers have found that perceptions of self-actualization are exhibited with high levels of job performance in the classroom (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). If teachers are satisfied with their job performance, their commitment to the profession is enhanced. Therefore, researchers recognize the importance of providing teachers the kind of support that will produce positive behaviors in the educational environment and promote a strong sense of self-efficacy, which will likely translate to increased teaching effectiveness and increases in student achievement (Paolini, 2015).

Related Literature

This literature review is a synthesis of scholarly sources that support the need for additional research into educators' perceptions of using intervention programs to teach students who struggle with reading, especially students enrolled in special education. The review contains a historical account of the process of reading with varying views on skills that are important for

learning how to read. Attention is given to addressing students with special needs in learning to read, intervention strategies (including SPIRE), and the role of teacher self-efficacy in adopting and implementing interventions.

The Process of Reading

Reading is commonly observed as a fundamental part of academic achievement. Based on historical and current research, reading is traditionally acknowledged as a complex process by the former International Reading Association, now the International Literacy Association (2018) and practitioners (Castles et al., 2018; Filderman et al., 2021; Petscher et al., 2020). Explanations of cognitive processes, fundamental skills, and reading instruction that effectively address the reading process have involved opposing views among researchers and practitioners. These views have included teaching reading as a whole-word approach featuring rote-memorized visual characteristics of words (Ehri, 2020) versus teaching reading emphasizing phonics (Bond & Dykstra, 1967; Castles et al., 2018; Flesch, 1955). Other explanations of the basic reading process of skills recognize the benefit of fusing together the approaches that involve whole words and phonics (Castles et al., 2018; Chall, 1967; Ehri, 2020). Research referred to as the reading wars attempted to resolve the conflict over reading skills and instruction involved three major publications: *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, *The First Grade Studies*, and the report of the NRP (Baumann et al., 1998; Castles et al., 2018; Chall, 1967).

Based on the research included in the 1967 publication *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, Chall (as cited in Hunt, 1969) found that decoding resulted in students being able to recognize words, spell, and read with understanding and that knowledge of letters and sounds influenced reading. According to Gates (1967), Chall noted that the whole-word approach is beneficial for a child's reading development in the early years. However, because the child

regresses in later years, a combination of instruction using whole word and phonics is helpful for the child sustaining progress in reading (Chall, 1967).

The First Grade Studies (Bond & Dykstra, 1967) represented a national effort to address the debate by determining what attributes are best related to reading success. Findings revealed that the ability to discriminate between word sounds and knowledge of names of letters had the most significant relationship to reading success in each instructional method examined (Bond & Dykstra, 1967). Other attributes examined included auditory and visual discrimination, pre-first-grade familiarity with print, and intelligence. Bond & Dykstra (1967) asserted that using phonics early in the child's education improves spelling, comprehension, and word recognition, providing a more significant impact on achievement than basal instruction. They also concluded that raising awareness of a need to shift away from comparing methods of teaching reading to addressing how reading occurs as a process was among the benefits of the study (Bond and Dykstra, 1967).

The NRP (2000) provided guidelines for teaching reading that incorporated views from findings of both Chall (1967) and Bond and Dykstra (1967). The U.S. Congress convened the NRP in 2000 to evaluate existing research-based knowledge and evidence of best-practice approaches to teaching children to read accurately, rapidly, and comprehensively (NRP, 2000). The analysis and synthesis of the research resulted in a framework for using the findings in five critical areas for reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension (NICHHD, 2000). The framework also addressed criteria established for struggling readers to improve their reading skills and served as a guiding principle for the NCLB Act (2002) and the Reading First Initiative of 2000 (NRP, 2000).

The instructional components of the framework reflect the skills that presented reading instructional and achievement issues associated with the process of reading that were current at the time of establishing the NRP (NRP, 2000). However, some skills were not addressed along with the topic of second language learners. The panel addressed the skills by inquiring about best instructional practices for skill attainment. Therefore, the inquiry identified practical instructional reading approaches and determined their readiness for application in the classroom in accordance with the charge from Congress (NRP, 2000). The five skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension) are currently referenced as applicable to the reading process and are included in the instructional component of SPIRE.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the process of detecting and separating the smallest units of oral language into syllables and individual phonemes (International Literacy Association, n.d.). In reading preparation, students should hear, understand, and manipulate the sounds of spoken words and recognize that sequences of speech sounds make up syllables (National Reading Panel, 2000). Phonemic awareness helps students to understand that letters systematically represent the sounds in words; thus providing students a way to approach sounding out and reading new words. The NRP (2000) determined that phonemic awareness can be taught and that it helps children learn to read and improve their reading—even readers who are disabled or second language learners—and enhances reading comprehension. However, training in phonemic awareness does not improve the spelling ability of disabled readers (NRP, 2000). The same report also concluded that teaching phonemic awareness considers the learner's capabilities to determine when instruction should include letter instruction, segmenting initial sounds in words, and segmenting or blending with letters.

Phonics

Phonics refers to letter-sound correspondences or the relationship between sounds and spellings (Blevins, 2017; NRP, 2000). According to the report of the NRP (2000), a student who practices phonics can recognize, identify, categorize, and blend letter sounds. Phonics plays an essential role in helping students comprehend text. The goal of phonics instruction is to assist students in attaining knowledge in the use of the alphabetic code to facilitate learning to read and comprehend written language (Blevins, 2017). As an instructional approach for beginning readers and those experiencing reading difficulties, the explicit and systematic teaching of phonics can occur in various ways.

According to the NRP (2000), analytic phonics involves guiding students to analyze letter-sound relations in a word. In synthetic phonics, students are guided to recognize words through converting letters into phonemes blending sounds. Teaching phonics through spelling focuses on having children write words, having gone through a process of transforming sounds into letters. Researchers found that early instruction in phonics in kindergarten and first grade is more effective than in later years (Hingstman et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2018). Effective early phonics instruction begins with an awareness of letters and phonemic awareness; compared to non-phonics approaches, systematic phonics approaches are significantly more effective; and the integration of phonics and other reading instruction permits a balanced instructional program (NRP, 2000).

Learning phonics allows students with disabilities to map sounds onto spelling, enabling them to decode words and providing a firm foundation for reading. Studies investigating phonics interventions for students with intellectual disabilities (moderate and severe) revealed that students could acquire phonological awareness and decoding skills if they have an intensive,

systematic reading intervention (Castles et al., 2018; NRP, 2000; Sermier Dessemontet et al., 2019). According to the International Literacy Association (2018), students need to know nearly all the alphabet letters because phonics is the first step. Conclusions of the NRP ((2000) indicated the appropriateness of systematic phonics instruction to address the needs of at-risk, disabled, and low-achieving readers. This systematic intervention resulted in substantial improvement among young (kindergarten through first-grade) children at risk of future reading problems, and disabled readers described as having an average IQ but severe reading difficulties (NRP, 2000).

Fluency

Researchers recognize fluency as reading quickly, accurately, efficiently, and meaningfully with proper expression (Hingstman et al., 2021; Lee & Yoon, 2017; Paige & Smith, 2018; Roberts et al., 2018). Developing fluency in reading enables the reader to perform multiple tasks in the reading process—such as word recognition and comprehension—at the same time while demonstrating such indicators of fluency as reading speed, proper oral expression, and correct word recognition (Lee & Yoon, 2017). Further, fluency suggests the reader engages in an effortless process that extends beyond accurately recognizing words and may improve comprehension (Paige, 2020; Roberts et al., 2018). Oral reading fluency is a prerequisite to reading comprehension and an essential reading competency (Paige, 2020; Paige & Smith, 2018). The most critical components of verbal reading fluency that correlate with reading comprehension are prosody (expressive reading that encompasses variables of timing, phrasing, emphasis, and intonation), reading words effortlessly and rapidly, and word recognition (Aita et al., 2019; Hindin & Steiner, 2022; Maki & Hammerschmidt-Snidarich,

2022). Thus, these components of verbal reading fluency are critical for allowing the reader to read fluently while comprehending the information stated in the text.

Specific to learners with disabilities, the NRP (2000) reported studies on the ability of special needs learners to develop and use techniques associated with reading fluency. An examination of practices that addressed the needs of students with special needs revealed that instruction included one-on-one tutoring, small-group arrangements, repeated tape-recorded readings, and varying instructional time periods (NRP, 2000). These learners included those with learning disabilities, autism, and other special needs. According to researchers, repeated and recorded reading and strategies improved students' reading and maintained their gains during instruction so that readers with poor skills acquired information about words (Aita et al., 2019; Hindin & Steiner, 2022; Maki & Hammerschmidt-Snidarich, 2022). The NRP concluded that guided oral reading instruction and repeated reading improve most learners' fluency, word recognition, comprehension, and overall reading achievement (Aita et al., 2019; Hindin & Steiner, 2022; Maki & Hammerschmidt-Snidarich, 2022). Aita et al., (2019) and Hindin and Steiner, (2022) also suggested that fluency aims to develop students' basic word reading skills and automatic word recognition to support reading comprehension.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to words that a person must understand to communicate effectively and comprises one of two skills contributing to reading comprehension, with the other being reasoning (Filderman et al., 2021; Kuder, 2017; NRP, 2000). Since vocabulary predicts acquiring the critical aspects of metalinguistic awareness (knowledge of one's language), it allows the reader to activate relevant background knowledge while integrating new information with existing knowledge (Moody et al., 2018). During the process of learning to read, learners acquire

words that become a part of their oral vocabulary (NRP, 2000). Although students learn vocabulary indirectly through everyday experiences with oral and written language (Oslund et al., 2018), it is taught directly and explicitly through general word-learning strategies and specific words related to content learning (Oslund et al., 2018). New concepts become accessible to students with an extensive vocabulary who learn to apply context clues to discover unknown words (Tuyen & Huyen, 2019). An extensive vocabulary is characteristic of the skilled reader's comprehension processes (NRP, 2000); however, students who struggle with vocabulary tend not to attempt complex reading tasks, hindering them from fully comprehending the text.

Vocabulary has been affirmed as essential for student with disabilities to succeed in reading (Elleman et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021); however, the NRP (2000) found that more attention has been directed to reading comprehension despite the recognized importance of vocabulary. Studies investigating instructional methodologies in teaching students with disabilities include investigations of visually impaired English as a Second Language learners (Baltisberger & Seljenes, 2019; Ozer & Cabaroglu, 2018; Susanto & Nanda, 2018). Instructional strategies that aided visually impaired students to build their vocabulary included using assistive technologies, audiovisual aids, games, stories, songs, and repetition **(**Özer & Cabaroglu, 2018). The NRP noted that vocabulary research for early grades is limited and attributed the limitation to the practice of teaching vocabulary integrated into other instruction at this level. However, the research shows that reading ability and vocabulary size are related (NRP, 2000). The NRP noted further that age and ability levels influence gains from vocabulary instruction. Researchers recommend that vocabulary instruction include repeated exposures to words, direct and indirect instruction, and pre-teaching the vocabulary in reading lessons (Manyak & Kappus, 2021; Manyak & Manyak, 2021); the reading exercise outcomes are

influenced by pre-teaching the vocabulary where the number of unfamiliar words that the reader will encounter decreases.

Spelling

Spelling is defined as the ability to correctly organize letters to design communal words (Van Rijthoven et al., 2021). Spelling instruction is a complex developmental process that contains code based skills such as phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, phonological awareness, and awareness of the phoneme-grapheme relationship (Chapleau & Beaupré-Boivin, 2019; Williams et al., 2016). According to Williams et al. (2016), spelling typically begins with instruction in phonemic awareness, allowing students to establish their ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken speech. Spelling is vital because it will enable the student to develop phonics, orthography, morphology, and vocabulary (Institute for Multi-Sensory Education [IMSE], 2020). Also, Ehri and Wilce (1987) found a high correlation (.60 to .86) between reading comprehension and spelling among students. Still, this connection is not always bidirectional in terms of the ability to read for comprehension and to spell.

Researchers explain that although a good speller may be a good reader, a good reader may not be a good speller (Kim & Petscher, 2023; Spichtig et al., 2022). In examining the association between writing and reading, Berninger et al. (2002) found that the outcome of spelling is different than that of reading comprehension. Ingebrand (2013) noted that spelling capability and the relationship to reading could be further addressed by examining the connection between reading and spelling skills when interventions are implemented. In reading, students who learn the spelling rules are able to deepen their understanding of the English language (IMSE, 2020). Reading helps the student understand the spelling of a word and makes the representation accessible for fluent reading (Spichtig et al., 2022). However, some

researchers (Pan et al., 2021; Spichtig et al., 2022) suggest that spelling is the most forgotten component of reading development since many schools have deemphasized or abandoned spelling instruction altogether.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a significant component of the reading process. Durkin (1993) defined reading comprehension as the essence of reading, consisting of various cognitive and linguistic skills. According to the NRP, as an active cognitive and interactive strategic process, reading comprehension comprises an integration of complex skills, including vocabulary (NRP, 2000). As a result, if a student has deficits in cognitive ability, this process will lead to deficiencies in reading comprehension (Spencer & Wagner, 2018). Researchers have shown that inadequacies in understanding the strategies and skills involved in reading comprehension could lead to deficits in decoding, inference making, comprehension monitoring, syntactic processing, verbal working memory, and oral language skills (Babayiğit & Shapiro, 2020; Elleman et al., 2019; Oakhill et al., 2019; Stevens et al., 2019).

Reading comprehension is essential not only for academic learning but also for lifelong learning (Alenezi, 2021). It is a critical skill necessary in the professional, social, and recreational domains of society (Miles & Ari, 2022). Although comprehending text facilitates learning across the content areas, students are expected to read and apply knowledge from increasingly complex texts and are assessed through standardized measures. They often have problems understanding vocabulary, inferences, verbal reasoning, grammatical development, and oral expression (Block et al., 2009; Elleman et al., 2019; Torgeson, 1998). Thus, these increased expectations place core weaknesses on the student's ability to read for understanding and have

implications for instructional strategies that best equip learners to navigate the complexities of the reading comprehension processes.

According to Miles and Ari, (2022), students with disabilities who struggle with phonological skills, decoding, word recognition, and articulation skills have difficulty understanding what they read. The Nation's Report Card (2017, 2019) reported that only 37% of fourth graders and 36% of eighth graders met the standards for reading proficiency. Even worse, among students with disabilities, only 12% and 10% of fourth- and eighth-grade students, respectively, met the standards for reading proficiency. Researchers also found that students with emotional disturbances and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) frequently demonstrate difficulties with reading comprehension skills (Brown et al., 2021; McIntyre et al., 2017). Studies reveal that 65% of students with ASD displayed poorer reading comprehension skills than their peers (Fucha et al., 2018; Siperstein et al., 2019). Nally et al. (2018) attributed poor reading skills and thus low language scores among students with ASD to the severity of autism symptoms and stressed the need for highly individualized interventions.

Studies also showed that students with emotional disturbances scored in the bottom percentile in reading comprehension (Banditvilai, 2020; Harris et al., 2009). Siperstein et al. (2019) explained that students who demonstrate chronic or intense challenging behavior in school experience poor outcomes compared to their peers, especially in reading and mathematics. As their performance declines, their emotional difficulties increase, emphasizing the link between student behavior and academic progress (Siperstein et al., 2019). Furthermore, children who are not exposed to fluency, phonological awareness, alphabetic principles, vocabulary knowledge, and text comprehension strategies struggle during their formative years

(Torgeson, 1998). They may become poor readers who fall behind and rarely catch up in reading.

Intervention

Reading interventions were developed on the premise that teachers should not wait until a student falls behind to qualify for special education. In response, President George W. Bush signed the NCLB Act (No Child Left Behind, 2002) into law to address the inequalities in education and to improve the educational outcomes for all students (Ferguson, 2017). In 2015, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) , which was also known as NCLB (Ferguson, 2017). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB as the new statue that addressed academic interventions and research-based programs for closing the achievement gap among subgroups and struggling students (Ferguson, 2017). Consequently, reading intervention programs were developed and implemented as an effective method for serving all struggling students regardless of their disability status (Buffam et al., 2018; Ferguson, 2017).

Buffam et al. (2018) concluded that interventions should be provided as soon as a student starts to struggle academically. Once these students have been identified, research-based practices need to be in place. These interventions need to be presented with fidelity and at different levels (Buffam et al., 2018). In addition, an assessment monitoring tool should be in place to record the students' progress and determine if they are improving. Finally, the intervention must include communication within a team of educators who use the data to make decisions regarding the different programs and supports for all students (Buffam et al., 2018).

Reading and Special Needs Learners

Learners with special needs are those whose capacities limit them from fully participating in and benefitting from "regular" education because of physical, sensory, mental health, or learning disabilities and who may also experience difficulties in reading comprehension (Gallagher et al., 2019; Parks et al., 2022). Disability, as defined by the Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), includes the categories of autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2020), the category of learning disabilities represented the most common type of disability among students receiving services under IDEA for the 2019–2020 school term. As reflected in the discussion of the reading process, skills identified through the NRP (2000) also apply to students with special needs learning to read.

Intervention Strategies

The role of teachers in the 21st century is to provide academic intervention (Burroughs et al., 2019). Teachers should be advocates for students who struggle academically, socially, and personally. Current research suggests that the teacher's focus is to provide support, supplements, and extended classroom teaching (Burroughs et al., 2019; Qi, et al., 2020). According to the International Literacy Association (2018), the teacher meets the student's academic, social, and personal needs by implementing research-based reading interventions.

Teachers play a pivotal role in assisting children in developing and maintaining a positive attitude toward reading. Research studies have provided consistent evidence and clear messages of the teacher's instructional role during the intervention (Burroughs et al., 2019). That role

includes providing knowledge and skills, motivating children to read, planning, and organizing, observing and assessing, promoting teamwork, making cultural connections, and pursuing professional expertise (Okasha, 2020). Strategies that teachers use to motivate students to read include the following (Okasha, 2020):

1. Demonstrating a passion for reading
2. Modeling reading for students
3. Making reading meaningful
4. Encouraging students to apply reading strategies
5. Providing a rich and varied reading environment
6. Supporting students by fostering a positive self-image regarding their ability as readers
7. Allowing students to control their reading materials
8. Providing opportunities for interaction

In implementing interventions, teachers need to know their students' current developmental reading skills, utilize these essential strategies, and adapt their reading instruction intervention to match their students' abilities.

Importance of Reading Intervention

Reading intervention is defined as an activity and strategy that assists struggling readers in developing their ability to read (Snow, 2005). Early identification and reading intervention are crucial for educating struggling readers. Several studies have documented that children who fall behind early in reading invariably continue through school as poor readers (Fielding, 2022; Ningsih et al., 2019; Torgeson, 1998). Fielding (2022) argued that children who fail to acquire early reading skills and do not improve by the end of third grade struggle with academic skills

throughout their educational careers. This observation suggests the necessity for beginning reading intervention as early as the beginning of kindergarten.

The NCLB Act (2002) and the IDEA Act (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004) mandated that districts and schools improve outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). This mandate required meaningful and evidence-based reading instruction that targeted multiple reading components for students with and without disabilities (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The NRP (2000) suggested that interventions should include more than one and possibly all five essential components of reading and that reading intervention should be included in the general education literature (Foorman & Togesen, 2001). Researchers suggest that supplemental reading instruction incorporated in small-group arrangements for students with reading difficulties is beneficial for preventing and remediating reading difficulties (Banditvilai 2020; Fountas & Pinnell, 2017; Wanzek et al., 2018). This benefit applies to lower- and upper-elementary students (Wanzek et al., 2018). Wanzek et al. (2018) posited that reading intervention for upper elementary students positively affects reading comprehension and word recognition.

Reports on the status of reading instruction in the United States implied that reading failure will be a continuing condition without interventions (Snow, 2005). The position often expressed regarding reading failure is that as the trouble with children learning to read continues in their early education, reading deficiencies throughout the school years will result. This position suggests the possibility of several inhibiting factors to children learning to read that include insufficient language skills, lack of self-regulation, failure to provide systematic phonics instruction, and missed opportunities for appropriate instruction to struggling readers (Campbell, 2020; Ehri, 2020; Snow, 2005; Spear-Swerling, 2019). Some researchers (Campbell, 2020;

Oakhill, et al., 2019; Snow, 2005) agreed that when children gain early literacy skills, their basic knowledge is developed, but those who lack these skills fall further behind and continue to struggle.

Strategies for Teaching Reading Intervention

Educators involved in reading intervention use specific strategies that benefit students in attaining their highest reading potential. Utilizing the instructional method will assist the teacher in instructing the students to improve their reading abilities (Gersten et al., 2020). Some of these strategies include differentiated instruction, small-group instruction, and whole-group instruction.

Differentiated Instruction. Differentiated instruction is an approach that supports and attends to the academic needs and resources of the individual student (Goddard & Kim, 2018). Tomlinson (2005a, 2005b) defined differentiated instruction as responding to individual student differences and modifying the content processes. Differentiated instruction can be applied when teaching any content or concept. The research described differentiated literacy instruction as a strategy or practice for educators to respond to academic diversity, similar to an early description by Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) and Puzio et al. (2020). This form of instruction requires teachers to focus on creating clear conceptual goals; to consider a wide variety of assessment data; to carefully design plans that consider the students' needs, preferences, and strengths; and to be flexible in adapting the curriculum and instruction to fit their students (Puzio et al., 2020).

Educators should adopt an enormous array of methods to support, engage, and challenge each student (Puzio et al., 2020). Differentiated instruction in these ways not only targets students' abilities associated with the content, but consideration is also given to the teacher's selection of the most appropriate resources and instructional arrangements. When teachers differentiate instruction

for reading, they provide diverse practices such as literature circles, advanced content, and tiered spelling lists in recognition of strategies for skills that underpin comprehension (Babayiğit & Shapiro, 2020). Practicing differentiated reading instruction suggests that one program is not suitable for all students (whether below grade level, on grade level, or above grade level) because each classroom setting has a wide array of readers. The variations in these readers suggest the use of different instructional arrangements supported by research (Babayiğit & Shapiro, 2020) that shows the use of small groups or small learning communities within the classroom setting effectively meets the learners' needs at their reading level.

Whole-Group Instruction. Whole-group instruction is another method that teachers use to teach reading skills. Whole-group instruction is provided through teacher-led instruction where the same lesson is presented regardless of the student population (Campbell, 2020; Nagro et al., 2016). The lesson's objective is typically designed for the average student in the classroom. This strategy allows the teacher to provide a continuum to implement student engagement, gather information to inform instruction, and monitor student progress (Kuhn, 2020; Nagro et al., 2016). According to research on instructional grouping (Kuhn, 2020), complete whole-group instruction has become a predominant instructional model for whole-class instruction. Kuhn (2020) showed that the use of whole-group instruction allows the teacher to use strategies that can be used to accommodate a range of individual students' academic needs.

Small-Group Instruction. Small-group instruction allows the teacher to provide personalized instruction to each student. According to the Consortium on Reading Excellence in Education, small-group instruction allows the teacher the opportunity to locate gaps in students' development in their reading (Reutzel et al., 2014). Further, the teacher is able to tailor the lesson to focus on specific learning objectives, evaluate students' learning strengths and weaknesses,

check for understanding, reinforce skills, and break down concepts not easily understood (Reutzel et al., 2014). Also, in small-group instruction, the teacher provides a scaffolding of skills and ideas that is important to student learning and relevant for student motivation and participation (Kuhn, 2020; McMillon,1994). Small-group instruction enables the teacher to focus on specific skills needed by various groups (Kuhn, 2020; McMillon, 1994).

Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence **(SPIRE)**

The initial design of SPIRE (2016) is credited to Shelia Clark-Edmond, an Orton-Gillingham Fellow. The SPIRE (2016) program incorporates the 1930 Orton-Gillingham approach derived from a body of time-tested knowledge and practices and scientific evidence about how individuals learn to read and write (SPIRE, 2016). According to Stevens et al. (2021), the reading program incorporates multisensory, explicit, structured, and sequential instruction comprised of data-driven resources and strategies that include auditory, visual, and kinesthetic activities that keep the student actively engaged in continual practices. SPIRE allows for small-group or one-on-one reading instruction that can be used for struggling readers in prekindergarten through 12th grade including Tier 2, Tier 3, special education, students with dyslexia, and English language learners. This reading program is designed to make sure that each student gets individual attention based on his or her own needs.

Aspects of SPIRE

As a comprehensive multisensory intensive reading intervention program, SPIRE provides hands-on instruction designed to build on the foundational skills for reading (Stevens et al., 2021). Teachers use the program to develop struggling readers in Tier 2 and Tier 3 to full literacy upon completion. SPIRE is used in a one-on-one setting or a small group with three to five students for 50 to 60 minutes daily (EPS School Specialty, 2019). The reading intervention

program integrates phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, spelling, comprehension, and handwriting (EPS School Specialty, 2019; Monica & Pettine, 2011). SPIRE is systematic with a 10-step lesson plan that ensures mastery of concepts and allows for easy implementation (EPS School Specialty, 2019). The lessons are explicitly teacher-led instruction that keeps the teacher at the center of the teaching. The lessons in SPIRE use a spiral concept that allows struggling readers to excel (EPS School Specialty, n.d., *About the program*).

The SPIRE top level is designed for first- through eighth-grade students who are at-risk or struggling readers who have also demonstrated a mastery of letter-sound correspondences for single consonants (Monica & Pettine, 2011). The program is intended to be completed in two to four academic years. These aspects are driven by various tests and strategies incorporated into the assessment component of SPIRE.

Assessment Component

Student progress is measured by several features of SPIRE's assessment component. The first assessment is the decoding pre- and post-assessments, which are designed to be administered at the beginning and end of the school year. Among the unique features of SPIRE is the recognition that growth in reading is an integral component of any intervention program. Therefore, students are placed on a SPIRE level using an initial placement assessment (Monica & Pettine, 2011). which includes alphabet knowledge, encoding phonemes, decoding phonemes, decoding words, and encoding words (EPS School Specialty, n.d.). SPIRE is divided into two levels. Pre-Level one is called Sounds Sensible. The second part of SPIRE is the Top Level.

According to EPS School Specialty (n.d.), the data collected guides the individualized instruction and helps determine the next instructional step. The assessment includes words and sentences for each skill. The second assessment is the quick checks. The quick checks are a short

progress monitoring tool used at the end of classes. The assessment includes words, phrases, and sentences for every lesson.

EPS School Specialty (n.d.) describes all drills included in different assessment levels. The concept mastery fluency drill is a one-minute timed test available in both single- and multi-skills formats. The assessment includes multiple drills for every skill taught. The fluency drills monitor the students' progress using charts. The last assessment is the post-level assessment, which assesses the students' mastery of all level concepts (EPS School Specialty, n.d.). The post-level assessment includes single word reading, sentences with decodable and sight words, reading passages, and short-answer questions. These assessments provide guidance in the selection of skills and strategies for instruction. The information in Table 1 shows how students are placed in SPIRE by assessment and shows the correlations of grade levels.

Table 1

Grade Level and SPIRE Level

Grade level	SPIRE level
Kindergarten	Sounds Sensible: Levels 1–2
Grade 1	Sounds Sensible: Levels 1–2
Grade 2	Levels 1–3
Grade 3	Levels 2–4
Grade 4	Levels 3–5
Grade 5	Levels 4–6
Grade 6	Levels 5–7
Grade 7	Levels 6–8
Grade 8	Levels 6–8

Instructional Component

SPIRE is a two-part reading intervention program that supports struggling students in building on foundational reading skills as the student ascends the staircase of text complexity (EPS School Specialty, n.d.). The first part is the Pre-Level called Sound Sensible. Sounds Sensible is a hands-on, multisensory program that incorporates phonological awareness and beginning phonics instruction (Balajthy, 2022; EPS School Specialty, n.d.). Sounds Sensible (Pre-Level 1), usually implemented within a six- to eight-month period, encompasses a continuous spiral review that links the new skills to the previous concepts taught in a 10-minute rotation. The Sounds Sensible steps are as follows:

1. The listening section focuses on the students' attention to sounds in words.
2. The rhyming section develops students' ability to identify and manipulate rhyme.
3. The segmentation section creates awareness of the one-to-one correspondence between oral and written words.
4. The phoneme-grapheme section relationship teaches a letter name, its sound, and correct manuscript print writing. (EPS School Specialty, n.d.).

The second part includes Levels 1through 8 and is called SPIRE. As a spiral skilled-based program that starts with simple concepts and builds on learned concepts while moving to more complex concepts, each lesson improves concept retention that taps into the student's auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning modalities. Instruction in SPIRE is delivered through a fast-paced, hands-on 10-step lesson focusing on the following skills: fluency, reading comprehension, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and spelling. These components are consistent with those that the NRP (2000) determined as skills essential for teaching children to read. Details about these components have been provided in the literature review sections above. In

essence, the discussion of these skills included their definitions and a summary of research supporting the need for teaching children to read. Instruction is based on assessing students' needs; therefore, lessons are tailored for each student. The 10-step lesson includes an introductory lesson with one or more enforcing lessons. SPIRE (Levels 1 through 8) is usually implemented within three to five years and encompasses differentiated instruction that moves from simple to more complex concepts taught in a 5- to 10-minute rotation. The SPIRE (Levels 1 through 8) steps are as follows:

1. The phonograms cards step focuses on letters and their sounds.
2. The phonological awareness step develops students' ability to hold sounds in their minds.
3. The word building step develops the students' ability to build and manipulate words.
4. The decoding and sentence reading step develops the students' vocabulary and comprehension while reading words and sentences.
5. The pre-reading step activates and builds on prior knowledge background.
6. The reading step allows the student to read fiction and nonfiction texts that introduce new concepts and develop comprehension skills.
7. The sound dictations step has the students write and say all known letter combinations for 10 sounds.
8. The pre-spelling step analyzes phoneme-grapheme relationships.
9. The spelling step allows the students to spell and sound out the words.
10. The sentence dictation step allows the students to say and write sentences and then proofread them and make corrections.

Research Supporting SPIRE

The premise of SPIRE is supported in the literature (Kim et al., 2017). Some researchers

acknowledge that interventions serve as approaches for students with reading deficiencies to acquire reading skills throughout their lives (Kim et al., 2017). SPIRE functions as a research-based scripted intervention program with a systematic, sequential, and spiral curriculum developed to improve a student's reading skills (EPS School Specialty, n.d., *SPIRE program overview*). The SPIRE assessments generate data to provide teachers with regular feedback to guide individualized reading instruction (EPS School Specialty, 2019). Research revealed that SPIRE positively affects struggling readers' phonics, phonological awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary achievement (EPS School Specialty, 2019). Case studies conducted in school districts supported the effectiveness of SPIRE for responding to the needs of struggling readers (Corbin Independent School District, Kentucky, 2022; EPS School Specialty, 2019). An experimental study revealed moderate evidence of the effects of SPIRE on fluency and vocabulary performance of students in the fourth through sixth grades (Gallagher, 2019).

Williams (2018) reported that while several peer-reviewed studies followed an integrated approach to literacy, the SPIRE program altered the way educators instruct students in reading and support struggling students. According to Ritchey and Goeke (2006), among these ways is that the program regulates special education teachers by decreasing their decisions on teaching reading; as a result, educators do not require students to master reading skills before advancing through more challenging content. As noted in the assessment component of SPIRE, procedures of the program include assigning students a level that determines the appropriate skills that they need to master.

Summary

Reading is a fundamental part of every student's academic achievement. Reading instruction, particularly evidence-based interventions, is used to close the achievement gap of

students who fall behind (Kim et al., 2017). As the research shows, reading intervention is vital in the reading curriculum for addressing reading deficits (Lee & Yoon, 2017; Spencer & Wagner, 2018). However, the data on student achievement shows that low percentages of fourth and eighth graders are proficient in reading across the United States (Nations Report Card, 2017), which suggests the need for identifying different ways to teach reading. Furthermore, the literature supports the idea that districts, schools, and teachers should implement evidence-based interventions in reading for students (NCLB, 2002; NRP, 2000: O'Cathain et al., 2019). Variations in student needs and abilities suggests that the implementation of reading interventions is in accordance with the guidelines of the NRP (2000), which concluded that, to develop a comprehensive reading experience, students need to be exposed to the following skills: phonics awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

This chapter outlined the theoretical framework for the study, Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, with implications for educators implementing SPIRE. Consistent with the theory, teacher efficacy is enhanced through four primary sources: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and psychological states. Bandura's theory asserts that individuals' beliefs in their cognitive ability, motivation, and resources are needed. Beliefs influence individuals' expectations of success and the effort they will expend to complete a task (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy theory provided a deeper understanding of how educators' perception and implementation of SPIRE affect the struggling reader.

This chapter also identified substantial research relevant to factors that influence educators' perceptions, and the role perceptions and behaviors play in teacher efficacy. The literature reviewed revealed the relationship between self-efficacy, motivation, and behavior (Chen and Mathies, 2016; Mohammad, 2016; Rodrigo-Ruiz, 2016). Further, studies showed that

educators' perceptions of experiences and practices correlate directly with student performance, thus suggesting how students with disabilities interact with SPIRE. Important in the review was raising awareness that the educator's beliefs, values, and attitudes regarding the implementation of SPIRE determine whether the program's outcome is negative or positive for the success of students who struggle with reading.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to describe educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards at a large suburban school district in Utah. This chapter describes the procedural elements of the study: the research design, setting and participants, procedures, data collection, and data analysis. The researcher's positionality and assumptions are also presented. The chapter concludes with an explanation of processes that ensured trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and a summary.

Research Design

This study represented a form of qualitative research. Qualitative research is appropriate for relying on participants' experiences and exploring a real-world setting. Applied to this study, qualitative research was appropriate for understanding human action and reading perception in a regular education class (Yin, 2018). The qualitative researcher observes participants' behavior and explores their lived experiences while often having direct contact with them in the setting (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2022). As the major instrument in the collection of data, the researcher typically collects data in a variety of ways. Data in the form of interviews, a focus group, and letter-writing prompts permitted a description of educators' perceptions of using SPIRE in the classroom. These data facilitated discovering the "why" and "what" of the research question. Also, beneficial in obtaining valid data in this study was acquiring insight into the educators' perceptions of their self-efficacy.

Qualitative research is advantageous for forming theories based on observations and offering explanations about numerical data. It allows for understanding contemporary real-life

situations while applying the findings to the chosen problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). However, this form of research is limited in its ability to transfer findings to other participants and settings as the data are self-reported and usually based on a purposeful sample. The reliability of this study was based on its trustworthiness, which involved the appropriate selection of the sample, triangulation of data, and a rich and thick description of the setting and participant responses.

This qualitative study was conducted using a multiple-case study design to describe educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards in a large suburban school district in Utah. According to Creswell and Creswell, (2022), case study research is designed to study a case (or cases) within a real-life, contemporary context or environment. The case study was the preferred method for this study because it permitted participants to verbalize details of a phenomenon while incorporating various sources of data that connected the details. Yin (2018) contended that examining the phenomena could not be separated from the context. This case study captured and formalized the participants' knowledge about the phenomenon. This knowledge assisted in determining the scope of data collection and differentiating from the context of the data that characterized the phenomenon as noted in the methodology literature (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) further asserted that a case study will link the data to the propositions and the criterion interpretation of results by asking specific questions of "how" and "why."

Furthermore, the case study was appropriate because it is a system bounded by time, place, or activity (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Yin, 2018). The bounded system suggests that the connection of the boundaries set is visible in a clear statement about the focus and extent of the research (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018).

The bounded system provided knowledge of the complexity of the educators' perceptions and patterns in the SPIRE program. The case study was also appropriate because the theoretical proposition guided the data collection and analysis process. Multiple sources of evidence were used to triangulate the findings. The phenomenon studied resulted in more variables of interest than just data points.

Yin (2018) defined a multiple-case study from the perspective of exploring a phenomenon from two or more cases that allow an analysis of the data within and across each different situation. This design is appropriately used when the researcher wants to examine the case using a more detailed level of inquiry (Yin, 2018). Using the multiple-case study method permits an analysis of at least two individuals or two instances of a phenomenon, selected either to be similar or different in some way of interest to the researcher (Gall et al., 2007). In this study, each case consisted of carefully selected educators from different schools within a particular district. The multiple-case design was also appropriate for analyzing various perceptions for similarities and differences among educators using SPIRE in a regular education classroom.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

Central Research Question

What are educator's perceptions concerning the implementation of the Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards within a large suburban school district in Utah?

Subquestion 1

How do educators use SPIRE as an intervention in the classroom?

Sub-question 2

What are the benefits and barriers educators experience when implementing SPIRE instructional practice in the classroom?

Subquestion 3

How do educators explain their professional development using SPIRE?

Setting and Participants

This section includes a description of the site, information essential to the study, and the rationale for selecting the site. The description provides a detailed depiction of the participating school district. The participant section includes a general overview of the demographics of the participants and the selection criteria.

Site

The site for this case study was the Jordan School District (a pseudonym), located in a large suburban area of Utah in the United States of America. This school district was explicitly selected for this study because it used SPIRE as Tier 2 and 3 interventions to address below-grade-level readers. Located in the largest city in Utah, the Jordan School District had 12 elementary schools, two middle schools, four high schools, and five other schools at the time of the study. This school district employed 434 teachers (NCES, 2020). Statistical data indicates that the school district had an approximate enrollment of 9,558 students (NCES, 2020). The NCES (2020) reported estimated demographic data for student enrollment as follows: 86% European American, 1% African American, 9% Hispanic, 1% Asian, 2% American Indian, and 2% other. In 2020, the NCES reported 4.9% of students in the district were classified as students with disabilities (NCES, 2020). District demographics also showed that 32.4% of the students were eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced lunch meal program (NCES, 2020).

The Jordan School District implemented the SPIRE intervention for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students who read below grade level. Reading proficiency test data revealed that approximately 50% of students in the district scored at or above proficiency on the Reading/Language Arts End of the Year Test (NCES, 2020). The Jordan School District also used Academic Reading to screen kindergarten through 3rd grade students to help identify students at risk of academic failure who might need intervention in reading. All schools in the district used SPIRE as a reading intervention program in the regular education classroom. However, some classroom teachers may have used additional supplemental materials.

Participants

Twelve participants for this study were drawn from a pool of 434 teachers employed in the district in Utah during the fall semester of the 2022–2023 school year. Participants represented teachers in elementary or middle school with more than one year of experience using SPIRE as the reading intervention for students. The sample pool for teachers was comprised of 96% Caucasian, 2% Hispanic, 1% African American, and 1% Asian American. In the district, 86.6% of the teachers had three or more years of teaching experience, 97.7% were certified, and 2.5% were not certified. Gender and ethnicity were not factors in selecting participants.

Researcher Positionality

I have always had a passion for being a part of change throughout my educational career by helping students develop a love for reading. As an educator, I was shocked by the influx of students who struggled with reading in the regular education classroom each year. My focus on providing a quality reading program for students led to inquiries about reading strategies and interventions to address these issues in other classroom settings. My experiences in using the SPIRE intervention for reaching students with mild to moderate learning impairments allowed

for a complete triangle of regular education teachers and parents working closely to address the reading deficiencies of these special education students while also holding them to a higher standard for reading performance.

Since teachers play a significant role in students' exposure to SPIRE as prescribed, I wondered how other educators implemented the program in their regular education classrooms. Therefore, my goal in conducting this qualitative multiple-case study stemmed from my desire to examine educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards. As a special education teacher, I have a deep concern for providing children with an essential background of knowledge and skills that will help them bridge the gap and emerge with the ability to think, understand, and make sense of what they see, hear, and read. My investment in this research is ingrained in my philosophy that if a child cannot learn the way the instructor teaches, the instructor must teach how that child can learn.

Interpretive Framework

Researchers' interpretive frameworks influence how they conduct their studies. Constructivism was the paradigm that guided my research. I recognized that multiple realities needed to be explored to fully understand how participants constructed their knowledge of SPIRE in order to describe the case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constructivism is a worldview in which individuals seek to understand their surroundings where they live and work (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Constructivism "asserts that people construct their understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences" (Adom et al., 2016, p. 2). The constructivism perspective guided my effort to understand how individuals make sense of their surroundings, SPIRE, and reading needs, based

on their perceptions. I described the educators' perceptions of their experiences and influences and how they constructed knowledge of their experiences concerning implementing SPIRE to report the essence of their meaning derived from these experiences as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards within a large suburban school district in Utah. Following recommendations in the literature (Tenny et al., 2022), I relied on the participants' decision-making skills and analyzed the causes and effects to understand their perspectives of SPIRE.

Philosophical Assumptions

Johnson and Christensen (2019) identified three philosophical assumptions: ontological, epistemological, and axiological. My qualitative research case study design reflected my perspectives of these assumptions. I brought several underlying beliefs and philosophical premises to the research for this study. My philosophical assumptions provided a frame of reference whereby the voices of educators were understood regarding improving reading interventions that affect students who struggle with reading. All three assumptions guided my research in relation to the nature of reality, knowledge, and values. I was concerned with my inductive logic in studying educators' implementation of SPIRE instructional practices and experiences within its context.

Ontological Assumption

Ontology identifies the nature of reality and truth (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). My ontological assumption is that the reality of the reading process is an individual but complex process; therefore, reading intervention programs may not effectively address all the cognitive and other processes associated with learning to read. Therefore, I sought educators' views of reading related to using SPIRE. Having various participants for this study permitted me to tap

into the reality of their perspectives on the reading process, intervention programs, and specific challenges and benefits of SPIRE. I used the words and different educators' views to describe similarities and differences in their ontological positions. Conducting the study determined the reality of educators' perceptions about SPIRE and implementing the program for students who struggle with reading.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemology focuses on the nature of knowledge and the justification of knowledge claims (Gall et al., 2007). Epistemological assumptions allow the researcher "to get as close as possible to the participants being studied" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). My epistemological assumption is that the best way to obtain knowledge about a reading intervention program is to ask educators engaged in the process. Therefore, I conducted a case study and employed various data to thoroughly understand the educators' perspectives of SPIRE. Consistent with Creswell's (2022) views, justification for my position was supported by studying the participants in the real-world context in which they employed SPIRE to discover their disposition about the program.

Axiological Assumption

As applied to research, axiology, the study of value, worth, and morality, examines the role and judgment of the researcher's own value and ethics in all stages of the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). My axiological assumption is that I value reading especially for students with disabilities. My familiarity with SPIRE's instructional practices and my belief that they are essential components of reading proficiency instruction had the potential to bias the interpretation of the findings. Therefore, I disclosed my personal biases that may potentially impact my research. Awareness of my biases also meant that I could effectively bracket them to

ensure that the truth of the participants' voices emerged in the reporting of results. I continued to revise experiences from the field while creating a complete description of the case.

Researcher's Role

At the time of this study, my role as a researcher was to serve as a human instrument for data collection and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). I had no authority over any of the participants in this study. In conducting this study, I acted as a nonparticipant observer while exploring participants' experiences. The collection, analysis, and synthesis of data were filtered through the process of observing and exercising nonsubjective judgment. During the data collection process, I served as a human instrument that listened to and interviewed participants, observed, collected data, documented examined documents, observed behaviors, and transcribed information (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

My role as the researcher was to take on different roles such as teacher, evaluator, interpreter, advocate, or biographer (Stake, 1995). Moreover, as the human instrument, I was aware of my personal relationship to the study, which included my experiences teaching SPIRE and using SPIRE as an intervention that constituted potential biases. However, to address these potential biases, I used bracketing. Bracketing is a process in which researchers restrain his or her biases, assumptions, or experiences to describe and see the overall dimensions of a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Bracketing assisted me in becoming more deeply reflective in designing the study, collecting the data, analyzing the data, and reporting the findings. As Patton (2015) noted, I bracketed my prejudice or assumptions about the experiences to give full attention to the instance of the currently appearing phenomenon. This bracketing helped me separate my personal connection to the study and made me aware of any assumptions or biases that may have influenced my findings.

I used the interview and focus group protocol, as Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested, to ensure that the interviewees expressed their experiences about the subject matter and that I conducted the interview with an open mind. I provided each interviewee with a copy of the transcribed individual interview and focus group interview to ensure the validity of the transcription (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Although not functioning as a participant in this study, I wrote memos throughout the data collection and analysis process. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), memoing is a process that involves the researcher writing reflective ideas learned from the collection and the analysis of the data. Memoing allowed for formulating written records of the analysis by separating my biases and focusing on the ideas about emerging categories or aspects of the connections of the categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Refraining from paraphrasing the interview conversation and information collected from focus groups were among the memoing procedures employed in the study. Also, following Yin's (2018) recommendations, procedures included restraining myself from allowing my judgments and assumptions to influence the process and ensuring that only the participants' voices led the data analysis process.

Procedures

Outlining detailed steps used in conducting the study, this two-part procedural section first provides a well-developed recruitment plan that ensured the design was aligned to the case study (Stake, 2014). The section also outlines the steps involved in completing the research process. Procedures adhered to best practices in providing an in-depth plan for data collection and analysis, allowing the study to be duplicated by future researchers (Stake, 2014; Yin, 2018). Explanations of the procedures begin with steps for acquiring permission to conduct the study, followed by discussions of plans for recruitment, data collection and analysis, sources, and a

synthesis of data that incorporates explanations of how the study achieved triangulation. The section concludes with discussions of ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and a summary.

Permissions

In the initial step of the permission process, I emailed a letter to the superintendent of the Jordan School District requesting permission to conduct the research in schools where SPIRE was implemented (see Appendix A). After successfully defending and receiving committee approval of the dissertation from the School of Education at Liberty University, I applied to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct the study (see Appendix B). This approval ensured that the research followed the U.S. federal government guidelines for conducting research with human subjects. After receiving approval from the IRB (see Appendix B) and from the district, I requested and received written consent from each participant in the case study (see Appendix C).

Recruitment Plan

Implementation of the recruitment plan began with both IRB and district approval. First, I communicated through email with the district's curriculum specialist to begin the sampling process. The curriculum specialist assisted in identifying names, emails, and phone numbers of educators who taught SPIRE as an intervention and met the study's inclusionary criteria (see Appendix C). An email letter was sent to all literacy coaches, special education teachers, and educational aids in the Jordan School District to invite them to participate in the research. The email contained a recruitment letter (see Appendix D), which provided an overview of the study, its purpose, and criteria for voluntary participation. The letter contained directions for those who expressed interest in participating (i.e., who were accessible, willing, and met the participation criteria) to reply by email. Follow-up involved contacting these individuals by phone to inquire if

they had questions that needed clarification. A follow-up email was sent two weeks after the original email to possible participants to encourage their participation in the study.

A review of replies from individuals expressing an interest in participating resulted in obtaining their consent through Docusign using the approved consent form from Liberty University (Appendix E). Twelve participants were selected for the case study through purposeful sampling of the teachers in the district. Purposeful sampling is used to explore a connection to a particular subset of participants with direct experiences of a target phenomenon (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). The decision to use purposeful sampling followed recommendations for the most appropriate sampling frame aligned with the qualitative case study. According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling facilitates the selection of information-rich participants. Therefore, the sampling frame permitted me to select those educators who could provide thick, rich perspectives on SPIRE and allowed for an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon in a real-world context.

Educators who had experiences with the common phenomenon of SPIRE and met the following selection criteria were selected for participation: (a) educators must have implemented the SPIRE program as an intervention for one year; (b) educators must have taught SPIRE at least three times a week; (c) educators must hold a full state certification as a teacher or have passed the state teacher licensing examination and hold a teaching certificate or license for the state; and (d) educators must have worked in the school district for at least one year.

The rationale for having only 12 participants included that the small sample size would assist me in building a closer relationship with the participants and improve the quality of exchange of information as Patton (2015) advised. Furthermore, following the recommendation of Glaser and Strauss (1967), this sample size allowed for theoretical saturation, which, through

interacting, permitted me to gain information that fully informed all aspects of the phenomenon being studied. Adhering to guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research and recommendations of research methodologists (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2007), the data collection process did not begin until the signed consent forms were received.

Data Collection Plan

This qualitative study used a case study approach to provide a detailed account of the characteristics and dynamics of educators who used SPIRE in the classroom. Yin (2018) offered six sources of evidence that can be useful and important in case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Letter-writing prompts, interviews, and a focus group were used in this multiple-case study. These forms of data constituted the primary sources of data. However, the data were collected in different phases of the study.

Letter-Writing Data Collection Approach

"Documents provide valuable information in helping researchers understand the central phenomena in qualitative studies" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 223). The document that was analyzed was a letter. The letter prompt and the interview comprised the first steps in the data collection process. In qualitative research, the purpose of compiling such documents is to substitute for materials that the researcher does not directly observe (Stake, 1995). Therefore, the letter-writing prompt provided initial information to understand the participants' perspectives on using SPIRE, which was later detailed in the interview. This form of document analysis enabled the participants to share and provide informed insights into their thoughts and actions about the research context (Patton, 2015).

Participants wrote a one-page letter in which they described their experiences in using

SPIRE as if the letter was directed to their school district. This letter was only used to collect data for the study. The document analysis gathered evidence not included during the interview or focus group discussion (Patton, 2015). The educator had two weeks to complete the letter, and individual interviews were also scheduled during this time frame. The letter provided personal insight to support the themes, provided a viewpoint of the educators' perceptions, and demonstrated relevance to the research questions. In their letters directed to the school district, the participants responded to the following questions:

1. What would you tell the school or district about the benefits and barriers you have had with implementing SPIRE? **[SQ2]**
2. What is something you would change when implementing SPIRE? **[SQ1]**
3. What support or professional development do you need from the school district when implementing SPIRE? **[SQ3]**

The first letter-writing question related to the process of the evaluation of the SPIRE framework. This question prompted participants to explain the advantages and disadvantages of SPIRE based on their experiences with using SPIRE. It provided insight into the participants' understanding of SPIRE by focusing on their personal experiences while utilizing SPIRE in the classroom. The second letter-writing question addressed the changes that the participant felt needed to be addressed. Teachers' use of SPIRE in the classroom can influence their beliefs and methods (Gallagher, 2019). This question elicited the opinions of the participants related to the factors that hindered or were most instrumental in assisting the students in meeting proficiency standards. According to Patton (2015), this question allows for understanding an individual's cognitive and interpretive process. The final letter-writing question invited participants to add their opinions about the support or professional development schools or districts should provide

for implementing SPIRE. There are varied reactions to the support or professional development that is needed for implementing SPIRE, and it was essential to acquire the participants' perspectives on implementation since this was the focus of the study. Support and professional development have been identified as key ingredients for effective interventions (Gómez-Marí et al., 2021; Heller et al., 2019).

Letter-Writing Data Analysis Plan

The letter was used to gather pertinent information for the research (Patton, 2015). Since the letter-writing prompts elicited the participants' perspectives in their own voices based on instructional experiences, this insight was relevant to the central research question and the three guiding questions. This section of the study contains techniques and steps used to analyze the data in this qualitative study. The data analysis allowed for a systematic search of the meaning of the phenomenon studied to make sense of the collected texts and images as well as to build answers to the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The first step in data analysis established a protocol to organize the data collected. According to Stake (1995), the data analysis protocol assists in decreasing the risk of misinterpreting of the data. The analysis entailed creating a word processing file based on the method utilized to collect the data.

In the second step, an Excel spreadsheet was created to help organize the interview questions and facilitate pattern matching of the data to allow for open coding of the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) noted that an initial step that provides categories about the phenomena studied can occur through segmenting information. This process is referred to as open coding and involves breaking the textual data into parts as an initial step for analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding included labeling concepts plus defining and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions. The process of open coding further involved examining the

transcriptions line by line, analyzing the data, and organizing the information according to sentences or groups that reflected a single idea resulting from tabulating the frequency of occurrences. During the second step, participants' responses were color-coded to reflect opinions or concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The systematic coding process formed a base for open coding. In essence, in steps two through six the data were analyzed, organized, categorized, interpreted, synthesized, rearranged, and coded for patterns, themes, and concepts based on the occurrences in the source of the data (Bogden & Biklin, 2007). Through systematic analysis and constant comparison of the data, the next piece of the pyramid reduced the number of codes and connected them to show a relationship among them (Moghaddam, 2006). After open coding, the analysis process included a reexamination of the data to identify recurring ideas and commonalities associated with the phenomenon.

The analysis also included a third step—axial coding to construct linkages between the multiple forms of data (Saldaña, 2016). The reason for axial coding in this study was to relate the data together to reveal codes, categories, and subcategories based on participants' voices within each form of data collected (Allen, 2017). Therefore, referring to the coded categories identified in open coding for each interview determined where they connected throughout all the interviews to produce the most meaningful codes for responding to the research questions. Finding categories that reflected the relationships based on the results of open coding occurred through using categories that Strauss and Corbin (1998) developed to ensure the most critical aspects of a study are visible: phenomenon, causal causation, strategies, consequences, context, and intervening condition.

Axial coding offered benefits for analyzing the data. The process aided in constructing a model that detailed the specific conditions resulting in the occurrence of the phenomenon. Axial

coding permitted reassembling any fractured data during open coding. Additionally, employing features of the Excel spreadsheets to manage, shape, organize, and store the qualitative data and developed codes assisted in identifying additional emerging themes as suggested by research methodologists (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2018). The final step involved formulating appropriate tables, graphs, and charts to summarize pertinent findings, codes, categories, themes, and transcripts. Drawing on the data collected and analyzed resulted in reflection on and interpretation of the educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards.

Throughout the study, all research participants and schools were identified with pseudonyms instead of their actual names. During and after the study, the anonymity of the schools and participants remained confidential in all oral and written presentations. Data files were stored on the researcher's personal home office computer with password-protected files. In accordance with Liberty University's IRB stipulations, all information obtained for the study will remain stored in a locked file cabinet for the period required.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

The rationale for using the individual interview as the main data source was based on the advantages of its use as reported in the qualitative research literature. Yin (2018) suggested that interviews are vital sources of evidence for qualitative case studies because they provide the researcher with relevant information about the participants' choices and behaviors. In qualitative research, interviews are used to better understand the participants' cultural world and the phenomenon being studied through the participants' perspectives (Patton, 2015). Interviews provide in-depth information about participants' thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about a topic (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Obtaining the

participants' thoughts, experiences, and beliefs provides direct information filtered through the participants' views (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Interviews are foundational data that are used when there is little research on the phenomenon and research is needed to validate the detailed insight of the participant (Evans, 2017; Gall et al., 2007; Gill et al., 2008; Patton, 2015).

The semi-structured interview used as a part of the initial steps in the data collection process was vital for examining educators' views of SPIRE as an intervention in the classroom and for gathering in-depth accounts of their experiences with using SPIRE. This importance is recognized in reports of methodologists who assert that semi-structured interviews, as the most dominant and widely used data collection method, consider experiences, the reality of the participants' experiences, and meanings (Bradford & Cullen, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the interviews can explore how these experiences, realities, and implications might be informed by society's discourse, assumptions, or ideas.

Data collection of individual interviews followed specific timelines. A week before the interview, an email to each participant confirmed the date and time of the interview. A second email was sent to participants who did not confirm the date and time. A Microsoft TEAMS link for the interview and a copy of the semi-structured open-ended questions were attached to the email so that each participant received predetermined questions. Individual interviews were conducted remotely using the Microsoft TEAMS teleconference platform.

The interview began with reviewing the signed consent form (Appendix F) that participants returned to acknowledge that they understood their rights and the study process. The interview followed the protocol containing the questions to ensure that the process focused on questions related to the research study. Each participant engaged in an interview for approximately 45 to 60 minutes, responding to open-ended questions. All interviews were

recorded using the recording features on Microsoft TEAMS and Google docs recording device as recommended for capturing participants' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). Taking field notes also captured instances of nonverbal responses and personal reflection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedures for assuring participant confidentiality included replacing each participant's name with a pseudonym on the transcripts and printed documents. All data collected were stored on a password-protected computer and external hard drive and will be deleted and destroyed after the period for retaining the raw data in compliance with Liberty University's IRB. The following interview questions with notations of the corresponding research question inquired about experiences associated with the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the theoretical framework.

Individual Interview Questions

1. What impact does an educator's perception have on their teaching? **[CQ1]**
2. How would you explain your perception of the use of SPIRE as an intervention for all students? **[CQ1]**
3. How do you integrate SPIRE into the curriculum? **[SQ1]**
4. How have you used SPIRE as an intervention in your classroom? **[SQ1]**
5. How would you define a struggling reader? **[SQ2]**
6. How would you explain the academic support a struggling reader needs to succeed in the classroom? **[SQ2]**
7. What impact does SPIRE have on a struggling reader? **[SQ2]**
8. What professional development experiences have influenced your ability to integrate SPIRE into the classroom? **[SQ3]**

9. What resources and support would help you be more effective in implementing SPIRE? **[SQ3]**
10. I appreciate your time and assistance. What other information would you like to add about your perception or experiences that have not been addressed about SPIRE? **[CQ1]**

Questions 1 and 2 examined the perception of the unique education gateway to job performance. Perception was defined as the thoughts or mental images educators have about their professional activities and students, shaped by their background knowledge and life experiences, and other influences on their professional behavior (Papadakis et al., 2020). These questions were necessary because the perception of job satisfaction allows teachers to show positive behaviors in their daily work activities. According to Moe et al. (2010), successful teachers instruct well, and they can provide a conducive learning environment based on a high level of job performance.

Question 3 was designed to address SPIRE's integration into the curriculum and teaching creativity. SPIRE's curriculum instruction is an intervention in which the reading program dictates explicit teacher-led instruction that keeps the student at the center of the teaching. According to Duncan-Owens (2009), the integration of SPIRE into the curriculum allows for the pace at which the lessons are taught and the different lessons that are addressed in the curriculum. Question 4 allowed participants to examine and reflect on their use of SPIRE in the classroom as an intervention. This question addressed the intervention as an educational approach that significantly improves students' outcomes in the classroom (Vaughan & Albers, 2017). The use of SPIRE is effective in providing plans and activities created to integrate evidence-based practices into the school and classroom settings (Mitchell, 2011). Durlak and Weissberg (2011) stated that teachers whose instructional philosophy correlates with their

instructional approach would implement the intervention with higher fidelity than teachers where a match does not exist.

Questions 5 through 7 focused on the struggling reader by prompting participants to provide research-based and personal explanations to describe a struggling reader, the support needed to address the struggling reader, and how SPIRE impacts the struggling reader. These questions aided in the analysis of the influence that teacher self-efficacy has on implementing differentiated instructional support, and the impact of their job performance on the performance of struggling readers (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Each question encouraged participants to reflect on internal and external factors as they related to providing interventions for struggling readers.

Questions 8 and 9 allowed the participants, through reflection, to examine the support and professional development they received with SPIRE. These questions enabled participants to share their flexibility in using the intervention and their use of strategically directed resources (Schechter et al., 2015). These questions permitted participants to share the framework that schools and districts use to shape their learning experiences instead of subjecting them to the school or district's professional development experiences (Papadakis et al., 2020). Additionally, these questions allowed participants to consider how districts and schools provide teachers with resources and instructional support (Papadakis et al., 2020). Research reveals that supporting teachers is an essential practice for schools and districts to meet students' academic needs (Opper, 2019; Yaqubova, 2022).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan for the interviews began with contracting with a credible transcription service to convert the recorded interview into transcribed text. Next, ensuring accuracy of the transcribed interview entailed engaging participants in member checking through

emailing a password-protected transcribed interview to each participant. Participants were advised to check the transcribed information for accuracy, make corrections, and return the corrections. However, I also listened to the interviews, read the transcribed text multiple times to make notes of important ideas or concepts, and reread the transcribed text to ensure accuracy. Rereading the text allowed me to become more familiar with the data and also establish validity and reliability of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Similar strategies were utilized in the analysis of focus group discussions, interviews, and the letters participants wrote.

Focus Group Data Collection Approach

This study included two focus group meetings, each comprised of a subsample of five or six randomly selected participants from the pool of 12 participants. Patton (2015) explained that a focus group interacts as a homogeneous group of people in a group setting. The small size of the focus group permitted better engagement of participants in the discussion, control of the interactions, and a better possibility to acquire rich information. Also, the size of the group permitted more opportunities for interacting with multiple participants simultaneously while encouraging dialogue among participants about utilizing SPIRE. My role in the group discussions was to collect shared views or understandings from several individuals or specific people in accordance with the purpose that Creswell and Creswell (2022) suggested.

Consistent with recommendations for conducting focus group interviews (Schwandt, 2015), the process entailed probing deeply into the educators' perceptions of their experiences, practices, and challenges with using SPIRE. During the sessions, I sought answers to the central research question. The focus groups were beneficial for exploring complex, multilayered concepts from the participants' perspectives. Yin (2018) noted that using focus groups can conserve time and replace follow-up interviews when collective responses are as good as, or

superior to, the evidence from individual interviews. Conducting the focus group interview as the last collection tool was the strategy for collecting data that clarified and extended understanding derived from prior data collected, thus obviating the need for follow-up interviews with individual participants.

The focus groups met after school on Microsoft TEAMS so that there would be ample time to interact outside of the school building. One week before each focus group meeting, an email was sent to each participant to confirm the date and time of the meeting. A Microsoft TEAMS link for the focus group interview and a copy of the open-ended questions were attached to the email. The focus group sessions were approximately 60 to 90 minutes, depending on responses to questions. Participants were apprised of established procedures that included respecting each other's views and the expectation that they would respond freely and honestly.

The focus group meetings were recorded using the Microsoft TEAMS feature and another technology device. The literature acknowledges that using more than one technology device will address potential technical malfunctions and capture clearly and verbatim participants' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). Important in the data collection was capturing nonverbal communication (Creswell & Poth, 2018); therefore, the recorded audio and visual interview on Microsoft TEAMS was supported with my field notes and a personal record of bodily movements and facial expressions.

Open-ended questions were used in the focus group interviews. Each group discussion was intended to provoke ideas and questions that were not shared during the one-on-one interviews. The participants' confidentiality was ensured through using pseudonym for the participants and their schools in the transcripts and printed documents. All data collected were stored on a password-protected computer and external hard drive for the required period and then

deleted and destroyed. The following questions correspond to the identified research question.

Focus Group Questions

1. How does your acceptance of SPIRE affect your implementation of SPIRE? **[CQ1]**
2. How would you describe your experiences that affect your performance with SPIRE? **[SQ1]**
3. What changes occurred in your instructional practices after SPIRE was implemented? **[SQ1]**
4. How would you describe the instructional practices of SPIRE with struggling readers? **[SQ2]**
5. What type of training did you receive with SPIRE? **[SQ3]**
6. How would you describe your overall satisfaction with SPIRE? **[CQ1]**
7. I appreciate your time and assistance. What other information would you like to add about your perception or experiences that have not been addressed about SPIRE? **[CQ1]**

The purpose of questions 1 and 2 pertaining to acceptance and experiences was to determine the participants' organizational behavior through their feelings of self-efficacy. The questions reflected views expressed in the literature that teachers' self-efficacy influences not only their acceptance of new instructional practices but also their experiences with the implementation process (Connor et al., 2018; Filderman et al., 2021; Solís et al., 2018). These questions also examined the unique education gateway to job performance. Lemon and Garvis (2016) found that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs determine a teacher's acceptance to engage with tasks as well as affecting the teacher's experiences toward the implementation of new instructional practices. According to the research, a vast number of instructional programs fail

due to the acceptance and experience factors that teachers need to engage in the initiative of the change (Bullo et al., 2021).

Question 3 was used to address the changes that occurred after the instructional practice of SPIRE. This question addressed the effectiveness of SPIRE and allowed the teachers to explore job satisfaction with the SPIRE, while addressing positive and negative behaviors in implementing instruction. According to Bullo et al. (2021), this question probed for successes and barriers and described the factors that had been either instrumental or hindering during the implementation process.

Question 4 allowed participants to reflect on the SPIRE instructional practices for struggling readers. According to Vaughan and Albers (2017), the performance of the teacher with an educational approach has significant effects on student improvement. The teachers' self-efficacy also has an impact on instructional practices and how these practices affect struggling readers. Teachers with lower self-efficacy are focused on how the implementation of practices will affect them. Educators with low self-efficacy also view themselves as less effective in addressing the instructional practices needed for the struggling reader (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). In comparison, teachers with high self-efficacy can persevere with struggling readers, are more effective with the instructional practices, and provide appropriate and more effective teaching materials and activities that guide the instructional practices for the struggling reader.

Question 5 was purposely designed to find out what type of training was provided to assist with the implementation of SPIRE. This question attempted to explore the different training that was needed for the success of SPIRE. Training with SPIRE is very important in promoting teacher efficacy. The literature supports that training is one of the most important roles for the

teachers (McMaster et al., 2021). Thus, the training of teachers allows them to be successful in producing meaningful student outcomes. Question 6 was based on the knowledge, experience, and satisfaction with SPIRE's cognitive and interpretive process. According to Patton (2015), it is essential to acquire participants' perspectives and opinions about the SPIRE program. This question was designed to gain a deeper understanding of the struggles associated with the program and acquire a deep reflection of the success of SPIRE and the implementation process. The question allowed participants to provide personal details about SPIRE and to talk more in-depth about the support they received, the training provided, and the implementation of the instructional practices.

The Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis for the focus group interview plan began with contracting with a credible transcription service to convert the recorded focus group discussion into transcribed text. Participants were then engaged in member checking for accuracy through emailing a password-protected transcription to each participant. Participants were advised to check the transcribed information for accuracy, make corrections, and return the corrections. However, I also listened to the interviews, read the transcribed text multiple times to make notes of important ideas or concepts, and reread the transcribed text to ensure accuracy. Rereading the text allowed me to become more familiar with the data and also to establish the validity and reliability of the data (Creswell & Poth, 20I8). Similar strategies were employed in the analysis of the individual interviews.

Data Synthesis

Several steps were incorporated in synthesizing all data collected to identify themes that corresponded to the study's research questions. Prior to synthesizing the data, steps for each data

source included transcribing the recorded information; reading the transcripts to ensure that the text was appropriately transcribed; coding the information using initial, axial, and color-coding techniques; reducing and adding codes according to the frequency of similar words and additional patterns found in the data; organizing the data into meaningful categories; and identifying themes that emerged from those categories. This process was facilitated by using the recording features of Microsoft TEAMS and Excel that allowed me to manage, shape, organize, and store the qualitative data and codes that I had developed according to recommendations in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2018). Additionally, this process aided in identifying additional emerging themes.

Data synthesis involved organizing categories and themes from all data sources in an Excel spreadsheet. This process enabled me to clearly identify relationships in the categories found in the analyses for each data source. Color-coding was helpful in classifying these categories into chunks or segments of text and for assigning a word or phrase to the general themes these categories supported (Creswell & Creswell 2022). Inductively analyzing the data to categorize, interpret, and synthesize themes resulted in a common set of themes that supported patterns of information from all data sources and that also related to the research questions. To ensure that the result was a synthesis of the data, these steps were reviewed several times to identify recurring themes or overlapping concepts. As recommended (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018), a peer researcher served as an external auditor who checked my procedures and helped to validate the results. The data results were compared to ensure that saturation was within both sets of results and that the single set of themes identified as the study's results was appropriate.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness plays a critical role in research studies (Yin, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) concluded that trustworthiness is the reader's criteria when determining a study's validity and reliability. Trustworthiness in qualitative research has four main criteria: credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability. These criteria were used to measure the reliability of the investigation of teachers' experiences with SPIRE. Triangulation, member checking, and peer review were among measures applied in the study to strengthen the research study's trustworthiness.

Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility in a qualitative study is defined as the construct of real value. Ensuring credibility or participants' reality of the phenomenon studied requires using various strategies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified three predominant strategies: (a) spending a significant amount of time in the field gathering data; (b) collecting data from a variety of information sources, and (c) providing opportunities for participants to review their responses to ensure that bias has not misrepresented their intent. These strategies were adopted in this study as efforts to provide dependable and potentially transferable results. The time strategy, however, involved time spent gathering multiple sources of data through a virtual format. Time was actively spent in one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews through the Microsoft TEAMS format.

Enhanced credibility of the research study occurred through triangulation of interview data sources along with a letter-writing prompt activity. Triangulation added validity to the findings (Gall et al., 2007). Credibility was also strengthened through providing opportunities for individual and focus group interview participants to engage in member checking in which they

reviewed, confirmed, and edited, if necessary, the typed transcripts for accuracy of their meanings. Further, to ensure the credibility of the study, an external auditor served as a peer reviewer of the process used to determine accuracy of the resulting themes of the study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the applicability of findings from the study to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, this case study represented the opinions of a specific sample of educators; therefore, the transferability of findings may not apply to the opinions of educators in different settings. This study identified conditions to suggest to readers whether the results would be applicable. Among the conditions were providing a thick, rich description of the site, SPIRE, and the educators' beliefs, preparation, and practices supporting SPIRE in the classroom. Additionally, the resulting themes were corroborated by sample statements from the participants that showed the relationship between the theme and participants' experiences. Through purposive sampling from a pool of teachers from different schools, the study procedures aimed to have a diverse participant pool with respect to gender, ethnicity, educational background, teaching experience, and experiences using SPIRE.

Dependability

Consistent and repeatable findings refer to a study's dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Incorporation of strategies commonly cited in the literature assisted in establishing the dependability of this study, including procedures for coding, analyzing data, synthesizing, and interpreting the data to ensure capturing the essence of participants' meanings void of researcher bias. Reporting these processes in detail helped to establish the study's dependability. Following the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985), a peer reviewer completed an inquiry audit of processes for collecting and analyzing data and for identifying the results of the study. Through

this examination, the auditor determined the accuracy of results and interpretations, guaranteeing that they were consistent with the data and were supported by the data collected. Furthermore, a detailed record of the study's procedures and findings ensures that other researchers can duplicate the study.

Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to confirmability as neutrality, which means that the findings of a study are based on participants' data and are not a result of researcher bias or the researcher's interest in the study. Techniques for establishing confirmability include (a) confirmability audits, (b) audit trails, (c) triangulation, and (d) reflexivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The study's confirmability was ensured through member checking since participants reviewed statements for accuracy and completeness, corrected factual errors if necessary, and provided more data when discrepancies occurred (Gall et al., 2007). Findings were supported through triangulating data from the multiple sources included in the study. Confirmability was also established through constant reflective practices including consciously setting aside my experiences and biases while reading, organizing, analyzing, synthesizing the data, and reporting the results. Creswell and Creswell (2022) recommended disclosing my personal experiences related to the phenomenon being studied so that the reader could understand that my personal biases did not influence the results or interpretation of results helped to ensure confirmability. Finally, maintaining an audit trail of the study's procedures permitted me to determine whether practices planned for ensuring the trustworthiness of the study had been implemented and if there were needed changes based on what was revealed in the audit.

Ethical Considerations

As the major instrument for collecting and analyzing data for this study, I conducted

the study according to best professional practices and guidelines for the protection of humans participating in a study. Ethical practices included gaining permission to conduct the study from the site and Liberty University's IRB and acquiring the voluntary consent of participants. Further, seeking to understand the human subjects' practices and challenges related to SPIRE assisted me to consciously reflect on the language that I used to ensure that my words were not perceived as demeaning in view of their knowledge base about SPIRE. Additionally, conveying participants' rights to voluntary participation verbally and in writing included that they could refuse to participate or withdraw from participating without any negative consequences.

Pseudonyms were used to ensure participants' confidentiality and conceal the names of the schools and district. Any individuals or companies having access to the data for transcribing or auditing purposes signed a confidentiality agreement form. Details were not provided that could link the identity of a participant in any documents associated with the study. Procedures for ensuring participants' confidentiality also included storing data in a password-protected computer and a locked file cabinet at my home. Data will be retained in these secured sources for three years in compliance with Liberty University's IRB and then computer-stored data will be destroyed through electronic shredding and paper documents through burning.

The study did not pose more than minimal risk or harm to participants. Minimum risks included the possibility that some participants might experience some anxiety about disclosing perceptions of their challenges in implementing SPIRE. Efforts to reduce this risk occurred through informing participants that they could omit any questions that made them uncomfortable. A confidentiality breach was also possible to emerge as a risk. Efforts to minimize this possibility included using pseudonyms, securing information to which only I as the

researcher had access, and requesting participants not to share that they were participating in the study. The recruitment letter clearly stated the purpose of the study, and the consent form disclosed practices that addressed such risks as confidentiality and anonymity.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards in a large suburban school district in Utah. The study served as a lens for understanding the experiences, practices, and challenges of educators who implement SPIRE. This chapter revealed the alignment of the research design for conducting the study and strategies for collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data. It also provided details of the processes associated with case study research and the procedures used to conduct this study, including the process for collecting data from three major sources: responses to a writing prompt, semi-structured individual interviews, and a focus group interview. Explanations of the treatment of data in preparation for the analysis involved transcribing the data and using Excel spreadsheets to organize it.

The analysis process entailed using three coding techniques to identify the frequency of similar words and expressions, categories of meaningful units, relationships among coded categories, and the final themes. Discussions in the chapter also described processes for ensuring the trustworthiness of the results and procedures that ensured observing ethical practices in both conducting the study and reporting results. Detailed descriptions were provided to enable other researchers to replicate the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

Declining reading scores in schools across the United States have generated the need for educators to meet the student's academic, social, and personal needs by implementing research-based reading interventions (International Literacy Association, 2018). The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to describe educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards at a large suburban school district in Utah. The theoretical framework that guided this study was Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. This study examined the perception of 12 participants who were current teachers or educational aids employed in the Jordan School District. The central question and research subquestions that guided this study are the following:

CQ: What are educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards in a large suburban school district in Utah?

SQ1: How do educators use SPIRE as an intervention in the classroom?

SQ2: What are the benefits and barriers educators experience when implementing SPIRE instructional practice in the classroom?

SQ3: How do educators explain their professional development using SPIRE?

This chapter includes a description of the participants. The findings of the data from the letters, individual interviews, and focus groups are also presented as well as themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. The chapter culminates by summarizing the findings based on the results of the data analysis.

Participants

This section presents a description of the 12 participants. All participants were educators in the urban area of Utah. Participants' demographic information (excluding their ages) was collected during the survey. All participants self-identified as Caucasian and female. The racial demographics of the participants reflected the general population of the community. The participants' average years of service ranged from 2 to 5 years (2 out of 11, 18%), 6 to 10 years (2 out of 11, 18 %), 11 to 20 years (4 out of 11, 36 %), and 21 to 30 years (3 out of 11, 27%). For data collection, participants wrote a letter, engaged in an individual interview, and participated in focus groups. All 12 completed their letters. Eleven of the participants were interviewed, and eight participated in a focus group. The sample met the saturation point of the data necessary for the study. Participants in the study were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy and confidentiality and that of the school division. A description of each participant follows.

Abby

Abby is a special education teacher in an elementary school. Abby also taught as a regular education teacher for two years. She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education and special education. She has implemented SPIRE as an intervention in the district for one year. Abby uses SPIRE as an intervention in the resource setting with students who currently are on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Allison

Allison is the literacy coach in an elementary school. She has a master's degree as a literacy specialist. Allison loves teaching reading. She has more than 20 years' experience in education and has been using the SPIRE program for four years as a Tier 3 intervention. She provides reading intervention to students in kindergarten through third grade.

Angel

Angel was the first participant to be recruited for the study and assisted in the recruitment of other participants. Angel is a district literacy specialist and Title 1 coordinator with a certification in English as a second language (ESL) and endorsements in level 2 math and levels 1 and 2 administration. Angel has a master's degree in elementary education K–8 and has been teaching SPIRE for four years. Since she is very knowledgeable about the reading programs in the school and around the district, she was able to provide valuable information about how long the reading program has been used in schools across the district and how it is being used to increase reading scores.

Ebony

Ebony is currently an educational aid in the district. She has a calm personality, which is beneficial for the students she works with in the special education department. She provides interventions as a pull-out service to students based on their IEP. Ebony has provided SPIRE as an intervention to special education students for one year. Currently, she does not have a college degree.

Jackie

Jackie's current position is the literacy instructional coach at an elementary school. Along with a master's degree in elementary education, Jackie has endorsements in ESL and reading. She has more than 20 years in the field of education. She provides reading interventions in a small-group setting and has used SPIRE as a Tier 3 intervention for one year.

Keisha

Currently, Keisha is a special education teacher in the district. She has certification in elementary education, early childhood education, and an endorsement in reading. In addition, she

also has a master's degree in special education. She is very passionate about reading interventions. Keisha has been teaching SPIRE in a pull-out service for four years with students who are currently on an IEP.

Kelly

Kelly has an extensive background in education with more than 19 years of teaching experience. In addition to a master's degree in education, Kelly has certification as a reading specialist and holds an administrative license. She has been a literacy coach for eight years and is a facilitator in Language Essentials for Teaching of Reading and Spelling (LETRS). Kelly has implemented SPIRE for three years, providing reading interventions to students that are on the Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels.

Linda

Linda is a veteran educational aid. She has been working with special education students for more than 10 years but currently does not have a college degree. At present Linda works with specific learning disability students in small-group settings. Linda has utilized SPIRE in the special education classroom for one year.

Madison

Madison is currently a literacy coach in the school district. She has an educational specialist degree and more than 20 years of experience in education. Madison has used SPIRE as an intervention for four years and provides literacy support to students in small-group settings and in the regular education classroom. She enjoys working with different interventions to assist students in gaining reading skills.

Mary

Mary has a bachelor's degree in special education and has been teaching the SPIRE intervention for one year. With certifications in elementary education (K–8) and special education (K–12), Mary has more than five years of teaching experience. Many of her students have IEP support. Mary has been using SPIRE as the reading program in her special education classroom for two years.

Sharon

Sharon loves teaching. Currently, she has a bachelor's degree in special education and has been using SPIRE as an intervention for one year. Sharon is taking courses that will help her develop students' reading skills. She previously taught in a middle school as a special education teacher but now serves as a special education aid in an elementary school. She works with students who have moderate level disabilities and low attention spans in small-group settings.

Stacey

Stacey has a bachelor's degree in elementary education in kindergarten through eighth grade. With 25 years in the educational field, she has been teaching SPIRE as an intervention for the last four years. She is currently working as an educational aid. All of Stacey's students are receiving intervention services at the Tier 3 level. Stacey provides SPIRE as the reading intervention in her literacy support classroom.

Table 2 displays a summary of the demographic characteristics of the study participants, including gender, ethnicity, highest degree earned, and area of specialization. The names for participants are fictitious.

Table 2

Teacher Participants

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest degree earned	Content area
Abby	Female	Caucasian	Bachelor's	Special education teacher
Allison	Female	Caucasian	Master's	Literacy coach
Angel	Female	Caucasian	Master's	District literacy specialist
Ebony	Female	Caucasian	Master's	Educational aid
Jackie	Female	Caucasian	No degree	Literacy coach
Kelly	Female	Caucasian	Master's	Literacy coach
Keisha	Female	Caucasian	Master's	Special education teacher
Linda	Female	Caucasian	No degree	Educational aid
Madison	Female	Caucasian	Educational specialist	Literacy coach
Mary	Female	Caucasian	Bachelor's	Special education teacher
Sharon	Female	Caucasian	Bachelor's	Educational aid
Stacey	Female	Caucasian	Bachelor's	Educational aid

The data in Table 2 reveals that half the participants had earned graduate degrees. The positions held are consistent with those whose roles include implementing reading interventions. As shown in the table, participants who volunteered for the study included four special education teachers, three literacy coaches, four educational aids, and one district literacy specialist.

Results

This section presents the results of the data analysis based on a detailed examination of data collected from the letter-writing prompts, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The communication platform Microsoft TEAMS was employed to conduct the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The participants responded to the letter-writing prompts using

Google Docs. The open-ended questions asked allowed the participants to expand on SPIRE as an intervention. The data collection consisted of 11 letters, 12 one-on-one interviews, and two focus groups. A transcription service transcribed each data source. Then, I read the transcripts to ensure that the text was appropriately transcribed. Next, I coded the information for similar words and patterns. The patterns and themes then emerged from the represented data. Next, I analyzed the data by categorizing, interpreting, and synthesizing for themes and subthemes related to the research questions, which aided in describing the educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to assist struggling readers. Participant narratives resulting from their responses to the letter-writing prompt, the semi-structured interviews, and the focus group discussion answered the research questions, and themes developed as findings of the study.

Theme Development

The data analysis process involved open-coding the data, which included labeling the concepts as well as defining and developing categories based on relationships. The open codes were then organized into patterns, themes, and subthemes based on the occurrences in the data sources. Through the lens of the self-efficacy theory, themes emerged from the data that described educators' perceptions of implementing SPIRE. Five unique themes and eight subthemes emerged in the analysis of the educators' narratives in the letters, interviews, and focus groups. Rechecking the data ensured the validity of the study. Table 3 presents the open codes, frequencies, themes, and subthemes that emerged from the coding.

Table 3

Theme Development

Open codes	Frequency of each open code across data sets	Themes	Subthemes
Knowledge Fidelity	96 35	Educator's understanding of SPIRE	• Educators' positive perception of teaching SPIRE • Fidelity of SPIRE
Engaging Repetitive Organization Tier 2 Tier 3 Explicit/direct instruction	30 33 25 9 18 35	The practice of SPIRE as an intervention	
Growth Change	40 23	Benefits of SPIRE	
Impact Challenges Time Materials Environment Space	30 37 40 30 20 10	Barriers to SPIRE	• Aspects of SPIRE • Time factor when using SPIRE • Lack of materials • Environment for SPIRE
Training	78	Professional development	• Training frequency • Training of general education teachers with SPIRE
Negative comments	3	Outliers	

Educators' Understanding of SPIRE

The first theme that emerged during data collection was the educators' understanding of SPIRE. The frequency with which the word *knowledge* appeared throughout all data sources revealed that participants' understanding of SPIRE encompassed perceptions that related not only to its aspects as an instructional intervention but also to their own attitudes toward SPIRE. Participants defined their understanding of SPIRE in terms of awareness of specific skills targeted for struggling readers, the role of teacher knowledge and understanding in implementing

its components, and requirements for implementing the intervention with fidelity. In terms of implementation requirements, six participants stated in their letters that educators become more knowledgeable about SPIRE as an intervention when they receive adequate training. Keisha wrote that training happened midyear: “I had a two-day training offered by the district. It was an explicit training from the company that was excellent.” The participants stated that their understanding of the elements of SPIRE such as repetition, word families, phonics, and writing provided opportunities for student learning that other approaches do not. The educators understood that SPIRE was the type of intervention they had wanted to supplement their instruction for low-performing students who struggle with reading.

Many of the participants described the need for an intervention that was geared toward the Tier 2 and Tier 3 student. Tier 2 is differentiated instruction that targets support in small-group lessons that focus on special teaching or interventions in core content areas; Tier 3 instruction features individualized instruction or lessons that target specific students’ needs in a resource room. All 12 participants shared their understanding of SPIRE in the classroom compared to other reading interventions, specifically phonics and writing in other content areas. This understanding increased their confidence and allowed them to use student-centered strategies to develop their students’ knowledge of reading.

When the teachers were asked for additional clarification of their understanding of SPIRE, the consensus was that understanding of skills is acquired through a person’s experiences with an intervention. Madison described the purpose of SPIRE and explained: “The Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training provided the necessary background information for teachers to be able to understand the skills of SPIRE so that they also can use these research-based methods in their classrooms.” Sharon reflected on her

experience when she initially implemented SPIRE and found value in being able to connect her university literacy education with her real-world classroom practices with students. Several of the educators and educational aids felt their understanding of implementing different interventions throughout their years played a significant role in their ability to effectively implement the SPIRE program. They perceived that a teacher's understanding of the program enables him or her to be more perceptive about teaching practices that would add to its value as a learning tool. Sharon stated, "My knowledge helped to improve my engagement with the SPIRE program." Several other participants explained that their knowledge about SPIRE and other programs increased the students' success with reading. Keisha shared how different programs based on the science of reading provided an overview of how the SPIRE instructional approach applies to struggling readers. In support of the educator's understanding of SPIRE, educators and educational aids also gave a detailed account of the educator's attitude toward teaching SPIRE and the effectiveness of SPIRE in assisting struggling readers.

Educators' Positive Perception of Teaching SPIRE

The first subtheme identified was the educators' positive perception toward teaching SPIRE. Most participants felt that their positive perception of SPIRE affected their success in teaching it. The participants also noted that the teacher's positive perception of SPIRE determines the teaching practices and how the teacher delivers the SPIRE content. During the interview session, three of the educators indicated that they perceived that SPIRE provides a foundation and gives the students practice that they need to become successful. Mary stated, "[SPIRE] addressed the particular skills that the students need." Abby commented, "SPIRE targets skills that the students need to be doing in order to make progress and improvements."

Linda explained, “SPIRE provides the students with a foundation. It allows the students to have practice that they need for long-term success.”

Participants described their positive impressions of SPIRE using a variety of words. When asked in interviews to describe SPIRE, they used such words as *excellent*, *exciting*, and *effective*. Other statements reflected the idea expressed by Madison in her interview: “An educator’s perception has a huge impact on their teaching.” Angel also expressed during the interview how a poor perception affects teaching SPIRE: “If you have a poor perception of anything, it’s definitely going to have an impact on the way you operate and impact your teaching performance in the classroom.”

During the focus group, participants expressed their attitudes about SPIRE. Linda, Sharon, and Allison stated that their years of knowledge made their perception of the SPIRE program clear. The perception of SPIRE for all the educators and educational aids was that SPIRE provided a more effective intervention for students compared to the other interventions that were implemented in the district. The participants also shared that their background knowledge of different programs also challenged their positive perception of SPIRE. In her interview, Angel said that perception “is probably the underlying thing that is often overlooked.” Participants agreed that positive perception influences everything the teacher does in the classroom and the teacher’s effectiveness in using interventions.

Fidelity of SPIRE

A second subtheme that emerged was fidelity or accuracy of SPIRE. This subtheme emerged from codes positing that teachers implement SPIRE with constancy. The fidelity of SPIRE is evident in the accuracy of the details of the program. Allison believed that educators accepted SPIRE as an intervention. Stacey stated during her interview, “I am still doing the

lessons all the way through. I provide the students with the introductory lesson and a review lesson for every skill. I am seeing growth, but it is slow." Sharon stated, "My acceptance of SPIRE will allow me to teach with fidelity."

The value of the fidelity of teaching and learning as influenced by one's knowledge and perception was shared in multiple ways in the focus groups, interviews, and letters. In a focus group, Abby referred to the practices of one employee and noted that, "Her failure to teach [SPIRE] with fidelity is showing. Students in that group are not advancing as quickly as they should." The participants recognized the value of the fidelity of SPIRE in improving students' performance in the classroom and on assessments. During the focus group Allison said, "Through the fidelity of SPIRE, I was able to recognize the importance of emphasizing things to students." Allison and three other participants claimed, "The fidelity of SPIRE provide[d] the missing link that was necessary to see what the students were missing and where the students needed to go." Madison and Kelly stated in the focus group, "The fidelity allowed the educator to break down the content, which allowed the students to be provided with an intensive word work session."

The Practice of SPIRE as an Intervention

A second theme that emerged illustrated the overall perception of SPIRE as an intervention program. This theme emerged from codes revealing that teachers recognized the effectiveness of SPIRE in terms of its direct instructional and organizational features for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Tier 2 provides selective supports for individuals or groups of students who have some low-level learning, social, emotional, and developmental needs. Tier 3 provides intensive support for individual students with more significant needs. Participants explained that SPIRE was effective because of its focus on explicit and direct instruction. Allison described the

program as “very systematic and sequential” and said it “follows the science of reading; everything is decodable, and the lessons do a spiral review.” The instructional focus provides students intensive practice in skills needed to be mastered beyond activities provided at Tiers 1 and 2. Keisha said, "SPIRE is a great program for students who struggle greatly with reading and have not made improvement with other interventions.” Abby and Jackie explained that direct and explicit instruction through SPIRE is most often provided to students in pull-out groups from the regular classroom by literacy coaches, reading specialists, and special education teachers.

The instruction in SPIRE is repetitive and presented at a slow pace. However, some participants concluded that the intensive direct instruction is not needed for all students. Jackie explained, “The actual SPIRE program would be too slow for all students. But for Tier 3, it’s been amazing and even for some of our Tier 2 [students]; we just have had to add some of the fluency.” Angel also shared the following:

> It’s a little bit more explicit and intensive and targeted than what some students need. And it doesn’t specialize to the needs of individual learners, so we do use it to target our students who are in need of Tier 3 interventions.

Madison, Linda, and Ebony also agreed that the instructional focus would be effective for most students but not all. The majority of participants agreed that SPIRE was most appropriate and effective for beginning readers and students who are struggling.

Instructional formats for implementing SPIRE were valuable for providing support services to struggling readers. The services were administrated to students pulled out from the classroom into a one-on-one or small-group instructional format. Linda shared, “I have two students in SPIRE. They are in second grade. One student has a lot of issues with attention and dyslexia; so, I have them one-on-one in SPIRE.” Abby said, “I use small groups, and I don’t

necessarily use it in the curriculum setting." Participants' comments showed that even within the whole classroom setting, small groups were often organized for students to receive more explicit instruction in targeted skills. However, Sharon observed SPIRE being applied in first- and second-grade whole-classroom settings. Referring to first grade, she said, "I've actually seen some of the teachers doing this where they do little drills on a daily basis, and then they mix it up [and] change the order of letters." However, she said regarding second grade, "I haven't seen much of that in the regular curriculum unless they're helping the kids with the board work and they're actually showing them how they sound out a word to spell it."

Benefits of SPIRE

The third theme that emerged was the benefits of SPIRE. Several participants in this study described the academic growth of the students and the acquisition of materials or resources as benefits from implementing SPIRE. Angel expressed satisfaction with SPIRE with regard to obtaining resources and stated, "The school specialist has been so good to work with as far as even getting things ordered or discussing options for professional development. Even when I first ordered the program, I didn't have any idea what I was ordering." Allison compared this to her experiences in getting access to materials with other companies:

> And it's like they [the company that publishes SPIRE] shipped things quickly. The orders are accurate. This is the first year I've ever actually had anything on back order, and they've been able to fulfill those orders; whereas we've had interactions with other companies who haven't. It's very hard to need the materials to work with students and not be able to get them.

Stacey noted during her interview, "Their school does not have an issue with getting materials or resources for SPIRE because they are a Title 1 school."

The participants described the integration of SPIRE into the classroom and core curriculum as well as the academic growth of the students as benefits. The discussion of SPIRE as an intervention as applied to the classroom and curriculum focused on the teachers, grade and tier levels, classification of special needs, instructional arrangements, and instructional modifications. However, Mary explained that because students in resource groups have a specific progression of goals, some parts of SPIRE can be added into the teachers' instruction. She said, ""For the most part, they're trying to learn how to implement it into the curriculum as it is." Similarly, Jackie expressed that efforts to demonstrate to all teachers how integrating SPIRE works in the classroom should be based on how it affects students' testing and discovering patterns that can assist the teacher with identifying strategies that can be applied to effectively help the student.

The participants repeatedly expressed how the implementation of SPIRE resulted in student growth by improving student progress in reading and by providing a process that facilitates long-term success. Allison, Jackie, and Keisha shared that they have seen growth in their students' performance in reading when using SPIRE. Madison and Mary made similar remarks in the interview, describing the benefits of SPIRE in providing support in the foundational skills. Madison commented during the focus group, "[SPIRE] identifies the skills they are lacking and addresses those particular needs. It is very foundational and gives them the practice and application that they need for long-term success." Linda and Sharon mentioned the benefits of students' acquisition of particular skills. Sharon noted student progress in "being able to look at a word and sound it out whereas [at the] beginning of the year they couldn't do that." Linda described SPIRE's benefits for her students: "I have actually been able to see growth and

progress in ways that we haven't seen them grow before. I have seen them grow in their language skills and sounding out vocabulary words." Angel concurred with this observation:

> Other teachers questioned why they were not introduced to SPIRE sooner and that they [students] were able to grow and make progress. This was kind of what they needed. They needed something different. This gave us a chance to do something different for them so they could make more growth than they had made for quite some time.

Several participants confirmed during the interviews that growth among struggling readers was revealed in post assessments and in student behavior. Keisha explained the benefits of SPIRE and how she observed improvement in students; scores.:

> I think that if there are low readers, this is an awesome program for them and even my third graders who we just went on to level 2, have succeeded. They definitely went up on their DIBELS testing that we just tested them by 2020 words. They did really well. They do really well with this program.

Growth for the struggling reader resulted from the systematic and sequential process characteristic of SPIRE. The slow process for "those really low kids means it slows down the instruction and teaches more explicitly to the student," according to Ebony.

Barriers to SPIRE

The fourth theme that emerged from the participants is barriers to SPIRE. The barriers were often attributed to the time associated with instructional models and the lack of materials. In her letter Linda wrote that the barriers made some parts difficult to implement. Other factors that made it challenging to implement SPIRE included policy issues with online resources,

training, integration, and pacing. Sharon mentioned in her letter that the barriers made it difficult to be flexible and to go through all the lessons.

Aspects of SPIRE

The first subtheme related to the barriers was lack of access to certain components of SPIRE. Policy issues were the main reason the participants encountered this barrier. Policy issues refers to the lack of availability or access to materials or resources that were sometimes due to lack of funding, inability to track student progress, or inability to use online features of the program. Regarding the availability of online resources, Linda explained:

> The fourth edition has a computer-based option with online data collection and progress monitoring. The district and SPIRE need to coordinate efforts better, addressing privacy issues so that recording progress is not delayed. Additionally, the class records and data recording arm of SPIRE is not very friendly.

Ebony noted her satisfaction with SPIRE but agreed with Linda on the need to use online features. She said, "I think if I was able to use the online program it would be better." The lack of a waiver to the confidentiality agreement with SPIRE was also a contributing factor to the limits placed on online use, according to Ebony.

Training—including the nature of the training, recipients of training, and training frequency—was cited as a second barrier to implementing SPIRE. Participants perceived that training was necessary and should be provided to all teachers. It was problematic having to begin implementing the program without being trained. Keisha explained, "Getting aids trained was difficult. Implementation happened midyear, which made it hard to see growth in a short amount of time." She also concluded, "You need to be trained by the company. Sometimes the directions are confusing, and it is hard to understand what to do."

The next barrier was how SPIRE was used as an intervention, which also relates to when it should be used as an intervention. The participants provided different explanations of how SPIRE is used and when SPIRE should be used in the classroom and curriculum. Special education teachers, reading teachers, and resource teachers were less likely to report instances of the intervention being applied outside of one-on-one or group instructional arrangements. Angel explained, "I don't know if there's a lot of integration just because the classroom teachers aren't the ones doing SPIRE."

The final barrier reflected several participants' views with respect to the pace of SPIRE. Since instruction in SPIRE is repetitive and presented in a scripted format, it is usually conducted at a slow pace. However, the slow pace or intensive nature of direct instruction was not perceived as necessary for all students. Jackie said during the interview, "The actual SPIRE program would be too slow for all students." Angel also corroborated this in her interview:

> It's a little bit more explicit and intensive and targeted than what some students need. And it doesn't specialize to the needs of individual learners, so we do use it to target our students who are in need of Tier 3 interventions.

Time Factors When Using SPIRE

The second subtheme related to barriers was the time factor when using SPIRE. Time constraints—the leading barrier for the majority of participants—were often attributed to the time associated with instructional modules, including the time required for completing a lesson with students who have reading difficulties. In Jackie's letter, she wrote, "The program moves slowly, and students seem to get stuck on a level. It takes a long time to get through level 1 because students struggle to pass the end-of-lesson test unless you disregard the words with blends, which level 1 does not explicitly address." Keisha wrote in her letter, "It takes a long

time to get through the program." Ebony agreed: "Due to the scripted program, it moves at a slower pace. And due to the time restrictions, we have on the intervention of 40 minutes, it's not enough time to get through the lessons." And Stacey wrote, "The 60-minute block that we have for the intervention is not enough time to fully implement each component of the SPIRE lessons." Linda wrote, "I think additional time in text should be added to the program."

Lack of Materials

The third subtheme related to barriers was the lack of materials. This posed a barrier because of the amount of time it takes materials to be shipped to the schools and be distributed to the teachers. Mary described what happened during the first year of implementing SPIRE at her school: "The biggest barrier has been getting the materials. We have spent hours making [our own] materials and trying to figure out what materials even look like." She further explained that teachers had to rely on videos and observations of how others had implemented SPIRE in order to make materials and adjust the teaching environment because they lacked workbooks and readers. She said, "We spent hours and hours just putting together the student work boards; just doing them on like a magnet cookie tray."

Three of the participants during the focus group identified getting materials or resources as a barrier. Stacey commented:

> Overall, I've been satisfied with SPIRE. I think the materials and manuals could be more affordable and efficient so that student kits were included without having to buy them separate. The other thing is the difficulty getting some materials. They are not available to order and are on back order.

Angel explained in the focus group, “Most of the materials in the SPIRE kit were difficult to get.” Kelly added that she and fellow teachers lacked the materials needed for the program and “spent hours making items to implement the program.”

Environment for SPIRE

The fourth subtheme that emerged as a barrier was the environment for SPIRE. The teachers and educational aid participants expressed their knowledge of how an effective environment impacts the success of implementing SPIRE. Many educators referred to the environment as a crucial resource that aids them in implementing SPIRE with fidelity. Sharon stated in her interview: “I provided an environment that was sectioned off because I share the room with other people.” Allison also mentioned in her interview that her environment was “print rich” because she had made a word wall to review the words in the workbook each day.

However, some participants offered other issues about the environment. One comment Madison included in her letter was, “The barriers for us to implement is our lack of space for groups.” Additionally, Mary noted, “It is also challenging to use the rectangular tables to have enough space to work with students. The amount of traffic and noise in the SPED room has also been a barrier when trying to implement SPIRE [for students] who have major distractions because of their disabilities.” Other participants commented that the size of the space they used was not conducive to learning.

Professional Development

The last theme that emerged was professional development. Training was discussed as a component of professional development. Training provided the foundation for implementing SPIRE. Training was instrumental in adding to participants’ knowledge base of the science of reading and best practices for teaching struggling readers. Stacey stated, “The SPIRE training

provided strategies for the program." Through training, participants were better able to implement the program with fidelity to Tier 3 learners, modify instructional practices to accommodate Tier 2 learners, and identify gaps or holes in students' abilities. Jackie stated in her interview, "The SPIRE training provided videos that instructed on how to implement the program." Subthemes emerging from training focused on the frequency of training, feedback and assessment, and training needs for general education teachers.

Training Frequency

The first subtheme under professional development was training frequency. The frequency and nature of training should be addressed, according to some participants. Mary suggested, "We should practice in groups more." Allison agreed: "We can never have too much training when it comes to working with the lowest kids in the schools." She felt that training should be available to both old and new hires. Jackie was in favor of training that involved modeling lessons.

Training experiences differed among participants in terms of the nature and frequency. Most participants engaged in a one- or two-day training at the beginning of the school year. For some participants, training was conducted by the publishing company; however, most received training through a school specialist. One participant referred to her years of experience as a form of professional development. A frequent observation was the insufficiency of training and the need for follow-up trainings. Angel expressed this need based on discussions with colleagues:

> We kind of talked about the ability for us to come back together and really talk about how we're doing this in our schools, what's working, what challenges we're having because somebody might be having a challenge that another school already solved.

Jackie and Kelly agreed that a follow-up of the training was needed, as Kelly put it, “even if it is a day just to be able to ask questions and have them model for us again.”

Training General Education Teachers to Use SPIRE

The second subtheme under professional development was the training of general education teachers with SPIRE. Several participants expressed the opinion that training for general education teachers would improve the implementation of SPIRE since the program is not appropriate for only Tier 3 implementers. The consensus among participants was that general education teachers should be provided training to better facilitate the integration of SPIRE into the classroom and core curriculum. Abby suggested changes she would make in implementing SPIRE: “I would provide training for everyone in the program, even if not everyone will be teaching it. General education teachers should know what is being taught as they can reinforce it in their environment.” Abby also explained the need for training:

> Barriers in implementing SPIRE have been that not everyone is familiar with the program. Special education teachers, reading specialists, and paraprofessionals receive the training and insight into the program, but general education teachers do not. General education teachers often do not know what their students are doing when they go to their intervention groups.

Jackie echoed this observation of the need for training general education teachers to augment their instructional practices.

Evidence of the value of training emerged from participants’ experiences in using SPIRE. For example, in a focus group, Abby said that she was not sure that the instructional practices of SPIRE are really “hitting” with the students she teaches. She explained, “The students are at Tier 3 level. I don't feel like SPIRE is working for some of them. I wish that there was universal

application of these concepts so that they were reinforced in all settings." Most experiences referred to lessons learned, or knowledge gained from training and using SPIRE. The implied need for training all teachers, including general education teachers, is seen in Sharon's remarks:

> I can see how it is making a difference with the students that I work with. I had three students moved out of my group, and they asked if they could come back because they said it was helping them with the words in the book.

Participants saw the need to integrate information and activities in using SPIRE to address students' individual needs, to provide fun experiences, and to add flexibility to the learning experience. They suggested that general education teachers could enhance opportunities for struggling students through being aware of the concepts and strategies included in SPIRE.

Outlier Data and Findings

This section focuses on the outliers that emerged from the data analysis in the interviews, letters, and focus groups. Outliers represent unexpected findings during the research process that may not align with specific research questions or themes presented. Although different from the themes, these outliers provide additional information that may have an impact on similar research projects. The two outliers found in this study were differences in perceptions about training and the influence of SPIRE on student performance.

Outlier Finding 1

Only one of the participants in the study felt that the training the district offered was adequate to increase the level of knowledge that educators must have to integrate SPIRE as an intervention. Linda said, "I had a one-day training offered by the district. It was an excellent training." Additionally, Linda explained, "Of course, time actually working with students hands-on is the best training. Because the program is so carefully scripted more training is probably not

necessary." While the other participants felt that the professional development received was appropriate, they expressed the opinion that the district's level of training for the SPIRE intervention did *not* provide the key elements that educators needed to effectively implement the program.

Outlier Finding 2

Most participants expressed the view that SPIRE was an excellent intervention for increasing students' state proficiency scores. However, in their letters, two participants stated that SPIRE was too slow to impact student growth. For those participants the SPIRE intervention was more effective on the school-based scores. Sharon wrote, "I am seeing some success, it is just very slow." Keisha explained. "SPIRE is wonderful, but it takes a long time to move students through the program. So, it is hard to see growth in a short amount of time."

Research Question Responses

The following section outlines the data from the educators' letters, interviews, and focus group responses to the central research questions and subquestions. As these responses were reviewed, themes emerged from the data collected from each participant. Through the participants' responses, one can see how these educators use interventions to help struggling readers learn how to read. The following section provides an explanation of the data as responses to the central research question and subquestions.

Central Research Question

This question asked, "What are educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards in a large suburban school district in Utah?" Through the participants' letters, individual interviews, and focus groups, the research question was supported by five major themes: educators' understanding of

SPIRE, the practice of SPIRE as an intervention, benefits of SPIRE, barriers to SPIRE, and professional development. The participants' perception of the implementation of SPIRE was typically positive and reflected satisfaction with the intervention due to the skills it provides to Tier 2 and Tier 3 students, the fidelity of the program, and the repetitive, explicit, and direct nature of the instruction. Linda commented in her letter, "SPIRE is an excellent program to aid very early struggling readers." Madison relayed in the interview, "The benefits are that our most struggling students are getting foundational reading skills." Sharon stated in the focus group, "My acceptance of SPIRE will allow me to teach with fidelity." Although most participants perceived SPIRE positively, some perceptions reflected a dislike due to challenges with the environment, time, training, and materials. Stacey stated in the interview:

> During the professional development, I wish there was time for us to come back together and really talk about how we're doing this in our schools, what's working, what challenges we're having because somebody might be having a challenge that another school already solved.

Regarding the availability of materials and resources, Abby commented, "As far as resources go, just making sure we have the materials we need [is crucial]." Allison expressed her perception of the needs of a Tier 3 program: "We really need a prescription of one hour per day. If we follow the program and only have half an hour per day, we are not catching the kiddos up and bridging the gap."

Additional support was provided by the subthemes of perceptions of teaching, fidelity, the aspects of SPIRE, the time factor when using SPIRE, lack of materials, environment, training frequency, and training for general education teachers. The themes and subthemes provided an authentic description of the educators' perceptions of SPIRE as an intervention with struggling

readers. Moreover, the research showed that when the SPIRE intervention is administered with fidelity, the program does help students meet state proficiency standards.

Subquestion 1

"How do educators use SPIRE as an intervention in the classroom?" This research subquestion was supported by one major theme—the practice of SPIRE as an intervention. The data showed that educators use SPIRE to provide direct instruction to struggling readers in small groups or in one-on-one settings. Many of the participants explained that SPIRE was used as a Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention in the classroom to support students. Jackie, Ebony, and Abby mentioned, "SPIRE breaks [the concepts] down. It's very explicit. It's slow enough for [the students]. And the repetition provides kiddos with low-working memories that don't get it, five or six tries to be right." Allison said that SPIRE provides "systematic and sequential [instruction] and follows the science of reading. Everything is decodable, and the lessons do a spiral review."

Subquestion 2

"What are the benefits and barriers educators experience when implementing SPIRE instructional practice in the classroom?" Two major themes, the benefits of SPIRE and the barriers to SPIRE, answered this research question. The participants' unique experiences indicated that there are several benefits and barriers in the instructional practices of SPIRE as used in the classroom. The participants' experiences with SPIRE were beneficial. Factors that were noted as beneficial included academic growth of the students, change, engaging, repetition, and explicit direct instruction. Keisha explained, "SPIRE is a great program for students who struggle greatly with reading and have not made improvement with other interventions." The most profound benefit that the participants noted was student growth in reading skills.

The data showed the barriers to using SPIRE typically hindered the fidelity of the program. Barriers included aspects of SPIRE, materials, time, and environment. Mary stated, "The biggest barrier has been getting the materials. We have spent hours making the materials and trying to figure out what materials even look like." Kelly mentioned, "For a Tier 3 program we really need a prescription of one hour per day. If we follow the program and only have one-half hour per day, we are not catching the kiddos up and bridging the gap." Madison's letter stated, "The barrier for us in implementing is our lack of space for groups." The most profound barrier to implementing SPIRE that the participants noted was these challenging aspects of the program itself.

Subquestion 3

"How do educators explain their professional development using SPIRE?" The major theme of professional development addressed this research question. Participants affirmed that the professional development they received was excellent. It was a one- or two-day training provided by the company that publishes SPIRE (EPS School Specialty) at the beginning of the school year. Linda shared during the focus group, "We had training at the end of the school year and at the beginning of this year from district." Several participants stated that training was needed for all staff members. Professional development equipped the participants with tools used with instructional practices to help bridge the gap for struggling readers. As Jackie wrote,

> I can't see anything I would change about implementation besides providing training for instructors before beginning lessons. I would make sure that the general education teachers were introduced to the program so that they know how to complement instruction in their classrooms or know what their students are working on.

The most profound information that the participants noted was that professional development provided a foundation for implementing SPIRE as an intervention.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to describe educators perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards at a large suburban school district in Utah. Twelve individuals employed as teachers and paraprofessionals responded to letter-writing prompts; subsamples participated an individual interview and a focus group expressing their views about implementing SPIRE. Five major themes and eight subthemes emerged from the study based on comments in letters, focus groups, and individual interviews. The themes were educators' understanding of SPIRE, SPIRE as an intervention, barriers, benefits, and professional development; the subthemes were educators' positive perceptions of teaching SPIRE, fidelity, challenging aspects of SPIRE, the time factor when using SPIRE, lack of materials, environment, training frequency, and training of general education teachers with SPIRE. These themes and subthemes addressed the central research question regarding educators' perceptions of implementing SPIRE as an intervention.

The theme of SPIRE as an intervention makes the connection regarding educators' use of SPIRE in the classroom. The responses revealed that using SPIRE enabled them to implement it with fidelity, add and change activities and resources, and use different instructional arrangements to best promote student learning and progress in the classroom. For subquestion 2, the themes of benefits and barriers, and the subthemes of the challenging aspects of SPIRE, time factors when using SPIRE, lack of materials, and environment were responses to the question of benefits and barriers educators experienced when implementing SPIRE. The environment of

SPIRE addressed the positive and negative components of the environment that affected the implementation of SPIRE.

The final subquestion concerned explanations of educators' professional development for using SPIRE. The major theme, professional development, addressed this research question. The subthemes that addressed this research question were training frequency and the value of training general education teachers, which explained the advantages of training in preparing them for implementing SPIRE. Significant findings included that SPIRE was generally accepted as an intervention for the district's Tier 3 students and that teachers found it to be a valuable tool for struggling readers.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to describe educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards in a large suburban school district in Utah. This chapter consists of five discussion subsections: interpretation of findings, implication for policy, theoretical and empirical implications, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. The chapter summarizes the entire study and emphasizes important points based on the findings.

Discussion

Many students in fourth and eighth grade have challenges in reading; research shows that compared to 2019, reading scores in 2022 were three points lower in both grades (Nation's Report Card Reading, 2019). Investigation into the use of SPIRE as an intervention is scarce. This study explored the perception of SPIRE with 12 teachers and educational aids from elementary schools in the Jordan School District in Utah. The data analyzed revealed five major themes and eight subthemes related to the central question and three subquestions. The first theme, educators' understanding of SPIRE, addresses perceptions of educators based on their knowledge and experiences of SPIRE and other reading intervention programs. The second theme, the practice of SPIRE as an intervention, provides a detailed description of how SPIRE is used as an intervention with students. The third theme, benefits of SPIRE, focuses on components that make SPIRE effective. The fourth theme, barriers to SPIRE, illustrates challenges with using SPIRE as an intervention. The last theme, professional development,

addresses who needs training and how much training is needed to be effective with the intervention.

Interpretation of Findings

Summary of Thematic Findings

This study involved 12 participants who provided data in the form of letters, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. The first of the five themes (educators' understanding of SPIRE) is supported by two subthemes, perceptions of teaching SPIRE and the fidelity of SPIRE. Subthemes for the next two themes (the practice of SPIRE as a reading intervention and barriers to the use of SPIRE) did not emerge from the data. The fourth theme (benefits of SPIRE) is supported by four subthemes: aspects of SPIRE, the time factor when using SPIRE, the lack of materials, and the environment of SPIRE. The final theme (professional development) includes the subthemes of training frequency and training of general education teachers with SPIRE. An interpretation of these five themes is summarized in four key points.

Reading Intervention. The results of the study showed the connection of educators' perceptions of reading intervention with the literature. Research has shown that reading interventions are activities and strategies that help students develop their reading skills (Pao, 2022; Young et al., 2020); therefore, I wanted to explore how educators perceived the use of SPIRE as an intervention for struggling readers. The findings of this study showed that educators considered the use of SPIRE as a reading intervention to have had a positive impact on students' reading ability. Compared to other interventions, SPIRE can have more impact other reading curricula. Participants acknowledged that SPIRE was a systematic and sequential intervention. The findings of this study showed that educators perceive that SPIRE's claim to provide strategies that affect the struggling reader's ability to decode, comprehend, and become fluent

readers was correct. The analysis of the data revealed that educators thought that reading interventions provided remediation for students with reading difficulties. Most participants expressed that their perception of the SPIRE intervention had a substantial impact on the students' reading proficiency to meet state proficiency standards. Mary stated, "[SPIRE] provides students who struggle with the basic foundational skills of reading, and it assists them in applying those skills to their reading." Therefore, I would encourage the continued use of SPIRE because it is effective for helping to enhance the performance of struggling readers through a systematic, repetitive, and spiral review of skills. However, I recommend modifying the procedures, when appropriate, by adding scientifically based fun activities to increase students' motivation to read.

The teachers and educational aids in this study were receptive to the SPIRE intervention. When asked to share their opinions and experiences in implementing the program in their schools, some participants confessed that they had to make adjustments in their perception so that they could better embrace the intervention. The data supported that satisfaction with the program was important for implementing SPIRE. Overall, it appeared that participants were very satisfied with the SPIRE program. The participants were excited about the SPIRE program and looked forward to using the intervention; they were invested in the program. They discussed the importance of interventions with Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. The data suggested that most participants perceived SPIRE as an adequate accommodation in reading for their Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. Participants concluded that the program offered the struggling reader small-group or one-on-one instruction and embraced the scripted materials, explicit and direct instruction, and the repetition throughout the program for meeting students' needs. Important for the participants were program features with particular stress on phonemic awareness, the breaking down of the

word patterns, and the spiraling of skills. Reflection on the importance of an effective intervention in the schools made the participants realize the necessity of using an intervention with struggling readers.

Professional Development Support. Professional development is an important facet of improving educators' skills with intervention implementation. Participants received a two-day training provided by EPS School Specialty. Overall, they were satisfied with their professional development. However, several participants conveyed the need for training for regular education teachers. Sharon stated, "Something I would change is that I would provide training for everyone in the program, even if not everyone will be teaching it. General education teachers should know what is being taught so they can reinforce [it] in their environment."

Regardless of previous training, professional development dictates the degree to which educators can implement interventions with fidelity. In this study, most participants referred to training in the use of SPIRE as professional development. They felt the need for additional professional development to become knowledgeable about the program and its related activities and strategies. Findings also revealed that most participants perceived that experiential training was the best way to learn about the program. Based on participant interviews in this study, one- or two-day training with SPIRE is not effective enough to implement the intervention with fidelity.

Even though participants embraced the intervention, they felt there was a disconnect from school to school for implementing SPIRE. Because of the participants' awareness of this disconnect from school to school, I would encourage the administrators to provide professional development focused on creating a district-wide implementation structure to ensure continuity.

This structure would promote a level of awareness such that any educator transferring to another school would already be familiar with how SPIRE is to be implemented there.

Furthermore, I recommend that administrators offer literacy courses, conferences, webinars, workshops, and trainings that focus on SPIRE. A professional development session scheduled at the beginning of the year should include a "make and take" session for creating supplementary materials for use with SPIRE. Quarterly professional development sessions would address research findings, implementation strategies, and sharing and modeling lessons learned. Furthermore, I recommend that professional development include an end-of-year session focused on the challenges and benefits of using SPIRE as an intervention and suggested recommendations for change. This training should include classroom teachers so that they become familiar with the intervention process provided to students.

SPIRE's Computer-Based Program. In addition to other challenges with SPIRE, the participants expressed major difficulties with the use of the computer-based elements in the fourth edition of SPIRE. Many participants perceived that the online program would promote students' use of 21st-century technology skills. Kelly stated, "The program would allow the students to be engaged in 21st-century-based technology skills." Abby stated, "This element would allow for the program to be more engaging and interesting for the students." However, Madison said that she liked the original version better because it allowed her to see what the student was able to do during the lesson.

There appeared to be several policy issues related to the use of the computer-based program. Contributing factors included getting signed permission from the company to use the program, securing waivers from parents for children in elementary school to use the program, and protecting the confidentiality of the students using the program. The value of the computer-

based version, according to some participants, is that this program would allow educators to keep better data on each student. Therefore, I recommend that the SPIRE's computer-based version be made available to students to develop and apply technological skills that will enhance the intervention. I would encourage converting the implementation to the computer-based online version because it will allow real-time monitoring, digital assessments, and reporting. Further, the use of the computer-based program would allow educators to assist struggling readers in becoming fluent readers.

Implications for Policy

Returning and new educators must successfully complete the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) intensive professional learning opportunities that empower teachers to understand why students struggle to read. According to the U.S. Department of Education and Institute of Education Sciences (IES), fourth graders' reading scores dropped from fourth in 2019 to seventh place in the nation (NRP, 2020). Eighth-grade reading scores also showed a significant drop in reading in 2019 (NRP, 2020). The results of this study showed that educators perceived that those effective interventions impact student achievement in reading.

Reading intervention has become a critical topic in schools and districts across the United States over the past decade (Hurwitz & Macaruso, 2021). The number of students having difficulty mastering targeted reading skills continues to increase annually, and educators must be aware of how to provide high-quality research-based reading interventions (Vaughn et al., 2019). Policy development and application will assist school districts to bring better understanding of the need for intervention to meet the needs of the struggling readers. Reading initiatives will

assist the educator, the school, and district with identifying research-based reading interventions that provide the best practice in helping students become successful readers.

The first policy implication of this study is that schools and districts should provide professional development that focuses on key components for closing the gap between instruction and the students' needs (Gómez-Marí et al., 2021). Participants found it problematic to have to begin implementing the program without being trained. Keisha explained, "Getting aids trained was difficult. Implementation happened midyear, which made it hard to see growth in a short amount of time." In this regard the district needs to provide regular professional development four times a year. Quarterly professional development would allow educators to analyze data, track growth, and compare scores among the schools in the district. Educators can then consider and evaluate the strategies that are needed to properly implement the program. It is important that policies address these issues as professional development is recognized as a key strategy for broadening and deepening teachers' skills in order to meet the needs of all students (Collins, 2000).

Another implication is that professional development should address the role of stakeholders in identifying initiatives for district-wide implementation. Such professional development should ensure that educators are provided internal or external opportunities that invest in lifelong learning for teachers. This professional development will allow for training for all educators in the SPIRE program, including all regular education teachers so that they can assist with implementing aspects of the program in the core curriculum.

The last professional development implication will allow for the participants to have discussions and collaborations about the SPIRE program. Collaborations will focus on identifying and sharing effective academic and instructional practices, while ensuring that

practices are consistent across all educators and that all students benefit from interventions (DeHartchuck, 2021). District-wide initiatives will allow for continuity among the schools.

Another implication for policy is funding. Allegretto et al. (2022) concluded that investment in education varies significantly due to education funding in the United States relying primarily on local and state resources. In interviews, participants shared that they did not have enough resources or materials. Angel mentioned having to develop the materials that were needed to implement the SPIRE program. In regard to funding, budget cuts in the school are still occurring across the state, and this decrease is impacting student achievement in math and English language arts dramatically (DeHartchuck, 2021). School funding issues continue to affect the materials and resources needed to implement interventions effectively. The results of this study showed that participants perceived that the school district should provide appropriate funding and always obtain materials needed for implementing SPIRE. Administrators should clearly articulate the financial needs of their schools. It is imperative that all teachers have materials or access to the SPIRE computer-based program.

Finally, given the expressed needs of participants, policies should address hiring. Hiring decisions contribute to how a person feels about the job and how well they do the job (Ali, 2016). Consistent with participants' views, hiring issues continue to affect the continuity of implementing SPIRE. Mary stated in her letter: "I would like smaller groups for our SPIRE groups." This statement reflects that there is a need to hire more personnel to alleviate the overcrowding in groups using SPIRE. The results of the study showed that hiring reading specialists or reading support personnel is a key component that impacts student engagement with the program and student progress. The participants also discussed how the increase in the number of students is affecting the fidelity of the program. Some participants explained how they

had seven or eight students even though the program is designed for three or four students. In view of these issues, it is imperative that the district provide other support personnel to increase the effectiveness of the program.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The following section addresses the findings from this case study by providing evidence of the theoretical and empirical implications that corroborate prior research findings. The theoretical implication that guided this study was Bandura's self-efficacy theory. The empirical implication is using a case study approach that added to the existing literature about SPIRE as an intervention for reading.

Theoretical Implications

Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977) provided the theoretical framework for this study. The significant implication addressed in this study is the educators' perceptions are directed by their personal belief and self-awareness. Self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's ability to accomplish or succeed in a given task (Bandura, 1977). This is consistent with previous research that suggests the individual's perception of self-efficacy determines that person's approach and task completion (Glazer, 2018). The data provided evidence that the educators possessed skills that enabled them to effectively implement intervention strategies with struggling readers. Sharon wrote in her letter, "With SPIRE, I was able to recognize the importance of phonics in the reading program and use it with fidelity." In this study, participants perceived they were more empowered to implement the program with fidelity when they understood the purpose of the activities. Their perception corroborates Bandura's (2000) theory that self-efficacy results from one's own feelings of personal capabilities along with the perceptions of others.

Self-efficacy theory also focuses on social persuasion, vicarious experiences, mastery experiences, and physiological and emotional effect (Bandura, 1977, 1997). The training, professional development, and observation of other educators promoted teachers' self-efficacy. Consistently, the participants contended that they needed training in what strategies are instrumental in producing student growth. Throughout data collection participants expressed that they felt more capable of implementing SPIRE based on training and having embraced the program. Bandura's self-efficacy theory also involves motivation to complete a task successfully. Self-efficacy connects with the concept of intrinsic motivation and the need for competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017). My findings concur with previous research results that educators have a desire to find innovative interventions that can result in positive change in the reading performance of struggling students (Martins & Capellini, 2021). This study provides strong evidence that the expansion of the participants' knowledge base through training and reflective practice resulted in the motivation to help struggling readers. Furthermore, evidence showed that participants' level of satisfaction resulted in positive self-efficacy for implementing the instructional program. The precepts of the theoretical framework of self-efficacy applied to the participants in this study who revealed that they were motivated to promote reading interventions that resulted in developing the skills of struggling reading students when they felt prepared and received support from colleagues (Bandura, 1977; Martins & Capellini, 2021; Wang et al., 2017).

Empirical Implications

This study has empirical implications regarding educators' perceptions of the SPIRE intervention for assisting the struggling reader in meeting state proficiency standards. Previously, researchers concluded that reading intervention needs to be implemented with a struggling reader

in the early years of education, preferably during early elementary school (Hingstman et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2018). Several studies have documented that children who are poor readers in school invariably fall behind early in reading (Fielding, 2022; Ningsih et al., 2019; Martins & Capellini, 2021). The findings of this current study showed that SPIRE can successfully be used for early reading intervention with struggling readers. Linda contended that SPIRE provides varied activities that help young students with reading concepts. Other participants agreed that SPIRE can successfully be used for this purpose as an early intervention. Participants who used SPIRE observed reading growth among their students. Eventually, students who used SPIRE were able to meet the reading proficiency standards in their school.

Another empirical implication addresses critical skills for reading including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. Previous studies regarding critical skills focused on the sounds of spoken words, analysis of letter-sound relationships in a word, correct word recognition, speed, and oral and written language (Oslund et al 2018; Toste et al., 2019; Treiman, 2018; Tuyen & Huyen, 2019). Research showed that these critical skills are key components of the intervention and provide for additional student engagement and differentiated learning strategies in reading for struggling learners (Oslund et al 2018; Toste et al., 2019; Treiman, 2018; Tuyen & Huyen, 2019). The findings of the current study concur with these prior studies. For example, Allison wrote in her letter that phonemic awareness and sight word phrases add support to the intervention. Additionally, participants agreed that the critical areas (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary) assisted the participants in implementing SPIRE with fidelity. Consequently, educators who use SPIRE are able to teach the reading skills that positively impact students' achievement.

Previous researchers found that reading comprehension is essential not only for academic learning but also for lifelong learning (Farnsworth et al., 2022; Tegmark et al., 2022). Furthermore, reading comprehension is a critical skill necessary for the professional, social, and recreational domains of society (Farnsworth et al., 2022; Tegmark et al., 2022). This study also supports these findings. Participants observed that students who received SPIRE as an intervention increased their academic achievement across the curriculum. Once students develop reading comprehension, they can use that skill to understand complex concepts and various texts that they read. Additionally, the participants perceived that reading comprehension will assist students in lifelong learning.

The final implication is in reference to SPIRE as an intervention. Previous researchers have suggested that SPIRE improves struggling readers' skills including phonics, phonological awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (Cook, 2019; Corbin Independent School District, Kentucky, 2022; Gallagher, 2019; EPS School Specialty, 2019). Kim et al. (2018) found that students with reading deficiencies need practice by means of an intervention (e.g., SPIRE) to acquire reading skills that they will use throughout their lives. The current study also supports this finding. Based on the data from participants in this study, SPIRE provided Tier 2 and Tier 3 students with foundational skills, practice, and application that they need for long-term success. Very few previous studies have focused on educators' perceptions of SPIRE (Miles & Ari, 2022). In this case study, participants discussed the importance of fluency, vocabulary, and phonic awareness introduced in SPIRE and how it helps students develop their ability to read. However, continued research on SPIRE needs to be conducted. This present research provides a foundation for further research and fills the gap in this specific topic of SPIRE.

Limitations and Delimitations

A study's limitations result in potential weaknesses that may affect the accuracy of findings; limiting factors include participant characteristics (such as gender, age, and ethnicity) that are not predetermined by the researcher (Ross et al., 2020). In this study all the participants were female and Caucasian. Although this was representative of the population of the schools in the single school district selected as the research site, other schools from around the United States would allow for a wider variety of educators' perceptions about implementing SPIRE based on gender, race, and other demographic characteristics. The participants had a range of teaching experiences, but general education teachers were not represented in this study. Both these limitations may have influenced the study's results since participants' perceptions may differ based on their years of experience and their role in the school setting. Sample size was another limitation since only 12 individuals were willing to participate in this study. Furthermore, due to COVID-19 restrictions in the school district, persons not connected to the school were not allowed into the schools, so accommodations were necessary to complete the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews online.

Delimitations are the parameters that have been set by the researcher to keep the scope of the study manageable. Delimitations for this study included only selecting participants who had implemented the SPIRE program as an intervention for one or more years. I intentionally selected users of SPIRE because I sought detailed descriptions of how educators used SPIRE as an intervention. All 12 participants in this study were avid users of SPIRE. They each taught SPIRE at least three times a week as an intervention for Tier 2 or Tier 3 struggling reading students. Additionally, all participants had worked in the school district for one or more years.

Recommendations for Future Research

The first recommendation for future research has to do with the vocational backgrounds of the participants. Considering that most of the participants in this study were special education teachers, literacy coaches, or educational aids, further studies could capture the perceptions of regular education teachers using SPIRE as an intervention. It would be useful to understand the experiences of regular education teachers who use SPIRE as an intervention with regular education students.

The effectiveness of SPIRE needs to be investigated using a quantitative method to compare SPIRE students' reading proficiency scores to those of students using other interventions. This information will allow school districts to assess the effectiveness of different programs compared to the SPIRE program and to provide school data on the implementation process and the fidelity of the programs being implemented.

Another recommendation for future research would be to capture the perceptions of students and parents about SPIRE as a reading intervention. Capturing this perspective will yield more evidence regarding the challenges and benefits of the intervention. Providing opportunities for the research to be conducted among different populations of students is also recommended. Future research on implementing and evaluating the strategies of the intervention should be conducted in academic settings that have military, ESL, or immigrant populations. Further research could compare the different populations in terms of the effectiveness of the intervention. The different populations or settings will allow for more evidence on the fidelity of the intervention.

A longitudinal study could be conducted to follow students who struggle in reading over several grades in elementary, middle, and high school to determine the effectiveness of the

reading intervention. The participants in this study stated that they address different grade levels. The participants all stated that they saw growth in their students. Following the SPIRE intervention with these students would be a beneficial study.

This study should also be replicated in different types of schools (whether collectively or individually) including Montessori, charter schools, home schools, online schools, or private schools. Due to the various methodologies of teaching, the different perspectives would be beneficial to the research to see if the structure of the intervention that they are using assists the students in meeting state standards for reading proficiency. The next recommendation is that the location of the study could be expanded to include rural and urban districts across different states in the United States. It would be beneficial to examine the participants' boundaries by capturing the perceptions of educators who serve different communities of students. Schools in rural communities are usually smaller and have a lower student-to-teacher ratio. The intervention in these schools may also be structured differently. Another recommendation for future research would be to include educators from poverty area schools, which would also be beneficial in providing a broad array of challenges or benefits encountered while delivering the SPIRE intervention in a low-funded area.

My last recommendation is to explore what is considered appropriate and supportive professional development or training. It would be helpful to determine the effectiveness of expansion of training in terms of different types and frequency of professional development and training throughout the year. This recommendation stems from findings in this study illustrating the need to collaborate with other professionals who implement the intervention. The results of the training would give participants an opportunity to share their personal experiences. It would also provide an opportunity for the participants to share their perceptions of how the training

affected their ability to implement the program and how it affected the performance of the students.

Conclusion

This qualitative multiple-case study investigated educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of SPIRE as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards in a large suburban school district in Utah. SPIRE is an intensive, structured, multisensory intervention for nonreaders and struggling readers (EPS School Specialty, 2021). Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory guided this study, which included 12 participants who provided data for the study in the form of letters, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Data were collected through online platforms. Analysis of the data identified five themes (educators' understanding of SPIRE, SPIRE as an intervention, benefits of SPIRE, barriers to SPIRE, and professional development) and eight subthemes (perceptions of teaching SPIRE, fidelity, aspects of SPIRE, the time factor when using SPIRE, the lack of materials, the environment, training frequency, and training of general education teachers with SPIRE). Findings indicated that SPIRE (a) was mostly used in small-group or one-on-one settings with Tier 2 and Tier 3 students, (b) employed a systematic and sequential design, (c) focused on explicit and direct instruction, (d) focused on repetition for phonemic awareness, and (e) focused on decoding and spiral lessons. The two most important takeaways implied from the results were that SPIRE is an excellent program and provides support and strategies that struggling readers need to be successful readers. Despite the challenges with struggling readers, educators used the SPIRE intervention effectively to help their students meet state proficiency standards.

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Appendix A

District Letter

[REDACTED TO PROTECT THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT]

To Whom It May Concern:

I hereby give permission for Terra Jordan to conduct doctoral research on the use of the SPIRE intervention program currently being used in our school district as outlined in the description provided to the district.

Sincerely,

[redacted]

Director of Elementary Education

Appendix B

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 29, 2022

Terra Jordan
Susan Quindag

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-130 Educators' Perception of Implementing Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence: A Multiple-Case Study

Dear Terra Jordan, Susan Quindag,

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 C

General Consent

Title of the Project: Educators' Perception of Implementing Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence: A Multiple-Case Study

Principal Investigator: Terra Jordan, EDS, Liberty University

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be an educator who (a) have implemented the SPIRE program as an intervention for one year; (b) have taught SPIRE at least three times a week; (c) hold a full state certification as a teacher or have passed the state teacher licensing examination and hold a teaching certificate or license for the state; and (d) have worked in the school district for at least one year. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.
Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

The purpose of the study is of this study is to describe educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards.
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1.Writing a letter that will take approximately 30 minutes.

2. Participate in a 45-to-60-minute interview that will be recorded.

3. Participate in a 60-to-90-minute focus group that will be recorded.

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

Benefits to society include a better understanding of the educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards.
The risks involved in this study include minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress or becoming upset. The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life and will not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

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. Participant responses will be confidential. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and hard copy data will be stored in a locked file cabinet at my home. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer and hard copy data will be stored in a locked file cabinet at my home for three years

and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Utah School District (USD) or any other school. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

The researcher conducting this study is Terra Jordan. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Susan Quindag, at [redacted]
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.
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 me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix D

Email Letter

Title of Project: Educators' Perception of Implementing The Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence: A Multiple-Case Study

September 21, 2022

Dear Educator,

I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership program at Liberty University, Virginia. The purpose of this letter to request your participation in my doctoral research study. My research goal is to understand educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence (SPIRE) as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards. I am keenly interested in learning the needs of teachers regarding implementation of interventions.

For the study, participants must be educators that have (a) implemented the SPIRE program as an intervention for at least one year; (b) that have taught SPIRE at least three times a week; (c) certification/license or non-certified/licensed educator; and (d) who have worked in the school district for at least one year. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete an online survey. Participants, if willing, will be asked to write a letter. Participants may be asked to participate in one audio-recorded TEAMS interview and audio-recorded TEAMS focus group. The participants, if willing be asked to review the transcripts and return with any changes (return no later than 5 days) and follow up will request a return of 2 days). No response will indicate the data were acceptable. Only 5-7 participants are needed for the interview and focus group. Each survey should take approximately 15 minutes, the letter should take approximately 30 minutes, the interview should take approximately 60 minutes, and the focus group will take approximately 90 minutes, and each will consist of a series of open-ended questions. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

It is expected that this research will take place during the last week of September and end the last week of October 2022. If you are available and interested in participating in this endeavor, please contact me via email at [redacted] or by phone at [redacted] at your earliest convenience or no later than September 10, 2022.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me. After you have read the consent form, if you choose to participate, you will need to sign and date the consent document and return it to me, then click the link to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

I greatly appreciate your time and consideration of this request. I feel this research will be of great benefit to reading and elementary teachers. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Mrs. Terra B. Jordan

Appendix E

Letter-Writing Question

1. What would you tell the school or district about the benefits and barriers you have had with implementing SPIRE? [SQ2]
2. What is something you would change when implementing SPIRE? [SQ1]
3. What support or professional development do you need from the school district when implementing SPIRES? [SQ3]

Appendix F

Individual Interview Questions

1. What impact does an educator's perception have on their teaching? **[CQ1]**
2. How would you explain your perception of the use of SPIRE as an intervention for all students? **[CQ1]**
3. How do you integrate SPIRE into the curriculum? **[SQ1]**
4. How have you used SPIRE as an intervention in your classroom? **[SQ1]**
5. How would you define a struggling reader? **[SQ2]**
6. How would you explain the academic support a struggling reader needs to succeed in the classroom? **[SQ2]**
7. What impact does SPIRE have on a struggling reader? **[SQ2]**
8. What professional development experiences have influenced your ability to integrate SPIRE into the classroom? **[SQ3]**
9. What resources and support would help you be more effective with implementing SPIRE? **[SQ3]**
10. I appreciate your time and assistance. What other information would you like to add about your perception or experiences that have not been addressed about SPIRE? **[CQ1]**

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

1. How does your acceptance of SPIRE affect your implementation of SPIRE? **[CQ1]**
2. How would you describe your experiences that affect your performance with SPIRE? **[SQ1]**
3. What changes occurred in your instructional practices after SPIRE was implemented? **[SQ1]**
4. How would you describe the instructional practices of SPIRE with struggling readers? **[SQ2]**
5. What type of training did you receive with SPIRE? **[SQ3]**
6. How would you describe your overall satisfaction with SPIRE? **[CQ1**]
7. I appreciate your time and assistance. What other information would you like to add about your perception or experiences that have not been addressed about SPIRE? **[CQ1]**

Appendix H

Research Question

Central Research Question

What are educators' perceptions concerning the implementation of Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention to help students meet state proficiency standards in a large suburban school district in Utah?

Subquestion 1

How do educators use Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence as an intervention in the classroom?

Subquestion 2

What are the benefits and barriers educators experience when implementing Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence instructional practice in the classroom?

Subquestion 3

How do educators explain their professional development with using Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence?

Appendix I

Letter-Writing Transcript

Dear [redacted]

What would you tell the school or district about the benefits and barriers you have had with implementing SPIRE?

1. In my opinion, Spire is an excellent program to aid very early, struggling readers. The fourth edition has a computer based option, with online data collection and progress monitoring. The district and Spire need to coordinate efforts better, addressing privacy issues so that the recording progress is not delayed. Additionally, the class records and data recording arm of Spire is not very user friendly.

What is something you would change when implementing SPIRE?

2. I think additional time in text should be added to the program.

What support or professional development do you need from the school district when implementing SPIRE?

3. I had a one-day training offered by the district. It was an excellent training. Of course, time actually working with students hands-on is the best training. Because the program is so carefully scripted, more training is probably not necessary.

Sincerely,
[redacted]