

Teacher perceptions on implementing a reading program

Austin L. Moon
University of Phoenix

Elizabeth Young
University of Phoenix

ABSTRACT

A new reading can lose effectiveness if not implemented consistently by all teachers. The purpose of this study was to understand how first grade teachers perceived implementation of the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) reading program and what challenges they encountered when using the program. Three research questions were explored in the study. RQ 1: How do first grade teachers perceive the Core Knowledge Language Arts reading program? RQ 2: What challenges do first grade teachers experience when teaching the Core Knowledge Language Arts reading program? RQ 3: How do first grade teachers implement the reading program as evidenced by their lesson plans? First grade teachers along with special education and Title 1 teachers who support first grade students were interviewed. The teachers who participated in the study had been trained in using the CKLA reading program. The interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents and participants checked the transcriptions for accuracy. Through content analysis of the interviews, three themes from the interviews emerged. They were: 1) Strong Reading Skills Core, 2) Insufficient Interventions, and 3) Inadequate Writing Instruction. Dweck's mindset theory guided this study.

Keywords: First Grade Reading, Program Implementation, Teacher Perspectives, Core Knowledge Language Arts, Exploratory Case Study

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative action research study focused on the perceptions of first grade teachers who had implemented the inception of Core Knowledge Language Arts reading program in their classrooms for one year. Although the teachers had received training in the implementation of the new program, it was noted that several were finding it difficult to give up the materials and teaching strategies from their old program. Equality of educational opportunities and consistency in the delivery of curricular resources and programs are essential to providing all students with a solid reading background. Reading is a critical life skill that children begin to decipher early in their lives. Reading development is essential for student growth and success throughout their educational career (Graham, Liu, Aitken, Ng et al., 2018; Ionescu, 2017). A child's reading ability is foundational for all other academic work (Graham et al., 2018; Logan, Cutting, Schatschneider, Hart et al., 2013). Approximately 88% of students who begin school as poor readers will not increase their reading levels as quickly as their non-poor reading peers until the time they are in fourth grade (Iaquinta, 2006). Students who do not learn to read adequately during their early elementary years will likely continue to have reading difficulties (Solari, Denton, & Harin, 2017). According to the 2017 National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 37% of fourth graders in the United States are performing at or above a proficient reading level (The Nation's Reading Report Card, 2019). A strong foundational skill base was found to be inherent in the Core Knowledge Language Arts reading program by the teacher task force team. However, the team noted that some teachers are reluctant when asked to come out of their comfort level and engage in a new approach. Inconsistency in delivery could result in continued poor first grade reading scores and was the problem under investigation.

Background

Before 2016, all elementary teachers in the target school district in the rural west were using the balanced literacy approach to reading instruction in their classrooms. Teachers taught literacy skills through whole group and small group instruction. Guided reading groups were used in kindergarten through second grade to provide children the individualized instruction. Teachers taught students foundational literacy instruction through modeling during the small group mini-lessons. A gradual release of responsibility from the teacher to the student was used. First the teacher modeled the reading lesson work, students did the work with the teachers, and then the students were released from direct instruction to do the work independently. State standards were somewhat addressed through instruction; however, teachers did not follow a script, nor was each teacher teaching the full set of lessons. After using the balanced literacy approach for eight years, the school district determined that it was time to begin the search for a new program (B. Symes, personal communication, December 4, 2017).

PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

The goal was to find a new approach to teaching reading at the primary level that would provide a stronger skill set in basic reading fluency and comprehension. During the 2016-2017, school year, a team of teachers from the target school district met and researched the best practices for literacy instruction. As part of this project, the teachers created a list of guiding principles. The guiding principles included: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary,

and comprehension (B. Symes, personal communication, December 4, 2017). The guiding principles were based on the state's Common Core English Language Arts State Standards. In the spring of 2017, a group of teachers examined several reading programs and matched the programs with the guiding principles previously developed. These principles provided the standard guidelines by which the group selected two reading programs to pilot. The first program pilot began in the fall of 2017, and the second program pilot began in the spring of 2018. The programs piloted were Reach for Reading and Core Knowledge Language Arts. In April 2018, the team decided on which program best fit the needs of students. The Core Knowledge Language Arts program was chosen. The task ahead was to monitor the consistent implementation of the program among the teachers. The first-grade teachers were chosen as the target grade.

Comparing the old to the new reading programs

The Core Knowledge Language Arts program is fundamentally different from the Balanced Literacy Approach (BLA) that had been previously used. In the BLA first grade curriculum, literacy instruction was taught during a mini-lesson. Students were seated at the carpet for a short amount of time. Teachers used a gradual release of responsibility to teach students important reading skills. Phonics skills were taught using a curriculum that was not connected to other instruction occurred at various times of the day. When using the balanced literacy approach, teachers had to write their own lessons based on state standards and the need of the children in their class. Small group guided reading instruction was used in the balanced-literacy approach to teach foundational reading skills.

The Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) reading program was a different approach than the district educators were used to. Embedded within the first-grade program were phonics skills. Teachers used direct instruction to teach phonics skills. After having instruction on a specific concept, the children completed a worksheet for each phonics skill. Foundational reading skills were taught whole group with some small group as needed by the teacher, who released instruction gradually. Writing was embedded within the program. All the books used in the CKLA reading program were at grade level. Throughout the year the books increased in difficulty. Students who did not read at grade level were provided additional instruction in a small group.

Formulating the problem, purpose, and research questions

The concern that prompted the current study was children who do not learn to read adequately during the early elementary years will likely continue to have reading difficulties (Solari et al., 2017). Many schools use a specific reading program to teach foundational reading skills to children. Basal reading programs are scripted programs used in many schools across the United States. Instructional manuals are designed for teachers to follow to teach foundational and essential reading skills. Instructional manuals can be related to daily lesson plans. When given a new curriculum, it is not unusual for teachers to receive minimal training on how to teach the program and in turn be expected to implement the program with fidelity (Arden, Gandhi, Zumeta Edmonds, & Danielson, 2017). Teachers modify the program or select parts of the program. Lack of teacher training and preparation in turn affects children because not all children will be provided with the instruction needed to learn the foundational reading skills. Gaining teachers

perceptions of the CKLA program can promote the training of educators and increasing the knowledge of teachers in how to use the program effectively.

The purpose for conducting this qualitative action research study was to understand how teachers perceived the CKLA program and what challenges they may have encountered when using the program. The following research questions were explored.

Research question 1: How do first-grade teachers perceive the Core Knowledge Language Arts reading program?

Research question 2: What challenges do first-grade reading teachers experience when teaching the CKLA reading program?

Research question 3: How do first-grade teachers implement the reading program as evidenced by their lesson plans?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is critical that students learn to read. And, according to Anderson (2017), schools must be careful in how they implement a program, if a program is not implemented consistently it can lose its effectiveness. The amount of time a teacher does spend teaching content areas in such as phonics skills and reading skills has a positive impact on student achievement in that specific area.

Schools and then teachers within school have different philosophies on early reading instruction (Henbest & Apel, 2017). Systematic phonics instruction is an effective way to help students develop their early reading skills. Administrators and teachers all look for the new and innovative educational ways to teach students effective reading skills. Training teachers on how to use a program is essential and builds teacher's pedagogy which in turn has shown to increase the reading achievement in children (Anderson, 2017). The fidelity of implementation as aligned with a teacher's belief system and philosophy of education can determine how they implement a program and create powerful learning environments (Irvine, 2020). The teaching style also plays a part in how a teacher implements a program.

This study benefits all teachers and school administrators who are going to implement a new program. Each teacher who implements a new program will have a different interpretation about how to teach the program. When this happens, the program will not be implemented correctly. It is important that teachers and administrators work together to choose, study, and implement a new program in any subject area.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study was based on Dweck's (2012) growth mindset study. A mindset is what someone believes and things about themselves and what they can do and become (Dweck, 2012). Dweck explained that people can create a fixed or a growth mindset. Teachers in the education field that have growth mindsets are often more effective and search for ways to improve their teaching (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). It is critical that teachers have a growth mindset because they are able to boost student motivation and academic growth. Reading is an essential life skill that children begin learning early. Students who are poor readers in the first grade are more likely to be poor readers in fourth grade (Schmidt, 2017). The children that are struggling readers who do not get off to a good start in reading are not likely to catch up to their peers in reading (Jaquinta, 2006; Solari et al., 2017). When learning to read, struggling or low

performing children read fewer words than students who do not struggle (Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). In the early grades' children need support to prevent reading struggles and close reading gaps (Jaquinta, 2006; Solari et al., 2017). It is critical for educators to continually learn and develop the best practices to teach foundational skills (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016).

Contribution & Implications of the Study

A reading program can lose its effectiveness if not implemented consistently (Anderson, 2017). This qualitative action research study was to understand how teachers perceive the CKLA reading program and what challenges they had when using the program. The amount of time a teacher spends in instruction in a content area such as phonics skills and reading vocabulary positively impacts student achievement in that particular area (Samuelsson and Wendell (2016) conducted a study with findings focused on standards-based curriculum. Standards-based curriculum is currently a popular trend in education. It focuses on helping students develop essential reading skills. Standards-based curriculum is designed with an emphasis on analytical thinking which encourages students to develop thinking within individual subject areas (Samuelsson & Wendell, 2016).

There are both strengths and challenges associated with standards-based curriculums. One advantage of using standards-based curriculum is the ability to meet all student's needs. When developing special education goals around standards-based curriculum, the goals can be more focused and can target specific student needs (Caruana, 2015). According to Caruana (2015), individual education plans (IEP) that are standards-based have goals that relate to grade-level standards that must be met by the end of the school year. A second strength of standards-based curriculum is that it allows schools to use the standards with additional subject areas. Social studies and other content areas can be aligned with reading standards (Britt & Howe, 2014). A third strength of standards-based curriculum is that it provides all teachers with the ability to use the standards as end goals for students. When looking at the end goals, a backward design framework can be used to develop lessons (Britt & Howe, 2014). When using a standards-based curriculum, along with strengths, come challenges. According to Polly, Wang, McGee, Lambert, et al. (2014), one challenge that comes with using a standards-based curriculum is that teachers often modify the tasks, thereby, decreasing the task difficulty level. When modifying lessons, students rely more heavily on teachers and not on their own knowledge and ability.

An additional challenge encountered is that some teachers do not understand the standards. If the teacher does not understand the standards or does not like the standards, the curriculum will not be implemented correctly. A third challenge is professional development for teachers. Teachers need to have opportunities for ongoing learning to effectively continue to implement a standards-based curriculum (Polly et al., 2014). In many districts, ongoing professional development is a challenge because of lack of teacher interest and funding issues.

In standards-based curriculum classrooms, teachers are aligning lessons with standards that will help students to become college and career ready (Caruana, 2015). According to Coburn, Hill, and Spillane (2016), Common Core State Standards (CCSS) help teachers and students to be accountable for learning. The Common Core State Standards provide a clear outcome for student learning with robust and relevant standards (Caruana, 2015). There are both strengths and challenges within the standards-based curriculum design. The primary advantage of the standards-based curriculum is that teachers can meet all students' needs (Caruana, 2015).

Individual education goals can be developed with clear outcomes using the standards. Reading and writing standards can be used to help students deepen their understanding of other curriculum areas (Britt & Howe, 2014).

METHODOLOGY AND INSTRUMENTATION

This qualitative action research study was needed to facilitate an understanding of the CKLA reading program and fill the gap in determining how the CKLA reading program helps students develop critical reading skills. A study was also needed to determine how teachers implement a program and how they perceive the program to be working in their schools and classrooms. By conducting an action research study, the researchers were able to share with other teachers how the program was working in the classroom.

To carry out the study the researcher began watching teachers implement a new reading program. As the program was implemented the researcher noticed that teachers were discussing their thoughts about the program. It was then determined that first grade teachers should be asked what they thought or how they perceived the program. In order to understand how they perceived the program the researcher designed interview questions. A protocol for examining lesson plans was also developed. Only first grade teachers or those teachers who were working directly with first grade including special education and Title 1 teachers were asked to participate in the study. The teachers who did participate in the study were interviewed and provided a copy of a lesson plan for any reading lesson in the CKLA reading program.

Method

The method for this study was qualitative action research. The purpose of using action research was to understand how teachers perceived the CKLA reading program and what challenges they had when using the program. During the first part of the study student assessment data was analyzed to determine with students' reading scores had increased when using the CKLA program to learn reading skills. By using action research, the researcher was able to collect first-hand knowledge about a specific phenomenon. Action research was used to make see make improvements in the program and how teachers' perceptions and using the program can change.

Setting, Population, Sample

The research study took place in the rural west. The population of the town where the study took place was 12,000 people. The school district is the largest employer in the town. The economy of the town has been based primarily on the oil and gas industry. The district is home to four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The population of the first grade students across the school district is around 240. The first grade population is made up of white middle-class families with some English Language Learners (ELL) who speak two languages in their home. The four elementary schools are Title 1 schools with many students qualifying and receiving free and reduced lunch. The class size averages 20-22 students. There were 13 first grade teachers in the district.

The population sample for the study came from the first-grade teachers in the school district who had been trained and were implementing the CKLA reading program. Additional teachers who support first grade students included Title 1 and Special Education Teachers. To recruit participants a letter of inquiry and a copy of the informed consent form was sent to each member of the target population explaining the study. All interested participants were then given additional information about the research study based on the CKLA reading program. The sample size was identified from the target population by participant responses. After the sample was identified face to face interviews were scheduled with each interested participant. The Informed consent form was signed by each participant at the beginning of the interview. After the sample was determined the participants were interviewed following the structured interview protocol. The reason for conducting interviews was to understand how first grade teachers and teachers working with first grade students received the CKLA reading program. The teachers' challenges were also discussed. The interview was broken down into two sections. During the first section the teacher participants were asked important demographic questions about themselves and the district. During the second portion of the interview teachers were asked questions regarding their views of the CKLA reading program.

Materials and Instrumentation

Qualitative data was collected through teacher interviews. The teachers participating in the interviews were first grade teachers and those teachers supporting first grade students using the CKLA reading program. The sample population was asked to provide a copy of their lesson plan, the lesson plans were examined using a rubric.

During the first half of the interview, participants were asked questions related to their demographic information. Some of the questions asked included how many years of experience they had in education, how many years the teacher had been teaching first- grade, the type of teaching certification held, along with the highest degree they had earned. The second part of the interview was focused around the discussion of the CKLA reading program. The questions in the second part provided the researcher with information on how the teachers were perceiving the reading program. Teachers were asked about what they saw as the strengths and weaknesses of the program along with how they were using the program in their classrooms. The challenges teachers had with using the program, weaknesses they saw in it, and what components they felt were missing from CKLA were all included in the interview.

The Field Study was designed to collect data related to how teachers perceived the program and what challenges they experienced. The researcher contacted the field participants in person and ask them to participate. Information about the proposed study was provided. The field test participants were asked to determine the importance of each research and interview question on the test. The field test participants provided additional interview questions and rewording to clarify each question. The field test was sent to individuals via the school mail. The field test participants were encouraged to email or call the researcher personally if they had any questions about the interview protocol. The researcher was able to meet with both research experts to discuss their thoughts regarding the interview protocol.

Validity Reliability, Treatment

The credibility of the study is enhanced by using two expert researchers to examine the

interview questions. The researchers confirmed the appropriateness of the interview questions. It was vital for the researcher to periodically check with the interview participants to determine if their responses had been recorded correctly. After interviews were conducted and recorded, the researcher transcribed each of the interviews. To ensure credibility the transcribed interviews were given back to the research participants to check for accuracy (Lincoln et al., 1985).

Transferability

Is referred to how a study can be transferred to another setting. The results of the study can be transferred to other settings by examining the method of the study and determining how it can be transferred to other settings. The findings in this study can be used to understand how the CKLA program is perceived by additional teachers. Researcher can also use the research topic for additional research.

Dependability

Dependability is critical in a qualitative study and refers to the trustworthiness of the study. Findings from interviews should accurately reflect what participants say. Findings and evidence from interviews were analyzed in a way to minimize bias. In this action research study, data regarding the CKLA program within the classroom was examined through teacher lesson plans. Lesson plans were examined with a rubric to determine what teachers were doing when preparing for their lessons. In order to ensure transferability of the research, sufficient data was collected through teacher interviews.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings in the study can be corroborated or confirmed by other individuals. To enhance the confirmability of the study triangulation was used. Data was triangulated to establish the dependability of the study. Interviews and lesson plans from the sample participants were triangulated. When triangulating the data, if there were any differences, the researcher was able to determine deeper meanings for those areas examined (Patton, 2002). By triangulation the data, the trustworthiness and credibility of the study results and final conclusions were assured (Lincoln et al., 1985).

DATA COLLECT AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

In the study, qualitative data was collected and used to understand first-grade teachers perception of the CKLA reading program and what challenges they had when implementing it. Data was collected through formal interviews and by analyzing lesson plans.

The study began with a letter being sent to each of the 13 first grade teacher and special education a teachers and Title 1 teachers who support the children. After the sample population of the study was established, face to face meetings were scheduled with participants. Participants were interviewed using an interview protocol. The interview protocols consisted of a script of interview questions the researcher followed. The participants interviews were recorded and then \ transcribed in Microsoft Word. By examining the themes, the research questions of the study

were answered. Data collected through individual interviews included demographic information, perceptions of the program, and challenges teachers faced when using the program.

The qualitative data collected from teachers allowed the researcher to understand how teachers perceived the reading program and what challenges they may have had when using the program. By collecting interview data, the researcher was able to better understand specific issues or topics from the participants' point of view. This helped further the research by revealing a deeper, more complete understanding of the participants experience. Before the study began, student data was examined. The children in first grade did not grow in reading knowledge as measured by the state summative assessment and the district assessment during the first year of implementation.

Data Analysis

When analyzing data, themes and patterns were discovered from the data. In this qualitative action research study interview data was thoroughly analyzed by the researcher. The first step of analyzing the interview data included the researcher transcribing the recorded interview data into Microsoft Word Documents. Themes and patterns were extracted from the data. After the interviews data was transcribed and the initial examination for themes completed, the interviews were sent back to study participants. The study participants were asked to verify the interview transcription for accuracy and then return them. Once the interviews were returned the researcher once again analyzed them to find common themes and ideas which in turn became the central themes of the study. The researcher examined the findings and looked for patterns in the themes. Additional questions came from the interviews, which resulted a few interviews being examined an additional time (Erwin et al., 2012). By analyzing the data and resulting themes the research questions for the study were answered.

When conducting research, it was essential for the researcher to keep the information collected secure. When writing about the findings from the research, it was critical to keep the research participants identities confidential which included not using the participants' name or any identifying information about the participant in the study. In instances where specific or identifying information could give indications on a specific teacher and/or student population, such information was purposefully omitted from the study. The target school district and the name of the school was changed so as not to reveal the identity of the school. Data collected was stored in a secure place on the researcher's password protected personal computer. Information was backed up on an exterior hard drive. Data was not stored in a shared or public computer. Hard copies of the interviews and teacher lesson plans were stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home. The data was not shared with the general public until the results were compiled and completed.

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to understand how teachers perceived the Core Knowledge Language Arts program and what challenges they ha when usin the program. The research questions examined were: RQ 1: How do first- grade teachers perceive the Core Knowledge Language Arts reading program? RQ 2: What challenges do first-grade reading teachers experience when teaching the CKLA reading program? RQ 3: How do first-grade teachers implement the reading program as evidenced by their lesson plans?

Before the study began the researcher collected archival data from each of the school principals. The data collected was from state assessment and district assessments. Assessment data collected reflected the scores of first grade children from the 2017-2018 school and data collected when the CKLA program was initiated in the 2018-2019 school year. Student assessment scores were averaged for first graders across the school district. The years were then compared and the differences noted between the two years. The results of the data were used in the background of the study. When examining the results of the study, three themes were extracted from the participant interviews. The themes found in the study connect directly to the research questions. The first theme that emerged was that the program has a strong core for teaching children the necessary skills to become good readers. This theme is related to the first research question of how do the teacher perceive the CKLA reading program. According to teacher interviews, the teachers generally had positive feelings about the program. Two additional themes identified by the researcher were an insufficient amount of interventions provided for struggling readers and an inadequate amount of writing instruction and practice time for all students.

Theme 1 Strong Reading Skills Core

The theme around RQ 1: How do first-grade teachers perceive the Core Knowledge Language Arts reading program? was that the CKLA reading program has a strong core for teaching children skills they need to become readers. The majority of the participants in the study had positive feelings about the CKLA reading program. One participant liked some of the components but spoke negatively about the program as a whole. The majority of teachers spoke about the positive impact the program was having on the development of first grade children's reading abilities. The teachers noted that students who had received the program during the 2018-2019 year, the first year of implementation had skills that they were able to build upon during the 2019-2020 school year.

Theme 2 Insufficient Interventions

Research question two was: What challenges do first-grade reading teachers experience when teaching the CKLA reading program? The theme of this study was that there was insufficient strategies for interventions was a struggle for teachers using the Core Knowledge Language Arts program. Many of the participants noted that there was a lack of interventions within the CLKLA program or that the interventions were not sufficient. Most of the teachers said they used interventions from different areas such as Google search, teachers' pay teachers, and past programs.

Along with an insufficient amount of strategies for interventions, the participants also mentioned that the program moved quickly and students were not given enough instruction in one area. The pacing of the program was quick according to the majority of the teachers who participated in the interviews. Many of the teachers who were interviewed noted that in one lesson there is a lot to be covered and that many of the teachers did not have sufficient time to cover all the lesson materials. Many of the participants agreed that the program had strong phonics instruction. However, they felt additional time should be spent with each concept before moving on and that concepts should be reviewed more. This participant mentioned that many of the children have areas they are struggling in and need additional interventions. The lessons

moved forward quickly and the teacher felt she needed to continue to teach the program as scheduled.

Theme 3 Inadequate Writing Instruction

The final theme was based around the second research question. The program does not provide sufficient amount of writing instruction for children. This theme is connected with the second research question in the study regarding the challenges that first grade teachers faced when using the CKLA reading program. According to the first-grade teachers who participated in the interviews, the CKLA program does not provide enough writing instruction for children. The participants said that the program provided writing in both the skills and knowledge portions but she did not think it was sufficient and there was not enough time for writing. The children were only writing complete sentences in response to text and not learning to write narrative stories, nonfiction text, or opinion pieces. To give children writing experiences she was doing extra things in her class to teach writing. She was providing the children additional writing activities that were not included in the program. Teachers also supplemented her instruction with additional writing practice for her students.

TEACHER LESSON PLANS

Last an examination of the lesson plans using the lesson plan rubric was conducted (Appendix A). The third research question in the study was, how do first grade teacher implement the reading program as evidenced by their lesson plans. There were five areas in which teachers' lesson plans were scored. The five areas included introduction to the lesson, phonics instruction, reading of class books within the curriculum, and writing in response to reading. The additional support section was only scored on a yes or no basis. The yes meant that the teacher did plan and use the additional support section of the lesson, and no indicated that teachers did not use this portion of the lesson. Score 1 was the lowest score and meant that teachers were not using that area. Score 2 indicated that there was some instruction in that area and a Score 3 indicated that the area was well prepared by teachers.

Many of the teachers noted the program was easy to plan because the lessons were scripted in the teachers' manuals. Even with scripted lesson plans, many of the teachers said they made notes in their books as to what areas they were going to teach and focus on. Copies of scripted lesson plans from the manual with teacher notes were provided for the research. Several of the research participants noted they struggled the first year of implementation not knowing what to teach and how to fit all of the instruction in the time specified by the school district for reading instruction. Many participants said that during the second year of implementation they could read the lesson in morning before school began.

The majority of lesson plans included phonics and reading instruction. The introduction to the lesson was not strong in any of the lesson plans. For the purpose of this study, the introduction of the study included a review from the lesson the previous day with a review of concepts and major ideas. When examining the teachers' lesson plans, there was not a written review of what was taught the day before. The major areas focused on, as indicated by the lesson plans, were phonics and reading instruction. The lesson plans were rich in phonics instruction including vowel sounds and syllable instruction and practice. The lesson plan provided by P6 provided a strong focus in foundational skills which included clapping and reading two-syllable

words. There was also a worksheet practice in the lesson plan where students circled the sounds in words and then rewrote the words. Within P6's lesson plan there was a component for writing in response to reading a text. The focus of the writing was for students to read the story and answer comprehension questions in complete sentences.

Writing in response to reading was included in half of the lesson plans provided by the participants. One theme from the interviews was that teachers did not see writing as a strong component of the CKLA reading program. Writing in response to text is strong in the program. However, writing outside of reading responses is a weakness.

Additional instructional supports within the lessons was not in any of the teachers' lesson plans. Within the teachers' manual, there was an additional support section following each lesson. However, in the teacher lesson plans, the majority of the participants were not using the additional supports.

Organization & Structure

Theme 1 Strong Reading Skills Core

The first theme from the study was that teachers believed CKLA provided strong core instruction for teaching children essential reading skills. According to Steiner (2017), curriculum plays an important part in the success of students. Steiner continued by saying that a rich curriculum is a key for countries with high performance scores in academics. Over several years, results show that students who are taught reading using a curriculum can grow from the 50th percentile to the 75th percentile (Steiner, 2017). Teachers and schools must pick a curriculum that will have a positive impact on students' success and students' learning growth. Steiner (2017) said that teachers cannot just pick a curriculum and then in the first year have excellent instruction. It takes teachers one-year to have a shift in their instruction when using the new curriculum (Steiner, 2017). The study also determined that text books have a positive impact on student instruction and on achievement (Steiner, 2017).

The definition of curriculum refers to as the use of different types of instructional materials. Teacher created curriculum is used in many schools. It is important to note that novice teachers were less effective in creating and teaching their own teacher- created curriculum than their seasoned counterparts (Steiner, 2017). There was not a lot of research indicating that teacher created curriculum was effective (Steiner, 2017). Steiner (2017) noted that the fidelity of implementation is important when determining if the curriculum had an impact on student achievement. According to Steiner (2017), studies indicated that when a program was implemented with fidelity there were higher student gains.

Children who fail to learn reading skills were at potential risk of referral to special education, grade retention, dropping out of high school, and possibly ending up in the juvenile justice system (Connor, 2019). When providing instruction, teachers must remember that not all children fit into the same curriculum. According to a study conducted by Connor (2019), not being able to read is recognized by the Institute of

When learning to read, children do not all learn at the same time. The study indicated that children do need explicit reading instruction when learning to read. Along with explicit instruction children need time and practice. There are multiple sources that influence the reading development of children. They include the language centers, regulatory centers, and vision centers of the brain. Proficient literacy skills included language skills, decoding skills, and

comprehension text skills. In a study conducted by Johnson (2018), he discussed the importance of using an effective curriculum. When using a curriculum, there should be plans for supplementation of material to an existing reading curriculum. The reading supplements should be effective and research-based reading instruction that connects to the curriculum already being used in schools. Different types of instruction are found in all types of curriculum (Johnson, 2018). Curriculum is important along with the elements of reading interventions. Reading intervention elements include parts of the reading curriculum, expert teachers providing high quality instruction, briskly paced instruction, and direct instruction (Johnson, 2018). These areas can also be included in curriculum for regular education children. Practice and review, along with providing children a large variety of books to read, was also important.

Theme 2 Insufficient Interventions

The second theme found from the interviews conducted with the teachers who used the CKLA program was an insufficient amount of interventions within the program. Each teacher interviewed mentioned that the program provided interventions, but they thought the interventions were not sufficient to meet the needs of all students. Interviewees mentioned the importance of providing interventions and knew that interventions were important. However, they stated they needed to supplement the program with many additional interventions. According to Stentiford et al. (2018), interventions are important for all students that struggle. Stentiford et al. (2018) conducted a systematic literature review based around the reading interventions in the primary grades. According to their findings, instruction was separated into three different tiers. Every child should be provided with tier 1 instruction. In this study all of the children in first grade were receiving tier 1 instruction in the classroom with the teacher using the CKLA program. Stentiford et al. (2018) said that tier 1 instruction is delivered in the classroom by the regular education teacher. It is critical that all students have the tier 1 instruction because it is instruction that is at grade level and according to Buffum, Mattos, and Malone (2018) all children should be exposed to grade level materials.

Tier 2 instruction is the first type of intervention that students received. The students who receive tier 2 instruction are those that are not responding to the tier 1 instruction and need extra assistance and help. In the research study conducted by Stentiford et al. (2018), in eight out of 19 classroom studied students received tier 2 instruction outside of the classroom. Students getting tier 2 instruction had additional support in their tier 1 instruction.

Tier 3 instruction was the final type of intervention. Students who received tier 3 instruction in the study conducted by Stentiford et al. (2018) were students who struggled with basic concepts. These students were usually getting all types of interventions that were tailored to the needs of individual students. This type of interventions was outside of the classroom and mostly delivered by someone other than the classroom teacher. In some cases, a special education teacher delivered the tier 3 interventions.

In a research study conducted by Roberts et al. (2019), they determined the children who struggled in reading often struggled with behavior issues too. The interventions they determined would help those students was for the students to set goals and monitor their own goals. With the help of their teacher, the students monitored their goals and set new ones which helped to improve reading. Before this intervention began, the teacher used performance data to determine what areas the student needed additional support and where their needs were. For elementary students, a goal setting intervention was helpful in teaching students to self-monitor and self-

regulate their reading goals. It was vital for teachers to provide students different forms of interventions, because the students were not learning in the same way as their peers (Roberts et al., 2019).

Wagner et al. (2017) stressed the importance of providing interventions for children. The purpose of their study was to examine the use of brief experimental analysis to identify how reading interventions affected children with early reading struggles and the need for interventions. It was critical that students learn to read and develop important reading skills in the early grades. However, some children continue to struggle learning how to read (Wagner et al., 2017). When students struggle learning to read, it is the teacher's responsibility and job to provide students with interventions that was appropriate for the individual child (Wagner et al., 2017). However, little is known about where teachers pick the interventions that students need. Teachers do however, pick interventions students need based on the struggles and the areas in which children had reading gaps. When using the brief experimental analysis and interviews, the researchers found that each of the interventions examined helped student learn additional reading skills. Some interventions helped students more than others. Each teacher interviewed in the study believed that the interventions they used lead to positive growth on student reading (Wagner et al., 2017).

In a study conducted by Folsom et al. (2019), the results indicated that children needed instructional strategies to learn and improve reading strategies. When children were struggling readers, those struggles can persist and lead to the student being labeled as learning disabled. When providing interventions, teachers were able to catch struggling readers early. In the study conducted by Folsom et al. (2019), they indicated that when teaching children to read, teachers should focus on foundational skills in small group instruction. There is variability in what children are taught even in programs and schools where there is close monitoring. The results of their study indicated that more attention should be given to building the capacity and knowledge of teachers. However, student participation in their own learning is also important.

Theme 3 Inadequate Writing Instruction

Each of the first-grade teachers who participated in the study said that the CKLA program did not provide a sufficient amount of writing instruction for the children. In a study conducted by Coker et al. (2018), they found that writing instruction had a positive effect on reading achievement of students. In their study, they discussed different types of writing instruction. One type included having students learn to write letters and words. The second type of writing instruction they studied was composing, which was having students write their own stories. The results of their study were that the both types of writing instruction can benefit reading achievement. Research has shown that when teachers integrate handwriting and spelling instruction with word and text writing, there is a positive effect on students' reading (Coker et al., 2018).

The results of the Coker et al. (2018), study also determined that generative writing had a positive effect on student reading. When students could produce their own writing, they improved in their reading. Coker et al. (2018), also determined that when students used inventive spelling when writing they increased their knowledge and understanding of letters and words and how they all fit together. The results indicated that writing instruction can help improve reading achievement when students are taught how to compose a text and continually have writing practice.

In a meta-analysis examining the effectiveness of literacy programs including balanced literacy, Graham et al. (2018), recommend that reading and writing be taught together. Reading and writing skills are essential for the literacy development of students in school, work, and everyday life. When using a balanced literacy approach, teachers are instructing children in reading and writing simultaneously. Graham et al. (2018) examined several different approaches to balanced literacy, in their research, statistics showed improvement in reading and writing. However, in the four programs they studied, there were some inconsistencies. The major results of the study indicated that to enhance literacy skills in both reading and writing the skills should be taught together by balancing both areas of learning for children. Reading and writing use the same shared knowledge and cognitive processes (Graham et al., 2018). Studies have shown that reading and writing can be learned separately, but have also shown that reading and writing can be learned together. It is advantageous for students to learn both together.

In a qualitative action research study conducted by Duran and Karatas (2019) they discuss two different ways that writing can be taught to students. In their study they did not see a connection between teaching writing and reading together. The two areas they focused on in their study was repeated dictation and motivation practices. Within both of these areas, students were successful and improved in their writing skills. Dictation was used by the teacher telling students the letter, sound, word, or sentence and then students writing it down. The first stage in writing development was for students to know the letter name and be able to write the letters. Students must be able to practice this skill early on so that writing difficulties can be eliminated (Duran & Karatas, 2019). The results of their study showed that children need to be motivated to write and that all students need writing instruction to learn and improve writing skills. Early writing was the focus of the study conducted by Gabas et al. (2019). One strategy was to have children early on in their education write experience books (Gabas et al., 2019). By providing students with authentic writing opportunities, Gabas et al. (2019) determined that children will develop beginning writing skills. Teachers must also scaffold writing for young children. The first thing children do is draw and scribble. Next, they write letter like forms followed by writing the beginning sounds for words. Lastly, children write beginning and ending sounds. Early childhood education teachers provided these opportunities for children to develop their writing skills. Children must also be familiar with the writing process (Gabas et al., 2019). Knowing the purpose for their writing, allows children to develop a direction in their writing. By developing early reading and writing skills, children are able to develop emergent literacy skills which will help them to be successful readers and writers. Reading and writing development was important for children. Children need to have reading and writing activities spread across their day. There should also be clear and explicit expectations for reading and writing, modeling by the teacher with scaffolding, and plenty of opportunities to practice in an environment that is rich in print. Early oral language skills in children will lead to greater reading comprehension skills later (Gabas et al., 2019).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DISTRICT

It was recommended that district leaders examine the writing program connected with the CKLA program. Additional training may be needed by teachers. An additional recommendation is for teachers and district leaders to look at the state's Common Core State Standards and determine what areas they need to have additional writing instruction in. Collaborative teams

working together to develop or find curriculum that matches the requirements of the Common Core State Standards to supplement the program would be a suggestion.

Table 1

Results and Recommendations for the study

Results	Recommendations
<p>Theme 1 Strong Reading Skills Core</p>	<p>Teachers need additional time to become familiar with the program and see if the program is successful in improving student reading.</p>
<p>Theme 2 Insufficient Interventions</p>	<p>Teachers working together to determine what areas the students needed support in and develop interventions based on those needs.</p> <p>The program has an intervention guide that teachers may need additional training on.</p>
<p>Theme 3 Inadequate Writing Instruction</p>	<p>The CKLA program has a writing program that the district purchased. The schools are not yet using the writing program. Additional training for teachers on the CKLA writing program should be provided.</p> <p>Examine the Common Core State Standards of the state and then look outside of the program for writing that can be supplemented into the program that fits the standards.</p>

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study included only first grade teacher participating in the study. If additional grade levels were part of the study the results of the study may have been different. The limitations of the study included things that were out of the control of the researcher. Only one Title 1 teacher responded to the letter to participate in the study. The study included four elementary schools within the target school district. No teachers responded from one of the

elementary schools. The classroom teachers in the other three schools had a significant representation in the study.

An additional limitation to the study is that most of the classroom teacher supplemented their CKLA reading instruction with additional materials not connected to the reading program. Because the teachers were at varying years in their educational experiences, they each supplemented the program with different things.

FURTHER STUDIES

This study was conducted after the CKLA reading program was adopted by the school district. Qualitative data was collected through teacher interviews and by examining teacher lesson plans. If a quantitative research method was used the study would have been conducted differently. Instead of interviewing teachers, classroom observations could have been done. By observing teachers in action using the CKLA program, the researcher may have used a checklist to determine which components of the lesson were being taught. The observations could have occurred randomly over a few months. Within this study, the researcher looked at classroom data as an entire group. The study might have been different if the researcher had examined the data by school using pre and post assessments.

The results of the study indicated that teachers did not feel the interventions provided by the CKL reading program were effective. Following each lesson in the teacher manual there were additional supports and for instruction and learning. There is also a remediation guide for teachers to use if students are not understanding the work. A study on the use of the remediation guide would be useful.

Recommendations for further study include a quantitative experimental study where the researcher should examine pre and post assessment data. By examining pre and post assessment data, the researcher may be able to measure the growth of students at the beginning of the CKLA reading program and over several years. Multiple grade level could be studied.

CONCLUSION

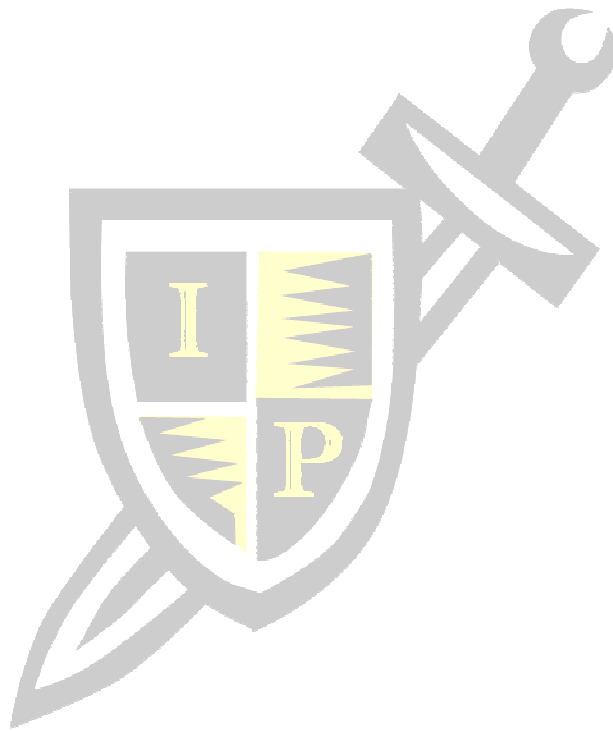
The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers perceived the CKLA reading program and what challenges they had when using the program. The research questions studied were RQ 1 How do first-grade teachers perceive the CKLA reading program? RQ 2 What challenges do first-grade teacher experience when teaching the CKLA reading program? RQ 3 How do first-grade teachers implement the reading program as evidenced by their lesson plans?

Three themes were extracted from the participant interviews conducted. The first theme was that teachers believed the CKLA program was an effective program to teach reading to children. The majority of teachers who participated in the study had positive perceptions of the program. The assessment results of first grade students decreased following the first year of the CKLA program implementation. Results were compared to those from the year before the program was used. According to Steiner (2017) it takes teachers one year to effectively implement the curriculum. The decrease in assessment results may be due to the teachers not knowing or understanding how to teach the program effectively.

The second theme found was that participants saw an insufficient amount of interventions within the program. Folsom et al. (2019) noted in their study that children need instructional interventions to learn and improve reading strategies. The curriculum and interventions that

schools use must be effective (Johnson, 2018). The third theme from the study was a lack of writing instruction and opportunities for children to write ideas that were not connected with response to text. According to Coker et al. (2018) writing instruction has a positive impact on students reading. Research has shown that reading and writing can be taught together and students are able to improve their reading and writing skills (Coker et al., 2018; Duran & Karatas, 2019; Graham et al., 2018).

Reading is a critical skill that all children need to gain. Teaching reading is important in first-grade and have a strong reading program that teachers use is critical.



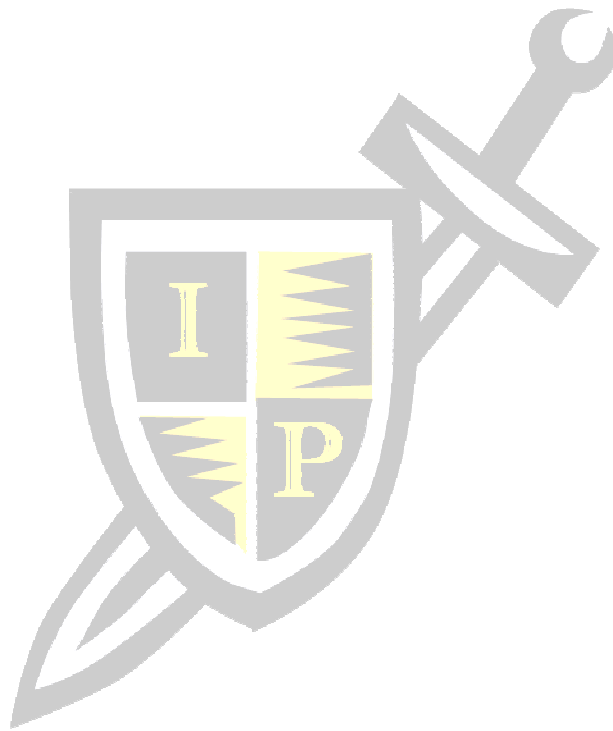
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**Appendix A
Lesson Plan Rubric**

Participant # _____

CKLA Lesson Rubric	Scores
Score 1 teachers were not using that area Score 2 meant that there was some instruction in that area Score 3 meant that the area was well prepared by teachers	1-3
Lesson # _____ What advanced preparation is listed on the lesson plan?	
Introduction to lesson Is the previous day's work being reviewed at the beginning of the lesson?	
Learning Target Student success criteria	
Phonics Is phonics instruction happening at the beginning of the lesson?	
Reading Is the class reading a book/chapter? Is the class reading the book/chapter whole group? Small group? Individually?	
Writing Are comprehension questions being answered by students? Are students working as a whole group? Small group? Individually?	
Additional Support What additional supports is the teacher using? Are students working as a whole group? Small group? Individually? Who is providing the additional support?	