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BOOKMARKED: A STUDY OF READING ENGAGEMENT

by

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The College of Education will ensure that this dissertation is globally accessible and will not

permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research dissertation to my mother, Cynthia Winkler. Thank you for your love, guidance, prayers, and support. You instilled a love of reading, a teacher's heart, and genuine enjoyment of all written work. I will never be able to express my gratitude for all the opportunities and encouragement I received throughout my life. You gave me a firm foundation, self-confidence, and the courage to return to school. You are a remarkable mother and a terrific Granny. I love you so much!

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ABSTRACT

In many Science of Reading programs, the focus on foundational skills like phonics and fluency can overshadow the importance of reading engagement in elementary classrooms. This dissertation investigates the effects of a balanced literacy intervention designed to incorporate purposeful engagement strategies across 12 lessons for at-risk third-grade readers. The six-week intervention integrated skills instruction with reading engagement strategies in the subcategories of social, cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement. Grounded in Engagement Theory (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), the study's instructional framework and literature review explore foundational theories of reading engagement within these subcategories: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social. The research was conducted in a rural, Title 1 elementary school in the southeastern United States, involving 14 third-grade students identified as at-risk by a universal reading screener. The 12 small-group lessons were scheduled outside regular school hours to complement in-class tier 2 interventions and supplement the district's newly adopted Structured Literacy curriculum. Using a quasi-experimental design, the study employed quantitative methods to analyze pre- and post-survey data collected from four small reading groups, comprising two control and two treatment groups. The *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) was the primary evaluation tool, revealing positive gains in all four engagement dimensions for the control and treatment groups. The behavioral and affective engagement subcategories showed the most growth, while cognitive engagement consistently achieved the highest overall scores. This research contributes valuable insights into the interplay between student-centered balanced literacy approaches and enhanced reading engagement.

CHAPTER 1. PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE

The National Department of Education's research department, the Institute of Education Sciences, spent $120 million on testing six research-based interventions that claimed to improve comprehension. Their findings in 2020 showed positive improvements in the interventions' targeted skills and assessments but not on standardized reading comprehension tests, thus showing that students do not apply individual skills to multiple contexts (Kim & Burkhauser, 2022). Amid new reading mandates, teachers are shifting from constructivist, balanced literacy approaches to systematic skills-based methods of instruction. As curricula align with Science of Reading instructional approaches, the focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency overshadows the importance of reading engagement in Structured Literacy programs (Yaden et al., 2021).

Systematic curricula define the content taught and the methods used to create uniformity in instruction, but teachers need flexibility to take advantage of student interest, knowledge, and abilities to personalize reading instruction (Null, 2023). This chapter discusses the background of the problem addressed by this research study, including the problem statement, the significance and organization of the study, theoretical frameworks, and the clarification of terms.

Background of the Problem

The National Center for Education Statistics stated that in 2019, only one-third of fourth-grade students could read proficiently, according to national standardized test scores (Kim & Burkhauser, 2022). Consequently, states passed legislation mandating a stronger focus on foundational skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, and word fluency) in early grades. For

example, Alabama, Virginia, and South Carolina passed legislation for the 2024-2025 school year banning programs using a balanced literacy approach and aligning all instruction to the Science of Reading (Mullins, 2025). Some reading professionals express concerns that mandating one approach over another does not allow teachers to differentiate for each student's needs, interests, and funds of knowledge (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021; Lindo, 2024).

The Science of Reading (SOR) "refers to a corpus of peer-reviewed research on how we learn to read and develop as readers" (Monaco & Conner, 2024, p. 20). These current trends in systemic foundational reading skills reflect the Stage Model Approach developed by theorists Ehri, Chall, Gough, and Firth (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). This linear view of early reading proposes that developing readers progress through the following stages of reading in order: visual, alphabetic, and orthographic word recognition (Tracy & Morrow, 2024). Within this body of research is the Simple View of Reading (SVR), a framework that describes the importance of decoding and language comprehension for reading development (Monaco & Conner, 2024). The International Literacy Association (2019) emphasized the need for structured phonics instruction in early literacy programs, recommending that instruction include opportunities for application in reading and writing. Although findings in research suggest that foundational skills are essential to early reading development, the debate concerning the best approach to teaching reading continues (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Parsons & Erickson, 2024). Chapter Two explores reading research through the lens of reading motivation and engagement and highlights the shift in reading approaches from top-down, constructivist, instructional approaches, such as balanced literacy and systematic skills-first frameworks that align with SOR approaches.

The National Reading Panel report of 2000 found evidence supporting the necessity of phonics instruction, comparing phonics instruction as a part of reading instruction to instruction that neglected phonics instruction (Hruby, 2020). However, no evidence supports the opinion that synthetic phonics, taught in isolation, is more effective than other approaches that teach phonics embedded in text (Hruby, 2020). SOR supports structured literacy curricula that utilize sequenced, whole-group instruction and decodable reading texts that ignore students' language, vocabulary, cultural differences, and background knowledge (Compton-Lilly et al., 2023; Esmail et al., 2017; Hruby, 2020; International Literacy Association, 2019). Analysis of SOR literature lacks studies observing children interacting with real books or authentic texts in classroom settings, focusing instead on isolated linguistic units and assessing comprehension through multiple-choice questions (Anderson et al., 2024).

Although these types of focused practice, scripted lessons, and universal assessments lend themselves to consistently aligning standards and direct accountability (Feller, 2010). The high-stakes testing and traditional, skills-based assessments have restricted teachers to systematic curricula with prescribed, sequenced, skills-focused lessons, with standardized, computer-based assessments (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021; Feller, 2010; Hruby, 2020; Lindo, 2024). Science of Reading (SOR) embraces a bottom-up, direct instructional approach to reading instruction. Reading curricula grounded in SOR approaches follow a linear path that centers around isolated phonics and decoding skills in a scripted sequence, including targeted practice through decodable readers (Kim & Burkhauser, 2022; Tracy & Morrow, 2024).

A 2020 study of the fluency and accuracy interventions used in the Reading for Understanding initiative found that skills-based interventions successfully taught isolated reading skills. However, there was no evidence that those skills transferred to improved reading comprehension (Kim & Burkhauser, 2022). Duke and Cartwright (2021) posit that teaching phonological skills in isolation ignores the importance of a reader's flexibility to actively switch between the graphophonological (letter-sound) information, semantic (meaning), and structural features of print. This study explores the importance of incorporating cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral engagement into skills-based approaches to increase reading metacognition, deepen connections to the text, and increase independence through social interactions.

A balanced literacy curriculum is grounded in constructivist theories that emphasize student-centered approaches. Building on prior knowledge and experiences, constructivist models focus on hospitable learning spaces with social opportunities for students to engage in the learning process through differentiated, active lessons and authentic assessments (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). To build a literacy community in a school, teachers must teach decoding skills within classroom practices that support comprehension and critical thinking while fostering motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021).

Statement of Problem

New structured literacy curricula often prescribe whole-class instruction on foundational reading skills, with limited opportunities for differentiation or authentic reading practices (Parsons & Erickson, 2024), failing to build upon students' unique strengths and perspectives, which fosters more equitable and meaningful literacy development (Aukerman & Chambers

Schuldt, 2021). School districts that have formerly supported student-centered, balanced literacy approaches are shifting to support structured, skills-based programs based on SOR research to form new educational policies (Anderson, 2024). This research study focuses on implementing reading engagement strategies within four subcategories (behavioral, social, cognitive, and affective) into small reading groups to teach skills within multiple genres and high-interest books.

As school districts shift to structured literacy curricula, balanced literacy materials remain unused. Materials such as the Fountas and Pinnell (2014) Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) kits present an opportunity to incorporate instructional strategies addressing reading engagement into a social learning environment that addresses multiple third-grade literacy standards. Research by McGeown and Smith (2024) shows that using engagement strategies during instruction significantly boosts academic success. Ultimately, reading engagement is crucial for cultivating independent readers who actively connect with texts, employ metacognitive strategies, and excel in comprehension (McGeown & Smith, 2024).

Significance of Study

This study adds to the depth of knowledge concerning reading engagement in elementary students. Findings from this study suggest that third-grade students receiving Tier 2 interventions increased their self-reported reading engagement across the four subcategories (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social). Reading is multidimensional, goes beyond isolated skill knowledge, and focuses on orchestrating skills and funds of knowledge to increase comprehension, at all grade levels (Clay, 2016; Lindo, 2024). Educators must consider what

motivates and engages students as they read, which needs careful consideration as teachers plan instruction (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021). The results of this study contribute to understanding student motivation and the impact of engagement strategies implemented into daily reading instruction. This research adds to a growing body of research examining motivation's vital role in supporting children's capacities for reading engagement (Parsons & Erickson, 2024).

More research is needed about the most effective methods to teach reading in the early grades because reading is the foundation for academic success (Lee et al., 2013). “Compared to students with higher literacy achievement, three-fourths of students considered poor readers in third grade are also classified as poor readers in high school, demonstrating higher rates of retention in grade and more behavioral and social problems in successive grades” (Gentilini & Greer, 2020, p. 327). Motivation and engagement are essential for reading instruction (McGeown & Smith, 2024). For any approach, SOR, Whole Language, Balanced Literacy, or another approach, students must be motivated to read and engaged in their reading for instruction to be effective (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021; D'Orio, 2020; Mondesir & Griffin, 2020). As high-stakes testing continues to dominate educational practices, educators must explore strategies that support student success (Sackstein, 2021) through motivation and engagement for every student.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation explores the relationship between a balanced literacy intervention incorporating engagement strategies within small reading groups and third-grade at-risk students’

self-reported level of engagement in four subcategories (behavioral, social, affective, and cognitive). This study aimed to answer the question: What are the effects of a six-week, small-group intervention that incorporates engagement strategies on third graders' reading engagement in the following areas: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social?

This reading engagement study took place over six weeks in a rural, southeastern elementary school with 16 at-risk third-grade participants. To examine the change over time, the researcher collected pre- and post-intervention data from participants in the control and treatment groups by administering the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024), a Likert-type survey to each student during the first and last group meetings. To supplement classroom instruction, the researcher conducted four small reading groups for at-risk third-grade students grounded in the theoretical framework of Engagement Theory (Wigfield et al., 2004), which falls under the Affective Lens of reading development.

Using the Fountas and Pinnell (2014) Blue LLI Kit lessons, the researcher led reading groups incorporating multiple engagement strategies and skills instruction with authentic texts, then compared participant feedback from the first and last group meetings, providing insights into teaching practices that motivate students to read and aid deeper engagement with text. Chapter Two explores the research in reading engagement, reading theories, and classroom practice. Next, Chapter Three details the methods and procedures followed to conduct this research study, including setting, participants, procedures, data collection, and analysis. Chapter Four provides an in-depth analysis of the summative findings and descriptive statistical data, and

Chapter Five connects findings to research, theoretical frameworks, and opportunities this research study presents.

Theoretical Frameworks

This research focuses on the four components of reading engagement and the engagement strategies implemented during reading instruction. The principal theoretical framework of this research falls under the Affective Lenses of reading. Perspectives within the Affective Lens relate to motivational and emotional factors that impact reading comprehension and engagement (Tracy & Morrow, 2024).

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) developed the *Engagement Theory,* which posits that engaged readers are intrinsically motivated to read and read frequently, using metacognitive strategies to comprehend text (Tracy & Morrow, 2024). Guthrie's research found that "engaged reading can overcome traditional barriers to reading achievement, including gender, parental education, and income" (Tracy & Morrow, 2024, p. 139). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) state that engagement is the primary pathway to reading proficiency, proposing that engaged readers are motivated to use cognitive strategies to create new knowledge during interactions with text (Unrau et al., 2015). Motivated and engaged students demonstrate high self-efficacy and a growth mindset, which are essential for continued growth and independence (Wigfield et al., 2004). The Engagement Model (Wigfield et al., 2004) has three levels: three student outcomes in the center (achievement, knowledge, and practice), with four student imperatives (conceptual knowledge, strategy use, motivation, and social interactions) in the middle, surrounded by nine instructional practices (teacher involvement, learning and knowledge goals, real-world

interactions, autonomy support, interesting text, strategy instruction, collaboration, rewards and praise, and evaluation).

These nine teaching practices are grounded in multiple frameworks and theories of reading and student engagement. The balanced literacy approach encompasses multiple theories and models that create a student-centered teaching pedagogy within these lenses. Tracy and Morrow (2024) write that effective teachers utilize multiple frameworks that complement and coexist within teaching practices. Table 1 illustrates theoretical frameworks woven throughout this research, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Table 1

Theoretical Frameworks

Theory	Theorist	Engagement Domain
Constructivist Lenses: consistent and active construction of knowledge		
Schema Theory	Piaget	Cognitive
Psycholinguistic Theory	Goodman	Cognitive
Transactional/Reader Response Theory	Rosenblatt	Affective
Cognitive-Processing Lenses: cognitive processes involved in reading		
Interactive Model	Rumelhart	Cognitive & Behavior
Literacy Processing Theory	Clay (Clay, 2016)	Cognitive, Behavior & Social
Simple View of Reading	Gough	Cognitive
Active View of Reading	Duke, Cartwright & Burns (Burns et al., 2023)	Cognitive
Affective Lenses: connection between emotions and the brain		
Engagement Theory	Guthrie & Wigfield	Affective, Behavioral Social & Cognitive
Affective Neuroscience	Immordino-Yang	Affective & Cognitive
Mindset	Dweck	Affective
Social Learning Lenses: effects of social interactions on learning.		
Funds of Knowledge	Moll	Social & Behavioral
Expectancy-Value Theory	Wigfield & Eccles (Van der Sande et al., 2023)	Social & Behavioral
Social Constructivism	Vygotsky	Social, & Cognitive
Social Cognitive Theory (Self-Efficacy)	Bandura	Social

Note: All information taken from (Tracy & Morrow, 2024) unless otherwise noted.

Clarification of Terms

Authentic Text- Texts written to replicate real-world books for beginning readers (McTighe & Willis, 2019).

Balanced Literacy- A top-down, constructivist approach to reading that teaches the orchestration of information from multiple sources (Mondesir & Griffin, 2020).

Cueing System- refers to the sources of information a reader uses while reading. These include meaning (Semantics), structure (Syntax), and visual (phonemes/ graphemes) (Tracy & Morrow, 2024).

Decodable Text- Simple reading passage designed to teach phonetic skills (Ehri, 2020).

Direct Instruction- Teaching specific objectives based on observable behaviors in a systematic manner (Tracy & Morrow, 2024).

Dopamine- A chemical in the brain that is associated with executive function, attention, and positive experiences (McTighe & Willis, 2019).

Executive Function Skills (EF)- The neurocognitive self-regulation processes are needed for complex, goal-directed tasks such as reading (Duke & Cartwright, 2021).

Foundational Skills- Skills: The basic skills needed to decode text are phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, and fluency (Mondesir & Griffin, 2020).

Fountas and Pinnell- educators and researchers who created a brand encompassing a gradient to level books, a guide to implementing balanced literacy approaches into elementary classrooms, and a curriculum of leveled books for small group instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014).

Funds of Knowledge- Language, experiences, and culture that shape a child's background knowledge and perspectives (Esmail et al., 2017).

Graphophonological- Semantic Flexibility (GSF)- the cognitive ability to switch between phonetic, semantic, and syntactic information in printed text while reading (Burns et al., 2023; Duke & Cartwright, 2021).

Guided Reading Group- A small group (3-4) of readers with similar reading levels receiving intensive, student-centered instruction lasting approximately 30 minutes (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014).

Independent Reading Level- When a child can fluently read a text with 95% accuracy or higher, with a satisfactory level of comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014).

Instructional Reading Level- When a child independently reads a text with 90%-94% accuracy, with satisfactory comprehension, or above 94% with limited comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014).

Interactive Read Aloud- When a teacher reads a text aloud, the teacher encourages the students to interact with the story and each other to deepen comprehension (Watts & Gandy, 2024).

Metacognition- When individuals monitor and control their mental processes (McTighe & Willis, 2019).

Motivation- having interest, value, and a desire to read; motivation leads to engagement (Duke & Cartwright, 2021).

Reading Engagement- active participation and deep interaction with text that is needed for comprehension. Reading engagement has four subcategories: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; McGeown & Smith, 2024).

Record of Oral Reading (Running Record)- a formative assessment tool used to track and analyze a child's oral reading of text (Bates & Malloy, 2024).

Science of Reading- a growing body of research from multiple disciplines (education, psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience) about how children learn to read (Parsons & Erickson, 2024).

Simple View of Reading (SVR)- a theory that states reading combines decoding and language comprehension. Gough posits that these two components (word recognition and language comprehension) are separate but equally essential for text comprehension (Hruby, 2020). This theory is popular in SOR literature.

Structured Literacy- Reading programs that are systematic and scripted with a heavy focus on phonics skills (Hruby, 2020).

Strategic Activity- Using multiple sources of information from text to problem solve, monitor, and make corrections during reading (Clay, 2016). This includes self-monitoring, re-reading, decoding, summarizing, using multiple sources of information, and fluency.

Theory of Mind considers one's and others' mental states, including characters' mental states, to make inferences from text (Burns et al., 2023).

Summary

Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, the researcher answered the question: What are the effects of a six-week, small group, balanced literacy intervention that incorporates engagement strategies on third graders' reading engagement in the following areas: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social? The introduction briefly explains the current issues of literacy in public education and the purpose and significance of this study. Chapter One also discusses the study's organization, theoretical principles, and a classification of terms. Chapter Two reviews the literature surrounding motivation and engagement while exploring the foundational theories and instructional approaches of reading instruction. Chapter Three outlines the quantitative methodology, which utilizes a quasi-experimental design to analyze the impact of the intervention on pre- and post-intervention data. Chapter Four presents the descriptive data extrapolated from the pre- and post-test data. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the findings from the study, supporting research, implications, and limitations. This study adds to the literature concerning reading engagement for third-grade at-risk readers.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Formal reading instruction begins when children start school, learning to be independent of caregivers, navigate new relationships, and master skills while gaining new responsibilities daily. It is difficult to capture the attention of young children for extended periods of time, so teachers must find ways to motivate them to engage in complex reading processes. This chapter analyzes key research, foundational theories, and methodologies incorporated into literacy instruction through motivation and the four subcategories of reading engagement (behavioral, social, cognitive, and affective).

By looking through multiple lenses and theories of literacy instruction, researchers have proven that various effective methods are needed to teach literacy skills, including decoding, comprehension, fluency, writing, monitoring, and applying literacy in multiple contexts (Tracy & Morrow, 2024). Current neuroscientific research also supports the necessity for student engagement in reading comprehension (Lyons, 2024; Rabun, 2017). Teachers must motivate and engage students in reading and writing so students can become independent and literate adults. Students bring diverse funds of knowledge consisting of experiences, cultures, interests, and background knowledge (Esmail et al., 2017; Lindo, 2024; Tracy & Morrow, 2024). Effective teachers differentiate teaching to provide an equitable education for all learners (Kim & Burkhauser, 2022; Monaco & Conner, 2024; Posey, 2019). Each theory and study contributes valuable information to classroom practice, but theories and programs cannot produce proficient readers and writers alone. Expert teachers apply various practices in their classrooms to meet the needs of every student daily (Tracey & Morrow, 2017).

Author and researcher Hugh Catts (2021-2022) wrote that learning to read differs from learning to swim. When kids learn to swim in the pool, they can apply those same skills to a different body of water. However, teaching decoding skills and language comprehension in isolation does not prepare students to read the different texts they will encounter during their lifetime. Reading is essential to all academic subjects, and the ability to comprehend depends on the complex application of multiple skills and knowledge (Catts, 2021-2022). Current legislation in twelve states bans educational approaches that use balanced literacy, three cueing methods, or instructional programs other than the Science of Reading (SOR) or structured literacy curricula (Schwartz, S, 2023).

The first part of this literature review will examine theories of motivation and engagement and how they apply to reading research. The following section will focus on balanced literacy, guided reading, and the current shift to structured literacy. This research will add a unique perspective to literacy that looks at the motivational and engagement aspects of learning to be a reader and how these theories are represented in balanced literacy, whole language, and skills-based approaches.

This literature review aims to synthesize the research on reading motivation and engagement, and how various approaches to reading instruction address these topics. Literature for this review was identified through the following databases: ERIC, Google Scholar, EBSCO, Wiley Online Library, Springer, Gale, Reading Recovery Council of North America (RRCNA), International Literacy Association, ProQuest, and Phi Delta Kappa. The researcher used the following search terms: *reading engagement, reading motivation, metacognition, self-efficacy,*

reading clubs, early literacy, balanced literacy, book choice, mindset, Science of Reading, executive function, Reading Recovery, Fountas and Pinnell, early literacy, whole language, Guided Reading, and structured literacy to locate peer-reviewed resources within the date range of 2010-2024.

The following sections of this chapter will present findings related to reading motivation, the four types of reading engagement (behavioral, cognitive, emotional/affective, and social), and different instructional approaches (Balanced Literacy and Science of Reading).

Reading Motivation

Motivated readers read more often, try different genres, and become more proficient than less motivated peers (Turner & Paris, 1995; Van der Sande et al., 2023). Teachers who build motivation for reading "mold literacy instruction to the needs, interests, and skills of their students" (Turner & Paris, 1995, p. 672). Motivation plays an essential part in reading instruction. To decode and understand the meaning, students must apply and practice the skills they learn. Motivation is the reason students read and engage with a text or choose not to read at all (Cho et al., 2019; Gentilini & Greer, 2020; McGeown & Smith, 2024; Taboada et al., 2009; Van der Sande et al., 2023).

There are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is the internal desire to read, while environmental factors influence extrinsic motivation to promote reading (Cho et al., 2019). Extrinsic motivation is affected by goal setting, rewards, test scores, praise, and symbolic factors that promote success. Intrinsic motivation is reflected in students' attitudes, values, and enjoyment of reading to learn or reading for pleasure. Intrinsically

motivated students often read with deeper engagement than students who are only extrinsically motivated.

Van der Sande et al. (2023) meta-analysis found multiple studies showing that middle schoolers, struggling readers, and boys are at a greater risk for low reading motivation. Interest significantly positively affected motivation and reading comprehension across all 39 studies. Studies also showed that adapting instruction using materials and activities that matched the individual student's interests proved successful for reading motivation (Van der Sande et al., 2023). Qualitative studies suggest that intrinsically motivated students read and engage profoundly and emotionally with the information (Cho et al., 2019; McGeown & Smith, 2024).

The foundation for students' motivation is relationship building (Jensen, 2013). To build motivation, the teacher must demonstrate a passion and purpose for reading to build student interest. Books must appeal to children for continued motivation during reading instruction, or children will begin opting out when reading becomes dull and monotonous (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Student choice and a safe classroom environment can reduce student stress and anxiety. Teachers nurture persistent and resilient readers by allowing students to choose books, activities, and assignments in a classroom environment where they can take risks and feel valued as a part of the culture. High expectations for each student lead to increased intrinsic motivation (Dweck, 2007; Jensen, 2013).

Motivation in the first and second grades is essential because it directly affects reading comprehension in later grades. Motivated students in primary grades who are intrinsically motivated to read become better readers than their less motivated peers. This process eventually

leads to achievement gaps in reading comprehension in later grades (Cartwright et al., 2016). A two-year study of 68 first and second graders found that word and non-word reading abilities were significant in how beginning readers perceived their competence as readers. The young students surveyed in the study equated proficient reading with quick word decoding (Cartwright et al., 2016). This study also found that girls had higher motivation to read and outperformed boys on comprehension tests. This study shows that motivation in the primary grades contributes to reading comprehension in later grades, decoding, and verbal ability. Motivation surveys showed that even the youngest reader finds value in understanding the content while understanding the importance of decoding efficiently (Cartwright et al., 2016). The intrinsic motivation of beginning readers is essential because young readers are learning to make sense of texts while cultivating their identities as readers (Shaffer, 2019, p. 29).

Positive feedback based on effort and growth will help students develop a growth mindset. Teachers must value students' efforts and contributions to the classroom environment for intrinsic motivation to be sustainable (Jensen, 2013). McGeown and Smith (2024) emphasize that the cornerstone of our work as elementary educators is understanding what effectively motivates students to engage with texts. Comprehension depends on the reader's engagement with the text, and that engagement begins with the motivation to read (Marinak, 2013).

Engagement

The American Psychological Association released a statement in 1998 of learner-centered principles that included cognitive and meta-cognitive factors, developmental and social factors, and motivational and affective factors needed to learn (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). These principles are

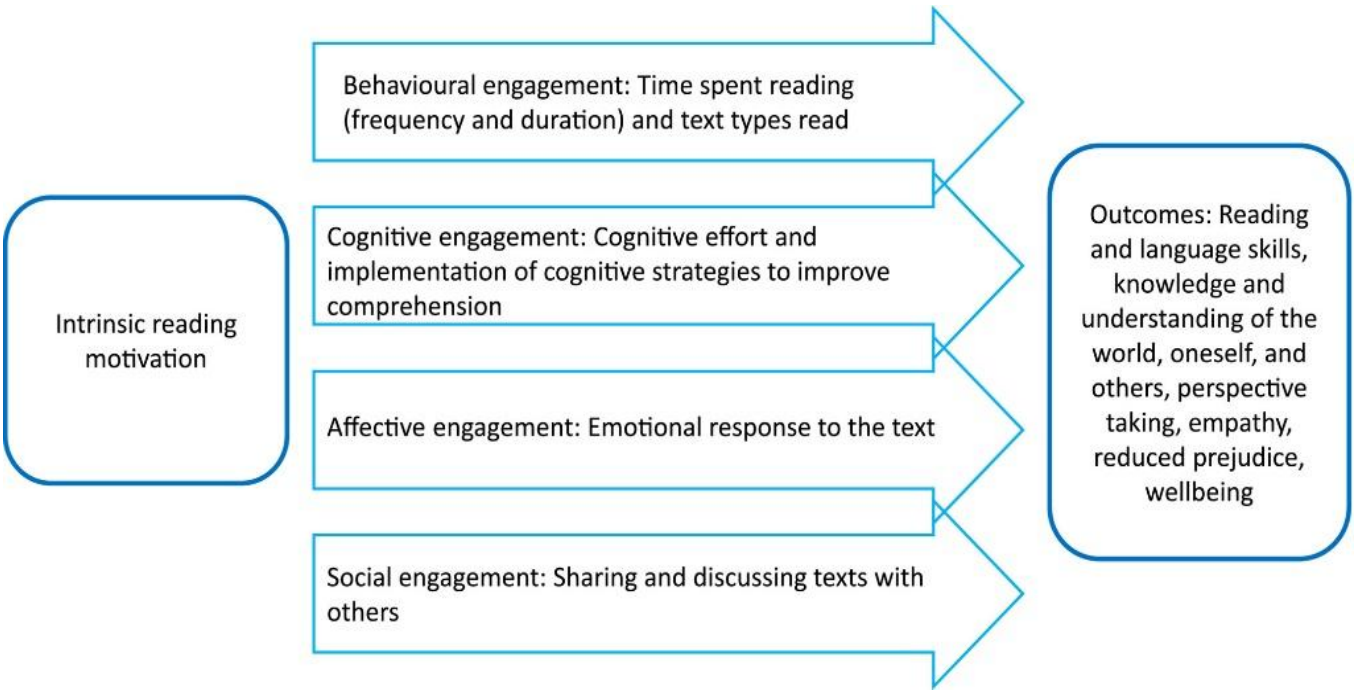
reflected in current studies that focus on four dimensions of engagement essential to reading comprehension: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social (Cho et al., 2019; McGeown & Smith, 2024). Our attitudes and beliefs drive our motivation, while the level of motivation influences our engagement in a task. Students who are engaged readers strive to understand text, gain pleasure and knowledge from reading, and are confident in their abilities (Harrison et al., 2017). Engagement is critical to student achievement; for every 2 percent drop in engagement, the failing rate on state tests rises by 1 percent (Jenson, 2013).

Students who effectively apply essential reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary knowledge, can comprehend text (Clay, 2016; Ehri, 2020; Pinnell & Scharer, 2003). Teachers must provide instructional support for students to engage with the text as its demands become more difficult (Clay, 2016; Kelly & Neal, 2009). Higher-level texts require more inferential reasoning and flexibility as language and text structures become more complex, new vocabulary is introduced, and visual analysis becomes more challenging (Kelly & Neal, 2009).

Four distinct subcategories of reading engagement exist: behavioral, cognitive, affective or emotional, and social (McGeown & Smith, 2024). Children who feel reading is valuable and enjoyable are intrinsically motivated to read and deeply engage in the books they read (McGeown & Smith, 2024). Motivation is the precursor to reading engagement, and students who are effectively involved in reading have increased reading and language skills (McGeown & Smith, 2024). Figure 1 illustrates the four types of reading engagement.

Figure 1

The Link Between Intrinsic Reading Motivation and Outcomes



Note: From McGeown, S., & Smith, K. C. (2024). Reading Engagement Matters! A New Scale to Measure and Support Children's Engagement with Books. *The Reading Teacher*, *77*(4), 462-472. https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2267

As educators, we must instill in our students the will to learn, apply skills, and engage in the learning process from the beginning of reading instruction. The long-term results of disengagement are academic failure and high dropout rates (Lee, 2013), making engagement the necessary path to reading achievement through comprehension (Cho et al., 2019). Sustainable

literacy engagement is the power that educators want to foster in their students, so they become literate adults (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021; McGeown & Smith, 2024). To make the learning engaging, the flow of events should be purposefully planned around the needs and interests of the students. Heavily structured or scripted curricula must be more student-centered and plan for engagement (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

Behavioral Engagement

In this era of high-stakes testing, schools struggle to balance teaching isolated skills with reading for pleasure (Merga, 2020). Strong readers enjoy reading and read often, strengthening their skills and independence, thus making reading more accessible. Unfortunately, the opposite is true; struggling students do not enjoy reading because it is difficult, reducing reading time and missing opportunities to apply and strengthen skills (Merga, 2020; Taboada Barber & Klauda, 2020). The behavioral aspect of reading engagement focuses on increasing time spent reading, independence, and interest (McGeown & Smith, 2024). Student reading behaviors directly affect their ability to independently decode, understand, and discuss the content of texts. Expert teachers strategically plan instruction and create classroom environments to promote behavioral engagement through intrinsic motivation. Teachers who design instruction to increase behavioral engagement build interest and independence by planning time for students to read and exposing students to a variety of genres.

Interest

A meta-analysis of 39 studies conducted by Van der Sande et al. in 2023 found that interventions focused on building interest had the most substantial effects on reading comprehension, with the most significant gains in comprehension for the youngest readers (Van der Sande et al., 2023). Teachers want to increase the time and stamina of students actively engaged in reading activities, both independently and socially. One way to build interest in reading is through book choice. Choosing books that pique interest and connections for the student innately focuses attention and activates the dopamine system in the brain. (Rabun, 2017; Wolfe, 2010).

Neuroscience has proven that dopamine is key to intrinsic motivation because it increases behavioral engagement through focused attention (Ng, 2018). Teachers can build stamina for early readers by utilizing novelty and sustained focused attention. Stamina, the time readers spend on tasks, is essential for comprehension. Students must learn to control their focus and attention to increase engagement for extended reading periods (Serravallo, 2015The brain releases dopamine to make accurate predictions, which triggers the memory of decisions and actions related to this dopamine drop. This positively affects motivation, attention, curiosity, and memory as the brain seeks more dopamine (McTighe & Willis, 2019). As readers successfully use problem-solving strategies and increase fluency and accuracy, they become more motivated and engaged in reading.

Appealing to a student's interest can motivate a child to read more books. Teachers who make reading meaningful and authentic promote the intrinsic motivation to read often and increase effort and engagement during the reading (Merga, 2020; Posey, 2019). Behavioral engagement is a part of motivation that focuses on how the student spends time reading independently. McGeown and Smith (2024) cite evidence that reading outside of school contributes to increased reading achievement, with fiction contributing to reading development (McGeown & Smith, 2024). Effectively building reading skills and teaching students to solve problems quickly within texts they enjoy can have a lifetime impact on students' success. Students who spend time reading build and reinforce their reading comprehension capacity, succeed in academic subjects, and enjoy recreational reading (Taboada Barber & Klauda, 2020).

Independence

An active learner takes the initiative to experiment with new information and construct new concepts to add to existing knowledge (Lyons, 2004). Teachers create safe environments for students to craft and test new concepts while guiding them to independence. Yet, each child must do the work for themselves (Harrison et al., 2017; Lyons, 2024). A teacher must “foster and support active, constructive problem solving, self-monitoring and self-correction from the first lesson, helping learners to understand that they must take over the expansion of their competencies” (Clay, 2015, p. 225). Teachers need to allow students to monitor their reading and self-correct independently while offering enough support without doing the work for the child. When adults monitor and correct, it makes the reader dependent on adult support (Clay, 2011; Clay, 2015; Lyons, 2004; Lyons, 2024). Successful readers stay on task, are persistent, put in the

effort to understand the text, read frequently, and take the initiative to try new genres (Cho et al., 2019; Clay, 2015; Lyons, 2004; Lyons, 2024; McGeown & Smith, 2024; Merga, 2020; Serravallo, 2015; Van der Sande et al., 2023).

Time

Silent reading is a classroom practice that gives students time to choose reading material, practice skills, and build stamina. It allows the brain to focus intensely on the meaning and comprehension while reading. Patricia Wolfe (2010), teacher educator and author, states that when students read silently, positron emission tomography (PET) scans show more activity in the frontal lobe than when reading aloud. The brain scan of a student reading aloud only indicates activity in the brain's motor area that controls speech. However, scans show activity in the frontal lobe area when the same reader reads silently. Silent reading indicates a higher level of thinking. Teachers must allow students time to read silently in the classroom to build independence and more profound engagement for greater comprehension (Wolfe, 2010).

In contrast, Daniel Buck, with the Thomas Fordham Institute, argues that class time spent in silent reading would be better spent in “systematic exposure to science, history, and other subjects" (Buck, 2024, p. 9). Citing the federal Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K: 2011), Buck (2024) writes that students need to build better content knowledge. The ECLS-K: 2011 study followed 18,000 students in the U.S. from kindergarten to fifth grade. Results show that increased time in social studies instruction is associated with improved reading ability, especially in girls, children from lower socio-economic areas, and students from non-English speaking homes (Tyner & Kabourek, 2020).

Citing the ECLS-K: 2011, the Fordham Institute also says that instruction time would be better spent reading non-fiction text to build knowledge, over focusing on artificial comprehension skills such as main idea and sequencing events (Northern & Petrilli, 2020). This website advocates for building a solid content knowledge base in elementary schools with specific demographics. Eric Jensen (2013), the author of over 30 books on neuroscience and education, writes that for children in low socioeconomic situations who do not have access to learning experiences outside of school, teachers should build a deep knowledge base by connecting to authentic contexts. This reduces stress and demonstrates how to extract information from the text (Jenson, 2013). Encouraging students to read multiple genres adds depth, changes perceptions, and gives value to others' experiences.

Genre

To extend learning, background knowledge of the subject matter is essential (Kim & Burkhauser, 2022). Teachers help students build comprehension and background knowledge through questioning as they read in the content areas. Deep engagement is essential for comprehension, regardless of a student's motivation to read fiction for relaxation at home or within a specific content area at school. Students need opportunities to read in different contexts and exposure to various genres. Teachers should help students build background knowledge and comprehension strategies to apply and extend their knowledge base (Jensen, 2013).

Guthrie and Klauda (2014) studied how literacy instruction integrated into science and social studies can affect comprehension, engagement, and motivation. Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) is founded in Engagement Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory,

purposefully creating motivation and engagement through teaching literacy in the content areas (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). Teachers using CORI explicitly provided activities and discussions around student choice, collaboration, value, and building confidence during reading instruction using historical informational text. This study found that the seventh-grade students in the CORI group scored higher on informational text comprehension than other seventh-grade students in the control group, confirming the importance of student engagement in reading instruction (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). Similar classroom instruction models also show the positive effects of reading across curricular areas.

The Model of Reading Engagement (MORE) intervention, a successful tool designed for teachers in first through third grades, has shown promising results. In a study by Kim and Burkhauser (2022), the effects of building background knowledge and reading engagement on reading comprehension were measured, with the MORE intervention proving effective. The intervention focused on connecting concepts and essential vocabulary through thematic units and creating opportunities for students to use these ideas and vocabulary terms in group discussions and writing activities. The goal of MORE is to teach students how to organize, remember, and apply what they have learned to new topics. Using concept maps, students connect topics and related vocabulary, while teachers capitalize on opportunities to teach literacy skills such as morphemes and grammar through the content areas.

Researchers used the MORE intervention in 30 schools, involving nearly 3,000 first and second graders. Using transfer passages designed by Cornell University, researchers tested the comprehension of passages with varying levels of differences from the instructional texts.

Evidence was clear that low and high-performing students extended the knowledge gained in class and applied it to passages on related content. Results were also successfully replicated in other subject areas (Kim & Burkhauser, 2022). The Harvard Gazette defines the MORE program's goal as personalized literacy support at school and home, building motivation and engagement in reading (Byer, 2018).

Currently, 102 schools and 45,000 students in North Carolina are part of the MORE intervention through a program called Reach Every Reader (NBC News, 2024). The Reach Every Reader initiative, a collaborative effort comprising Harvard, MIT, and Florida State University experts, begins in pre-kindergarten, working with children and families to build literacy skills and interest in reading. Kindergarten through third-grade students receive reading instruction through an integrated science curriculum. “The MORE curriculum includes books that motivate students and foster situational interest, comprehension instruction that integrates reading and writing, and developmentally adapted and personalized activities” (Reach Every Reader, 2024). The Reach Every Reader initiative targets foundational skills and builds comprehension and vocabulary by motivating children to read exciting books.

Expert teachers increase behavioral engagement in reading with purposeful planning that increases independence, stamina, and genre exposure. Increasing time spent reading builds stamina and engagement, essential executive functioning skills. Increasing independence builds problem-solving and application skills within the text, as well as growing exposure to new genres.

Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement is the strategic activity happening in the brain as students read. Unlike behavioral engagement, observers can only see the results of a child's cognitive activity reflected in decoding, fluency, miscues, problem-solving, and comprehension (Lyons, 2024; McTighe & Willis, 2019; Rabun, 2017). Compton-Lilly et al. (2020) wrote that although science has yet to show a complete picture of brain activity while reading, neuroscience models and observations of young readers show bidirectional interactions of brain activity as children read, demonstrating an orchestration of multiple sources of information (Compton-Lilly et al., 2020; Tracy & Morrow, 2024). This section regarding cognitive engagement will briefly discuss current brain research concerning reading theories of schema, cueing, and executive functioning.

Schema

Our brains store information in the visual, auditory, and motor cortices and connect it through networks of neurons (Compton-Lilly et al., 2023; Wolfe, 2010). The brain ability to continuously generate new neural networks called neuroplasticity (McTighe & Willis, 2019; Tracey & Morrow, 2017; Tracey & Morrow, 2024). The brain looks for patterns to match related neural networks already stored within the memory circuits. Intellectual frameworks store and organize knowledge (Kim & Burkhauser, 2022). In 1957, Piaget called these cognitive framework schemas (McTighe & Willis, 2019).

Teachers activate these schemas when teaching new material to make meaningful connections that build memory (Posey, 2019). A person's experience determines how neurons connect, organize, and reorganize information, creating numerous pathways for brain

development (Lyons, 2004). Schema Theory reflects the importance of each student's prior knowledge and culture as a building block for learning (Tracey & Morrow, 2024). Piaget argued that experiences constantly construct intelligence, making children active learners (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Listening, reading, writing, remembering, and understanding require connections made by millions of neurons.

Wolfe (2010) posits that students need context to see the purpose of isolated content. By teaching letters, sounds, and orthographic patterns within the text, teachers are linking both hemispheres of the brain and showing students how to use multiple sources of information for problem-solving (Gibson, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2021). Developing phonological skills and phonemic awareness is not linear for young children but is constantly being added to existing schemas and building new neurological pathways (Gibson, 2009; Lyons, 2024; Tracey & Morrow, 2017).

Scaffolding

Readers learn to make predictions based on their knowledge and experiences as they read. These approximations lessen the cognitive load in the working memory as children decode (Schwartz et al., 2021). When the working memory becomes overwhelmed, adding information, changing schemas, and creating new networks consumes brain power and leads to cognitive overload (Lyons, 2004). Effective teachers scaffold learning, so students ' interests are high and have the right balance of challenge and support during a reading or writing lesson (Gibson, 2009; Lyons, 2024; Merga, 2020; Schaeffer, 2021). Challenging students encourages them to work and

discover new ways to build their literacy processing, creating a self-extending system that works beyond classroom instruction (Lyons, 2024).

Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory (1978) proposes the need for teachers to gradually release responsibility, using modeling, discussions, practice, and constructive feedback within a carefully planned scaffold. Effective instruction reduces cognitive overload by differentiating lessons to meet individual needs. One example of scaffolding is the book introduction during a Reading Recovery Lesson (Clay, 2016; Morgan et al., 2020). A book introduction aims to scaffold the learning process for the reader, tailoring it to support weaknesses and provide opportunities for challenges. The book introduction, given before a student reads a new book on his instructional level, bridges the story's meaning with the decoding and structures within the text (Clay, 2011). The introduction is responsive to the student's existing knowledge, language, and decoding abilities. It builds interest, purpose, and engagement through successful problem-solving. The level of support decreases as the student becomes independent (Clay, 2016).

Sources of Information: Cueing

The cueing system is a psycholinguistic theory of reading introduced by Kenneth Goodman in 1967 (Mondesir & Griffin, 2020). This theory, from a constructivist lens, views learning as the integration of new knowledge with existing knowledge using graphophonic (letters and words), syntactic (arrangement of words), and semantic (word meaning) cues from the text (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). Students use multiple sources of information from the text to decode, check, and understand the message being read (Clay,

2011; Clay, 2015; Compton-Lilly et al., 2023; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). “Integration of all three sources of information takes coordination, mental effort, and strategic action” (Serravallo, 2015, p. 103). Duke and Cartwright (2021) add that graphophonological-semantic cognitive flexibility (GSF) is the brain's ability to instantly switch from visual information of letters and sounds to semantic details while reading. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) images also reveal connections between phonological and semantic processing areas during reading (Aboud et al., 2016).

In 2018, neuroscientists mapped reading networks that connect regions across the brain, finding overlaps between phonological and semantic systems in readers (Compton-Lilly et al., 2023). Neuroscientists recognize four information cueing systems in literacy processing that link parts of the reading brain. The first system is the phonetic system (language sounds) involving the temporal lobe and auditory cortex; next, the orthographic system (letter combinations) uses the occipital-temporal ventral cortex. The syntactic system (grammar and word arrangement) and semantic system (meaning of words and prior knowledge) involve regions of the frontal cortex (Compton-Lilly et al., 2023). Cueing systems are the sources of information readers consistently orchestrate to read and monitor their reading. Clay used the term *working systems* to describe these neural processing systems children assemble as they increasingly orchestrate multiple sources of information (Clay, 2016; Compton-Lilly et al., 2023).

The best way to make teaching decisions is to critically observe the student's reading. The teacher utilizes a record of oral language to document and analyze a reader's

strategic activity during reading (Bates & Malloy, 2024). This formative assessment provides evidence of the child's decoding ability, phonics knowledge, visual analysis, fluency, sight word knowledge, and basic comprehension (Bates & Malloy, 2024; Clay, 2016).

> When teachers take records of children reading texts, those teachers record children searching for particular information, finding it, associating it, linking it to prior experience, moving across visual, phonological, language, and semantic information, checking how it is going together, backing up and looking for new hypothesis, self-correcting, reading on, using peripheral vision and syntactic anticipation (Clay, 2011, p. 114).

Making sense of the letters on a page and extracting meaning from text is problem-solving. This strategic activity happens in less than one second as neural networks send electrical signals around the brain without conscious direction (Clay, 2011; Lyons, 2024; Rabun, 2017). Students build these problem-solving networks as they learn and apply reading skills. Rumelhart's (1977) Interactive Model posits that as children interact with text, they simultaneously engage higher-level cognitive skills, such as semantics, vocabulary knowledge, and syntax, to assist with lower-level processes as they read (Tracy & Morrow, 2024). When students transfer their learning independently within authentic texts, the result is evidence of student understanding (McTighe & Willis, 2019).

Executive Function

The high-level cognitive skills that regulate and direct our behaviors are Executive Function (E.F.) skills (Williams, 2022). The development of E.F. skills begins at birth and continually progresses as children mature. EF skills are essential for completing goal-directed tasks like reading and comprehension. Readers use E.F. skills to coordinate processes in the brain, requiring flexible attention to multiple activities, including word recognition and language comprehension, to make meaningful connections while self-monitoring and problem-solving (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Williams, 2022).

E.F.'s skills for self-regulation include planning, organization, using working memory, self-monitoring, task initiation, flexibility, reaction, emotion control, sustained attention, and goal-directed persistence (Williams, 2022). Self-monitoring and correcting while reading a text are evidence of a student's E.F. development and can be supported by the teacher by guiding the student's reflection on his thinking process (Clay, 2015). Through metacognition, students become aware of their reading abilities and extend their own learning, becoming more independent and successful (Clay, 2015). Jensen (2013) suggests that students from low socio-economic backgrounds may experience a delay in developing these critical processing skills, leading to low reading readiness scores. Cognitive engagement refers to the inner processing of information while reading. Students must learn to read and make connections to understand. Teachers create learning

experiences that build cognitive engagement while nurturing a reading environment for affective engagement.

Affective/-Emotional Engagement

Emotions play a crucial role in the learning process, acting as the gatekeeper to the brain (Lyons, 2024). Before students can fully engage in the learning process, they need to understand the value and purpose of their efforts and feel supported and confident in their abilities (Harrison et al., 2017). Teachers play a key role in creating an emotionally safe environment that fosters a growth mindset, builds self-efficacy, and nurtures positive relationships. This environment is essential for motivating students to work harder, take risks, and expand their cognitive skills (Jensen, 2013; Lyons, 2004; McTighe & Willis, 2019).

Emotional engagement in reading means making meaningful connections with the characters, story, and information in the book while reading. Students who enjoy reading will sustain attention for deeper comprehension (McGeown & Smith, 2024). Cognition and emotion are linked through experience because the emotional responses from the experience cause the brain to focus and take in current information or reject it (Lyons, 2024; Pinnell & Scharer, 2003; Rabun, 2017).

Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader Response Theory connects Schema Theory to reading instruction, stating that every reader's experience with text is unique based on the individual's schemata (Tracy & Morrow, 2024). The theory posits that readers react to text on a continuum of efferent responses to acquire meaning and collect facts, as well as aesthetic responses to emotionally connect, create mental images, and develop opinions about the writing (Rosenblatt,

1993). Rosenblatt (1993) states that engagement is a mix of responses that orchestrate meaning while consciously reacting to the text through the perspectives and experiences of the reader.

Our brains constantly take in and sort through information while deciding where to focus our attention (Wolfe, 2010). The brain cannot process all the information from our senses, so it must sort through incoming stimuli simultaneously to focus attention. Using meaning and emotion, the brain decides if incoming information will be attended to, stored, discarded, or forgotten.

When information is meaningless to the student, sustained attention and comprehension are impossible (Wolfe, 2010). “Emotions are essential to thinking and are an inseparable part of the learning process” (Rabun, 2017, p.56). To create situational interest, the teacher must plan for challenges, novelty, exploration, and activities that will be enjoyable and sustain attention (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). This approach makes reading more enjoyable for students and encourages sustained attention and deeper comprehension.

Creating purposeful, meaningful, and exciting reading experiences requires students to commit time and energy to reading. Students who see themselves as readers understand the connection between effort and accomplishment and are motivated to engage in reading challenges that arise (Harrison et al., 2017). Confidence in one’s own abilities and a growth mind-set are essential to creating communities of readers.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993) is a significant factor in reading motivation. Students with high self-efficacy are motivated by their self-confidence, visualize success, and commit to

accomplishing goals. Teachers must understand the urgency of building self-efficacy by fostering their students' independence, autonomy, responsibility, and confidence.

> Students with high self-efficacy look forward to reading in school. They identify themselves as readers and view reading as a way of learning, being entertained, and interacting socially with others' efficacy. Students with high self-efficacy believe in their ability to meet reading challenges. Metacognition can also help students understand the reasons for their motivation and engagement (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 219).

In contrast, people who lack agency over their environment have higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression and are unable to persist through challenges as they fall into self-doubt and worry (Bandura, 1993). Feedback from peers and teachers can affect the self-efficacy of students. Repeated academic failures can erode a student's confidence in his performance and lead to avoidance behaviors and aggression (Bandura, 1993).

The personal feelings of students about their reading ability are a significant factor that should not be overlooked, as they have a profound impact on reading performance. McKenna and Kear (1990) conducted a national survey of 18,185 first through fifth-grade elementary school students from 95 school districts in 38 states, revealing compelling insights. The study compared students' feelings about recreational reading to academic reading. Findings indicate that while first-grade students felt optimistic about reading at home and school, as students grew older, fewer students found reading enjoyable. The most robust results came from low-ability readers, whose negative attitudes about reading in school became stronger as they progressed in

grades (Marinak, 2013). Subsequent studies further confirmed this trend, showing that older elementary students lose confidence in their reading abilities and value reading less than their younger counterparts (Marinak, 2013). These findings have significant implications for student literacy and the need for interventions to address negative attitudes toward reading.

One possible explanation for the decline in self-efficacy is how students view reading. The self-efficacy theory of reading motivation states that children who believe they can complete a task successfully will work through the difficulties, putting more effort into complicated tasks (McGeown et al., 2017). However, students who believe they must gain a skill set to complete the task will avoid it altogether. Another explanation for the decline in self-efficacy in older students is the reading tasks students must complete. A student's lower-level word-reading ability closely correlates with their positive attitudes. In third grade and above, students viewed reading as their ability to understand longer texts (McGeown et al., 2017). Teachers must give authentic opportunities for students to have successful reading experiences to foster high self-efficacy.

Mindset

Over thirty years ago, Carol Dweck and associates studied why some students could persevere through challenges while others continued to fail (Mindset Works, 2017). She coined the terms *Growth Mindset* and *Fixed Mindset* to describe students' beliefs that lead to achievement. Students with a growth mindset believe intelligence and ability improve with effort and learning, but students with a fixed mindset believe their ability is set and cannot be changed (Dweck, 2007). Challenges become part of the learning process when someone has a growth mindset, creating resilience to setbacks and growth from their mistakes.

Dweck's research also studied how adults, teachers, and parents can affect students' mindsets (Dweck, 2007; Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017; Mindset Works, 2017). Praising children for being clever when they are successful can cause students to believe that their intelligence is set and will determine their performance on tests or assignments (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Focusing on the child's effort and work fosters the idea that they have control over their success. Giving process-focused feedback to students for mistakes builds resilience and coping skills. Criticism that expresses disappointment in the child instead of showing how to improve can also be detrimental (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Students who understand that mistakes are a part of the learning process learn resiliency and enjoy the challenge of becoming better readers.

One study of 195 fourth graders from low socioeconomic homes in six different public schools in the Southern United States examined how a growth mindset affected standardized reading scores (Petscher et al., 2017). Fifty-eight percent of the students were English language learners. Researchers found that most mindset studies found a positive relationship between an overall growth mindset and math concepts. However, studies could not prove the effects of reading-specific mindsets on reading outcomes. The Student Mindset Survey provided eight questions to the students, seven of which focused on their reading mindset and used Likert-scaled responses. Then, students took tests to assess comprehension, fluency, and decoding ability. Results showed that students with a higher fixed mindset had lower scores on reading comprehension, noting that low word reading scores also contributed to low comprehension (Petscher et al., 2017). Tests also indicated a strong relationship between reading comprehension scores, reading-specific growth, and overall Mindset. This means that students who believed

their efforts affected their reading ability tended to score higher on reading performance tests. However, the research could not determine if a growth mindset resulted in better reading scores or if the students' mindsets were caused by successes and failures during reading instruction (Petscher et al., 2017).

Families also influence how children view reading. A meta-analysis (McGeown et al., 2017) found that sociocultural factors significantly affect how children feel about reading. Children encouraged to read at home are more likely to read for pleasure outside of school and believe themselves to be good readers. The earlier parents participate in literacy activities with their children at home, the longer the positive effects last on academic achievement (McGeown et al., 2017). Reading at home gives value to reading, builds self-efficacy, and shows children that reading is integral to life.

Praise for progress, meeting goals, and building E.F. skills can raise a student's self-efficacy and skill set (Dweck, 2007; Jensen, 2013; Ng, 2018). Students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds or adverse situations experience a diminished sense of control. When students feel they have no control over their situation, they feel anger, hopelessness, or both (Jenson, 2013). It is essential to reading achievement for all students that teachers create classroom environments where motivation and engagement thrive; students have choices and a sense of control due to negative experiences and failures diminish self-efficacy and cause students to withdraw (Harrison et al., 2017; Jensen, 2013; Lyons, 2004).

Environment and Culture

Lewin wrote that teachers must understand the lives of their students because each person and his environment are interdependent (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Educators who tap into a student's funds of knowledge (language, culture, experiences, and background knowledge) utilize each student's unique perspective to plan exciting and relevant learning experiences (Esmail et al., 2017).

Turner and Bailey (2020) point out the importance of book choice. In an interview with the founders of The Brilliant Boys Book Club, researchers Turner and Bailey discovered how an inner-city school motivated students to read. Book club facilitators found that choosing culturally relevant books allows students to connect to the story. Books must value children's unique gifts, intellect, and prior knowledge (Turner & Bailey, 2020). Books with urban settings written by black authors about inner-city youth appealed to their students because the characters and stories reflected the students' lives. Field trips and author visits enhanced the experiential learning experience. The Brilliant Boys book club reported higher test scores in reading, better behavior in these students, and sustainable enjoyment of reading (Turner & Bailey, 2020). Culturally responsive educators support students by integrating their experiences into the social and academic framework of the school, adding a higher level of motivation and value to education (Esmail et al., 2017).

Based on research by Turner and Paris (1995) on motivation and engagement, Marinak (2013) wanted to incorporate the engagement strategies of choice, challenge, collaboration, and authentic reading materials into the district's mandated curriculum. The expectancy-value theory

provided the theoretical framework for this intervention (Marinak, 2013). Expectancy-value theory states that students decide if the value, utility, and cost are worth the effort to complete a task (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Marinak, 2013; Van der Sande et al., 2023). This year-long study on motivation included seventy-six fifth-grade average readers from two schools. Researchers used pre- and post-intervention data to determine if the intervention affected the students' reading engagement and motivation.

The students completed the *Motivation to Read Profile* (Marinak, 2013) utilizing a Likert-type scale survey and interview questions. After the yearlong intervention, results showed that engagement strategies of choice, challenge, collaboration, and authenticity can be successfully implemented in classroom instruction without jeopardizing the fidelity of the curriculum. Post-intervention student surveys and interviews revealed a higher appreciation for reading for academic assignments and personal enjoyment. Students reported enjoying the discussions about their reading and having a higher value of reading competency (Marinak, 2013).

The brain's organization reflects its experiences, so if a child's experiences are stressful and overwhelming, the neurochemical response influences the brain's structure (Pinnell & Scharer, 2003). Teachers must know the emotional, cognitive, and social effects on behavior while learning to read. Teachers effectively build a positive reading environment by choosing books and writing tasks that reflect students' interests and providing support for scaffold learning. Teachers foster self-regulation by teaching students to self-monitor their reading accuracy and understanding of the text (Pinnell & Scharer, 2003). Building a safe learning

environment with reasonable expectations for behavior, high expectations for effort, and specific praise for achievement will foster caring relationships and positive social interactions (Lyons, 2004; Sackstein, 2021).

School culture and classroom environments can positively or negatively affect learning. One study of 3,268 fifteen-year-old students from 121 schools across the United States found that emotional engagement led to higher behavioral engagement that resulted in better academic performance in reading (Lee, 2013). Slightly more than half of the study group were female; 60% were in tenth grade, while 40% were in ninth grade during this study. Survey analysis revealed that the sense of belonging (value and connection) within the school setting influenced students' effort and persistence on tasks. Lee (2013) discovered that students who felt like they were a part of the school made a more substantial effort and worked harder in academic activities valued by teachers and schools. When students feel they have no control over their learning environment, they disengage, making challenges in the learning process more cumbersome.

Emotional engagement depends on students' feelings about themselves and their reading content. The investment of students' efforts depends on the relevance, usefulness, and enjoyment they gain from reading (Marinak, 2013; Pinnell & Scharer, 2003). Adults play a significant role in constructing a student's self-efficacy, mindset, and emotional engagement related to all learning (Dweck, 2007). Emotional engagement and a robust literacy environment are essential to building intrinsic motivation.

Social Engagement

Teachers provide many opportunities for social engagement throughout the day. In elementary classrooms, social interactions build language and problem-solving skills and engage the students in meaningful learning. These skills are essential to being a successful reader (Clay, 2015; Serravallo, 2015). Social engagement in the classroom is integrated into the curriculum through scaffolding, discussions, group activities, open-ended tasks, and book clubs.

Theory

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) research stated that cognitive development is a socially collaborative process in which children learn cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through interactions with more knowledgeable others (MKO). Parents, teachers, coaches, and peers can take on the role of MKO. Their interactions increase the learner's engagement, the quantity of information and skills, and the development of executive skills (McLeod, 2024). All learning is social because the learner observes or interacts with the MKO to build knowledge and skills. The MKO modeled and encouraged self-regulation through actively scaffolding problem-solving during reading instruction (Pinnell & Scharer, 2003).

Vygotsky's (1978) theory about the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) explores how the teacher keeps the learner engaged by challenging the student while offering enough support for success. When teaching is student-focused, teachers plan opportunities for students to learn by scaffolding knowledge with opportunities to build independence. Scaffolding helps the learner become a risk-taker and learn from mistakes (McLeod, 2024; Pinnell & Scharer, 2003). A child reaches a point when he realizes he can try hard or quit trying (Dweck, 2007). Through

scaffolding, the teacher balances interest and challenge with the proper support needed for the child.

Teachers scaffold reading instruction by choosing books that interest a student and are within the student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). When a teacher chooses a book within the ZPD, it allows the student to be successful while introducing the new skills they will learn through reading the text. The teacher supports the scaffold during the reading by praising correct responses, coaching through partially correct attempts, and teaching ways to correct mistakes (Clay & Cazden, 2023). Affirming the child's efforts and guiding the acquisition of new schemas creates a growth mindset and high self-efficacy through the social interactions of the teacher and student (Clay & Cazden, 2023; Rabun, 2017; Pinnell & Scharer, 2003).

Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) includes interpersonal engagement, meaning that reflecting on your learning process and metacognition increases automaticity for future work (Rabun, 2017). Participating in book discussions allows students to connect to the book, predict outcomes, and make judgments. As students learn to analyze and reflect on their reading, deeper comprehension becomes more accessible for the child. Guiding students through a book discussion while modeling active listening to other perspectives from peers scaffolds the learning for each student at their level (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

Researchers have proven theories about the importance of interest, attention, engagement, and reflection in student learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Rabun, 2017; Hill, 2012; Turner & Bailey, 2020). Social interactions enhance essential aspects of reading. A "Constructivist learner-

centered model focuses on learning spaces where learners have ownership and control over the learning process, learning with and from each other" (Kolb & Kolb, 2017, p. 240). Effective teachers purposefully plan activities that are challenging and relevant to the learner in a positive social environment. Social interactions develop language skills and scaffold instruction with various levels of learners (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; McLeod, 2024).

Practice

Social interactions can build self-efficacy and a growth mindset or cause stress and anxiety for the student (Bandura, 1993; Dweck, 2006). The brain's organization reflects its experiences, so if a child's experiences are stressful and overwhelming, those neurochemical responses influence the brain's structure (Lyons, 2004; Pinnell & Scharer, 2003). Teachers must be conscious of the social environment's emotional, cognitive, and social effects as each student learns to read. Jensen (2021) says to avoid making excuses for students based on personalities, genetics, or home situations. Instead, praise them for their effort, resilience, strategies, or learning process (Jensen, 2021). Dweck explains that achievements require effort, focus, multiple methods, and "allies in learning" (Dweck, 2006, p. 67).

The Expectancy Value theory applies to social interactions in reading by raising the value and interest in reading (Van der Sande et al., 2023). Through book recommendations and discussions, adults and peers motivate students to read more, improving reading skills and enjoyment (McGeown et al., 2017; Merga, 2020). A quantitative study of 30 librarians in Australia surveyed how librarians promote value and interest in reading within their schools. Merga (2020) interviewed and surveyed librarians about their literacy roles throughout

elementary schools in different demographics with diverse groups of students by looking for patterns in their responses. Most librarians responded that talking about books to individual students encourages reading for pleasure (Merga, 2020). By starting conversations with shy students about books they are reading, students who are uncomfortable talking with peers can share their thoughts and feelings while preserving their autonomy. Similar answers included the importance of book discussions with individuals or small groups to help the librarian find books that match student interests and skill levels. This process also assists the librarian in narrowing book choices for students who need more guidance in selecting the right books (Merga, 2020).

Librarians can highlight parts of a book that students will find engaging, model positive attitudes toward reading, and find books with similar themes for students when they visit (Merga, 2020). Book discussions guide the purchase of new books by making the librarian aware of cultural diversity, evolving trends, and the background knowledge of the readers in her school. Finally, student-led discussions help students bond and learn from their peers through informal discussions that cultivate ideas and open minds through diverse types of literature (Merga, 2020).

Changing whole-group book instruction into small-group book discussions changed the level of engagement in one fourth-grade classroom. Through self-study, teacher Rosa Miller documented her shift in teaching (Miller, 2015). Using questionnaires, self-reflection, and personal observations, she documented the increased motivation and deeper comprehension of the books her students read. She grouped her students into groups based on reading level and chose books within the groups' Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), which allowed students to learn socially while the teacher provided appropriate support (Kolb & Kolb, 2017;

Rabun, 2017; Miller, 2015). Assigning graphic organizers to accompany reading assignments helped students focus on critical details, reflect, and guide group discussions.

She discovered increased interest and engagement from her students while reading books by authors representing the class demographic: “Students are more motivated to read when they have access to texts that reflect their own cultural identities and experiences” (Miller, 2015, p. 103). Teachers who create a safe environment for social interaction choose books relevant to the reader and plan for book analysis and reflection to increase motivation, social engagement, and comprehension.

Teachers who scaffold reading comprehension at the beginning of reading instruction to support a child’s understanding of the material can allow a reader to build word decoding skills in authentic texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014). Students need emotional and social connections to the books they are reading to increase cognitive and behavioral engagement. The daily tasks that teachers plan for their students are the best indicator of student engagement (Turner & Paris, 1995).

Skills-based programs concentrate on closed tasks, such as completing worksheets, and emphasize remembering the correct answer. In contrast, student-directed activities allow students to explore interests, collaboratively problem-solve, and participate in more cognitively complex activities (Turner & Paris, 1995). Turner and Paris (1995) proposed an alternative approach to reading instruction. They posited that “open-ended tasks are more likely to provide appropriate challenges, genuine choices, some student control over learning, opportunities to collaborate with others and construct meaning through reading and writing” (Turner & Paris, 1995, p. 671).

Open-ended tasks included class discussions during read-alouds, book choice, and integrating reading and writing through the curriculum through authentic experiences such as journal writing.

Turner and Paris (1995) closely observed two types of instruction: skills-based classrooms that followed the basal reading program and classrooms that integrated authentic text and student-directed activities into the reading program. Researchers spent five days in each classroom, taking notes about the teacher and student interactions, the lesson, and the tasks children completed. After completing observations, researchers interviewed 86 students to determine their value and understanding of literacy (Turner & Paris, 1995). The researchers compared students' responses in both groups. They found that students were more engaged, possessing a strong sense of agency in their reading and writing abilities in classrooms that utilized open-ended tasks.

Using open-ended activities allowed students to actively participate in various reading and writing tasks. Simultaneously, the skills-based approach sequenced the basal stories and incorporated skills-based worksheets, which lowered autonomy, independence, and differentiation (Turner & Paris, 1995). The research concluded that open-ended tasks motivated students with highly engaging activities that included challenge, choice, control, collaboration, and construction of ideas through reading and writing. Finally, open activities fostered feelings of competence and self-efficacy (Turner & Paris, 1995). Conducted before the term balanced literacy became popular, the study illustrates the changes from a bottom-up approach to literacy

to the top-down approach that has dominated early literacy for the past three decades (Mondesir & Griffin, 2020).

Balanced Literacy

Balanced literacy is a term used to describe a literacy approach that combines phonics-based instruction with a whole language classroom environment. It is a top-down, student-centered approach that integrates skills instruction within reading and writing activities, typically used in kindergarten through second-grade classrooms (Fisher et al., 2023; Lyons, 1998; Mondesir & Griffin, 2020; Pressley, 2002; Warton-McDonald, 1997). Theories and models within balanced literacy fall under multiple theoretical lenses rooted in psychology, sociology, anthropology, physiology, education, and neuroscience (Tracey & Morrow, 2024).

In the mid-1990s, this approach gained popularity as teachers used authentic texts to teach multiple reading skills through modeling, mini-lessons, and class discussions (Fisher et al., 2023). Teachers embedded phonics, grammar, and writing skills into thematic units that taught vocabulary and comprehension. In 1996, the State Education Commissioner of California called for schools to adopt a balanced literacy approach to spend equal time on skills and reading trade books to improve test scores. When California and Texas adopted balanced literacy policies, it caused publishing companies to create curricula to meet new initiatives, thus influencing textbook adoptions across the country (Fisher et al., 2023).

As balanced literacy became popular, its implementation within the classroom took on a cultural perspective, acknowledging the funds of knowledge unique to each child (Mondesir & Griffin, 2020). Teachers also planned to include reading and writing in content areas and support from home. Over the past twenty years, the term balanced literacy has taken on a broader definition due to the various theories and programs evolving to meet students' needs and the demands of high-stakes testing (Fisher et al., 2023).

Literacy leaders Lucy Calkins, Maury Clay, Irene Fountas, and Gay Sue Pinnell, who have been at the forefront of literacy instruction for the past two decades, have not been immune to criticism (Hanford, 2020). Their popular curricula and practices for teaching reading have been the subject of debate. The New Yorker, for instance, labeled balanced literacy as a rebranding of whole-language and *vibes*-based reading instruction (Winters, 2021). This controversy has sparked discussions among educators and researchers. Supporters of a balanced approach argue that teaching skills through texts that are captivating and meaningful to the reader is more effective than using meaningless, decodable stories. This approach contrasts with the bottom-up approaches to reading, which take a skills-first perspective, proposing that decoding skills are taught first and in isolation (Fisher et al., 2023; Tracey & Morrow, 2024).

Balanced literacy is not a scripted sequence of lessons and practice sheets. It is a student-centered approach that requires teachers to integrate multiple sources of information through engaging tasks and demands extensive and responsive planning

(Pinnell & Scharer, 2003). Teachers need expertise in reading skills, theory, and classroom management while keeping up-to-date assessments on each student to run a balanced literacy classroom effectively. This student-centered approach allows teachers to make educational decisions based on the students' needs. Unfortunately, in the face of high-stakes testing, teacher accountability, and demands for program fidelity, districts are mandating a skills-based approach. The focus on decoding and comprehension of skills-based assessments ignores the differences in students' language, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021).

Whole Language

Balanced literacy is a middle ground between skills-based, prescribed reading programs and Whole Language practices. In the early 1990s, researchers studied highly effective reading teachers to understand how they utilized the reading curriculum. They discovered that integrating reading skills into authentic reading and writing activities produced the best reading outcomes, not a particular program (Fisher et al., 2023; Pressley et al., 2017; Wharton-McDonald & Metsala, 1997). Student-centered practices and literacy-rich environments embrace the Emergent Literacy Theory, which stresses the importance of the home environment in literacy development (Tracy & Morrow, 2024). At that time, educational theories about immersing students in literacy contradicted the skills-based basal reading programs of the 1980s.

According to Whole Language Theory, teaching oral language, reading, and writing through authentic literature is beneficial (Tracey & Morrow, 2024). This is the

opposite end of the theoretical system of explicit phonics instruction. Frameworks of Whole Language include Goodman's Psycholinguistic Theory, a psycholinguistic theory of language cueing systems that posit reading integrates decoding, semantics, and comprehension (Mondesir & Griffin, 2020). Clay (2015) developed a similar system, theorizing that readers use three sources of information from the text: meaning, structure, and visual, and integrate these sources strategically during the literacy process.

In Whole Language classrooms, instruction and assessments reflect student growth and interests. Assessments are varied, student-produced, progress-based, and ongoing. Instead of following one reading program's scope and sequence, teachers plan activities based on literature and opportunities for authentic reading and writing (Tracey & Morrow, 2024).

Creating a Balance

The National Reading Research Center conducted a year-long study of 123 classroom teachers from kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and special education who were recommended as highly effective in early literacy practices (Wharton-McDonald & Metsala, 1997). Through observations and surveys during the 1994-95 school year, researchers found similarities in all effective classrooms: multiple opportunities to read and write within authentic text and extensive, explicit teaching in various groupings of students. One teacher described her instruction as so highly integrated that to complete any assignment, a student must read something first (Wharton-McDonald & Metsala, 1997). This environment was vastly different from

typical classrooms of that time. Less effective teachers mainly utilized direct instruction approaches, such as copying from the board and worksheets, with scant time for reading during literacy instruction. Other differences noted for highly effective classrooms were learner scaffolding, self-regulation, high expectations for all students, diverse reading materials, and awareness of purpose (Wharton-McDonald & Metsala, 1997).

Michael Pressley's 1998 book, *Reading Instruction That Works: The Case Study for Balanced Teaching*, is another foundational piece in the beginnings of Balanced Literacy instruction (Pressley et al., 2002). After examining effective and ineffective literacy practices, he found that students in classrooms with skills- instruction embedded within authentic texts became successful readers. One study concluded that 150 kindergarten through second-grade teachers were nominated as highly effective literacy teachers, and they taught reading skills in the context of authentic reading and writing activities. "They were empathetic in stating that whole language and skills instruction are not contradictory but, rather, complementary approaches in their instruction of struggling, beginning readers" (Pressley et al., 2002, p. 3). The studies also found that scaffolding, student independence, self-regulation, diverse reading materials, and high expectations were commonalities in effective reading classrooms.

Observing classrooms of teachers trained in Reading Recovery, a one-on-one tutoring program developed by Marie Clay (Pressley et al., 2002), he found outstanding early literacy teachers. During his two-year study of ten exemplary classrooms, Reading Recovery trained classroom teachers consistently transferred Reading Recovery strategies

to literacy instruction. Using authentic texts, these teachers implemented a complex balance of direct instruction and scaffolding in multiple student groupings. Through scaffolding instruction, self-regulation and independence develop through reading and writing activities (Pressley et al., 2002).

Reading Recovery had already proven to be a successful program in the United States and New Zealand for over ten years when balanced literacy was mandated in California (Lyons, 1998). By the end of the 1997 school year, Reading Recovery completed its thirteenth year in the United States. A total of 436,249 first graders participated in the Reading Recovery intervention between 1984 and 1997 in the United States, with 81% of students completing first grade on average reading levels (Lyons, 1998).

Clay's Literacy Processing Theory (2015) is similar to Goodman's psycholinguistic theory (1967) in that students use multiple sources of information to decode and comprehend text (Clay, 2016; Mondesir & Griffin, 2020). She described the working systems children use to read, monitor, and self-correct. Readers are shifting quickly between letters, sounds, words, structures, and meanings within the text, cross-checking these sources of information and problem-solving at text difficulty (Clay, 2011). For teachers to be responsive to the child's needs and scaffold their instruction, teachers must "know what the student can do, understand what the student needs to learn next, and provide appropriate instruction for optimal student learning" (Zarling, 2021, p. 43). Recording oral reading assessments (running records)

allows the teacher to assess which processing systems the child used to read effectively, monitor the reading, and self-correct. The teacher analyzes the miscues and self-corrections and codes them for meaning (semantics), structure (syntax), and visual (graphic/phonetic), represented by MSV (Clay, 2016; Compton- Lilly, 2023). After analyzing the running record, the teacher scaffolds the specific instruction for the student.

Irene Fountas and Gay Sue Pinnell were Reading Recovery teachers in the early 1990s who also worked with teachers and literacy coaches on professional development and small group interventions (Fountas & Pinnell, n.d.). Through their work with early reading intervention, they developed the *F&P Text Level Gradient*™ to help teachers choose books for their students. Their first book, *Guided Reading*, explained what the reader needs to know and be able to do to read at each level. This gradient explains the components of books at each level, including print features, text complexity, grammar, vocabulary, and story development (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). To move students along this gradient, teachers use oral reading assessments (running records) coded with MSV to guide the small group lessons around the needs of the students. Their belief that expert teachers guide student achievement influenced their work to write professional teaching guides (Fountas & Pinnell, n.d.). As balanced literacy programs became popular, they became characterized by interactive read-alouds, guided reading groups, shared reading and writing, and independent reading and writing (Fisher et al., 2023).

The Current Balance

The term *balanced literacy* has become ubiquitous, with various components included and excluded, depending on who defines it (Fisher et al., 2023). Using quantitative methods, researchers surveyed 25 veteran, highly qualified elementary teachers across California. Researchers wanted to answer the questions, "What does balanced literacy mean to you?" and "What types of instructional materials do you use in your literacy program?" (Fisher et al., 2023, p. 192). Through follow-up interviews, teachers gave specific examples from their schools.

The teachers agreed on five overarching instructional methods that defined balanced literacy (Fisher et al., 2023). All 25 teachers surveyed said that balanced instruction included multiple groupings of students. The whole group instruction included modeling, discussions, read-alouds, and shared reading and writing. During small group instruction, the teacher led guided reading groups while students worked collaboratively in centers or independently, reading and writing. All teachers noted the importance of assessments and data when forming groups (Fisher et al., 2023)

Next, the majority agreed that direct instruction and dialogic approaches should be balanced. “Direct instruction is teaching. It’s a fast way to address some of the things students need to learn. However, they also need to put what they've learned into practice. There has to be a balance there” (Fischer et al., 2023, p.192). Teachers responded that balancing informational text with narrative text was essential, noting that access to quality text has improved over the years.

The final two methods had fewer than half of the participants in agreement. Those methods balanced phonics, comprehension, reading, and writing (Fischer et al., 2023). Six teachers commented that writing was valued less than reading; colleagues devoted time to writing conventions, responding to prompts, and limited direct instruction for sentence structure, text types, and coherence. The discussions about phonics instruction revealed that teachers balanced systematic phonics instruction with vocabulary and comprehension strategies. A kindergarten teacher described her phonics instruction as including letter and sound instruction with decodable books, and a fourth-grade teacher said she spent time teaching multisyllabic words, spelling patterns, affixes, and homophones that were confusing for students (Fisher et al., 2023). This study shows that balanced literacy includes many top-down teaching methods that teach skills and applications with direct instruction and social engagement. However, little was noted about teaching foundational skills like phonemic awareness and decoding skills.

The Science of Reading

The Science of Reading (SOR) is a collection of scientific research on how people learn to read (Goodwin & Jiménez, 2020; Parsons & Erickson, 2024). This bottom-up approach is a cognitive–processing view of reading based on Gough's Simple View of Reading model (Gough, 1996; Tracey & Morrow, 2024). SOR was introduced in 2018 by media specialist Emily Hanford's podcast, *Hard Words.* Later, Hanford ignited a national movement in 2020 with the podcast *Sold a Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong,* which focused on the necessity of reading programs that focus heavily on

phonemic awareness (PA) decoding and phonics instruction (Hanford, 2018, 2020; Tracey & Morrow, 2024).

Like balanced literacy and whole language, this approach does not have a specific definition and encompasses different teaching practices and theories. It is important to note that early research on PA and phonics instruction, referred to by SOR advocates, occurred before balanced literacy curriculums became popular. The early PA and decoding research aimed to disprove the whole language theories that learning to read occurs naturally in a literacy-rich environment like listening and speaking (Ehri et al., 2001; Gough, 1996; Mondesir & Griffin, 2020; Tracey & Morrow, 2024). Researchers such as Gough and Ehri proved that reading skills must be directly taught. SOR advocates propose that current reading research on phonics, PA, and comprehension should focus on scientifically proven instructional applications and theory (Shanahan, 2020).

Early Research

Gough's Simple View of Reading (SVR) model posits that "reading (R) equals the product of decoding (D) and comprehension (C) or R = D x C" (Gough, 1996). He writes,

> Evidence suggests that successful readers require explicit awareness of the phonological structure of spoken words, which should be taught in kindergarten before formal reading instruction. Beyond this point, reading success depends on

a modicum of phonics instruction together with extensive practice with reading itself" (Gough, 1996, p. 4).

In his first study with 32 preschoolers, he used flashcards to teach sight words to children. He found that the students randomly attended to various attributes, word size, or a fingerprint on the card, to recognize the words, but they could not identify the words in other contexts. He demonstrated that teaching early reading skills directly is crucial, as opposed to teaching speaking (Gough, 1996). In another 1986 study to disprove the claims of the whole language movement, Gough found that students needed more than isolated phonics skills to read. After a study teaching 150 first graders phonics rules (the cipher), only 53% could apply the rule to new pseudowords. Gough (1996) wrote, "I doubt that whether phonics is the panacea many think it is, for it fails too often to install the cipher. In fact, there is reason to believe that the cipher cannot be installed, for there is no direct way of doing so" (Gough, 1996, p. 4). He recommends teaching PA with letters that connect to the sounds. Bottom-up models, like the SVR (Gough,1996), propose that mastering foundational skills is essential to higher-level comprehension (Mondesir & Griffin, 2020).

The National Reading Panel in 2000 found evidence that reading instruction should include these five components: PA, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Parsons & Erickson, 2024). In a meta-analysis of 52 quantitative studies, researchers found positive results for instruction in phonemic awareness and manipulating sounds in words (Ehri et al., 2001). The most effective instruction taught

sounds and letters together instead of teaching sounds in isolation first. Small-group instruction focused on learning one or two letter-sound combinations together showed the best results (Ehri et al., 2001).

Through analyzing the studies on PA, the National Reading Panel listed six tasks, from simple to complex, that should be taught in order, along with how to apply each skill. The 2001 panel cautioned, “There is a danger that PA will be regarded as a magic bullet and will be taught at nauseam without any connection to reading and writing and will replace other important kinds of reading instruction and activities” (Ehri et al., 2001, p. 279). This linear approach theorizes that students need to learn individual foundational skills, from letters systematically and sounds to orthographic patterns and more complex morphological patterns (Tracy & Morrow, 2024).

Current Research

Systematic phonics instruction is a key component of the SOR approach (Ehri, 2020; International Literacy Association, 2019) and consists of a sequence of isolated skills, drills, or words taught in isolation from meaning (Ehri, 2020). The International Literacy Association (2019) stated that effective phonics instruction builds on known information with frequent review and repetition. Through discussion and analogies, teachers build awareness of how words work, increasing difficulty for the student (International Literacy Association, 2019).

Teaching students to decode by connecting spelling patterns, sounds, and word meaning enables students to read words by sight with review and repetition (Ehri, 2020).

Teaching students to decode by connecting spelling patterns, sounds, and word meaning enables learners to read words by sight with review and repetition (Ehri, 2020). Decodable readers (accountable texts) are recommended at the beginning of reading instruction to control the phonics skills required to read the text, which builds foundational skills faster than leveled texts (International Literacy Association, 2019).

The actual SOR research is extraordinarily complex, with much relevant research beyond phonics instruction, including phonological awareness, oral reading fluency, complex texts, writing, motivation, engagement, and comprehension strategies. It constantly changes as new research emerges (Shanahan, 2020; Tracey & Morrow, 2024).

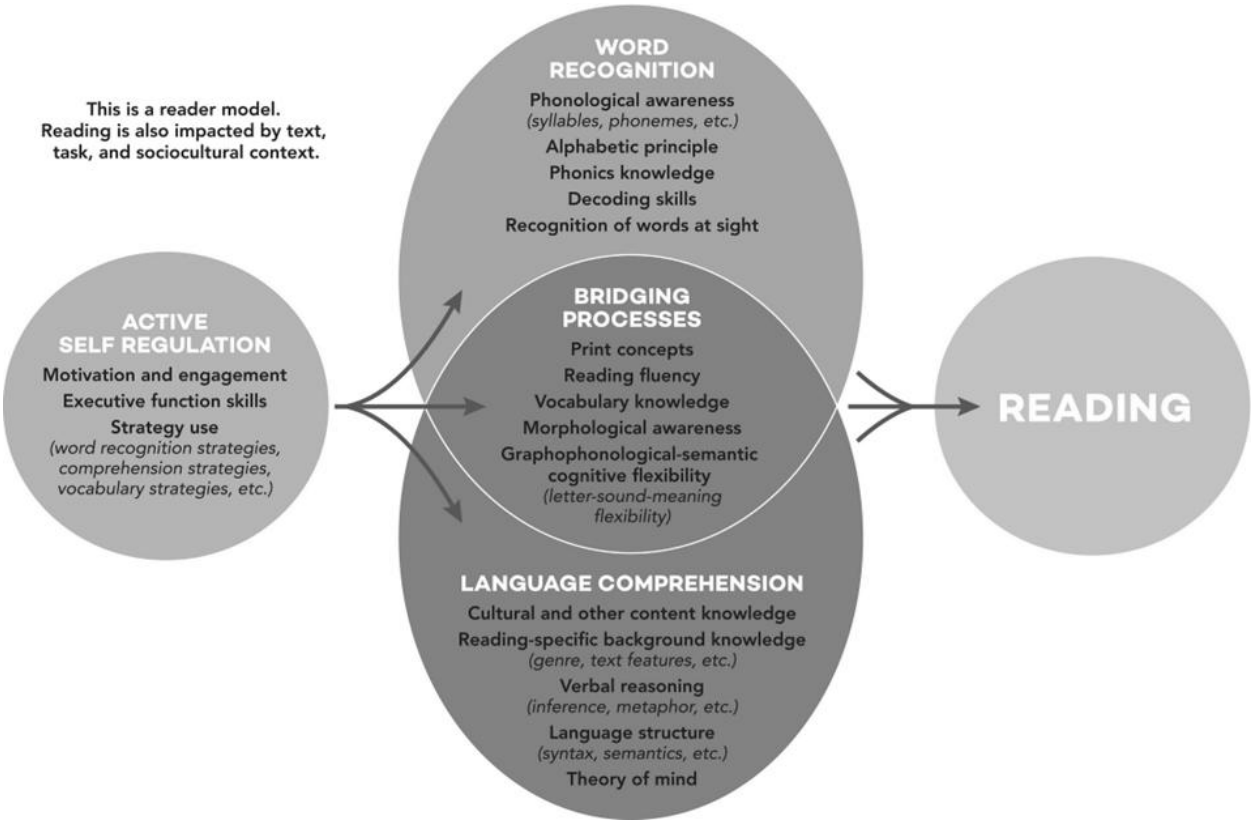
Duke and Cartwright (2021) broadened SVR components from decoding (D) and comprehension (C) to word recognition (WR) and language comprehension (LC) to encompass more foundational skills associated with decoding and comprehension. The SOR movement champions structured literacy programs built on the SVR theoretical framework, a bottom-up, linear framework (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Tracy & Morrow, 2024). Conservations about the implementation of SOR "often focus heavily on the importance of systematic, explicit phonics instruction" (Lindo, 2024, p. 26). This approach means that lower-level skills (phonics, phonemic awareness, and decoding) must be mastered before higher-level comprehension can occur, thus neglecting the multidimensional aspects of reading (Compton-Lilly et al., 2020; Lindo, 2024; Mondesir & Griffin, 2020; Tracey & Morrow, 2024). Duke and Cartwright (2021) created the Active View of Reading Model (AVR), which adds two sections to Gough's 1986 model

of the Simple View of Reading (SVR) (Gough, 1996). The SVR states that reading results from language comprehension and decoding, which operate independently (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Tracey & Morrow, 2017). Gough's (1996) model of reading is simplistic and does not fully represent the complex nature of the reading process (Compton-Lilly et al., 2020; Lindo, 2024). The added components of the AVR provide a more transparent, more comprehensive picture of the cognitive engagement needed to read (Duke & Cartwright, 2021).

The AVR uses the two components of the SVR (Word Recognition and Language Comprehension) and adds two more components (Active Self-Regulation and Bridging Processes). By adding the two new components, the AVR now includes these processes along with the SVR: motivation, engagement, executive function, strategy use, print concepts, vocabulary knowledge, GFS flexibility, understanding word forms, different types of writing, personal knowledge, verbal reasoning, sentence structure, meaning of words, and understanding others' thoughts (Burns et al., 2023). Figure 2 illustrates the components of the AVR.

Figure 2

The Active View of Reading



Note: Image copied from: Reading Research Quarterly, Volume: 56, Issue: S1, Pages: S25-S44, First published: 07 May 2021, DOI: (10.1002/rrq.411)

Teachers must be experts in early literacy instruction to respond to each student's needs effectively. Hanford's (2020) description of SOR, which focuses on decoding and phonics, has guided the misconception that reading is simply learning the code (Tracey & Morrow, 2024). The body of research in the SOR needs to be broader and account for the different environmental influences, and each student's funds of knowledge affect how a child learns to read (Goodwin & Jiménez, 2020; Lindo, 2024). Educators who know the strategies associated with bottom-up and top-down approaches will improve how we help our students learn to read (Mondesir & Griffin, 2020).

Summary

Children need purpose and interest to motivate learning. Trust must be established before students can take risks, ask questions, and share ideas. Responses to students must be genuine and specific (Couch & Cambourne, 2022). Across the nation, educators shift to skills-focused, structured approaches as explicit, skills-based approaches dominate the SOR curricula. Teachers are essential in successfully implementing the curriculum, and their pedagogy influences their approach to reading instruction, making it critical to understand the impact of motivation and engagement in student literacy. This research study shows that participants in small reading groups, incorporating engagement strategies into reading instruction, report higher reading engagement across the four subcategories of behavioral, social, cognitive, and affective engagement.

CHAPTER 3. METHOD AND PROCEDURE

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this quasi-experimental, action research study, focusing on third-grade engagement during small-group reading instruction. This chapter includes the following sections: research question and hypothesis, a description of the study's design, the setting and participants, and the procedures followed when conducting the study. These procedures include ethical considerations, research design, participant selection, group assignments, recruitment, instrumentation, schedules, instruction, and fidelity. This study is unique in its focus on integrating engagement strategies into small reading groups to complement classroom reading instruction in a rural, low-socioeconomic, elementary school in the southeastern United States.

Research Question & Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a small-group reading intervention that implemented reading engagement strategies using a balanced literacy approach on third-grade students' behavioral, affective, cognitive, and social engagement with reading. The following research question guided the study: What are the effects of a six-week, small-group intervention that incorporates engagement strategies on third graders' reading engagement in the following areas: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social?

It was hypothesized that participants in treatment groups who participated in a six-week reading intervention incorporating specific engagement strategies would rate their reading engagement higher than those in the control groups who participated in a similar six-week intervention without the engagement strategies. Engagement Theory posits that motivated

students who are actively engaged with text and reading become more resilient and persistent readers (Tracy & Morrow, 2024). This research hypothesizes that the deliberate application of engagement practices across four subcategories (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social) within reading instruction can enhance intrinsic motivation. Specifically, it was anticipated that participants in the treatment groups would report higher levels of engagement in these four domains compared to their peers in the control groups. This practical evaluation contributes to existing literature by exploring the potential benefits of integrating engagement strategies into small-group reading instruction.

Research Design

This study utilized quantitative methodology, specifically a quasi-experimental design (McKinley et al., 2016). The researcher analyzed the quantitative data from 14 third-grade participants to determine how engagement strategies used in the intervention affected students' engagement during small-group reading instruction.

Quasi-experimental designs are standard in education due to constraints like time and limited random sampling (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). In this study, the teacher-researcher addressed the issue of planning for engagement and implementing specific strategies in small-group reading instruction. Due to the researcher's inability to randomly select participants, the researcher used a convenience sampling of available participants within one school.

The postpositivist worldview uses the scientific method but acknowledges that outcomes are not absolute when studying human behavior and attitudes (Creswell, 2009). These designs

suit quantitative methods to show numerical relationships between variables (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Researchers utilize action research to find practical solutions within specific contexts, recognizing potential biases from students and researchers (Creswell, 2009)

In this study, the researcher measured changes in the reading engagement of 14 third-grade participants, utilizing a nonequivalent control group, pretest-posttest design (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). The nonequivalent pretest-posttest design measured the same dependent variable (reading engagement) before and after the intervention for the control and treatment groups. The *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) provided Likert-type rating scale responses for the pretest and posttest. The pretest served as a baseline, allowing the researcher to compare all four groups (Control Groups A and C, Treatment Groups B and D) before and after the small group meetings. The baseline controlled the experimental mortality threat to validity because students who did not participate in all 12 meetings also took the post-test for comparison (Mertens & Wilson, 2019). See Table 2 for an overview of the study's design.

Table 2

Quasi-Experimental Design: Nonequivalent Control Group Pretest – Posttest

Table 3.1ontrol Groups:	Measurement: Dependent Variable	Quasi-Independent Variable	Measurement: Dependent Variable
Group A: 7:30 Monday/ Wednesday Group C: 2:40 Monday/ Wednesday	Measure Engagement using a Reading Engagement Scale. (Pre-intervention)	Students participate in Small-Group Intervention (LLI) Morning and Afternoon	Measure Engagement using a Reading Engagement Scale (Post-Intervention) Morning and Afternoon
Treatment Groups:	Measurement: Dependent Variable	Quasi-Independent Variable	Measurement: Dependent Variable
Group B: 7:30 Tuesday / Thursday Group D: 2:45 Tuesday & Thursday	Measure Engagement using a Reading Engagement Scale. (Pre-intervention)	Students participate in Intervention (LLI) Group using engagement strategies Morning and Afternoon	Measure Engagement using a Reading Engagement Scale (Post-Intervention) Morning and Afternoon

Note: All groups participated in the Balanced Literacy, Fountas and Pinnell LLI program. Differentiation for Treatment Groups B and D included free-choice reading, free journal writing, specific individual feedback, books to take home, and reading goals.

Setting

This study took place in a small elementary school in a farming community that US News (2024) calls distant rural. Rural is defined as non-metro counties with open countryside and places with less than 5,000 people and 2,000 housing units (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2024). The local Recreational Center, the old high school built in 1920, offers volleyball, soccer, and baseball to students in the area. It is part of a small district that graduated 644 seniors from

three high schools in 2022 (name removed for confidentiality, 2023). The unique characteristics of this location, such as its rural setting, socio-economic status, and small size of the school, provided a rich context for this study.

County

This county has a population of 81,220, with 18.8% of the population being below 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). The median income in this county is $55,000, below the state's median income of $64,115. The county's population is 83.7% Caucasian, 6.6% African American, and 5.8% Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). The county's poverty rate of 20.3% is above the state average of 14%. Due to the prevalent poverty rate within the school system, the district qualifies for the Community Eligibility Provision, which allows all students to receive free breakfast and lunch daily (School District, 2023). This rural county in the southeastern United States contains one school district.

District

School District A is the largest employer in the county, with 1538 employees; 942 are certified, and 67% hold advanced degrees (School District, 2023). This district covers 674 miles with ten elementary schools that feed into three middle schools, three high schools, one alternative academy, one adult education school, and one career and technology center. Eighty-four buses travel 7,200 miles each year to provide transportation for students. The 19 schools in the district enroll 10,232 students, with 68% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The district's graduation rate is 81.8%, with 57.4% of graduating seniors receiving lottery-funded scholarships.

School District A requires all pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers to take Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training for two years as part of the state initiative to boost reading scores. The school district switched from a balanced literacy curriculum to a skills-based Science of Reading curriculum to meet new state requirements for the 2024-2025 school year (name removed for confidentiality, General Assembly, 2024). Table 3 provides ethnicity information for the 2022-2023 school year.

Table 3

Student Ethnicity of School District A

Ethnicity	Student *(N= 10,232)*	%
African American	822	8
American Indian	48	0.4
Asian	52	0.5
Caucasian	8,315	81
Hispanic	648	6
Two of More	316	3
Students Receiving ESOL Services	610	6

Note: Taken from School District A website

School

Elementary School F, one of ten elementary schools in School District A, houses 591 pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade students. The student population is 88.5% Caucasian, 3.8% Multiracial, 3.7% Hispanic, and 2.5% African American students. Economically disadvantaged students comprise 71% of the school population (U.S. News & World Report, 2024). Students and families participate in special events throughout the year, such as Literacy Night, Ag and Arts Night, STEAM Night, family breakfasts, chorus concerts, awards days, and celebrations. In the 2023-2024 school year, 38 teachers, 73% with advanced degrees, taught in the school, with an average classroom size of 20 children (School Report Cards, 2023). According to the state's Report Card survey, 100% of responding teachers and students in this school felt safe attending school and were satisfied with the social and physical environments (School Report Cards, 2024).

Elementary School F has five full-day kindergarten classes. According to the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) results, 28.2% of the 96 kindergartners tested in 2023 demonstrated appropriate readiness skills at the beginning of kindergarten. The lowest KRA scores were in Language, Literacy, and Social Foundations (School Report Cards, 2023). According to end-of-the-year assessments, at the end of 2023, 35.5% of the 93 first graders tested on track for second-grade English Language Arts (ELA). However, only 33.7% of the 86 second graders tested ready for third-grade ELA. Overall, 57.9% of the 279 third, fourth, and fifth graders at Elementary School F scored "met" or "exceeded" on the ELA portion of the state assessment test in 2024 (School Report Cards, 2024). This percentage is slightly higher than the

district average of 52.25% and the state average of 54.1%. Table 4 summarizes Elementary School F's 2023-2024 ELA and Kindergarten Readiness data.

Table 4

Report Card Testing Data for ELA and Kindergarten Readiness 2023-2024

Grade Level	%	n
KRA: Overall Readiness	28.2%	96
First Graders on Track in ELA	35.5%	93
Second Graders on track in ELA	33.7%	86
Third Graders Met or Exceed	63.5%	92
Fourth Graders Met or Exceed	59.8%	86
Fifth Graders Met or Exceed	63.5%	101

Note: Retrieved from School Report Cards

Third Grade Reading Instruction

Elementary School F has five third-grade classrooms, each housing 20–22 students. Each class has an English-Language Arts (ELA) block of 90 minutes each day. The classroom teachers plan together weekly for each part of the ELA block. This block includes daily whole-group reading, phonics instruction, and writing. Primary reading instruction is based on the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) Into Reading Curriculum Modules for Foundational Skills, Writing, and Reading (HMH, 2025). Classroom teachers supplement with Scholastic Storyworks Magazine (Scholastic, 2018) to differentiate the reading formats and the Fountas and Pinnell

Guided Reading Curriculum (Heinemann, 2025) to address standards not covered in HMH modules. Teachers utilize Mastery Connect, IXL, and Fast Bridge interventions to assist with implementing individualized instruction and progress monitoring for isolated skills.

At the beginning of the year, all kindergarten through third-grade students complete a reading diagnostic assessment to determine which students will receive Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. School District A uses the Fast Bridge Learning (FBL) diagnostics for this assessment. FBL has multiple criterion-referenced assessments for each grade level and a scripted lesson sequence for phonics and phonemic awareness (Christ, 2019). The Benchmark scores are based on national norms and percentile ranges. In Elementary School F, students who score below the 39th percentile in at least one category are considered at risk for reading and receive Tier 2 interventions in one area: phonemic awareness or phonics. Students who score below the 39th percentile in two or more areas receive Tier 3 interventions (Renaissance Learning & Inc, 2025)

Participants

A total of sixteen third-grade students participated in the study. The study required students to receive Tier 2 interventions during the school day, as recommended by their classroom teacher. According to Goodman & Bohanon (2018), Tier 2 interventions serve as targeted supplementary support for students who are not making adequate progress with regular classroom instruction. Students identified as “at-risk” do not meet grade-level expectations on one or more areas of the state-approved universal screener (FBL). The target population consisted of third-grade students struggling to meet mid-year grade-level expectations and

receiving Tier 2 interventions in addition to their 90-minute English-Language Arts (ELA) regular classroom instruction. Third graders were ideal candidates for this study as they become more independent readers and writers, forming opinions and behaviors that foster strong reading engagement at age eight (McGeown & Smith, 2024).

Elementary School F had 98 enrolled third-grade students, with 25 receiving Tier 2 interventions in December 2024. Due to transportation, location, scheduling, and time considerations, the accessible population was limited to available students. Following the recruitment procedure described in the next section, the final sample included nine boys and seven girls. The participants' ages ranged from eight years and four months to nine years and four months, with half having summer birthdays. Morning Control Group A and Morning Treatment Group B were equally divided, with two males and two females in each group. Afternoon Control Group C had four males, and Afternoon Treatment Group D had three females and one male student. All students were Caucasian; only one in Control Group A repeated a previous grade. Table 5 shows the number of students in each group divided by homeroom.

Table 5

Control and Treatment Groups Divided by Homeroom

Group	Number of students in each group by teacher				n=16
Control A	1	2	1		
Treatment B			1	1	2
Control C		1	1	1	1
Treatment D	1		1	1	1
Homeroom	Z	Y	X	W	V

Procedure

The researcher followed the procedures detailed in this section guided by the research question: What are the effects of a six-week, small-group intervention that incorporates engagement strategies on third graders' reading engagement in the following areas: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social? The following sections explain the researcher's procedures, including IRB approval, participant selection, recruitment, instrumentation, planning, intervention, data collection, and data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher received university IRB and district approval in December 2024 (See Appendix E). The ethical consideration of each student's well-being was of great concern for this study, and the researcher followed all elements of the IRB application with fidelity. To protect the students' identities, the researcher assigned a number to each participant to record data in secure forms. Testing information did not include student names, and participants were instructed to use their numbers on all their papers. The researcher stored all information in

password-protected documents or locked it in the researcher's classroom filing cabinet, including all forms, data collected, student journals, reading records, lesson notes, and any information gathered during this study. The researcher will safeguard all documents and information from this study until January 2027, when they will undergo shredding. The researcher saved all de-identified electronic documents on the researcher's computer in a password-protected document folder.

Each participant's well-being and anonymity were prioritized during the small group intervention. The researcher advised all students and families on the study's purpose, requirements for participation, and meeting times. The researcher did not offer rewards or incentives for participation and did not grade the participants' work. Risks included a potential loss of up to ten minutes of classroom time each day for the morning groups between 8:00 am and 8:10 am. The researcher minimized the loss of classroom time as much as possible, and all morning groups were dismissed promptly before 8:10 am. Participation in the study was voluntary. No one compensated participants or families for participating.

Participant Selection

The researcher used a convenience sample of a larger targeted population of third-grade at-risk readers. The researcher used a convenience sample, which is non-random and not representative of the target population, to select participants based on availability. The researcher recruited a non-random convenience sample of the target population to measure the effects of incorporating engagement strategies in reading engagement, measuring the change in pre-test and post-test data (Drew et al., 2014). The sample frame consisted of students receiving Tier 2

interventions during the school day. The researcher used the accessible population of third-grade students to select the sample group.

To identify potential participants, the researcher met with the five third-grade teachers at Elementary School F at their weekly Grade-Level Meeting to explain the intervention and student selection. The teachers compiled a list of 20 students receiving Tier 2 interventions from the 25 total students receiving Tier 2 interventions at the time of recruitment. After dividing the list into students available for either the morning or afternoon groups, the list was narrowed to twenty possible participants: ten available for the morning and ten available for the afternoon. To narrow the list from 25 to 20, each teacher chose four students from their classroom to be added to the final list. Each teacher chose two students who consistently arrived by 7:30 am and two who were available until 3:20 pm with reliable transportation. The researcher requested phone numbers and contact information from the front office for the 20 potential participants.

Group Assignments

Before recruitment, the researcher assigned the 20 participants to groups, ensuring families knew the times and days their students would need to be available. After collecting twenty student names, the researcher assigned students to the Control and Treatment groups using the following method. A simple random sampling method was administered to balance the unpredictability of random elements with the structure and order of controlled conditions (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). The researcher printed the students' and teachers' names, morning or afternoon, on the same line, then cut the paper into even strips and folded each strip with the participant’s information four times. Ten names for the morning groups were placed in a

coffee mug. Four names for Morning Control Group A were chosen, then four for Morning Treatment Group B. The remaining names were listed as alternates. The researcher repeated the process for the afternoon Control Group C and Treatment Group D. The days and times were communicated to families during the phone call and on permission forms.

Having the days and times for the groups readily available helped families and homeroom teachers with scheduling and communication. The researcher did not share which students or meeting days were assigned to the control and treatment groups. The researcher assigned the groups a letter (A, B, C, D), and teachers, students, and families were not informed which groups were assigned as the treatment or control groups. Table 6 lists the criteria for including and excluding potential participants.

Table 6

Criteria for Sample Frame

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
A third-grade student at Elementary School F	Does not attend third grade at Elementary School F
Receives Tier 2 Interventions	Does not receive Ties 2 interventions
Teacher Recommended	Not Teacher Recommended
Parent/ Guardian sign and return permission forms by the deadline	Parents/Guardians do not sign and return permission forms by the deadline
Student assent to participation	Student declines participation
Does not receive Tier 2 intervention	Receive Tier 2 interventions or Academic Special Education Services.

Recruitment

After identifying a pool of eligible participants, the researcher called each family of the selected participants. The researcher described the study to each family (see recruitment script in Appendix B), answered questions, and addressed their concerns. After the questions were answered, the researcher asked families to look for the informed consent paper in their child's take-home folders, sign it, and return it to school in the folder the next day. To participate, the student had to return the informed consent paper, signed by a legal guardian or parent, within three days of the phone call (see Appendix C). Students who did not return the form were replaced by another randomly selected child from the participant pool, and the researcher repeated the procedure to gain informed consent for the new student. The recruitment process continued until sixteen students had parental consent. Due to scheduling conflicts and transportation issues, two students exchanged places in Group A and Group C. Two alternates replaced the two students who could not participate.

To complete the recruitment process, the researcher met with the participants in each group for assent and comparison to ensure each participant met all inclusion criteria. The first task completed at the first group meetings was to read the assent forms to the group and answer questions, and each student signed their name and dated the form. After the first group meeting, the researcher learned that two participants from Control Group C received Tier 3 interventions, which had been overlooked before the groups began. The group included the students, but the results did not include their data. This reduced the data collection to 14 participants.

After selecting the participants and obtaining permission from the families, the researcher initiated group meetings. During the first meeting, the researcher explained the study, reviewed the assent form, and asked the participant to sign. The researcher discussed the morning and after-school groups' expectations, including meeting dates and times, purpose, and behavioral and procedural expectations. Each child voluntarily signed the assent form after it was read to them (see Appendix D).

Instrumentation

The researcher utilized the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) to assess students' reading attitudes, motivation, and behaviors. This study employed a Likert-type rating survey to measure engagement, which was administered during the first and last small group meetings to collect data on changes over time in reading engagement. Grounded in pertinent theory and research, the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) measures children's self-reported reading motivation and engagement. The four scale subcategories (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social) are informed by existing theoretical and empirical research, paralleling other instruments such as the *Motivation to Read Questionnaire* (Guthrie et al., 1999).

The *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024), which appeared in the January/February 2024 issue of Reading Teacher (refer to Appendix A), evaluates intrinsic motivation through four dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social engagement. The scale gives teachers insights into the reading process by asking students to self-reflect on their reading engagement. It generates discrete quantitative data (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell,

2019), enabling comparisons of pre- and post-intervention attitudes toward reading engagement (Creswell, 2009). McGeown and Smith (2024) recommend using the *Reading Engagement Scale* with students aged eight to eleven, as children within this age group demonstrate heightened self-awareness (see Appendix A). The survey is designed with appropriate language and response options for elementary-aged students (Gavin, 2008). All third-grade participants in this study, aged eight to nine, answered the survey questions individually during the first and last group meetings.

The Reading Engagement Scale (McGeown & Smith, 2024) can provide a summative score ranging from 24 to 96, based on responses to 24 prompts using a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = "never" to 4 = "always"). The authors recommend that unanswered questions receive a score of 1. The open-ended questions do not impact the score but assist the teacher in planning lessons based on the student's responses. The survey consists of four subcategories: behavioral (questions 1–3, divided into fiction and non-fiction prompts), affective (question 5, with six prompts), cognitive (question 6, with six prompts), and social (question 7, with six prompts). Question 4, which reveals the reader's preferred genres, is not included in the total score but gives depth to the behavior subcategory (McGeown & Smith, 2024). Summing each subcategory’s ratings can produce scores that range between six and 24 points. The researcher chose *the Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) because it aligned with the research and theories for student reading engagement, making it an appropriate instrument for this study.

Groups

Each group included four participants: Control Group A and Treatment Group B met from 7:30 a.m. to 8:10 a.m. two days each week, and Control Group C and Treatment Group D met from 2:40 p.m. to 3:20 p.m. This arrangement allowed participants to eat breakfast or afternoon snacks and participate in a thirty-minute lesson. Groups met twice a week in the researcher's classroom for the six-week intervention, with Control groups A and C meeting on Mondays and Wednesdays and Treatment groups B and D meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays for twelve lessons.

Participants came to the researcher's classroom at assigned times. In the morning, students could get breakfast from the cart in the hallway. The morning meeting ended promptly, and participants returned to class at 8:10 a.m. In the afternoon, participants came during bus dismissal and selected a snack provided by the researcher. The researcher walked afternoon participants to the pick-up location to meet their parents at 3:20 p.m. Table 7 shows the weekly schedule for each group.

Table 7

Weekly Schedule for Control and Treatment Groups

Days	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Control A	7:30		7:30		7:30 make-up
Control C	2:30		2:30		3:30 make-up
Treatment B		7:30		7:30	
Treatment C		2:30		3:30	

Note: Four Friday make-up days replaced two Monday holidays and two snow days.

Group Meetings

Each meeting followed the lesson structure from the LLI Blue Kit Lesson Guide (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014). Odd-numbered lessons introduced an instructional-level book, focusing on meaning and applying new orthographical or morphological skills within the text. Even-numbered lessons introduced a new independent-level book, focusing on reviewing phonological skills and fluency while allowing more time for writing instruction. Depending on the level of readers, the researcher differentiated the amount of support until the students could complete the activities independently. The Fountas and Pinnell (2014) curriculum recommends a thirty-minute lesson time frame. The schedule included ten extra minutes for each meeting to allow morning participants to eat breakfast and afternoon students to eat snacks. Table 8 shows the structure followed by the researcher for small-group instruction.

Table 8

LLI Small Group Structure

Lessons	
Odd Number	
Allotted Time	Activity
5 Minutes	Independent Reading/ Progress Monitoring
5 Minutes	Phonics Instruction orthography and morphology
15 Minutes	New Book Instruction (Instructional Level) book intro review of new vocabulary decoding practice new and essential concepts students read with a partner /or to self
5 Minutes	High-Frequency Word Review
Even Number	
5 Minutes	Independent Reading/ Progress Monitoring
5 Minutes	Phonics Instruction orthography and morphology
15 Minutes	Writing Instruction tailored to the needs of students as they write to scaffold instruction in grammar, encoding, and structure
5 minutes	New Book Instruction (Independent Level) book Intro Discuss new concepts and vocabulary students read with a partner or to themselves

Note: Ten minutes were added to Independent Reading for students to eat. All groups followed this lesson structure with differentiated instructional engagement strategies, as shown in Table 3.5 (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014)

Variations in this lesson structure occurred during the first and last meetings. During the first meeting, the researcher discussed expectations and administered the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024). During the final meeting, the researcher administered it again. The procedure took ten to fifteen minutes, allowing the researcher time for instruction.

Small-Group Instruction

Because School District A was not using balanced literacy programs that utilized leveled reading books, Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) kits (2014) were available. The researcher began in the Blue LLI kit at Level N, Lesson 109, a beginning third-grade level according to the Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading text Gradient (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014). All small groups received 12 lessons from the Blue LLI kit (2014). Each lesson included vocabulary, phonics, and comprehension skills embedded in authentic literature and integrated throughout the lesson. Small group instruction, conducted by the researcher, complemented classroom instruction by covering the same third-grade reading and writing standards taught in the classroom; a chart comparing the standards taught in HMH and group meetings is included (see Appendix F).

To include engagement strategies for treatment groups B and D, the researcher incorporated various strategies to focus on the four areas of reading engagement: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social. All four groups followed the lesson structure, time frame, skills, and vocabulary using the same student books from the LLI lesson plans. Planned differences for Treatment and Control groups, described below, allowed for the implementation of more engagement strategies for Treatment Groups B and D.

Control Groups. The specific strategies the researcher used for Control Groups A and C follow the lesson structure in the Fountas and Pinnell LLI kit. (2014). The researcher assigned books to read during independent reading and for progress monitoring. As the researcher took notes for progress monitoring, control group participants did not receive specific feedback or praise. During writing instruction, the control group participants wrote prescribed sentences dictated by the researcher to practice skills from the lesson. Control Groups A and C were not assigned reading goals for reading outside of the group, and they were not allowed to take extra reading group books home for practice.

Treatment Groups. The researcher differentiated strategies for Treatment Groups B and D. The participants chose books from a basket of lower-level books from different genres from the Blue LLI Kit and chose the books for progress monitoring**.** As the researcher progress monitored, the participants read aloud, students received specific feedback and praise for using strategic activities (self-monitoring, re-reading, decoding, summarizing, using multiple sources of information, and fluency). During writing instruction, the participants created original sentences in their writing journals to practice skills covered during the lesson.

Treatment Groups B and D read the books together, and they could take copies home after group time. The researcher set a goal of five books each week, and participants took books from the LLI kit home to practice. Upon completing the goal sheet, the student received a small prize. Participants wrote creative responses in their journals instead of dictated sentences. Table 9 shows the engagement strategies implemented in Treatment Groups B and D.

Table 9

LLI Small Group Structure

Activity	Control Groups A and C	Treatment Groups B and D
Independent Reading	The teacher assigned books for independent reading.	Students chose books from a basket of various genres on the students' independent levels (Behavioral)
Writing	Dictated Sentences	Free Creative Writing to practice skills (Behavioral and Social)
Progress Monitoring	No feedback from the teacher	The teacher gave specific positive feedback on metacognitive strategies during Progress Monitoring (Cognitive and Affective)
Reading	Read silently/ with the teacher.	Read with a partner (Social) Take books home and set reading goals (Affective and Social)

Note: This graph shows the difference in the control and treatment groups. This procedure follows the lesson plans from the Blue LLI Kits from Fountas & Pinnell (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014).

Fidelity of Implementation

To ensure the fidelity of each session, the researcher followed the routines as prescribed below in Table 10.

Table 10

Established Routines to Ensure the Fidelity of Information

Routine for Small- Groups
The teacher conducted lessons at a kidney-shaped table in her classroom.
In the morning session, students exited the bus, collected breakfast items, and walked into the researcher's classroom. From 7:30 to 7:45, they ate breakfast and read.
In the afternoon session, students walked from their classroom, chose a snack provided by the researcher, and read from 2:20 to 2:55.
Students used the restroom at the end of the hallway as needed, but participants were encouraged to go before or after group instruction.
The teacher followed the time and lesson structure from the LLI plans for all groups.
The teacher stored all materials (writing journals, books, sharpened pencils, chart paper, markers, and wipe boards) and had them available as needed.
Upon arrival, the students' items were placed by the windows. Water bottles were left in the bookbags and allowed only to be used during snack time.
At the end of each lesson, students chose a new or like-new book to take home to build their at-home book collections.

Table 11 shows a timeline of events followed by this research study.

Table 11

Timeline of Events

Description	Date
Obtain permission from the building administration.	October 2024
Receive IRB approval and District approval.	December 2024
Select Participants	December 2024
Collect informed consent forms	December 2024
Gather pre-intervention data	January 2025
Conduct study intervention	January- February 2025
Gather post-intervention data	February 2025
Analyze data	February 2025

Data Collection

The researcher collected pre- and post-test data to answer the research question: What are the effects of a six-week, small-group intervention that incorporates engagement strategies on third graders' reading engagement in the following areas: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social? Data collection began during the first small group meeting with a pre-test survey and concluded at the last meeting with the post-test survey. The instrument used for pre- and post-test survey data was the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024).

During the first group meetings, the participants completed the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024). At the start of the first four group meetings, each participant received individual copies of the survey. To administer the survey, the researcher read questions and answers sequentially to the group members, and students circled or wrote responses. The researcher reviewed the data and planned the small group lessons using the LLI intervention plans. During the final group meetings, students completed the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024). The researcher repeated the same procedure, reading each question as the students circled the answers and wrote responses.

The researcher added three open-ended questions to the end of the post-test survey to deepen the data analysis. These questions were: Which part of the group did you like best? Would you attend another group like this one? Reasons. What would you change about the group for next time?

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed student data to answer the research question: What are the effects of a six-week, small-group intervention that incorporates engagement strategies on third graders' reading engagement in the following areas: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social? To answer the question, the researcher statistically analyzed the pretest and posttest data to measure changes in reading engagement during the six-week small-group instruction for participating students. The analysis established the effect of the independent variable (reading engagement strategies) on the dependent variable (reading engagement). The researcher utilized the Mann-Whitney U Test to assess the differences between control and treatment groups, and

the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test to compare data within the groups. These non-parametric tests were employed to compare two samples of ordinal data, making them suitable for small sample sizes with non-normal distributions (Bobbitt, 2018).

The summative findings and descriptive statistics for all data collected in the subcategories of reading engagement (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social), allowed the researcher to explore the self-reported reading engagement of the participants. Employing comparative analysis of pre-and post-intervention data, followed by descriptive statistics to describe the data, and item analysis of individual questions, permitted the comparison of the change over time from each group's pre-test to post-test data (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019).

Summary

Chapter three presents a comprehensive elucidation of the methods and procedures employed in this research study, designed to address the research question: What are the effects of a six-week, small-group intervention incorporating engagement strategies on third graders' reading engagement in the subcategories of behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social engagement? This study utilized quantitative methodology within a quasi-experimental design framework and included data from 14 third-grade participants in a distinctive rural setting. The researcher used Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon tests to compare the results between the control and treatment groups, and descriptive statistics were used for more detailed item analysis. Eight participants in the Treatment Group received small group reading instruction augmented with specific engagement strategies. These strategies encompassed a variety of book genres tailored to

the students' independent reading levels, opportunities for free choice writing to reinforce skills, targeted positive feedback on metacognitive strategies, and options for independent reading both within the group and at home. In contrast, the six participants in the Control Group received small-group instruction with a similar structure and lesson plans but without the specific engagement strategies addressing the four engagement subcategories (behavioral, affective, cognitive, and social). Chapter four presents the findings from the pre- and post-survey data of the Control and Treatment Groups, offering insights into the intervention's effects.

CHAPTER 4. STUDY RESULTS

This quasi-experimental research study utilized a quantitative methodology to determine the effects of incorporating strategies that address the four engagement components (behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social) into small-group reading instruction. The research question for this study was: What are the effects of a six-week, small-group intervention that incorporates engagement strategies on third graders' reading engagement in the following areas: behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social? Pre- and post-test survey data were collected using the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024), which measures intrinsic motivation divided into four subcategories of reading engagement (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social). The researcher examined summative scores of pre- and post-test data for the control and treatment groups individually and together, examining differences between and within these groups. The researcher also examined the data by subgroups (Control Groups A and C, Treatment Groups B and D), meeting times, gender, and individual questions. The researcher then used descriptive statistics to interpret the data from each survey, including open-ended questions to give depth to the summative scores.

Findings

This study divides its findings into two sections: summative findings and descriptive statistics. Both data types play crucial roles in research and evaluation, measuring the change over time in reading engagement. The summative data from the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) focuses on the overall outcomes of the treatment and control groups, while the descriptive data reveals characteristics and trends within data sets. Analyzing

descriptive statistics (means, medians, and frequencies) can provide insights into behaviors and experiences that affected the students during the group meetings.

Summative Findings

This section discusses the summative scores collected and analyzed for this study. The researcher used the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) to gather numerical ratings from pretest and post-test scores on a Likert-type rating scale. The data calculated were ordinal data from a Likert-type rating scale survey and ratio data taken from pre- and post-test surveys. Since the distance between the responses of never, often, sometimes, and always is not equal, the scale provided ordinal data to measure the abstract concept of reading engagement (Darnton, 2023).

To analyze this data, the researcher employed two non-parametric tests to compare samples for ordinal data: the Mann-Whitney U for independent samples and the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for paired samples. Based on Cronk's guidance (2012), the Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests are preferable to T-tests when assessing statistical significance in small samples with non-normal distributions or ranked data. The data from this study satisfied the conditions for these tests.

The Mann-Whitney U Test compared the differences between two independent groups by ranking all the engagement scores from both the Control and Treatment groups and analyzing these ranks to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the groups' summative means (Cronk, 2012). The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test compares differences between paired samples and is often used when comparing related samples or repeated

measurements on the same individuals (Bobbitt, 2018). The researcher performed these non-parametric tests with SPSS 29 (IBM Corp, 2023) software.

To complete these tests, the researcher compiled all pre- and post-test data from each participant in the Control and Treatment groups into an Excel spreadsheet. Each question from each subcategory was listed with scores from each participant. After removing data from two participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria (please refer to Chapter 3—Recruitment), a research partner checked the data for accuracy. The researcher uploaded the data into the SPSS 29 program (IBM Corp, 2023).

To examine the differences in ratings between the Control and Treatment groups, the researcher used the Mann-Whitney U Test to compare the summative scores for both groups for the pre-test and post-test. Findings indicate there were no significant differences between the Control (n=6) and Treatment (n=8) groups at the pre-test ($U=8$, $p>.05$) or the post-test ($U=5$, $p>.05$).

To examine the differences within each group, the researcher used the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to compare each group's summative pre- and post-test scores. Findings indicate no significant difference ($Z= 0$, $p=>.05$) in summative scores from pre- and post-test surveys in the control group and no significant difference ($Z=.871$, $p=>.05$) in summative scores from pre- and post-test surveys in the treatment group.

Descriptive Statistics

The summative findings from the Mann-Whitney U and the Wilcoxon showed no significant difference between the groups or within the groups (n=14) from pretest to post-test. However, the increase in means and ranges between the pretest and posttest scores suggests a positive effect of the small-group instruction on the students' engagement across the four subcategories (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social), and across the control and treatment groups. The pre-test range for the summative scores was 37-87, with a mean of 65.6. The post-test range was 48-93, with a mean of 71.9. The increase in the test ranges and means suggests that small-group instruction positively affected the summative scores of the control and treatment groups.

Findings from the descriptive statistics identified which elements of the small groups might have contributed to the change in reading engagement scores. First, the researcher analyzed the summative means of pre-test and post-test scores, divided into Control and Treatment Groups (Figure 4.1). Then, the pre- and post-test means of summative scores were divided into four groups: Control Group A, Control Group C, Treatment Group B, and Treatment Group D (Figure 4.2). Then, the researcher examined the summative mean of test scores based on meeting times and gender (Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4).

Next, the researcher compared the individual participants' mean scores for each reading engagement subcategory (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social) to compare pre- and post-test results for 14 participants across groups (Figure 4.6). The researcher also compared individual mean scores of each participant's answers from the Control and Treatment groups'

subcategories (Cognitive, Affective, and Social) (Table 3). Then, the researcher analyzed the differences between the pre- and post-test mean scores of individual responses for each group's subcategory (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social) (Figure 7).

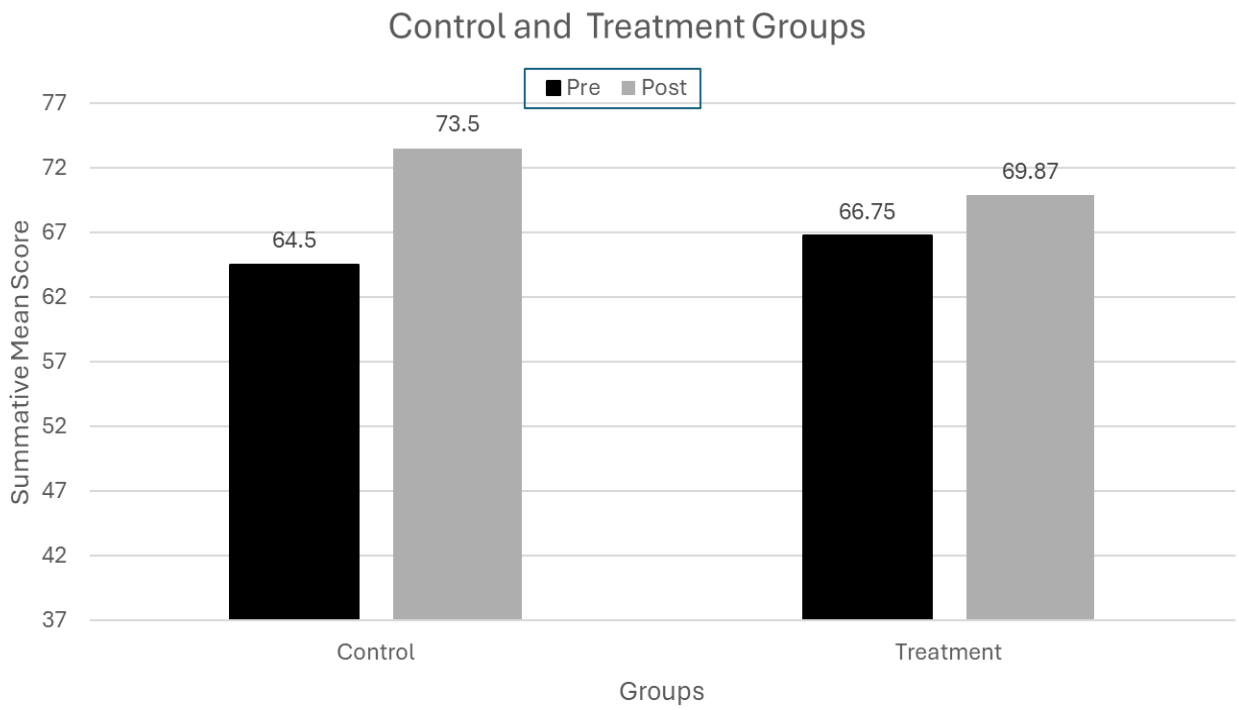
The researcher conducted an item analysis by examining the means of the individual total score for each question for the pre- and post-test of all 14 participants. The behavioral subcategory also included a question about genre choices with twelve possible answers. The researcher analyzed pre-test and post-test selections to determine differences in the number and types of genres chosen across groups and then examined genre selections based on gender (Table 13).

Analysis of Comparisons Between Control and Treatment Groups

The researcher compared the summative means across the groups to examine the difference between the pre- and post-test mean scores of the Control and Treatment Groups. The Control Groups gained nine mean points, and the Treatment Groups gained 3.12. Figure 3 compares the summative scores of the Control and Treatment Groups.

Figure 3

Comparison of Summative Mean Scores Across Groups

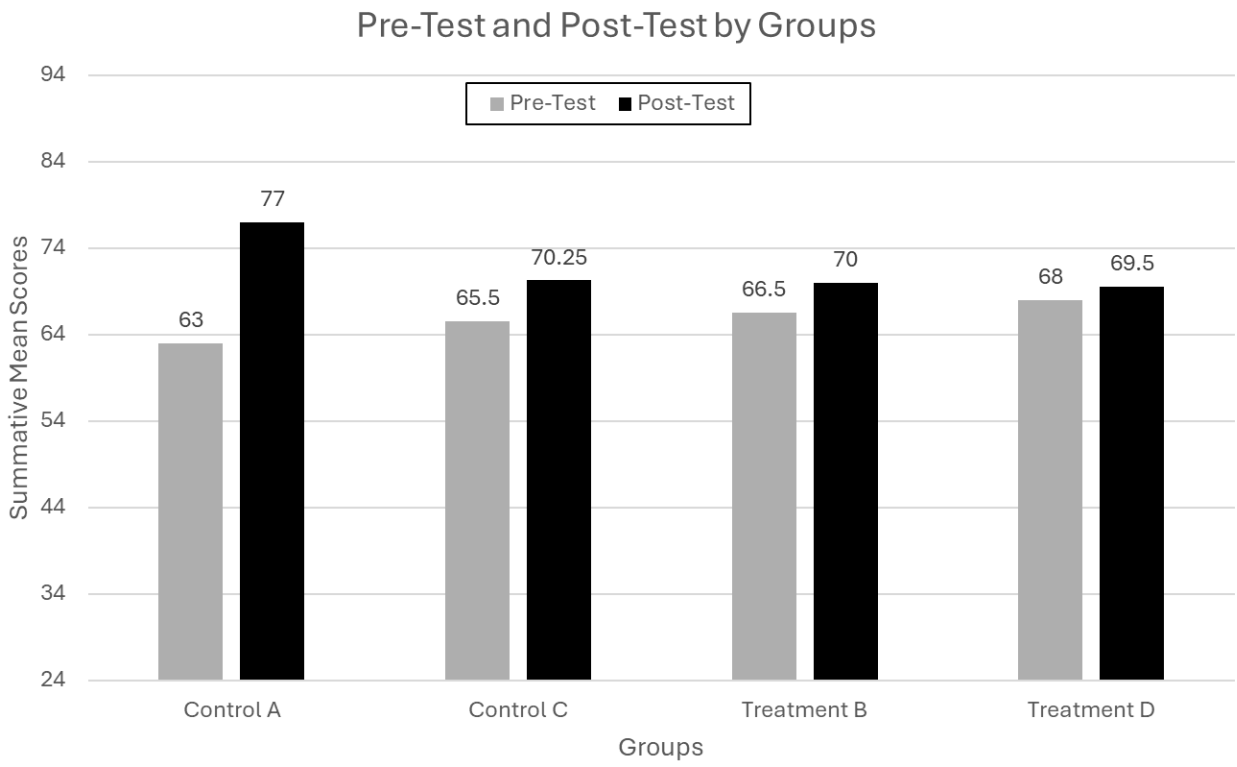


Note: Mean Range 24-96; Control Groups A and C (n=6); Treatment Groups B and D (n=8).

To examine the summative mean scores for each subgroup, the researcher compared the pre- and post-test means for each participant for Control Groups A and C and Treatment Groups B and D. Figure 4 shows pre- and post-test summative mean scores. Findings indicate Control Group A increased by 14 points, Control Group C increased by 4.75 points, Treatment Group B increased by 3.5 mean points, and Treatment Group D increased by 1.5 points. Figure 4 shows the pre- and post-test means of the summative scores for each group.

Figure 4

Group Pre and Post-test Mean Scores



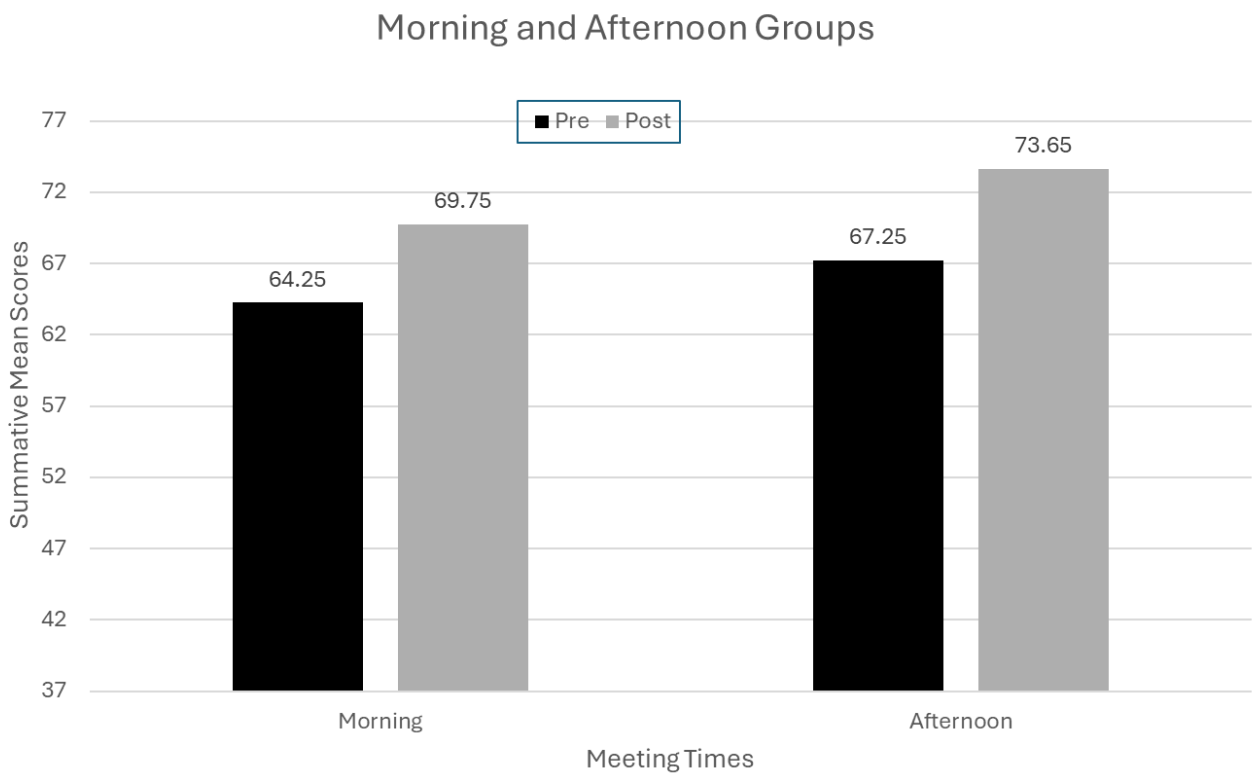
Note: Possible Range = 24-96; Actual Range = 37- 93; Control Group A (n=4); Control Group C (n=2); Treatment Group B (n=4); Treatment Group D (n=4).

Analysis by Meeting Times

The researcher compared the summative means across the participants to examine the morning and afternoon groups' pre- and post-test summative mean scores. The findings indicate an increase of 5.5 mean points for the morning and 6.4 points for the afternoon groups. Figure 5 shows the morning and afternoon groups' pre- and post-test summative means.

Figure 5

Pre and Post-test Summative Scores for Morning and Afternoon Groups



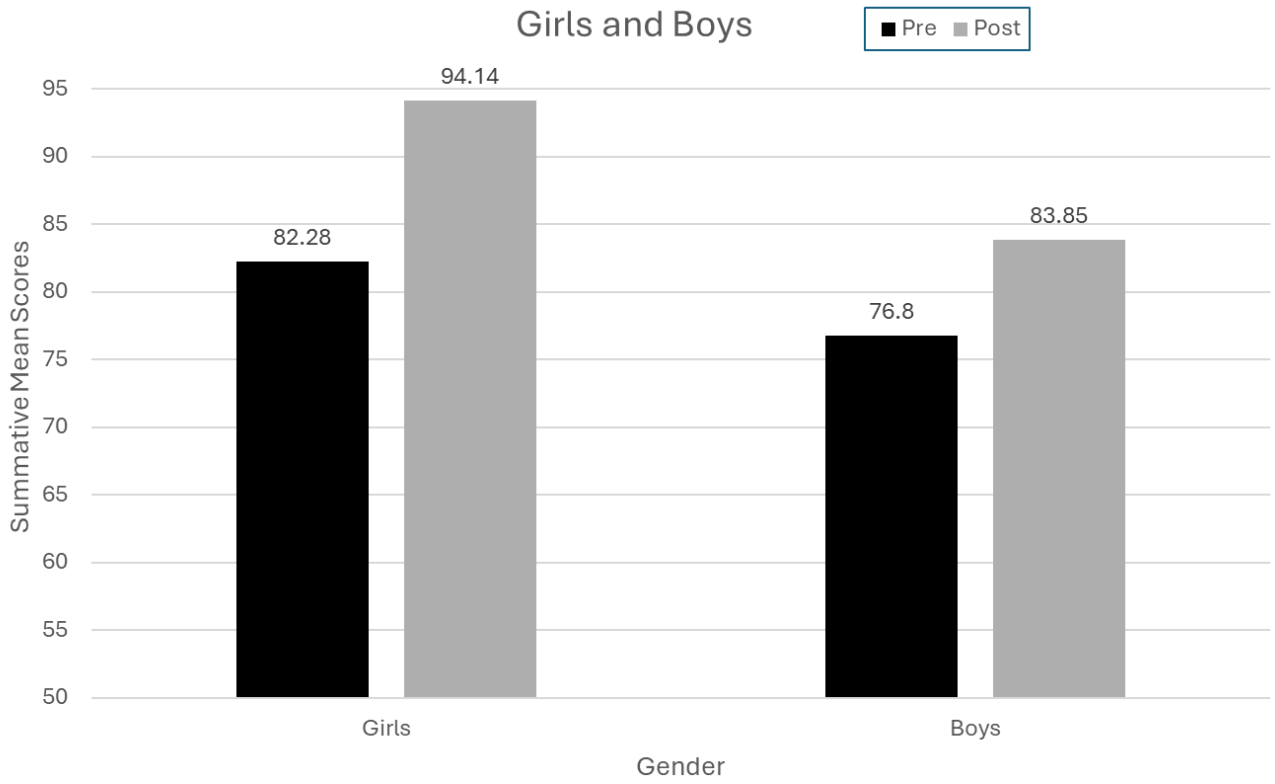
Note: Possible summative Range = 24-96; Actual Range = 37- 93; Morning Groups (Control Group A and Treatment Group B); Afternoon Groups (Control Group C and Treatment Group D).

Analysis by Gender

To examine pre- and post-test scores by gender, the researcher analyzed the summative mean scores across the participants. Findings indicate that the girls' mean scores increased by 11.8 points, and the boys' scores increased by 7.05 points. Figure 6 shows pre- and post-test scores for all four groups based on gender.

Figure 6

Pre- and Post-test Summative Scores for Morning and Afternoon Groups



Note: Possible Range = 24-96; Actual Range= 37- 93; Girls (n=8); Boys (n=6).

Analysis by Subcategory

The following section analyzes each of the four subcategories for reading engagement. It begins with the mean scores of the individual responses to the Affective, Cognitive, and Social subcategories and divides the summative mean scores into the four subcategories. Then, the following tables compare the pre- and post-test responses to each question within each subcategory, followed by the questions with the largest differences listed for each subcategory.

Using a Likert-type scale to examine the individual mean scores on the pre- and post-test in the cognitive, affective, and social reading engagement subcategories, the researcher analyzed the means of the individual question scores for participants in the treatment and control groups. Findings indicate an increase between the pre-test and post-test means in all three subcategories across the control and treatment groups. The scores from the behavioral subcategory are listed later, as the information differs from that of the other subcategories. Table 12 shows the means of individual scores by subcategory. (See Appendix A).

Table 12

Means of the Individual Scores by Subcategory

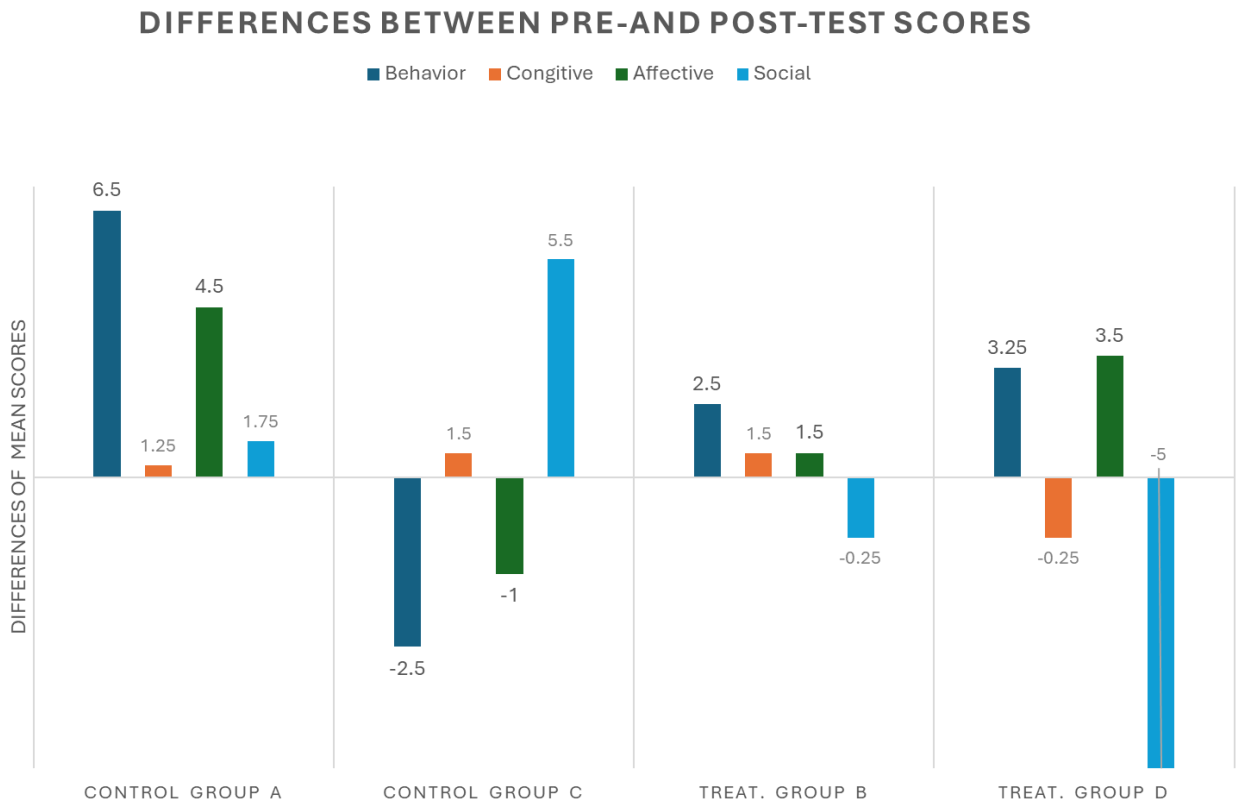
Subcategory	Pretest	*SD*	Post-test	*SD*	*n*
Affective					
Treatment	2.81	*.599*	3.18	*.698*	8
Control	2.97	*.786*	3.38	*.621*	6
Cognitive					
Treatment	3.16	*.549*	3.23	*.684*	8
Control	3.09	*.780*	3.25	*.573*	6
Social					
Treatment	2.79	*.825*	2.31	*.945*	8
Control	2.72	*1.18*	2.66	*.805*	6

Note: Range of individual means = 1-4

To examine the difference for each group, the researcher calculated the difference in each group's mean score by item in each subcategory. Findings indicate the largest mean increases were for Control Group A in Behavioral (6.5) and Control Group C in Social (5.5). At the same time, Control Group D shows the largest decrease in Social by five points. Figure 7 shows the difference between pre- and post-test scores for each group by subcategory.

Figure 7

Differences in Mean Scores Across Groups

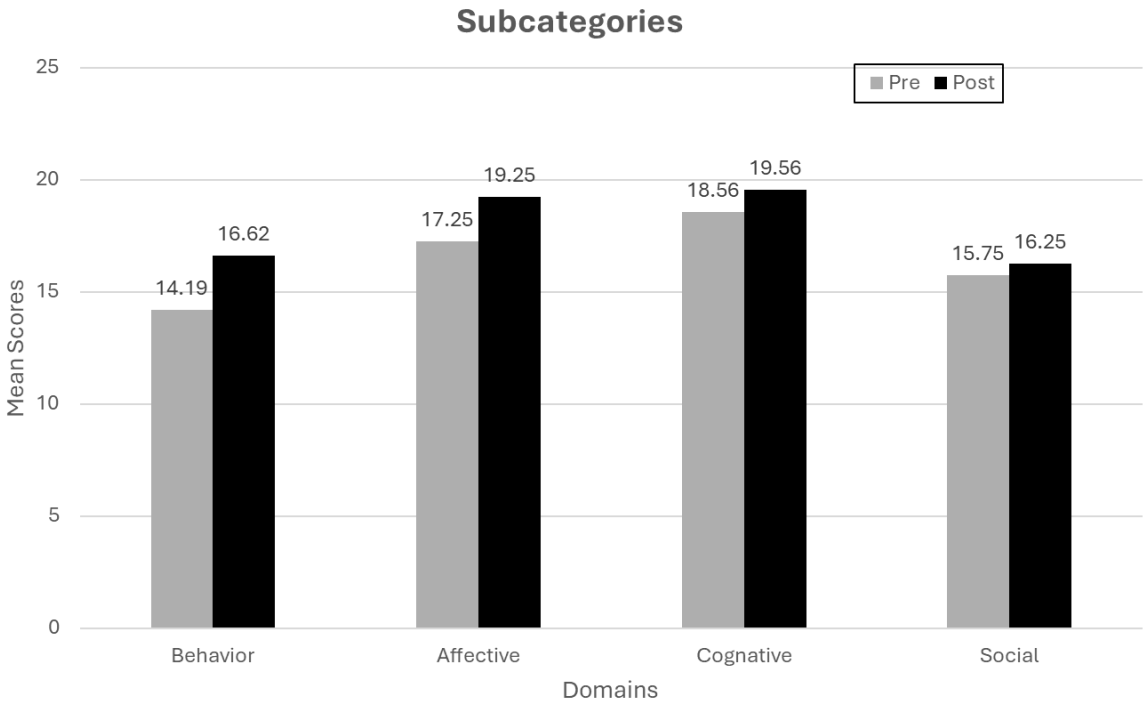


To examine the groups' summative mean pre- and post-test scores by subcategory across the control and treatment groups, the researcher compared the summative mean scores in each subcategory to find the differences between the pre- and post-test scores. Findings indicate that the differences in pre- and post-test mean scores are as follows: Behavior (+2.43), Affective

(+2), Cognitive (+1), and Social (+0.5). Figure 8 shows each subcategory's mean scores of individual pre- and post-tests.

Figure 8

Summative Individual Means by Subcategory



Note: Likert-type scale of Responses: *Never* (=1), *Sometimes* (=2), *Often* (=3), and *Always* (=4); Range 6-24.

Item Analysis

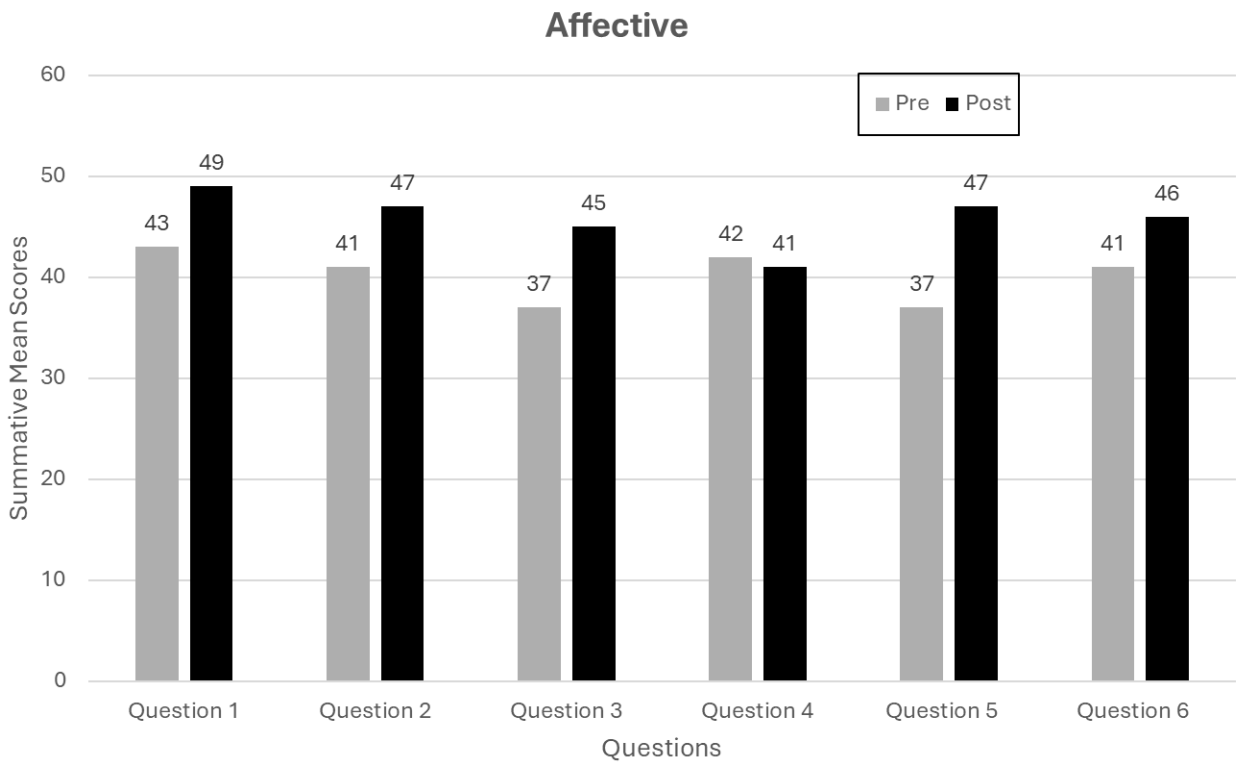
The researcher used descriptive analysis at the item level of the survey to better understand the intervention's impact on specific engagement subcategories using the Likert-type scale: *Never* (=1), *Sometimes* (=2), *Often* (=3), and *Always* (=4). Combining the responses of the control and treatment groups (n=14), each question in the subcategories has a possible range of 14 (all *Never* responses) to 56 (all *Always* responses). The following figures show the differences between the participants' pre- and post-test question scores. The graphs below represent the six questions in three subcategories (affective, cognitive, and social). Figures 9, 10, and 11 show the total mean scores from fourteen participants.

Affective Subcategory

To examine the individual questions in the Affective-Affective subcategory, the researcher compared the summative means from the pre- and post-test for each question. Findings indicate increased means for each of the six questions. Figure 9 shows the difference between the pre- and post-test scores.

Figure 9

Questions in the Affective Subcategory



Note: n=14; Range 14-56; Scale of Responses: *Never* (=1), *Sometimes* (=2), *Often* (=3), and *Always* (=4).

The questions in the Affective subcategory are as follows:

Think about how you feel when reading books and why you choose different books.

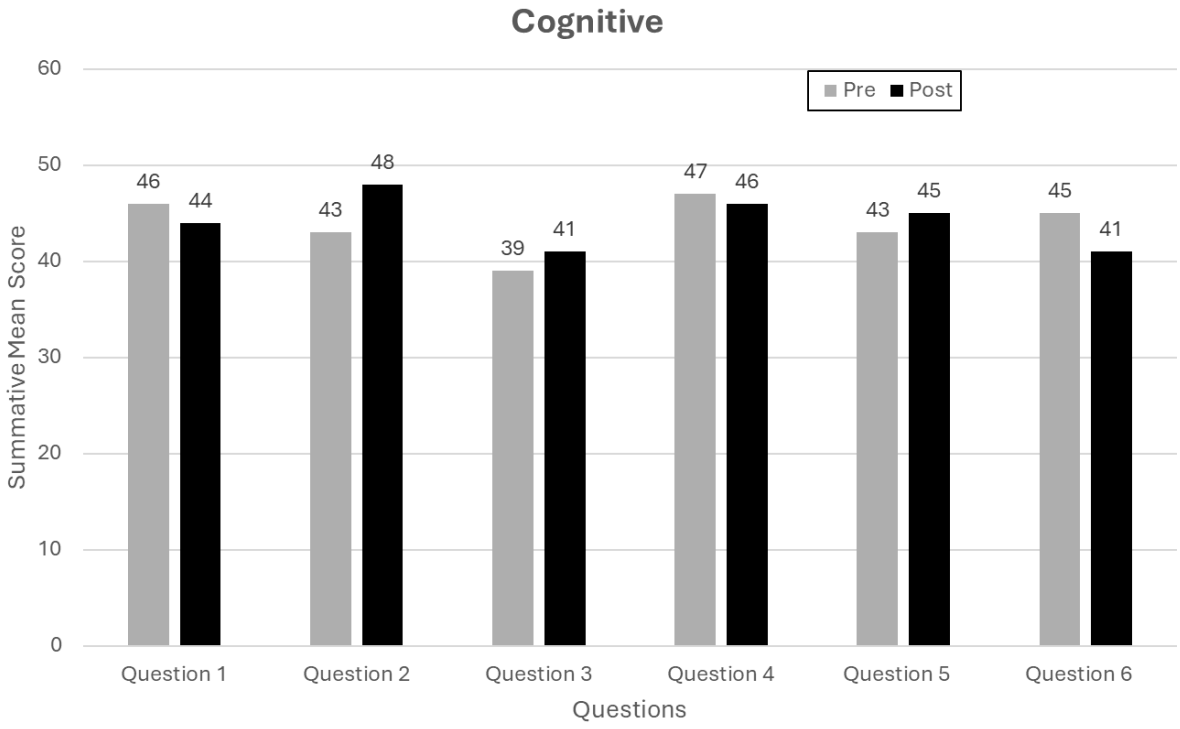
- Question 1: I feel happy when I read books.
- Question 2: I feel relaxed when I read books.
- Question 3: I feel connected to the characters, stories, or topics that I read about in books.
- Question 4: I care about what happens to the characters in the books I read.
- Question 5: Book reading takes me to another world.
- Question 6: I read books to learn more about my interests.

Cognitive Subcategory

The researcher compared the summative means from each question's pre- and post-test scores to examine the individual questions in the cognitive subcategory. Findings indicate a mean increase for questions 2 (+5), 3 (+2), and 5 (+2) and a decrease for questions 1 (-2), 4 (-1), and 6 (-2). Figure 10 shows the difference between pre- and post-test scores.

Figure 10

Questions in the Cognitive Subcategory



Note: n=14, Range 14-56; Scale of Responses: *Never* (=1), *Sometimes* (=2), *Often* (=3), and *Always* (=4);

The questions in the Cognitive subcategory are as follows:
Think about what you do when you read.

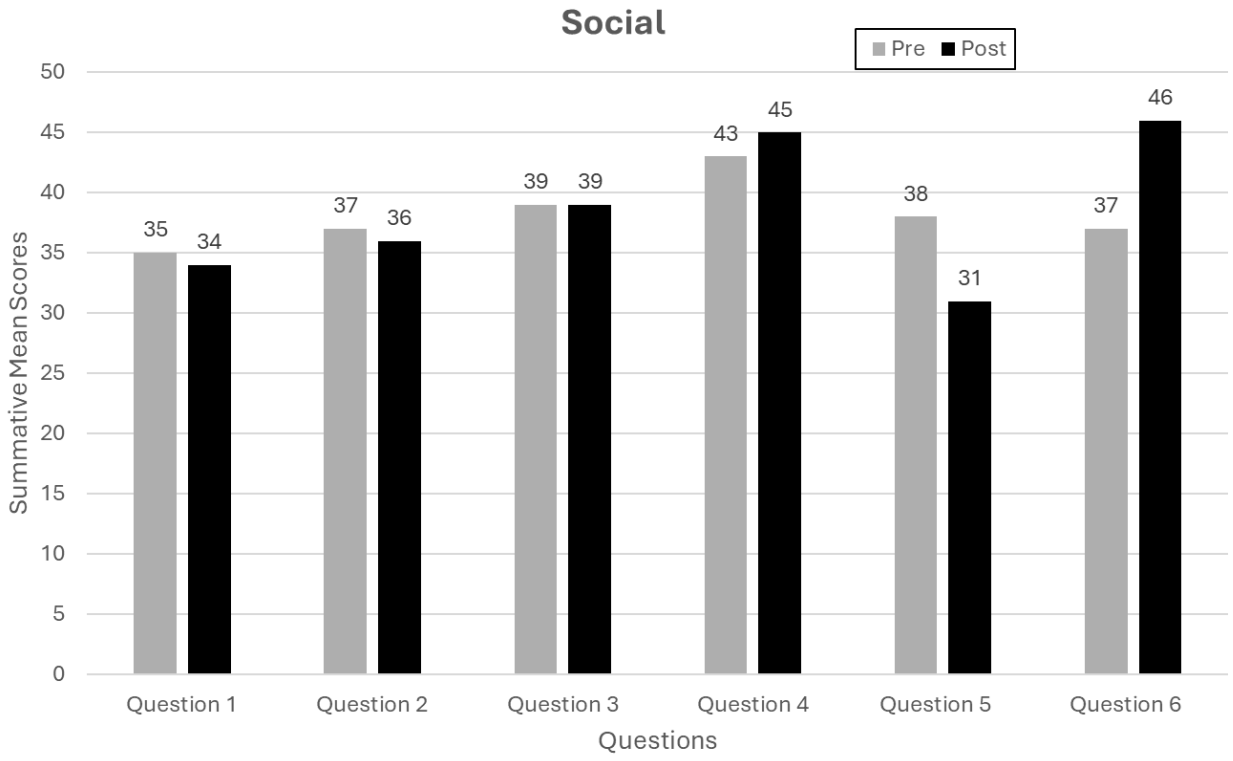
- Question 1: If a book becomes difficult, I re-read to increase my understanding.
- Question 2: When I read books, I think a lot about what I am reading.
- Question 3: I think about what I already know to help me understand what I need.
- Question 4: When I read books, if I come to a word I do not know, I will try to work it out.
- Question 5: If a part of a book is difficult to understand, I will keep reading until it becomes clearer.
- Question 6: If a book uses words I do not know, I will still try to understand the main story.

Social Subcategory

To examine the individual questions in the Social-Social subcategory, the researcher compared the summative means from the pre- and post-test for each question. Findings indicate a mean increase for questions 4 (+2) and 6 (+9), a decrease for questions 1 (-1), 2 (-1), and 5 (-5), and no change for question 3. Figure 11 shows the difference between the pre- and post-test scores.

Figure 11

Questions in the Social Subcategory



Note: n=14, Range 14-56; Scale of Responses *Never* (=1), *Sometimes* (=2), *Often* (=3), and *Always* (=4).

The questions in the Social subcategory are as follows:
How much do you share about reading with others?

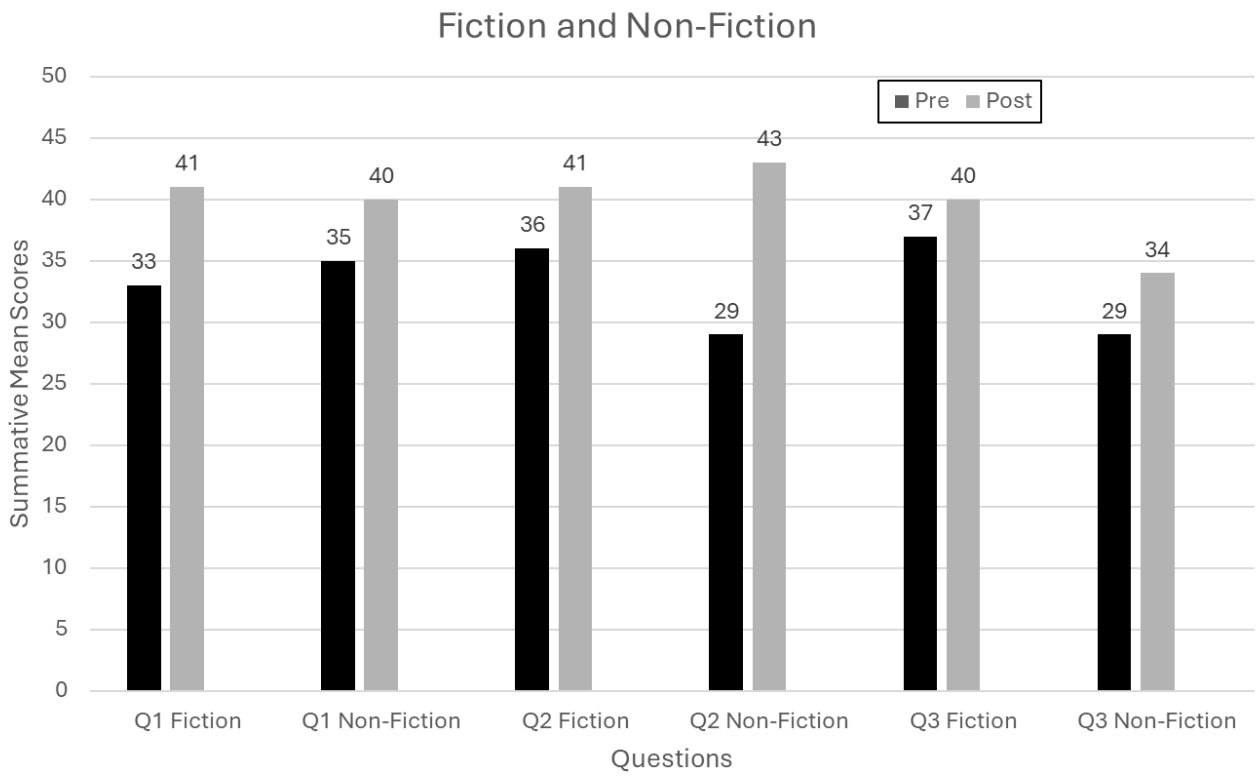
- Question 1: I talk about books with others.
- Question 2: I enjoy discussing books with others.
- Question 3: I recommend books to others.
- Question 4: Others recommend books they think I will like.
- Question 5: I feel confident discussing books with others.
- Question 6: I start conversations about books with others.

Behavioral Subcategory

To examine the individual questions in the behavioral subcategory, the researcher compared the summative mean scores from the pre- and post-test for each question. Findings indicate a mean increase for each of the six questions. This subcategory divided three questions into fiction and nonfiction. The answers differ from those of the other subcategories because they ask for the amount of time spent doing each activity or an estimate of the types of books the students read. Figure 12 shows the difference between pre- and post-test scores.

Figure 12

Questions in the Behavioral Subcategory



Note: *(n=14)*, Range 14-56

The questions in the Behavioral Category are as follows:

- Question 1: How often do you read fiction or nonfiction books in your own time each week? (Answer Choices: Not at All. 1-2 Days, 3-4 Days, 5-7 Days)
- Question 2: How many fiction and non-fiction books have you read in your own time in the last month? (Answer Choices: 0, 1-2, 3-4, 5+)
- Question 3: How long do you usually read fiction and non-fiction books without taking a break? (Answer Choices: 0-5 minutes, 5-15 minutes, 15-30 minutes, 30+ minutes)

To examine the different genre preferences across the groups for pre- and post-intervention, the researcher analyzed the genre types participants indicated they read before and after the intervention. Then, the researcher divided the post-test answers by gender. Findings indicate an increase between pre- and post-test totals and the genres most preferred by gender. Table 13 shows the participants' favorite genres.

Table 13

Favorite Genres Across Groups

	Total Pre	Total Post	Boys Post-test	Girls Post-test
Funny/ Comedy	6	7	3	4
Adventure	4	3	2	1
Mystery	6	10	4	6
Scary	5	6	3	3
Fantasy/ Magic	1	5	1	4
Historical Fiction	3	4	2	2
Sci-fi	1	2	1	1
Realistic Fiction	4	2	1	1
Picture	7	6	2	4
Biographies	1	2	1	1
Non-Fiction	3	5	1	4
Graphic Novels	4	9	5	4
Totals	45	61	26	35

Note: n=14

Analysis of Questions

To examine the impact of the small reading groups on the participants in both the Control and Treatment Groups, the researcher analyzed individual questions with gains or losses of four points or more. Findings show that questions in the behavior and affective subcategories had the most questions with at least a five-point gain, and one question in the social subcategory had a five-point loss. Table 14 lists these questions and the difference between the pre- and post-test scores. The questions are divided into subcategories and listed in order of largest to least difference.

Table 14

Questions with Differences of Five Points or More

Subcategory	Question	Difference
Behavioral	Question 2b: How many non-fiction books have you read in your own time in the last month?	+14
	Question 1a: How often do you read fiction books in your own time each week?	+8
	Question 1b: How often do you read nonfiction books in your own time each week?	+5
	Question 2a: How many fiction books have you read in your own time in the last month?	+5
	Question 3b: How long do you usually read non-fiction books without taking a break?	+5
Affective	Question 5: Book reading takes me to another world.	+10
	Question 3: I feel connected to the characters, stories, or topics that I read about in books	+8
	Question 1: I feel happy when I read books.	+7
	Question 2: I feel relaxed when I read books.	+6
	Question 6: I read books to learn more about my interests.	+5
Cognitive	Question 2: When I read books, I think a lot about what I am reading.	+5
Social	Question 6: I start conversations about books with others.	+9
	Question 5: I feel confident discussing books with others.	-7

Note: The results reflect the change over time in reading engagement taken from the pre- and post-test data of the Reading Engagement Scale (McGeown & Smith, 2024); the range is 6-24 (n=14).

Final Questions

To further examine the participants' attitudes about reading and participation in the study, the researcher added Question 8 to the pre-and post-test and Questions 9-11 to the post-test (See Appendix A). Survey Question 8 (Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences reading books, good or bad, that I have not asked?) was an open-ended question. Only seven students responded to this question on the pre-test and two on the post-test.

Next, the post-test survey added three more questions. Question 9 (Which part of the group did you like best) had five possible answers for all groups, with four extra options for the Treatment Groups. Question 10a (Would you attend another group like this one?) had two possible answers (yes/ no). The results were 13 "yes" and one "maybe" written beside the question. The next part of Question 10b (reasons for yes or no answer) received eight responses. Question 12 (What would you change about the group for next time?) received 11 answers. Table 15 lists answers to the open-ended questions that appeared more than once.

Table 15

Answers to Question 9

Answers to Question 9 from all participants	
Writing= 9	The Books =8
Meeting time= 6	New Skills= 5
New Vocabulary= 4	
Treatment Group answers for the differentiated parts of the lessons	
Reading Log= 2	Book Choices= 1
Reading with Friends 3	Free Writing= 2

Note: All Participants (n=14); Treatment Group (n=8)

Participants wrote answers to Questions 10 and 11. The answers were combined to show similar responses. Table 16 shows the responses to Questions 10 and 11

Table 16

Answers for Questions 10b and 11

Reasons for yes answer	What would you change?
Fun/ good = 4	Read more books = 4
Friends = 2	Nothing = 4
I love to read/ write =2	More writing/ vocabulary/ time = 3

Summary

The data demonstrates the positive effects of the intervention on participant engagement. Every participant exhibited positive changes in multiple areas, a promising sign of the intervention's potential. The researcher utilized the SPSS 29 (IBM Corp, 2023) program to conduct the Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon tests, examining pre- and post-test data across the groups. Despite the absence of statistical differences between or within the groups, the researcher conducted an item analysis to reveal propitious outcomes. By dissecting the data by meeting times, gender, subcategories, and individual questions and using descriptive statistics to analyze the data, the researcher identified shifts in attitudes and behaviors that yielded positive results. Chapter Five elaborates on these findings and how instruction can motivate students to deepen their reading engagement.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This study used quantitative methodology and a quasi-experimental design to collect and analyze data from 14 third-grade participants. The study's comprehensive approach aimed to answer the research question: What are the effects of a six-week, small-group intervention incorporating engagement strategies on third graders' reading engagement in behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social development? There were no statistical differences between or within the groups; this discussion will focus on item analysis of the subcategories (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social) and descriptives.

The pre- and post-test surveys using the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) revealed positive changes in reading engagement across the four subcategories (behavioral, affective, cognitive, and social). The findings suggest that a balanced literacy intervention, such as the Fountas and Pinnell Blue LLI kit (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014), and a focus on engagement practices within reading instruction can improve reading engagement in third-grade at-risk readers. This chapter includes a comparison of the results related to literature and theory, the implications of this research on instructional practice, and recommendations for future research on reading engagement.

Connection to Literature

The researcher conducted four small reading groups (Control Groups A and C, Treatment Groups B and D) over six weeks for at-risk third-grade students in a rural, Title 1, southeastern elementary school. For this discussion, the researcher synthesized the data from the 14 participants of the small reading groups (Control Groups A and C, Treatment Groups B and

D) to compare the change over time in reading engagement for each subcategory (behavior, affective, cognitive, and social). The researcher also explored the data in subgroupings of meeting times and gender. The findings of this study are consistent with existing research on balanced literacy and reading engagement.

Struggling readers benefit from book introductions, vocabulary instruction, and skills review within the text to build on known information and apply new skills (Merga, 2020). These components were integral to every small group lesson for the treatment and control groups (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014). Employing engagement theory (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), the researcher encouraged personal and content area connections to make reading relevant and engaging, while the vocabulary and skill instruction helped participants independently problem-solve, apply new knowledge, and gain confidence as readers. This alignment with existing literature validates this study's contribution to literacy education regarding reading engagement in the behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social subcategories.

Behavioral Engagement

Findings from this study suggest that participants who enjoy reading read more often and try a wider variety of books (Merga, 2020). Behavioral engagement is defined by the frequency, duration, and genres participants read (McGeown & Smith, 2024). To increase the frequency, the researcher gave participants in the Control and Treatment groups time to read independently, while the Treatment group participants took books home and set reading goals. The increased individual mean score of 5.75 points across groups reflects the increased independent reading time. To improve the duration and genres, all participants received 8-10 books to build a home

library, and multiple genres were included in the lessons. Participants in the control and treatment groups reported reading more books more often and spending more time reading fiction and non-fiction than before the study, indicating improved reading behaviors.

According to the survey results, the largest mean increase for Control Group A was in the behavioral subcategory of 6.5 points. This score increase is reflected in the change in one participant who asked on the first meeting, "Is this like reading jail?" whose individual score for the behavior subcategory increased by 12 points. Bandura's (1993) research on self-efficacy states that students who have repeated academic failures have low self-efficacy and do not have confidence in their abilities. The researcher built self-efficacy during the reading group meetings by planning for independence, metacognition, and successful experiences (Bandura, 1993). The researcher employed questioning techniques during group meetings to scaffold learning while encouraging problem-solving, reflection, and self-monitoring during reading to create successful reading experiences for all participants. These successful experiences could have affected this one participant's behavioral score.

Pre- and post-test scores show that all groups except Control Group C indicated increased behavioral engagement. A possible explanation for the decrease was the schedule changes due to inclement weather. This affected Group C's schedule the most, resulting in participants staying after school on two extra Friday afternoons. Two participants from this group missed four meetings due to schedule conflicts and illness. Also, only the data from two of the four participants contributed to the study's results, thus skewing the mean for this group. Still, the

behavioral subcategory showed a positive increase, specifically in genre, when combining the data from the study.

Research shows increased exposure to multiple genres increases behavioral engagement (Turner & Paris, 1995; Van der Sande et al., 2023). By teaching skills within various genres, the researcher appealed to the participants' interests, encouraging discussions about their connections to the stories to increase behavioral engagement (Clay, 2016; McGeown & Smith, 2024; Merga, 2020). Eight of the fourteen participants chose “the books” as a favorite part of the small group, reflecting the positive effect of the variety of authentic texts used in instruction.

As part of the lessons, participants in the four reading groups read various genres, including fantasy, biography, picture books, realistic fiction, informational, nonfiction, and narrative. Question 2b (How many non-fiction books have you read in your own time in the last month?) shows the largest mean increase of 14 points. This shift towards choosing more non-fiction books for independent reading reflects the exposure to multiple genres in the lessons and the variety of book choices for building at-home libraries.

Another question with a large mean increase (+8) across groups was Question 1a (How often do you read fiction books in your own time each week?). This increase indicates that more participants from all four groups spent more time reading fiction books than before the intervention. The number of genre choices also increased, with boys showing a preference for graphic novels and girls enjoying mysteries.

Successful readers maintain focus, exhibit persistence, invest effort in comprehension, engage in regular reading, and actively explore new literary genres. (Cho et al., 2019; Clay,

2015; Lyons, 2004; Lyons, 2024; McGeown & Smith, 2024; Merga, 2020; Serravallo, 2015; Van der Sande et al., 2023). The focus on free-time reading highlights the importance of leisure reading for comprehension and positive book experiences. Overall, the study indicated that participants in all reading groups read more often and enjoyed a broader range of genres than before participating in the small groups.

During the treatment group meetings, participants had more book choices than the control group for independent reading. Treatment Group participants took books home and completed reading logs, encouraging positive reading behaviors of increased frequency, duration, and text types (McGeown & Smith, 2024). Small-group instruction for treatment and control groups built interest and gave a purpose for reading, encouraging the participants to try new genres and connect to the books they read (Clay, 2016; Fountas & Pinnell, 2014), which is reflected by an increase in scores in the behavioral engagement portions of the survey.

Affective Engagement

The affective subcategory data reveal significant growth in students' emotional engagement with reading, underscoring the positive impact of instructional strategies used during this intervention. Affective engagement in reading means making meaningful connections with the characters, story, and information in the book while reading (McGeown & Smith, 2024). Students who enjoy reading can sustain their attention longer for deeper comprehension (Harrison et al., 2017). Key findings demonstrate notable gains in the participants' perceptions of reading as an enjoyable and meaningful activity, with increased motivation and confidence to explore books. Educational research highlights the power of authentic contexts, interactive

discussions, and scaffolded learning in fostering emotional connections and a deeper appreciation for reading (Jensen, 2013; Lyons, 2004; McTighe & Willis, 2019). Survey results emphasize the importance of creating a safe and supportive learning environment that encourages risk-taking, reflection, and the development of self-efficacy as the participants build their identities as confident and enthusiastic readers.

Data from the affective subcategory showed significant increases in five of the six questions. Affective question 5 (Book reading takes me to another world) received the highest gain of 10 points. Participants also reported that reading makes them feel happy and relaxed. The researcher capitalized on Jensen's (2013) research, suggesting that teachers build a knowledge base by connecting to authentic texts. These connections build interest for the students and scaffold the text's meaning for deeper comprehension.

Encouraging students to read multiple genres adds depth, changes perceptions, and gives value to others' experiences (Jensen, 2013). The increase in scores across the Affective subcategory reflects participants' connection within the text, text-to-text, and text-to-self. Treatment Groups (B and D) had more opportunities to reflect through journal entries and partner reading; in contrast, Control Groups (A and C) had quiet independent reading and dictated journal entries. Each group (Control and Treatment) participated in book discussions, and the researcher planned book introductions to build interest and support the reader. The increase in the Affective subcategory for both treatment groups highlights the increased focus on integrating time for reflection into small-group lessons.

The gains on Affective Question 3 (I feel connected to the characters, stories, or topics I read about in books) showed a positive gain of 8 mean points, suggesting the effectiveness of the book introductions and discussions. Rosenblatt (1993) stated that readers react to text on a continuum of Efferent responses to acquire meaning and collect facts—aesthetic responses of emotionally connecting, creating mental images, and developing opinions about the writing. The discussions before and after the participants read helped participants express their connections and reflect on others' connections. Book introductions were part of every small group lesson for both control and treatment groups. The researcher's book introductions scaffolded instruction by orienting the participant to new concepts, vocabulary, and sentence structure while gaining information on the participant's background knowledge through conversation and questioning (Clay, 2016).

The increase in affective engagement scores suggests that students felt comfortable taking risks in the group and felt successful as readers. Following the suggested reading levels in the LLI kit text, the researcher chose instructional level N because this was the beginning reading level for the third grade (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014). This level allowed the researcher to scaffold learning for the participants in the reading group, tailoring instruction to be challenging while allowing the participants to experience success in their efforts (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Miller, 2015; Rabun, 2017). Teachers who create an emotionally safe environment for their students foster a growth mindset, build self-efficacy, and build positive relationships before motivating students to work harder, take risks, and expand their cognitive skills (Jensen, 2013; Lyons, 2004; McTighe & Willis, 2019).

One participant from the treatment group wrote, “I am smart,” on the post-test survey. This participant demonstrates a growth mindset (Dweck, 2007), confidence to try complex text, and high self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). Students with high self-efficacy eagerly anticipate reading in school (Harrison et al., 2017). They see themselves as readers and regard reading as an avenue for learning, entertainment, and social interaction (Bandura, 1993). Such students have confidence in overcoming reading challenges (Harrison et al., 2017). Writing this statement on the final evaluation shows increased success and excitement for reading. Pressley (2002) found that students in classrooms with skills-instruction embedded within authentic texts became successful readers through scaffolding, diverse materials, and building independence. The researcher implemented lessons that taught skills within the text and built independence by creating a safe environment to learn from mistakes and celebrate successes.

Increases in the affective subcategory and the 13 “yes” responses to the question, “Would you attend another group like this one?” indicate that the participants valued the time spent in the small groups. Sackstein wrote, “Continuing to foster deep connections is likely to encourage students to not only seek your help when they need it but also follow your suggestions when you provide them” (Sackstein, 2021, p. 15). Using the survey to adjust lessons around participants’ needs and interests helped the researcher connect with the participants while creating a positive reading environment by choosing books and writing tasks that reflect participants' interests and providing support to scaffold learning (Pinnell & Scharer, 2003).

Cognition and emotion are linked through experience because the emotional responses to an experience cause the brain to focus and take in current information or reject it (Lyons, 2024;

Pinnell & Scharer, 2003; Rabun, 2017). Teachers foster cognitive engagement by designing learning activities that develop these critical skills and create a supportive environment that encourages emotional engagement with reading. Incorporating Rosenblatt's (1993) Transactional Theory of Reading, the researcher created opportunities for efferent and aesthetic responses to reading through self-reflection and discussion.

Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement shapes students' ability to comprehend and interact with texts meaningfully. By activating strategic mental processes, such as decoding, connecting new information to prior knowledge, and synthesizing ideas, students develop the skills necessary to extract meaning from what they read (Lyons, 2024; Wolfe, 2010). The significance of cognitive engagement is especially evident in the study's findings, which highlight the role of metacognitive strategies and thoughtfully designed learning experiences in fostering deeper comprehension. This section explores the notable improvements in cognitive engagement and the instructional practices that supported these gains, shedding light on how strategic teaching can inspire students to think critically and connect with their reading on a deeper level.

The greatest mean increase (+6) in the cognitive subcategory was Question 2 (When I read books, I think a lot about what I am reading). This statement refers to the strategic activity in the brain that begins with taking the visual information from the text, structurally understanding how it fits into the context of the book, and then connecting that information to prior knowledge to understand and make meaning from the words on the page read (Clay, 2011; Clay, 2015; Compton-Lilly et al., 2023; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). "Cognitively engaged

children are much more likely to spend time deciphering unfamiliar words, working out the meanings of new words, monitoring their comprehension, and making connections between information in the book and their existing knowledge" (McGeown & Smith, 2024, p. 2). The researcher focused on the author's purpose for reading: to learn new information, enjoy a story, persuade, or gain a deeper understanding of a character's life. Thus, phonics, fluency, and grammar became tools for reading for meaning.

During the small group lessons for both control and treatment groups, metacognitive strategies, such as rereading, decoding, fluency, and summarizing, were discussed, modeled, and praised as participants read aloud to the teacher (Bates & Malloy, 2024). The lessons taught by the researcher utilized authentic texts that were interesting and relatable for participants. During the 12 small group lessons for the control and treatment groups, the researcher planned opportunities to teach literacy skills, such as orthography, morphemes, vocabulary, and grammar, across various content areas and genres.

For example, in lesson 8, Fountas and Pinnell (2014), lesson 115, the researcher used the non-fiction informational text *Volcanoes* (Kirk, 2009) to create situational interest within the content areas of science and social studies. The phonics skill for this lesson was comparative and superlative suffixes (morphemes), which build on prior phonics skills. The text provided specific examples. Vocabulary instruction used the words *erupt, dormant, dangerous,* and *sure,* taken from the book, and included definitions in context and a demonstration on how to use orthographic (word parts) and morphological (units of meaning) information to make analogies to known words and decode words. In the book introduction, the researcher made a personal

connection to Mount St. Helens; then the participants found Washington on the map. During their discussions, participants made connections to their background knowledge of the Hawaiian Islands, text features, and volcanoes.

The next lesson (9) included writing that integrated the phonics skills and information from the *Volcanoes* (Kirk, 2009) book. The Control group composed a dictated sentence with the teacher, while the Treatment group composed original sentences about the story. Using text to apply the skills taught during the lesson makes learning meaningful, aiding the students in becoming independent problem-solvers as they connect to prior knowledge to solve words within the text (Clay, 2016).

Duke and Cartwright's (2021) Active View of Reading Model (AVR) reflects the metacognitive strategies utilized throughout each lesson. As discussed in Chapter Two, the AVR includes word recognition and language comprehension from Gough's (1996) Simple View of Reading (SVR), adding strategy use and bridging processes such as print concepts, content vocabulary, and flexibility. Rumelhart's (1977) Interactive Model asserts that the context of a sentence influences word recognition, and background knowledge is crucial for comprehension. This interactive process helps readers comprehend text more efficiently and accurately. Each lesson scaffolded the decoding skills, grammar, syntax, and background knowledge necessary to read and comprehend the text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2014). The researcher used the discussion and participant responses to adjust instruction as needed.

The increase in Question 3 (I think about what I already know to help me understand what I read) and Question 5 (If a part of a book is difficult to understand, I will keep reading

until it becomes clear) reflects evidence of cognitive strategies used by the participants during reading. Although the increase in this subcategory was only +1, the cognitive subcategory showed the highest combined scores in pre- and post-test data. One explanation of high cognitive scores is that each participant received reading instruction using a balanced literacy approach in kindergarten through second grade, with three participants receiving Reading Recovery (Clay, 2016) interventions in first grade. As discussed in Chapter Two, metacognitive strategies are essential to Reading Recovery (Clay, 2016) and Fountas and Pinnell's (2014) Guided Reading instruction.

Cognitive engagement involves the internal mental processes that help readers make sense of the text and form meaningful connections for comprehension (McGeown & Smith, 2024). Students gain awareness of their reading abilities through metacognition, fostering independence and success. It represents the strategic brain activity that supports effective reading (Wolfe, 2010). The researcher provided opportunities to make connections, reflect, and discuss their reading to increase metacognition through social interactions within the small reading groups.

Social Engagement

The social subcategory only had one question that showed a mean increase between the pre-and post-test surveys. Question 6 (I start conversations about books with others) had a nine-point increase, the second-highest mean increase on the survey. In contrast, Question 5 (I feel confident discussing books with others) decreased by seven mean points. The difference between

these questions is important. Students who start the conversation choose who they are talking to, while question 5 implies confidence in talking with any person, student, or adult about a book.

McGeown and Smith (2024) explain that students around age eight begin forming their reading identities. Students who have not had success learning to read, such as students labeled "at-risk," may not see themselves as readers and do not feel confident in their abilities. Struggling readers may lack self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993) or have a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2007), believing reading is completing a set of skills (Anderson et al., 2024). Providing inclusive opportunities for social practices, such as talking about books, reading together, and sharing books, is key to creating communities of readers (McGeown & Smith, 2024). However, some students do not enjoy the social aspects of sharing reading experiences (McGeown & Smith, 2024), contributing to a lower score than the other categories.

Overall, the social subcategory means increased for control groups but decreased in both treatment groups. The change could be attributed to the grouping of participants because the group of four boys (Control Group C) increased the most in this area. Other questions under the social subcategory also showed small mean losses or gains. Question 1 (I talk about books with others) and Question 2 (I enjoy discussing books with others) dropped one mean point each from the pretest to the post-test. Question 3 (I recommend books to others) had no mean gain or loss, and Question 4 (Others recommend books they think I will like) had a two-point mean increase. This slight change within these questions could be explained by reading at home not being a priority. For example, one participant said, "I do not have time to read at home because I have basketball practice."

Another possible explanation for the low social engagement scores is that independent reading is replaced by more screen time at school and home (Qi et al., 2023). One participant said, “I do not read at home because I play Minecraft.” Pew Research Center reported that in 2020, 42% of nine-year-olds read for fun daily, and 25% said they only read once or twice a week, a decrease from results in 2012 and 1984 (Schaeffer, 2021). A 2023 Meta-analysis found that schoolchildren aged six to 14 had an average screen time of 2.77 hours per day, with 46.4% surveyed having an average of more than two hours per day (Qi et al., 2023). Students spend more time on computer-based activities at school, with many reading activities shifting to online formats.

As our schools shift into Science of Reading (SOR), skills-based, systematic approaches to reading instruction, opportunities for students to read independently, and share reading experiences within a small group are replaced with decodable text to practice isolated linguistic skills and computer-based assessments (Anderson et al., 2024). This disconnect could explain the low mean scores in the social subcategory for the treatment and control groups, as students are less likely to participate in authentic book discussions and guided reading groups within the school setting.

As part of the study, participants in both the Control and Treatment small reading groups discussed books that the group read together. By scaffolding the skills and vocabulary and integrating these skills with a focus on meaning, the purpose of reading shifted from successfully decoding the words quickly to understanding and making connections to the text (Posey, 2019).

Authentic discussions surrounding books are essential for deeper comprehension (Anderson et al., 2024; Clay, 2016; Goodman & Bohanon, 2018).

This study aimed to measure the effectiveness of engagement strategies on third-grade at-risk readers. The researcher planned small reading groups that addressed reading engagement across four subcategories: behavioral, affective, cognitive, and social. Differentiating for the treatment group, the researcher implemented proven strategies to increase reading engagement. The researcher gathered pre- and post-test data using the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) and analyzed it using descriptive statistics. This section discussed the links between the data, research, and engagement strategies implemented in the six-week intervention.

Theory Discussion

The theoretical framework for this study falls into the constructivist theoretical framework, as discussed in Chapters One and Two. Students actively construct their learning, beginning with the known and moving to the unknown with the help of a more knowledgeable other (Tracey & Morrow, 2024). “Without insight into the psychological structure and activities of the individual, the education process will therefore be haphazard and arbitrary” (Dewey, 1929, as cited in Flinders and Thornton, 2004, p.17). Viewing reading from a Constructivist Lens, Balanced Literacy theories posit that the learner actively and constantly creates knowledge through hypothesis-testing experiences and that listening, speaking, reading, and writing are interrelated (Tracy & Morrow, 2024).

Based on the work of Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), the researcher implemented an intervention for engagement in reading that involves strategic interactions, motivating the reader.

Wigfield et al. (2004) posits that readers must be motivated to coordinate their conceptual knowledge and reading strategies through social interactions to achieve the expected outcomes. Engagement Theory seeks to explain how student motivation and teacher instruction interact to build reading engagement that leads to better readers (Unrau et al., 2015). This theory encompasses multiple reading theories contributing to the balanced literacy approach, while the Engagement Model (Wigfield et al., 2004) lends itself to practical classroom practice.

The Engagement Model (Wigfield et al., 2004) has three levels: three student outcomes in the center (achievement, knowledge, and practice), with four student imperatives (conceptual knowledge, strategy use, motivation, and social interactions) in the middle, surrounded by nine instructional practices (teacher involvement, learning and knowledge goals, real-world interactions, autonomy support, engaging text, strategy instruction, collaboration, rewards and praise, and evaluation). Each of these fourteen components, included in the three levels of the Engagement Model (Wigfield et al., 2004), was addressed during small-group instruction for the control and treatment groups.

Using books on the participant's instructional reading level, the researcher scaffolded instruction to build knowledge, create challenges, and practice skills needed for the students to become independent readers. Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) Engagement Theory states that engaged readers use cognitive strategies to connect to background knowledge to interact with the text. In each lesson, the researcher applied instructional practices aligned with the Engagement Model (Wigfield et al., 2004) to address student imperatives effectively. These practices included setting a clear purpose for reading each book and demonstrating and practicing essential

skills like orthography, morphology, and grammar. Collaborative activities were designed to introduce and explore new vocabulary and concepts. At the same time, participants received guidance and praise during reading sessions for employing strategic activities such as self-monitoring, re-reading, decoding, summarizing, and utilizing multiple sources of information. The researcher also encouraged social interactions during reading and writing tasks, fostering a supportive and interactive learning environment. Independent work, participant effort, and personal achievements were consistently praised, reinforcing motivation and a sense of accomplishment.

This discussion connects the results from this study, reading engagement strategies incorporated into small-group instruction and differentiated for the Treatment Group, with reading research and theory. The researcher employed Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) Engagement theory to guide planning and implementation. The researcher analyzed pre- and post-test data from the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) to identify areas of increased reading engagement

Implications for Reading Instruction

The findings from this study suggest that small-group reading instruction, using a balanced literacy approach, can increase reading engagement for at-risk third-grade students. The control and treatment groups' participants responded positively to integrating skills into reading and writing using authentic texts. As mentioned earlier, Chapter 5 discusses how focusing on engagement strategies, like those used in this study, in the different areas of reading engagement (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social) can help teach reading. This section explores the

implications for future reading instruction concerning genre, gender, theory, and instructional practice.

Data from this study show that the girls reported higher engagement levels than the boys who participated. Eight girls and six boys participated in this study, with Control Group A and Treatment Group B having equal numbers of boys and girls (two each). Treatment Group D had three girls and one boy, while Control Group C had four boys (data excluded for two). The eight girls' summative mean scores increased by 11.8 mean points, and the six boys' mean scores increased by 7.05 points across the reading groups.

Muntini et al. (2021) found that gender stereotypes of fifth-grade students reflected the belief that girls are better readers. The study found that the participants' belief in their reading abilities and their classmates' stereotypes affected boys' reading performance (Muntoni et al., 2021). Additionally, the boys who strongly endorsed the stereotypes that favored girls' reading ability over boys displayed lower motivation to read and reduced self-confidence in their reading abilities (Muntoni et al., 2021). Another study by McGeown et al. (2012) also shows that girls read more frequently, place a higher value on reading, and report more confidence in their reading abilities than boys (Muntoni et al., 2021). Further investigation of the research data shows a favorable shift in genre choices for both girls and boys.

To increase reading motivation among boys, educators can be cognizant of the book selections (McGeown et al., 2012). Analyzing the results of genres, this study shows that the boys who participated in this study prefer graphic novels and mysteries over non-fiction genres, with one male participant specifically writing "I like *I Survive* books" on his pre-test. Girls who

participated in this study chose mysteries as their preferred genre, with a broader variety of genres selected overall. The total number of genres also increased between pre- and post-tests, indicating that participants were motivated to try different genres. Four of the six boys indicated that “the Books” were a part of the lesson they enjoyed. These results suggest that providing the participants in all groups with an opportunity to try different genres within the lesson and with books to take home positively affected the participants’ reading engagement.

Utilizing a balanced literacy approach provided the researcher with options for improving reading engagement through small-group instruction. “Supporting behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social aspects of engagement will ensure all children have positive, rich, and diverse experiences with the books they read” (McGeown & Smith, 2024, p. 462). To strengthen a skills-based curriculum, teachers can incorporate opportunities for authentic reading, conversations, opportunities to try multiple genres, and connections to books students choose to read (Young, 2011).

Duke and Cartwright (2021) developed the Active View of Reading Model (AVR) by expanding on Gough's 1986 Simple View of Reading (SVR). The SVR asserts that reading comprehension results from language comprehension and decoding, which function independently. The AVR (Duke & Cartwright, 2021) improves this model by adding self-regulation and bridging processes, offering a more comprehensive view of the cognitive engagement involved in reading. As discussed in Chapter Two, the AVR combines SOR theories and research on reading engagement.

The AVR better aligns with current scientific understanding by addressing reading comprehension difficulties that occur despite age-appropriate word recognition and language comprehension (Burns et al., 2023). When taught, each element within the AVR improves reading comprehension, making it valuable information for all reading practitioners and people making decisions about reading instruction.

Using tools such as the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) in the classroom can help teachers find ways to engage students and unlock their potential for personal and academic growth. This tool allows teachers to gain insight into their students' mindsets, self-efficacy, and reading behaviors. McGeown and Smith (2024) include instructional practices with a *Reading Engagement Scale* that addresses each engagement subcategory to assist teachers in creating positive reading environments and fostering reading engagement. Knowing what motivates students to read can assist teachers in building relationships with students and planning engaging student-centered instruction.

Future Research

The results of this study indicated that intentionally including engagement strategies in four areas (behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social) could help improve reading engagement for third-grade students at risk during a six-week balanced literacy reading program. However, educators still need further research on reading engagement for elementary students. Although this study lasted six weeks, additional research could show more significant changes in reading engagement over a more extended period. Twelve of the 14 participants responded that they would participate in the group again, suggesting increased engagement.

McGeown and Smith (2024) recommend that teachers use the *Reading Engagement Scale* with a whole class of children to guide planning. Employing McGeown and Smith's (2024) research to understand the effects of the different subcategories of engagement in different contexts is needed. Additionally, research on the effects of self-reported engagement compared to student standardized test scores could be beneficial. The *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024) is a tool educators can use with students ages eight to eleven to research how age and gender affect self-reported reading engagement or how engagement differs between classrooms and schools.

This research was limited to available third-grade at-risk participants in Elementary School F in a rural setting. Future research could include students from different backgrounds, settings, and ethnicities, or compare students' reading engagement at various reading levels. Educators need to study how family reading behaviors and attitudes influence reading motivation and engagement as society becomes more media dependent. As schools adopt new reading curricula, studies are needed to determine how different text types, assessments, and computer-based reading assignments affect reading engagement over time. Screen time for students is replacing reading as a leisure activity (Schaeffer, 2021); research could offer insight into how this societal shift is changing students' reading motivation and behaviors.

Eight of the fourteen participants indicated that the books used for the lessons were the best part of the instruction. New research into genres and interests at different ages and by gender could assist teachers in creating and updating classroom libraries. To further research on student motivation to read, students need opportunities to share their reading behaviors, cognitive

strategies, attitudes, and preferences with educators. Continued study in reading engagement will improve instructional practices, benefiting reading instruction for all students.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting and generalizing the findings from this study. The study's limitations include the limited sample size, time, and location. Other limitations were winter weather, illnesses, transportation issues, and participant selection. The sample frame was limited to the students attending Elementary School F in a rural, southeastern community. The data collected was limited to 14 participants from Elementary School F, and the intervention lasted only six weeks.

The researcher discovered two participants received Tier 2 interventions during the initial group meeting. The researcher allowed these students to continue in the group but removed their data from the results. Although 16 students participated, the researcher could only analyze data from 14 participants. The two extra participants contributed to Control Group C's experience but did not contribute to the final data.

Another limitation is that participant attendance and scheduling may have affected the data. Control Group A and Treatment Group B met during breakfast before class, meaning that participants had to arrive at school by 7:30 am, and some had to wait in line to get breakfast before coming to the meetings. Unfortunately, if participants arrived too late, they missed parts of the lessons.

Control Group C and Treatment Group D met after school dismissal at 2:40 pm. Afternoon participants needed reliable after-school transportation to participate. Participants

missed lessons due to afternoon appointments or occasional transportation issues. The researcher rescheduled two meeting days due to weather-related school closings, and the one-morning meeting took place after a 2-hour school delay, causing the participants' parents and teachers to adjust from the previous schedule.

Another limitation of this study was potential researcher and participant biases. The researcher organized and guided the small group activities and administered data collection instruments to participants, potentially introducing unintentional bias in the process. To control this, the researcher followed the lesson structure and plans in the Fountas and Pinnell (2014) teacher's guide and implemented pre-established routines for all four groups. A daily journal documented daily activities, the participants' behaviors, and other lesson variances.

Another limitation was the convenience sample, contingent on the participants' availability. The researcher limited the sample frame to students with morning or afternoon transportation that suited the meeting times. Teacher recommendations could have been biased toward students who were consistently present at school and were a better fit for a small-group intervention. Two students did not return permission forms and had to be replaced by alternate students, further limiting the selection.

Additionally, the researcher was an interventionist at this school during the study and taught three participants in an intervention setting in previous school years. Two participants had family members working at the school. As a teacher in this school, the researcher built relationships with many participants and families before this intervention. Building relationships is vital in promoting student engagement, and the researcher created a supportive environment

more efficiently than if an external individual had carried out the intervention for a six-week duration.

The limitation of outside influences during the intervention's duration was out of the researcher's control (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). Confounding variables could have included, but were not limited to, the time of day the intervention took place, participants being affected by events during the day, illness, inclement weather, and conflicting personalities within the group. Participants missed meetings due to illness and prior commitments. One participant missed three meetings, another missed four, and one missed five, possibly influencing their engagement and the other's experiences during the 6-week intervention. The small group sessions met either during breakfast before school or immediately after school, which could have influenced energy levels and a willingness to interact with others. Participants ate breakfast during the morning group times, and the researcher provided snacks to the after-school groups to help with hunger and hydration.

Ultimately, it was impossible to explicitly separate the impact of the small group intervention from the overall impact of the typical daily instruction the participants were already receiving. This intervention complemented classroom instruction and the daily Tier 2 interventions the participants received. The researcher had prior experience using the Fountas and Pinnell intervention kit and conducting small reading groups, which assisted with planning, management, flow of the lessons, and overall fidelity. Limitations of this study had possible effects on the data and implementation that need to be considered when reviewing the study's findings.

Summary

The researcher synthesized data from 14 participants' scores on the *Reading Engagement Scale* (McGeown & Smith, 2024), analyzed it, and distilled it into a cohesive summary to provide a new perspective on reading engagement, adding to existing literature. A balanced literacy approach, such as the Fountas and Pinnell (2014) LLI kit, to teach phonics, fluency, cognitive strategies, writing, and vocabulary through authentic text can appeal to the student's interest and background knowledge. Participants reported increased engagement in reading, specifically in behaviors, affective responses to the text, metacognitive strategies, and strengthening comprehension skills through social interactions (Esmail et al., 2017; Gentilini & Greer, 2020; Lindo, 2024; McGeown & Smith, 2024). The findings from this study are supported by previous research on reading engagement across the four subcategories of behavioral, affective, cognitive, and social engagement (Lee, 2013; McGeown & Smith, 2024).

Young (2011) defines a high-progress literacy classroom as one in which all students are wholly engaged with reading or writing of connected text for at least 75% of the time allotted for reading instruction. Utilizing a small group setting, the researcher delivered instruction on third-grade ELA standards across twelve lessons for both the control and treatment groups (see Appendix F), fostering active student engagement, sparking motivation and curiosity through dynamic book discussions, and integrating skills into student-based instruction (McTighe & Willis, 2019). This study adds to the growing body of literature supporting the importance of reading engagement in reading instruction.

The findings of this study align with the Engagement Theory developed by Gutherie and Wigfield (2000). The results support the theory that motivated and engaged students demonstrate self-efficacy and a growth mindset, which is crucial for continued growth and independence (Wigfield et al., 2004). The study's findings also contribute to the literature on using balanced literacy programs to incorporate engagement strategies, demonstrating that small-group, balanced literacy interventions complement third-grade classroom instruction by increasing student engagement in reading. The long-term results of disengagement are academic failure and high dropout rates (Lee, 2013), making engagement the necessary path to reading achievement through comprehension (Cho et al., 2019). Sustainable literacy engagement is the power that educators want to foster in their students as they become literate adults (Aukerman & Chambers Schuldt, 2021; McGeown & Smith, 2024).

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APPENDIX A

Reading Survey

Participant # _____

1. How often do you read fiction and nonfiction books in your own time each week?

Fiction:	Not at all	1-2 days	3-4 days	5-7 days
Non-fiction	Not at all	1-2 days	3-4 days	5-7 days

2. How many fiction and non-fiction books have you read in your own time in the last month?

Fiction:	0	1-2	3-4	5+
Non-Fiction:	0	1-2	3-4	5+

3. How long do you usually read fiction and non-fiction books without taking a break?

Fiction:	0-5 minutes	5-15 min.	15-30 min.	30+ min.
Non-Fiction:	0-5 minutes	5-15 min.	15-30 min.	30+ min.

4. If you read in your own time, what are your favorite types of books to read? Please circle all that apply:

Funny/ Comedy Adventure Mystery Scary

Fantasy/Magical Historical Fiction Sci-fi Realistic Fiction

Picture Books Biographies Non-Fiction Graphic Novels

5. Think about how you feel when reading books and why you choose different books.

I feel happy when I read books.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel relaxed when I read books.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel connected to the characters, stories, or topics that I read about in books.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I care about what happens to the characters in books I read.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Book reading takes me into another world.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I read books to learn more about my interests.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always

6. Think about what you do when you read.

If a book becomes difficult, I re-read to increase my understanding.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
When I read books, I think a lot about what I am reading.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I think about what I already know to help me understand what I read.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always

When I read books, if I come to a word I do not know, I will try to work it out.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
If a part of a book is difficult to understand, I will keep reading until it becomes clearer.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
If a book uses words I do not know, I will still try to understand the main story.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always

7. How much do you share about reading with others?

I talk about books with others.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I enjoy discussing books with others.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I recommend books to others.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
Others recommend books to me that they think I will like.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel confident discussing books with others.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
I start conversations about books with others.	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always

8. Please write anything you want me to know about yourself or how you feel about reading.

(These questions were added to the Post Survey)

9. Which parts of the group did you like the most?

The books we read together, Writing, Learning, New Skills, Learning new vocabulary, coming before/ after school

9a. B/D Group: Reading Log, Reading with Friends, Free writing, Variety of books

10. Would you attend another group like this one? Yes or No: Reasons

11. What would you change about the group for next time?

(McGeown & Smith, 2024)

APPENDIX B

Telephone Script for Participant Recruitment

Hello, I am Miranda Dickson, a reading interventionist at F. Elementary.

May I please speak to (person listed on contact list as primary parent or guardian)?

I am calling to discuss a research study through Anderson University, and I hope that (Child's Name) will be able to participate. The study's purpose is to measure reading motivation and engagement before and after the six-week intervention. He/She was recommended by (teacher's name) for this extra reading intervention.

With your permission, (child's name) will be included in a small reading group of 4 students on (day and times) for six weeks.

Your child will participate in Group (A, B, C, or D). Which will meet on:

Group A: Monday and Wednesday from 7:30- 8:10

Group B: Tuesday and Thursday from 7:30-8:10

(Child) can eat school breakfast or food from home in my room before the beginning of the group. He/She will miss the first 10 minutes of classroom time, but that is during WIN time, which is independent study time.

Group C: Monday and Wednesday from 2:40-3:20

Group D: Tuesday and Thursday from 2:40-3:20

(Child) will come to my classroom at dismissal and stay with me until 3:20. I will provide a snack each day. To participate, someone must pick him/her up at 3:20 at the front of the school.

Participation is voluntary, and your child will not be penalized for not participating or rewarded for joining the group.

We will use the Fountas and Pinnell LLI kits for the lessons, which include reading fluency, vocabulary, phonics, writing, and comprehension instruction.

My goal is for this to be an enjoyable experience that supplements the classroom reading instruction. We will begin on... and end on …

Do you have any questions?

Tomorrow, a permission form will be detailing this research study's guidelines. Please check the child's bookbag. If you decide that (child) will participate, please sign and return the form to school before Friday. My cell number is listed on the permission slip if you have any questions or concerns. I appreciate your time and consideration and hope you have a wonderful afternoon.

APPENDIX C

Parent Permission Form

INFORMED CONSENT FOR Bookmarked: A Study of Reading Engagement

Your child is invited to participate in a research study to test the effects of small-group reading intervention on reading engagement. The intervention aims to provide students with vocabulary, comprehension, phonics, and reading strategies to improve engagement. This study will be conducted at F. Elementary and poses no known risks to your child. The researcher will access confidential information such as demographics and test scores during the study. This information will help us learn how this reading intervention impacts reading engagement. Data will be anonymously reported, and all information will be kept confidential during and after the study.

Mrs. Miranda (Randi) Dickson, a Reading Interventionist at F. Elementary, is conducting this study. Your child was selected as a possible participant because your child has been identified through mid-year reading assessments as possibly benefiting from extra reading intervention. If you allow your child to participate, the session will meet for 40 minutes in room 251 at F. Elementary School. The total time in the intervention group will be 8 hours, divided into 40-minute meetings. This intervention is free; the school or researcher will provide all necessary materials. Your child will participate in this group:

Group A: Mondays and Wednesdays 7:30 to 8:10 Group B: Tuesdays and Thursdays 7:30 to 8:10
Group C: Mondays and Wednesdays 2:40 to 3:20 Group D: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:40 to 3:20

Your child has been chosen to participate in Group _____. The group times are indicated above. Breakfast can be eaten during morning groups, and snacks will be provided for afternoon groups. Your child's participation in this study may involve minor risks or discomfort. These include potentially losing ten minutes of classroom instruction each meeting day.

This intervention is free of charge and offers instruction in reading comprehension, vocabulary, phonics, and reading strategies in a small group setting with other third-grade students. Each participant can eat school breakfast or a snack during the meeting. Participation is voluntary, and results will vary among students. This study cannot replace any school-based programs your child is receiving.

This is a RESEARCH project. It is not a diagnosis/treatment for a learning/ reading disability.

Any information obtained during this study that can be connected to your child will remain confidential and anonymous. Individual student data or other information linked to individual students will not be shared with school or district employees. Information collected through your child's participation will be used to

fulfill an educational requirement for Anderson University. No identifiable information about the participants will be included in the research.

Students may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All data and information linked to your child will be protected and destroyed within two years. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Anderson University, F. Elementary, or the school district.

If you have questions later, please contact me at rdickson@xxxx.org or (864) 650-0004. I am happy to talk with you. Please keep this information page and return the signature page by _____.

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee/Institutional Review Board by phone or e-mail at Dr. Gilbert Eyabi, **hsc@andersonuniversity.edu**, 864-231-2167.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN THIS PAGE FOR YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO ALLOW YOUR STUDENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SMALL-GROUP INTERVENTION, AS EXPLAINED.

- I permit my child to participate in the research study at F. Elementary from (start date to end date). If my child is in Groups C or D (meeting from 2:40 to 3:20), I agree to provide transportation for my child at 3:20.

Your child is assigned to:

Group A: Mondays and Wednesdays 7:30 to 8:10

Group B: Tuesdays and Thursdays 7:30 to 8:10

Group C: Mondays and Wednesdays 2:40 to 3:20

Group D: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:40 to 3:20

_____ _____

Parent/ Guardian's signature Date Investigator's signature Date

_____ _____

Print Name Print Name

Student's Name: _____ Contact Number : _____

Does your child have health or allergy concerns that could affect snacks or breakfast choices?

APPENDIX D

Student Assent Form

Bookmarked: A Study of Reading Engagement
ASSENT FORM

My name is Miranda (Randi) Dickson. I work at F. Elementary and attend Anderson University. I invite you to participate in a research study about reading engagement. I want to learn how to make reading fun for students and help them become better readers.

Your parent/guardian knows about this study and signed the paper for you to participate. If you agree, I will ask you to:

- Come to my room before/after school for 12 lessons on (days & time)
- Participate in group discussions and ask questions about the books we are reading
- Choose books to read and read independently
- Talk about your favorite books with your friends
- Write about parts of the book we are reading and read aloud to the teacher
- Answer questions about how you feel about reading and reading aloud to the teacher
- Be respectful, responsible, and ready to learn
- Always try your best and have fun!

You do not have to be in this study. No one will be mad at you if you decide not to do this study. Even if you start the study, you can stop later if you choose to do so. You may ask questions about the study at any time.

If you decide to participate in the study, you will come to my classroom two days a week (at 7:30 am and eat breakfast with me or come at 3:20 pm and eat a snack).

Signing here means that you have read this form or had it read to you and are willing to be in this study.

Name of Participant (Write your name in the line):_____

Signature of Participant (Put your signature in the line): _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX F

Third-Grade Standards List

Third-Grade Standards covered in Small-Group and in the Second and Third Nine Weeks HMH

Group Lessons	State Third-Grade Standard	HMH Module
LLI lessons #108-119	ELA.3. F.4.2 Read a variety of texts orally and silently with accuracy, appropriate rate, expression, and intonation.	Module 4, 5, 6
LLI Lessons #108-119	ELA. 3. F. 4.3 Read texts by: a. using letter-sound knowledge to segment and blend sounds together; b. decoding the words by analogy; c. recognizing chunks including familiar prefixes, suffixes, or the first syllable of the word; d. generalizing phonic skills to unknown words e. using context and visuals from the text to support monitoring and self-correcting.	ELA.3.F.4.3a: Module 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 ELA.3.F.4.3b: Module 8 ELA.3.F.4.3c: Module 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 ELA.3.F.4.3d: Module 5, 7, 8 ELA.3.F.4.3e: Module 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
LLI Lessons #108-119	ELA.AOR.1: Evaluate and critique key literary elements that enhance and deepen meaning within and across texts.	Module 4, 5, 8, 9
#108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 114, 116, 118	ELA. 3. AOR. 1.1 Explain how one or more characters develop throughout the plot.	
#111, 114,	ELA.3.AOR.1.2 Identify and explain the purpose of forms of figurative language to include metaphor, hyperbole, and idioms.	
LLI Lessons # 113, 115, 117 # 108- 119	ELA.AOR.4: Evaluate and critique how an author's perspective and purpose shape style and meaning within and across informational texts.	Module 5, 6 Module 7, 9

	ELA.3.AOR.4.1 Determine and explain an author's purpose (e.g., what an author wants to answer, explain, or describe); identify an author's perspective on a topic.	
LLI Lessons #108-119	ELA.3.AOR.7.1 Determine or clarify the meaning of known and unknown words and phrases, choosing from an array of strategies: a. use sentence-level context clues (e.g., definitions, examples) to determine the meaning of a word or phrase;	ELA.3.AOR.7.1a: Module 4, 5, 6
LLI Lessons 109, 111, 114, 116. 115	ELA.3.AOR.8.1 Determine an author's use of words and phrases in grade-level literary, informational, and multimedia texts: a. distinguish between literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases (e.g., take steps); b. identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., describe people who are helpful)	ELA.3.AOR.8.1a: Module 4, 6 ELA.3.AOR.8.1b: Module 5, 6
LLI Lessons #108, 109, 110, 114.	ELA.C.4: Demonstrate command of standard English grammar and conventions when writing. c. use commas and quotation marks to indicate direct speech and quotations from a text; d. use apostrophes to create contractions	ELA.3.C.4.1g: Module 6
LLI Lessons # 108-119	ELA.C.8: Through collaboration, react and respond to information while building upon the ideas of others and respecting diverse perspectives. ELA.3.C.8.1 Participate in structured conversations and collaborations about grade-appropriate topics and texts: a. enter a conversation appropriately, listen actively to others, and ask and respond to questions to clarify thinking and express new ideas; b. consider and reflect upon the ideas expressed during conversations.	ELA.3.AOR.8.1a: Module 4, 6 ELA.3.AOR.8.1b: Module 5, 6

LLI Lessons # 111, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118 (-er, -est, -ly, -ing, -tion, -ed, -s)	*ELA.3.AOR.9.1* Identify and use derivational morphemes, prefixes, suffixes, and phonic patterns to determine the meaning of words in grade-level content.	Module 4, 5, 6

Note: HMH. (2025). *HMH Into Reading*. Retrieved from https://www.hmhco.com/programs/into-reading; Fountas & Pinnell (2014)

APPENDIX G

IRB Approval Copy

Human Subjects Committee (HSC) Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Dear Miranda Dickson,

Proposal Title: Bookmarked: A Study of Reading Engagement

Submission date: Monday, November 25, 2024, 4:10 PM

The Human Subjects Committee (HSC) has received and reviewed the submitted above-titled research proposal. I am happy to inform you that AU's IRB has voted to **APPROVE** your proposal as submitted. Your approval number is **AU042IRB2425.**

Please be reminded that if at any point during the research, the risk level to any human subjects involved changes, either physical harm or loss of anonymity, or should you find it necessary to make any adjustments to the study as approved, please contact the HSC/IRB Chair in advance of implementing such changes. This may require that you submit an IRB Modification form.

We wish you well in your research.

If you need clarification regarding the committee's decision, please contact Dr. Gilbert Eyabi, IRB Chair, at HSC@andersonuniversity.edu.

Sincerely,

[redacted] 12/10/2024

Gilbert Eyabi, PhD
Assistant Provost, Anderson University,
Professor of Mathematics,