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Novice Teachers' Perspectives of Self-Efficacy Using Literacy Assessment Data to Make Decisions

Dylan Teut
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education

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Dylan C. Teut

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Walden University

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Abstract

Novice Teachers' Perspectives of Self-Efficacy Using Literacy Assessment Data to Make

Decisions

by

Dylan C. Teut

MPhil, Walden University, 2020

MEd, Concordia University Nebraska, 2015

BSEd, Concordia University, Nebraska, 2012

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Reading, Literacy, Assessment, and Evaluation

Walden University

May 2021

Abstract

A significant number of U.S. students are unable to read proficiently by fourth grade, and over two billion dollars are spent each year on students who repeat a grade due to reading problems. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques to use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. The conceptual framework was assessment theory. The research question focused on novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques to use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. A total of 10 teachers having 3 to 5 years of experience in Grades K-3 in school districts around the United States shared their perspectives in semi-structured interviews. Interview transcripts were analyzed using open and axial coding. The results included strategies that administrators, teacher educators, policymakers, and mentor teachers might use to improve novice teachers' self-efficacy in using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Through thematic analysis, three overarching themes emerged: (a) collegiate support and high-quality field experiences contributed to self-efficacy of data use for decisions, (b) reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions, and (c) novice teachers relied on instincts to strengthen self-efficacy when using data. Leaders may use the results of this study to inform their decisions regarding preparing preservice teachers and supporting novice teachers for high-quality literacy instruction, assessment, and intervention.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my sister, Taylor Marie Teut, who died tragically and unexpectedly at the age of 19 on December 12, 2014. Taylor was a freshman at Iowa State University majoring in psychology with the dream of pursuing a career to help people. Although literacy is a different line of work, I hope to continue her legacy by using my findings and my degree to help children and teachers and policymakers for years to come. I love you and I look forward to a reunion in heaven someday where degrees will not matter, but we will celebrate eternal victory with Jesus Christ. I also give a nod to my great grandmother, Anna Teut and grandmother, Virgene Fredericks, who are also in heaven but I know they would have been cheering me on this entire journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

There is a significant number of students unable to read proficiently by fourth grade, and over two billion dollars are spent each year on students who repeat a grade due to reading problems (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). Classrooms in which assessment data drive instructional adaptations and guide intervention support have significantly improved the number of students who are proficient in literacy by the time they reach fourth grade (Oakes et al., 2018). Whole-group instruction does not need to change, but targeted interventions and support needs to change for students who are not meeting benchmark targets or outcomes at a given point in the school year (January et al., 2018). Teachers need to be prepared to align their instruction with assessment data in a manner that differentiates to meet learner needs and provides support for those who are below benchmarks (Prenger & Schildkamp, 2018). Novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques are limited and are necessary for greater understanding of why some of them are not effectively using data to inform their instruction and practices (Curry et al., 2016).

In this chapter, I provide background information from the research literature related to the problem of limited novice teachers' perspectives of using adaptive instructional techniques using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. The problem statement presents the context to frame the purpose of my study on novice teachers' perspectives on using literacy assessment data. I used the conceptual framework to develop the research question, data collection process, and data analysis plan. This chapter also contains information about the nature of the study,

definitions of key terms, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study.

Background

When teachers have the support from their administration to differentiate instruction, students have significantly higher literacy achievement scores (Missall et al., 2019; Puzio et al., 2020). If teachers cannot effectively use and analyze student work samples and formative assessment data, they will not be able to effectively plan intervention or acceleration for students (Dial, 2015). Literacy is such a complex and multifaceted skill that it is necessary for teachers and administrators to be reflective and responsible about assessment data gathered, and what the data mean for classroom instruction and interventions (Amendum et al., 2016; Cartwright & Duke, 2019). Collecting data from assessments is not enough; teachers need to be able to use interventions to support better access to instruction, skills to interpret data, and knowledge to respond to data of all kinds (Filderman et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Lynch et al., 2016; Marsh, 2012; Vaughn, 2019).

When interviewed, novice teachers in their first year expressed concerns about their students, feeling overwhelmed, concerns about the quality of their teaching, and excessive accountability from administrators (Curry et al., 2016). Although there are many struggles novice teachers face, many novice teachers are not applying adaptive instructional techniques to their teaching (Broemmel & Swaggerty, 2016; Cech et al., 2018; Jimerson et al., 2016; Vaughn, 2019). There are several influences on novice teachers and their growth and development as professionals, including their experiences

in undergraduate coursework and field experience, their administrator expectations and support, and support they have from their curriculum and team teachers and mentor teachers (Coombs et al., 2018; Curry et al., 2016; Dial, 2015; Zimmerman, 2017). It was important to explore the perspectives of novice teachers regarding this practice because using assessment data is so beneficial to student growth and development.

When assessment data are used to make decisions about classroom instruction and intervention, the decisions lead to improved student learning, growth, or development (Filderman et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Lynch et al., 2016; Marsh, 2012; Vaughn, 2019). Many forms of assessment data can be used to gather information about student performance and needs. The data gathered from these assessments provide teachers with the information necessary to make shifts in instruction and intervention that lead to improvements in long-term growth and achievement in students (Farrell & Marsh, 2016; Lynch et al., 2016). Because research has indicated that such practices are beneficial, all novice teachers should feel a strong sense of efficacy to implement such practices. I gathered perspectives from novice teachers about using assessment data to inform instruction and intervention decisions in my research.

Problem Statement

Many novice teachers are not using adaptive instructional techniques using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions (Broemmel & Swaggerty, 2016). Exploring novice teachers' perspectives was necessary to determine what is stopping some teachers from teaching using adaptive instruction based on literacy assessment data (see Kippers et al., 2018). These instructional practices include using

data from summative and formative literacy assessment tools to make choices about whole group, small group, and individual interventions for literacy instruction (Afflerbach, 2016). Adaptive teaching, reflecting, and modifying instruction are cornerstones of an effective literacy program (Vaughn, 2019).

Some preservice teachers leave their undergraduate coursework feeling ill prepared to make informed instructional decisions for their students (Sharp et al., 2018). The opportunities for preservice teachers to practice making data-informed instructional decisions are limited during field experience, practicum, and student teaching opportunities (Scales et al., 2018). When novice teachers enter their classrooms and encounter their students and curriculum, the content these teachers learn in methods courses does not always transfer to their classroom experiences, practices, or expectations (Smagorinsky, 2018).

Some first-year teachers were unable to effectively use assessment methodology from literacy instruction courses they took as preservice teachers (Broemmel & Swaggerty, 2016). For the most effective instruction to take place, incongruences among novice teacher abilities, efficacies, and classroom practices need to be identified (Scales et al., 2017). A gap in the literature revealed no one significant factor why some novice teachers are not using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Because using assessment data is so beneficial to student growth and development (Cech et al., 2018; Jimerson et al., 2016; Vaughn, 2019), it was important to explore novice teachers' perspectives about using assessment data to inform literacy practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques to use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. I encouraged teachers to share their perspectives of their efficacy in using literacy assessment data by identifying their understandings, feelings, and concerns to make instructional and intervention decisions. The findings from this study may provide information for assisting new teachers and for teacher training and professional development. The novice teachers' perspectives may provide new insight into novice teachers' efficacy on using data and may help administrators and teacher preparation educators better prepare and support preservice teachers and novice teachers.

Research Question

This qualitative research study addressed one central research question: What are novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques to use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions?

Conceptual Framework

The framework for the study helped to identify variables, coding, and themes among data given in the interviews. The conceptual framework for this study was derived from Brookhart's (2004) assessment theory. Brookhart theorized that classroom assessment information should be the basis that educators use to inform important classroom processes and outcomes. These processes and outcomes include the topics of

students' studies and work patterns, students' understanding of what they are learning, and teachers' instructional and grading decisions (Brookhart, 2004). When attention is given to principles of assessment quality, especially validity and reliability of the assessment tools used, confidence in assessment information quality increases (Brookhart, 2004). Brookhart's assessment theory states that assessment data are the basis for which instruction is driven. I encouraged novice teachers to share their perspectives of their efficacy in using literacy assessment data by identifying their understandings, feelings, and concerns to make instructional and intervention decisions as described in Brookhart's theory. Because teachers who have strong self-efficacy are prone to commitment in new teaching approaches, it was important to hear the perspectives of novice teachers regarding their self-efficacy in using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions (see Mills & Harrison, 2020).

Qualitative research is based on the belief that construction of knowledge happens when people engage in meaning making of an activity, experience, or phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The basic approach allows the researcher to conduct studies that help the researcher understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used a basic qualitative approach including one-on-one interviews. Brookhart's (2004) assessment theory provided a foundation to view the importance of regular assessment and the use of the assessment data to improve student performance and achievement. I designed the interview questions using the constructs of this theory to assist me with probing for information regarding novice teachers'

perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions.

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative approach including one-on-one interviews to obtain an in-depth investigation of people's lives as experienced in their natural environments (see Yin, 2016). This qualitative analysis helped create an understanding of novice teachers' perspectives on their self-efficacy to use data to inform instruction and intervention. The study sample consisted of 10 novice teacher participants. I recruited participants in their third, fourth, and fifth years of teaching through a snowball sampling approach. These individuals must have had reading instruction included in their teaching responsibilities. The participants must have been teaching kindergarten through third grade at the same grade level for at least 2 years in the same school. The study site was schools around the United States. The population included teachers who teach reading in their third through fifth years teaching kindergarten through third grade.

Definitions

Assessment: Gathering information about students' literacy skills to be used for the purpose of demonstrating understanding or a lack of understanding (Brookhart, 2004).

Assessment theory: "Classroom assessment information should be the basis for important classroom processes and outcomes: students' study and work patterns, students' understanding of what they are learning, and teachers' instructional and grading decisions" (Brookhart, 2004, p. 5).

Data inquiry: Teachers working together to analyze student progress using data, make recommendations about curricular and instructional next steps, and follow up on the results of these actions to identify areas of ongoing improvement (Bocala & Parker Boudett, 2015).

Data literacy: The ability to understand and use data to make decisions and inform instruction, rather than collecting data with no purpose (Mandinach & Gummer, 2016).

Evaluation: Using data garnered from assessment tools to make judgments about the worth of a specific strategy or intervention (Brookhart, 2004).

Formative assessment: Informal assessments that provide data that are useful for continued student learning, positive classroom change, and other improvements (Brookhart, 2004).

Novice teacher: For the purposes of this study, novice teachers are defined as having 2 to 5 years of experience in Grades K-3. This study focused on novice teachers who at the time were teaching reading in kindergarten, first, and second grade in school districts around the United States. Due to challenges of COVID-19, teachers in their second year were unable to complete the previous school year and collect data in a normal setting. First-year teachers were not included because they did not have adequate experience with reading assessments and data (see Dvir & Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2020; Kayalar, 2020).

Summative assessment: Formal or informal assessments that are cumulative and provide data that are useful for making final decisions such as letter grades (Brookhart, 2004).

Assumptions

The first assumption of this study was that the novice teachers would participate willingly and respond honestly to the interview questions. I assumed all responses from the novice teachers would be unbiased. Each novice teacher received an email letter or invitation and a consent form with the expectation to reply, “I consent” as a means of authenticating their permission. I assumed that the responses from the novice teachers would reflect their true perspectives concerning their use of assessment data. Objectivity and willingness were crucial to the validity of the findings of the study.

The second assumption was that the novice teachers had an interest in participating in this study. I assumed they did not have any motives or rewards for their participation. I assumed this to be true because there was no incentive offered for participating in the study.

The third assumption was that the novice teachers would answer interview questions based on their experiences. To discover each novice teacher’s perspective, I assumed novice teachers discussed their experiences using assessment data to inform instructional techniques to make instructional and intervention decisions.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was novice teachers in districts across the United States. This study was delimited to bachelor’s level teachers who had been teaching the same

grade level in the same building for 3 to 5 years. The study was delimited to teachers in kindergarten through third grade. The study was delimited to teachers who teach reading as part of their instructional responsibilities. Novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques to use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions were necessary to obtain a better understanding of why some are not effectively using data to inform their instruction and practices.

The research sample consisted of novice teachers because their perspectives were limited (see Kippers et al., 2018). Teachers who had been teaching for only 1 or 2 years, who had changed schools or grade levels, or were beyond the scope of kindergarten through third grade did not participate in the study. For the purposes of this study, novice teachers were defined as having 3 to 5 years of experience in Grades K-3. Due to challenges of COVID-19, teachers in their second year were unable to complete the previous school year and collect data in a normal setting. First-year teachers were not included because they did not have adequate experience with reading assessments and data.

I included detailed descriptions of the data collected to ensure transferability. Providing descriptions allows readers to make comparisons to other contexts based on as much information as possible. This allows the audiences of the research (e.g., readers, other researchers, stakeholders, participants) to transfer aspects of a study design and findings by taking into consideration different contextual factors instead of attempting to replicate the design and findings (see Creswell, 2012).

Limitations

The first limitation of this basic qualitative study was that data collection and analysis of qualitative studies are considered time consuming (see Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I set aside ample time for collecting and analyzing data. The second limitation was that the participants were a convenience sample of 10 teachers who were bachelor's level teachers who had been teaching in the grade levels kindergarten through third grade at the same grade level in the same school for 3 to 5 years. The sample was large enough to describe the phenomenon of interest and address the research question by attaining saturation (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The small number of potential participants in this study may limit transferability to other populations.

Due to COVID-19, participants may not have been interested in participating in this study. Information about the necessary time required to participate was provided to each potential participant so they would be able to decide whether to volunteer for the study. Interviews were conducted through Zoom or telephone call. The interviews did not take place on school property or during school hours. A snowball sampling method was used to recruit 10 participants to be interviewed.

My personal biases may have affected the outcome of this study. Reflexivity requires the researcher to be keenly aware and to constantly check their position and subjectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I did not allow my thoughts and perspectives to interfere with this study. One way to control bias was to ensure that I was aware and took note of any bias toward a participant's responses. I used reflexivity when reviewing the

interview transcriptions to check for biases. I also wrote personal notes in a reflective journal to double-check my biases.

Significance

Some novice teachers do not know how to use assessment data to make instructional decisions and find appropriate interventions (Kippers et al., 2018). In other instances, novice teachers are limited by restrictions such as lack of resources available for assessment, proper support from administration, or choices to not use assessment data for instructional purposes (Kippers et al., 2018). Summative assessment data are gathered, but sometimes they used only to report scores and achievements to stakeholders (Afflerbach, 2016). For novice teachers to be able to effectively use assessment data, they need additional opportunities to practice data use through practicum and student teaching experiences and additional support in their first years (Scales et al., 2018).

In classrooms where experienced teachers use assessment data to drive instructional adaptations and guide intervention support, the practice has significantly improved the number of students who are proficient in literacy by the time they reach fourth grade (Kippers et al., 2018). Whole-group literacy instruction does not need to change, but targeted interventions and support need to improve for students who are not meeting benchmark targets or outcomes at a given point in the school year (January et al., 2018).

Novice teachers need to be prepared to align their instruction with assessment data in a manner that differentiates to meet learner needs and provides support for those who are below benchmarks (Prenger & Schildkamp, 2018). Novice teachers' perspectives

of self-efficacy regarding the ability to use adaptive instructional techniques in their teaching were limited and were necessary to understand why some are not effectively using data to inform their instruction and practices. The implications for positive social change are providing teacher educators, administrators, and policymakers the findings so they may better equip and support novice teachers to use data to inform their instruction. When novice teachers are better equipped and supported, literacy proficiency can improve through effective data use to inform instruction (Oakes et al., 2018). The findings of this study also added to the body of literature.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I identified the problem of students being unable to read proficiently by Grade 4. I connected the importance of using literacy assessment data to effective and adaptive teaching. I identified the problem that novice teachers are not using literacy assessment data to inform their instructional and intervention decisions. I also noted that the perspectives of the novice teachers regarding efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques using assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions were limited and could help teacher preparation programs, mentor teachers, and administrators.

In Chapter 2, I describe the factors that contribute to novice teachers' use of literacy assessment data to inform instruction. I explain the research strategies that I used to become familiar with the topic. I describe the theoretical framework of the study and explore Brookhart's assessment theory. I explain related research that included studies documenting the importance of using data to drive instruction, types of assessments and assessment data, challenges that novice teachers encounter, and current and historical

practices of gathering and using literacy assessment data to inform instruction and interventions. I also briefly explore reading intervention programs that are contingent on gathering and using literacy assessment data to support striving readers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Many novice teachers are not applying adaptive instructional techniques to their teaching (Broemmel & Swaggerty, 2016). Exploring novice teachers' perspectives was necessary to determine what is inhibiting some teachers from teaching using adaptive instruction based on literacy assessment data. The purpose of this study was to examine novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques to use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions.

Chapter 2 includes a discussion of the conceptual framework and a review of the literature review in three areas. The first area focuses on types of assessment and assessment data and how others are using literacy assessment data. The second area covers influences on novice teachers' practices, beliefs, and efficacy. The third area focused on data-driven instruction and its implications for educators and literacy intervention programs. As a result of the limited peer-reviewed articles featuring all three areas in one study, searches were done separately on each area of focus. This chapter includes an introduction, information on the literature search strategy, and a description of the conceptual framework. A literature review related to key concepts is followed by a summary and conclusion.

Literature Search Strategy

For this literature review, I used books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and internet sources to investigate novice teachers' perspectives of using literacy assessment data to inform instruction. I used the Walden University library and searched several

databases including ERIC, Sage Journals, EBSCO, and Taylor and Francis Online. I used Google Scholar to locate articles that cited other articles relevant to the literature review. The following keywords assisted me with searching for relevant articles: *literacy assessment, assessment data, data-driven instruction, assessment theory, formative literacy assessment, summative literacy assessment, differentiated instruction, literacy interventions, reading interventions, novice teachers, novice teachers' perspectives, administrator support for novice teachers, field experience, student teaching, and mentor teachers.*

Scholarly literature included relevant information that supported the research question. The scholarly literature provided insights into the importance of using data to inform instruction, types of assessment, and common influences and struggles novice teachers face in their first 5 years. As I read primary and secondary sources, I looked for common themes and sorted the information into three categories: assessment, influences on novice teachers, and data-driven instruction. I discuss each of these categories of research in the literature review.

Conceptual Framework

Brookhart's (2004) assessment theory was the theoretical foundation of this study. Brookhart's (2004) theory says that classroom assessment information should be the basis for classroom instruction decisions, interventions, and other outcomes. Assessment data should inform student study and work patterns, students' understanding of what they are learning, and teachers' instructional and grading decisions (Brookhart, 2004). When assessment practices are based in sound theory, they are valuable tools that lead to high-

quality information about student achievement in the classroom (Brookhart, 2004). When assessment data are used to make decisions about classroom instruction and intervention, the decisions lead to improved student learning, growth, or development (Brookhart, 2011).

Brookhart (2011) articulated the skills teachers need to effectively implement meaningful assessments that lead to data about student needs and areas of growth, and teachers need to process assessment data into useful information for decisions about students and classroom instruction. Brookhart (2011) recommended that teachers should be able to articulate the reasoning behind their decisions based on assessment results to families and stakeholders. Teachers are the single biggest influence on students and their learning (Brookhart, 2018). Although there are many resources available for teachers to help with instruction and intervention, they are filtered through teachers' beliefs and knowledge as the teachers utilize the resources for classroom purposes (Brookhart, 2018). A teacher should be equipped with the skills needed to carefully analyze questions, assessment items, and performance tasks and the knowledge and thinking required from their students to use the skills to complete questions, assessments, and performance tasks (Brookhart, 2011).

When teachers have support from administration and curricular resources to differentiate instruction, students have significantly higher literacy achievement scores (Missall et al., 2019; Puzio et al., 2020). Although teachers can use intuition and experience to make decisions, it is more effective to use data from assessments to make data-based decisions that will improve the quality of education in the classroom (Kippers

et al., 2018). Confidence levels of teachers to use data affect teacher responses to data to inform instruction (Lockton et al., 2020). Such confidence is related to teachers attaining skills to analyze classroom questions, test forms and items, and performance assessment tasks to ascertain the specific skills and knowledge students need to respond to the assessments correctly (Lockton et al., 2020).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables/Concepts

Influences on Novice Teachers

Novice teachers' initial immersion into a school environment is contingent on personal and professional support as perceived by the teachers (Curry et al., 2016). Assessment is a challenging for novice teachers who are beginning to make connections between their understanding of how students learn to read and how assessment data can be used to shift instruction and provide effective interventions for students (Zimmerman, 2017). If teachers cannot effectively use and analyze student work samples and formative assessment data, they will not be able to effectively plan intervention or acceleration for students (Dial, 2015). Both inadequate preparation and administrator restrictions can hinder the use of assessment data to inform instruction (Dial, 2015).

Novice teachers' personal experiences with literacy as a child while at home and in school can either motivate or discourage efficacy in establishing meaningful literacy instruction in their classrooms (MacPhee & Sanden, 2016). Environmental factors in the building are also contributing factors to novice teachers' success in the classroom (Curry et al., 2016). Some novice teachers face a problem of enactment in which novice teachers' perceived ideas about high-quality reading instruction do not align with their

practical intentions (Zimmerman, 2017). As novice teachers recognize a disconnect between their beliefs and their abilities, they experience emotions and some leave the profession (Zimmerman, 2017).

If novice teachers do not have an awareness of the multidimensional nature of their classrooms and how their practices and assessments inform the nature of student learning and growth, it is difficult for them to design instruction that meets the needs of all students (Coombs et al., 2018). Teachers who have had more experience also have a stronger awareness of their classrooms (Coombs et al., 2018). Resiliency is another important component for novice teachers, and feedback from undergraduate professors, supervising teachers, administrators, and mentor teachers help creates a strong level of resilience in novice teachers (Dial, 2015).

Undergraduate Coursework

Preservice teacher education programs have the most significant influence on teachers' approaches to assessment and approaches to using assessment data to inform instruction (Coombs et al., 2018). When interviewed about the experiences teacher education programs offer, teachers who had coursework that focused on data-driven decision making reported higher levels of literacy teaching skills across their coursework, and also reported higher levels of self-efficacy (Raymond-West & Rangel, 2020). Undergraduate coursework should include introductions to literacy development theories, instructional strategies, routines, and student needs to best prepare novice teachers (Scales et al., 2017). Courses and professors should also coach preservice teachers so they are able to adapt any literacy environment, materials, and methods to particular

situations and students and their respective needs based on assessment data (Raymond-West & Rangel, 2020; Scales et al., 2017).

Teacher education coursework content often includes a deep focus on classroom behavior management (Zimmerman, 2017). A better approach to designing teacher education coursework would be framing preservice teachers' cognitive abilities to be flexible in circumstances (Zimmerman, 2017), especially those centered around using literacy assessment data to continuously inform instruction (Bocala & Parker Boudett, 2015; Conrad & Stone, 2015). Teachers must continually make compromises in their classroom environments with their students to achieve a balance between the notions they hold about high-quality reading instruction and the realities of their classroom (Zimmerman, 2017). When teachers are trained with adequate information about data-driven instruction and enter classrooms with strategies and techniques for both classroom management and differentiating literacy instruction, they can have a tremendous impact on student learning (Berenato & Severino, 2017).

Courses about using data to inform instruction are rarely offered in teacher training (Kippers et al., 2018). Schools of teacher education often include instruction about data in stand-alone courses about interventions rather than use it as an integrated approach to teaching across all methodology courses (Bocala & Parker Boudett, 2015). Novice teachers are poorly prepared to analyze data in a manner that equips them to use individual student data; rather, they are taught to use data for whole-class or whole-school improvement (Bocala & Parker Boudett, 2015; Clark, 2015). Although it is clear that novice teachers would benefit from courses focused on data literacy, the gap between

the diverse needs of preservice and novice teachers is so wide that it is unclear where such a course would be best recommended in the undergraduate course continuum (Levy-Vered & Alhija, 2018; Mandinach & Gummer, 2016).

Along with coursework that focuses on assessment data-informed instruction, it is important that preservice teachers have the opportunity to administer assessments and analyze multiple data sources of data from children either in practice case studies or real experiences (Zehms-Angell & Iwai, 2016). In coursework, when preservice teachers had an opportunity to use simulations to use assessment data to make decisions, it increased their data literacy (Ferguson, 2017; Gillett & Ellingson, 2017; Reeves & Honig, 2015). Coursework should focus on children's characteristics, trends, strengths, and weaknesses revealed through assessment data, and the ability to use this data to inform decisions about instruction (Zehms-Angell & Iwai, 2016). These skills are difficult to attain through lecture and practice simulations; they are best refined when they are paired with quality field experience (Zehms-Angell & Iwai, 2016).

Field Experience

Preservice teachers draw on pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge to make in-the-moment teaching decisions (R. Griffith, 2017). When knowledge of teaching practices combines with opportunities for preservice teachers to think about the complexity of classrooms and their participants, they are able to engage in effective metacognitive decision making that includes data to inform their instructional and intervention decisions (R. Griffith, 2017). It is often difficult and time-consuming for school districts to work directly with local teacher preparation programs to align literacy

methods courses with specific field experience that will allow preservice teachers to practice using data to make instructional and intervention decisions (DeGraff et al., 2015; Scales et al., 2018). Teachers reported higher levels of self-efficacy in connection with a high level of literacy exposure that they experienced as preservice teachers in their field experiences (Raymond-West & Rangel, 2020). Teachers are best suited to face unique situations in environments and student needs when literacy coursework is directly tied to field experience (Liu et al., 2016; Scales et al., 2017; Sharp et al., 2019).

Frequent opportunities to practice what is taught in literacy methods courses about assessment data to inform instruction and intervention are important to bridge the gaps between theory and practice and the university and the schools in which novice teachers begin their careers (Anderson & Fauconer, 2016; DeGraff et al., 2015; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016; Paquette & Laverick, 2017; Sanden, 2016). Opportunities for preservice teachers to practice using data to make instructional decisions should be paired with careful supervision and reflective dialogue about successes and opportunities for improvement (Gardiner, 2018; Hail et al., 2015; Zehms-Angell & Iwai, 2016). When incongruences exist between coursework, field experiences, and opportunities given to preservice teachers, consequences lead to confusion and feelings of ill preparedness among novice teachers (Rubin, 2018; Sanden, 2016). When preservice teachers faced such discourse, some avoided discussing their concerns with their supervising teacher (Sanden, 2016).

Student Teaching/Clinical Experience

Scales et al. (2017) found significant incongruences between what preservice teachers said they learned over the course of their preparation programs and what they were able to enact in their placements for student teaching. During the duration of student teaching, preservice teachers should use ongoing assessment during learning with real students (Gillett & Ellingson, 2017). Practice analyzing, interpreting, and making decisions based on data is important for preservice teachers to experience in an in-depth and sustainable setting (Reeves, 2017).

One of the few opportunities preservice teachers have to engage in long-term experience in practicing and witnessing firsthand how assessment data can inform instruction is the student teaching experience (Bratsch et al., 2017). Regardless of field experience and practice in undergraduate classrooms, the student teaching experience is one of the most critical times for preservice teachers to see how assessment data use can have a significant impact on student growth and achievement (Reeves, 2017; Sanden, 2016). Sometimes preservice teachers experience incongruences in their student teaching experiences with what they are taught in coursework and what they are expected to do in their student teaching classrooms (Young et al., 2017). Some preservice teachers find ways they can implement strategies for best practices in literacy data use in their student teaching experience (Young et al., 2017).

Curriculum

Some literacy curriculum emphases are focused on high-quality interactions (Pakarinen et al., 2017). Young children learning to read were more likely to be successful when teachers had a strong sense of comprehension in literacy instruction and

used that knowledge to create highly organized activities and cognitively stimulating instruction by using both their knowledge about pedagogy and the curriculum provided by the school (Pakarinen et al., 2017). Using curriculum and adaptive teaching strategies is critical for effective literacy teaching (Vaughn, 2019). Novice teachers should have knowledge of the concepts they are teaching and appropriate interventions for students who need additional support (Cartwright & Duke, 2019; Cech et al., 2018; Nevenglosky et al., 2018).

Curriculum can support and restrict novice teachers' ability to adapt instruction and provide interventions based on data (Valencia et al., 2006). Even more important than the content of curriculum is the ability of novice teachers to use what they know about high-quality instruction to support their students (Valencia et al., 2006). Whole-class teaching should be coupled with appropriate interventions, including small group and individual meetings, to supplement the instruction and provide support for the students who need additional time and practice to master the skills (Filderman et al., 2018; Jaeger, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Vaughn, 2019; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2018).

Administrator Support/Expectations

When principals have knowledge in the field of literacy, it makes a significant impact on novice teachers' ability to effectively deliver high quality literacy instruction (Kindall et al., 2018). Data initiatives for student learning are often created at the top and passed down from administrators, while it is important for teachers in the field to voice their concerns and experiences (Lasater et al., 2020). Time should be set aside on a weekly basis for principals and teachers to have ongoing conversations about instruction

and self-reflection (Kindall et al., 2018). These conversations strengthen the support novice teachers feel from their administrators and such practices can be beneficial to their desire to continue to grow and refine their practices (Kelly et al., 2018).

Creating a culture of using data as a whole is contingent upon leaders in schools who are competent in data driven instruction and creating conditions necessary to support effective data use (Berebitsky et al., 2014; Lasater et al., 2020). Rather than focusing solely using assessment data for compliance purposes, school administrators and leaders need to focus on using data for improving student achievement and growth (Lasater et al., 2020). A critical piece to using data to improve instruction is when school leadership engages in meaningful discourse with all teachers about data use and share ownership of data with the teachers (Garrison Wilhelm et al., 2020; Lasater et al., 2020).

Mentors/Teams/Support Groups

Novice teachers are not only expected to be able to use data, but also use it collaboratively with colleagues and school leaders (Bocala & Parker Boudett, 2015). In some cases, teacher teams gather with a goal to analyze data to improve instruction, but the conversations at the meetings turn toward planning instruction or discussing concerns within curriculum and matters unrelated to data collection (Lockton et al., 2020). When a structured and focused meeting time is set aside for teachers to discuss student data and make decisions, lead to new ways about thinking about data use for student achievement and growth (Datnow et al., 2018). These common discussions can also provide insight on how student effort, behavior, and family circumstances affect student learning and outcomes (Datnow et al., 2018). Data discussion between fellow teachers and team

members can lead to new ways of thinking about student learning and examine a broader, holistic range of data (Datnow et al., 2018).

When teams work together to design curriculum, assessment, and instruction around data to improve student growth and achievement, the chances for student success are higher (Lai & McNaughton, 2016). Mentor teachers are some of the most influential people on novice teachers (Kippers et al., 2018). Mentor teachers help novice teachers with advice about pedagogy, planning, strategies, and management (Kippers et al., 2018). A specific faculty member in a school district often known as a data coach can be influential in helping novice teachers learn skills and practices to use data to inform instructional decisions (Kippers et al., 2018).

Ongoing Professional Development

A novice teacher and mentor teacher relationship does not guarantee development of effectively using data to improve instruction (Bocala & Parker Boudett, 2015). School districts need to provide ongoing professional development to make up for the gap in practices and understanding of using data to inform instruction and intervention (Bocala & Parker Boudett, 2015; Dobbs et al., 2017). While data-based decision-making has been found to improve student skills and proficiency, there are very limited opportunities for teachers to engage in ongoing professional development (Glover, 2017). Providing opportunities for professional development in using data to make instructional and intervention decisions is likely to lead to a positive impact on teachers' self-efficacy, perceptions, and practices pertaining to using data to inform practices (Glover, 2017; Gupta & Lee, 2020).

While ongoing professional development is important, it is also critical that the professional development provided is of high quality (Basma & Savage, 2018). Ongoing short, well-executed professional development is more effective than longer professional development sessions without clear outcomes (Basma & Savage, 2018; Datnow et al., 2018). It is important that with professional development, a provision of the curriculum and instructional materials in a classroom occurs to ensure that the resources teachers use align with best practices using data to inform instructional and intervention decisions (Mandinach & Gummer, 2016).

Use of Data to Inform Instruction

Types of Assessment

Summative assessments are generally given at the end of a term, unit, or school year (Brookhart, 2004). Formative assessments are less formal and can include student feedback and even assignments within a unit (Brookhart, 2004). Summative assessments such as state assessments or district assessments given at the end of a school year are less likely to provide the data necessary for teachers to make instructional and intervention decisions (Farrell & Marsh, 2016). Data gleaned from regular student work and more frequent formative assessments have been identified by teachers as very useful, and were subsequently linked to changes in instructional and intervention delivery (Farrell & Marsh, 2016).

Types of Assessment Data

While end of year assessments and benchmark assessments can provide thorough and numerical data, the data is holistic in providing a broad overview rather than pinpoint

specific student needs (Farrell & Marsh, 2016). Formative assessments can provide teachers very quick data, though it may not be quantified, formally collected, or measured against any state standard (Farrell & Marsh, 2016). There is also a differentiation between assessment data and education data (Mandinach & Gummer, 2016). Assessment data is using assessment results as the sole form for classroom use in regards to a particular subject area, while education data provides a more comprehensive depiction of students (Mandinach & Gummer, 2016). Literacy is such a complex and multifaceted subject area that it is necessary for both teachers and their administrators to be reflective and responsible about assessment data gathered (Amendum et al., 2016; Cartwright & Duke, 2019). Both teachers and administrators need to work together to use the data for classroom instruction and interventions (Amendum et al., 2016; Cartwright & Duke, 2019).

Assessment data can be used in a wide variety of ways to differentiate instruction (Puzio et al., 2020). Differentiation in literacy instruction can include changing instructional content, changing process by grouping students according to needs, and providing different materials and products for student learning (Jones et al., 2016; Puzio et al., 2020). Assessment data provides some information, but teachers must also rely on other sources of knowledge and data such as motivational factors and family background to make decisions (Datnow et al., 2018; Lynch et al., 2016). While some schools use data to inform instructional practices, greater attention on knowledge of interventions used in response to assessment data is needed in some school districts (Jones et al., 2016; Lai & McNaughton, 2016; Lynch et al., 2016).

Historical Use of Assessment Data

Data has been used to influence equitable instruction (Datnow & Park, 2018). The goals for data driven instruction include accountability-driven data use and data use for continuous improvement, using data to confirm assumptions and challenge beliefs, and using data to create flexible grouping to promote student growth (Datnow & Park, 2018). The use of data has led to a great impact on students' daily educational experiences and their trajectories toward growth and improvement (Datnow & Park, 2018; Pastore & Andrade, 2019).

Data has been used to help educators determine and differentiate between student ability and student achievement (Datnow et al., 2018). A shift in the use of assessment data and its relationship to instruction and intervention has taken place, providing teachers more opportunity to have a process for transferring knowledge in ways that promote enhanced student performance and outcomes (Dial, 2015).

Current Use of Assessment Data

Effective data use to improve instructional and intervention decisions is surrounded around several common conditions (Marsh, 2012). These include data capacity, data properties, leadership and organizational structure, and teacher trust, beliefs, and knowledge (Marsh, 2012). Similar conditions were found to be influential in a positive school data culture that lead to student improvement (Cech et al., 2018; Lasater et al., 2020). These conditions include trust and collaboration among teacher teams and administrators, clear purpose of data use, leadership expectations and teacher agency, data ownership, leader competency, and data as a tool (Lasater et al., 2020).

More states are moving toward data-driven models (Davis et al., 2018). Accrediting bodies like the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) use growth as an indicator for student success, rather than proficiency (Davis et al., 2018). Teachers need to be able to rationalize the instructional adaptations and interventions they chose to use based on the data they collected (Faber et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016). If differentiated instruction is based on teacher observations rather than data collected through assessments, student achievement is less likely to improve (Faber et al., 2018). When used in a manner to support student achievement and not threatening teacher success or merit, school cultures lean stronger toward student growth and proficiency (Cech et al., 2018; Jimerson et al., 2016; Vaughn, 2019).

In an era of school accountability systems and a push toward stronger performance-based teacher evaluation systems, summative data from benchmark and year-end assessments is observed more critically (Farrell & Marsh, 2016). While stakeholders may look at such data from a critical lens, it is formative assessment data that is gathered more regularly by classroom teachers that will provide teachers the information necessary to adapt instruction and make intervention decisions (Farrell & Marsh, 2016). It is the formative assessment data that provides teachers with the information necessary to make shifts in instruction and intervention that lead to improvements in summative assessment data (Farrell & Marsh, 2016; Lynch et al., 2016).

Schools that used a data driven model for designing instruction and intervention for two or more years significantly improved performance of students, especially those students in low socioeconomic status schools (van Geel et al., 2016). While many short-

term studies on effects of data driven instruction exist, there are few that have followed student achievement long term (van Geel et al., 2016). Collecting data from assessments is not enough; educators need to be able to use interventions to support better access to instruction, skills to interpret data, and knowledge to respond to data of all kinds (Filderman et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Lynch et al., 2016; Marsh, 2012; Vaughn, 2019).

Need for Perspectives

Many teachers are not prepared to effectively integrate assessment into their daily teaching practice (Pastore & Andrade, 2019). Novice teachers enter the field with an inadequate understanding of the role of assessment in instruction and student learning (Clark, 2015). While data-driven decisions are becoming increasingly common, teacher quality has come into question (Davis et al., 2018). When interviewed, novice teachers in their first year expressed concerns about their students, feeling overwhelmed, relationships with others, concerns about the quality of their teaching and excessive accountability from administrators (Curry et al., 2016). Zimmerman (2017) stresses the importance for researchers and policymakers to be aware of how novice teachers' cognitive processes shape their instructional decisions. Instructional leaders need to stay attuned to teachers' needs and perspectives, such as what teachers value in data and how data lead to meaningful changes in instructional and intervention decisions (Farrell & Marsh, 2016).

Children who had teachers who were warm, responsive, and sensitive to children's needs and provided well-planned activities and expectations had better reading

skills at the end of their school year (Pakarinen et al., 2017). While data driven instruction is important, it is also important that novice teachers begin their careers doing it correctly (van Geel et al., 2016). If novice teachers are not equipped to use data correctly but are expected to do so by their administrator or district, misinterpretations of data can lead to less adequate goals and a less effective instruction strategy, resulting in lower student achievement (van Geel et al., 2016).

Summary

While research indicates that students are best served by teachers who use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions (Filderman et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2016; Lynch et al., 2016; Marsh, 2012; Vaughn, 2019), some novice teachers are not using data to inform their instructional and intervention decisions (Curry et al., 2016). The literature helped to bring a deeper understanding of the need for novice teachers to have their voices heard about their perspectives of efficacy in using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions (Clark, 2015; Curry et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2018; Farrell & Marsh, 2016; Zimmerman, 2017).

While there are a number of influences on novice teachers and their growth and development as professionals (Coombs et al., 2018; Curry et al., 2016; Dial, 2015; Zimmerman, 2017), the literature revealed no one significant factor that revealed why some novice teachers are not using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Since using assessment data is so beneficial to student growth and development (Cech et al., 2018; Jimerson et al., 2016; Vaughn, 2019), it is important that novice teachers are able to share their perspectives on this topic.

In Chapter 3, I provide greater insight into the methodology I implemented for this study. This includes the research design and rationale of my study. I also include details pertaining to the role of the researcher. Chapter 3 includes a focus on the components of the methodology. This consists of participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data analysis, data collection plan, and data analysis plan. I also discuss the trustworthiness of my study. This will identify the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of my study. I also include ethical procedures and steps that will be taken to protect participants.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. I encouraged teachers to share their perspectives of their efficacy in using literacy assessment data by identifying their understandings, feelings, and concerns to make instructional and intervention decisions. In this chapter, I describe the research method for the study, including details of the research design and its rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodology used, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question used to guide this study was the following: What are novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques to use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions? A basic qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because qualitative research is based on the notion that construction of knowledge happens when people engage in meaning making of an activity, experience, or phenomenon (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The basic approach allows the researcher to conduct a study that helps the researcher understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I selected the basic qualitative design after considering other possible designs. I considered a quantitative approach, but it was necessary to hear perspectives to make sense of the gap rather than gather numerical data. I also considered the phenomenological design. However, a phenomenological study is

used to explore experiences of individuals concerning an identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). In a phenomenological study, the researcher looks at the individual experiences of the participants and constructs a universal meaning of the event (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I was not trying to make sense of a phenomenon; I was gathering perspectives from novice teachers.

I also considered a narrative design, which is used to understand the meaning of individual experiences concerning a phenomenon (see Burkholder et al., 2016). In a narrative design, participants provide first-person accounts of an experience told in story form having a beginning, middle, and end, using artifacts such as documents, journals, emails, letters, photographs, and videos to tell a story (Burkholder et al., 2016). The design of my study did not fit a biographical or historical account of using literacy assessment data to inform instruction and interventions; instead, I was interested in the perspectives of individual teachers based on their lived experiences and knowledge of the topic.

Conducting semistructured interviews was the best approach for this study because the participants' responses might have included statements about the instructional practices of colleagues or the professional decisions made by administrators. I considered using focus groups to collect data for this study, but because of sensitivity to the privacy of the individuals, I decided to use one-on-one interviews. Focus group interviews are not confidential, and they might have prevented participants from giving accurate and honest responses to interview questions. I used one-on-one interviews and no other methods of data collection; therefore, a basic qualitative design was appropriate.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to design and implement the study, collect the data, analyze and evaluate the data, and present an analysis of the findings. My experience in literacy instruction and assessment includes teaching first grade, instructing college-level courses in literacy instruction and intervention, consulting with the state department of education in its implementation of the recent reading laws for schools, and presenting peer-reviewed panels at the International Literacy Association and National Council of Teachers of English annual conferences. I have an undergraduate degree in early childhood education and elementary education and a graduate degree in literacy instruction and assessment as well as a reading specialist certificate. My knowledge and experience as an educator and working with preservice educators and those in the field provided me the insight in understanding the disconnect and difficulty that novice teachers face with data from literacy instruction in their first few years of school and prompted my interest in this study. The background I have was supportive to the trustworthiness of this study.

Through my work with preservice teachers, I recognized that some biases might exist about novice teachers and their ability and opportunity to use literacy assessment data to inform their instruction. To minimize biases, I transcribed participants' words verbatim. I also remained cognizant of any bias or subjectivity so my personal biases would not affect the outcome of this study. Reflexivity requires the researcher to be keenly aware and to constantly check their position and subjectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I did not allow my thoughts and perspectives to interfere with this study. One way

to control bias was to ensure that I was aware and took note of any bias toward a participant's responses. I used reflexivity when reviewing the interview transcriptions to check for biases. I also wrote personal notes in a reflective journal to double-check my biases.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The participants of the study were novice teachers in their first 5 years of teaching who had been teaching kindergarten through third grade at the same grade level for at least 2 full years in the same school. Their instructional responsibilities must have included reading instruction. The participants included teachers in their third, fourth, and fifth years of teaching. The participants were chosen from public schools in different school districts using snowball sampling. For the purposes of this study, novice teachers were defined as having 3 to 5 years of experience in Grades K-3. Due to challenges of COVID-19, teachers in their second year were unable to complete the previous school year and collect data in a normal setting. First-year teachers were not included because they did not have adequate experience with reading assessments and data.

I used snowball sampling to recruit participants who fit the parameters of the study due to COVID-19. Snowball sampling is useful for drawing valid samples from hard-to-reach populations (Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017). Snowball sampling provides opportunities for individuals in similar networks to refer other individuals to the researcher after understanding the confidential nature and purpose of the researcher and study (D. A. Griffith et al., 2016). I used snowball sampling to find participants who fit

the parameters of the study due to COVID-19. I am a member of two social media groups that include literacy teachers. I do not know any of the teachers in the groups personally. I invited them to participate in a study involving interviews with novice teachers and asked them to send me an email if they were interested in participating in this study. I sent them the formal invitation and consent form. After agreeing, the individual shared my contact and study information with teachers they knew who fit the parameters and encouraged them to reach out to me.

Sampling

The study sample consisted of 10 teacher participants. I recruited participants in their third, fourth, and fifth years of teaching through a snowball sampling approach. These individuals must have had reading instruction included in their teaching responsibilities. The participants must have been teaching kindergarten through third grade at the same grade level for at least 3 years in the same school. The study site was schools around the United States. The population included teachers who teach reading in their third through fifth years teaching kindergarten through third grade.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation was one-on-one interview questions (see Appendix) based on the research question of this study. I created the interview questions to solicit novice teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. I used the interview protocol form (see Appendix) to gather demographic data, to record minor details, to inform the participants of the study expectations, and to ask interview

questions. I asked the questions in the same order for each participant to ensure consistency. The interview questions were designed to elicit data that I could use to answer the research question. I asked follow-up questions as necessary throughout the interview process. Follow-up questions provided clarity or explanation to answers given by participants that needed further probes or explanation to clearly convey the perspective of the novice teacher being interviewed. Probing or follow-up questions were only asked if more information or elaboration was necessary (see Appendix). The interview questions were informally reviewed by current teachers in the field. This was done as part of an assignment for the Advanced Qualitative Research and Design course at Walden University.

Answers to interview questions were analyzed to discover recurring codes and themes. The content validity was accomplished through the various stages of instrument development (see Creswell, 2012). I began by planning the purpose of the instrument and recruiting the participants from snowball sampling. I identified the objective of the instrument and evaluated alignment with the conceptual framework. Construct validity was established when meaningful data were identified and fully measured the construct of teachers' perspectives.

Recruitment

I spoke to each potential participant and explained the study. Participants who volunteered to take part in the study were given consent forms. Including participants from around the country recruited using snowball sampling provided a broad range of backgrounds, experiences, and expectations of teachers. I collected data from one-on-one

interviews. All interviews took place via a Zoom or telephone call for privacy and convenience for participants. I attempted to conduct each interview within a 45- to 60-minute time frame but allowed for extra time as needed. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Interviews took place before or after school hours or on weekends.

Participation

Once approvals were received, I commenced recruiting the participants through the first participant in the snowball sampling. The letter of invitation to the participants included background information about the study, the procedures, risks and benefits, contact information for questions, and instructions for providing consent. Each mentor teacher replied, “I consent” to agree to participate before scheduling an interview.

Once I received participants’ email replies and had the minimum number of participants required for the study, I emailed the participants options for specific days and times to schedule interviews via Zoom or a telephone call before or after school hours. Interviews were not scheduled during instructional time or time during which teachers are expected to be working in their school building. Participants were interviewed before or after school hours or on weekends. Passwords were provided to interviewees to manage participation during interviews. Novice teachers needed to have access to a computer, have the Zoom address, and have the password to participate in the interview. If they chose to do a phone interview, they needed to have access to a telephone. When I met with each participant via Zoom or telephone call, I used the interview protocol form to gather demographic data, record minor details, inform participants of expectations, and

ask interview questions (see Appendix). I scheduled, conducted, and recorded individual interviews with each novice teacher.

Data Collection

Qualitative interviews are a data collection method used by the researcher to seek a deeper understanding of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection for the current study was conducted using qualitative structured interviews. Interviews provide researchers a mode to uncover people's perspectives, their constructions, and reflections on their experiences (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Two days prior to scheduled interviews, I sent a courtesy email reminding the participants of the upcoming scheduled interview. To be prepared on the day of the interview, I reviewed the interview protocol. Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon date and time via Zoom or telephone call. Each interview was one-on-one using Zoom video conferencing utilizing the audio feature. While telephone calls were an option, all participants chose to use the Zoom software. I reminded and orally asked the participants' permission to utilize the Zoom software to record the audio of the interview sessions. Recording the interviews allowed me to go back to review the responses to the interview questions. I asked each participant if they had any questions prior to beginning the interview. After questions were answered or if there were no questions, I stated that the recording would begin.

To achieve the objectives of the study, I conducted interviews with 10 novice teachers. Their responses provided detailed descriptions of their perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques using literacy assessment data to make

instructional and intervention decisions. During the interview, the interview questions were asked one at a time. Each participant was interviewed one time. Each interview lasted 45–52 minutes. Any notes that were relevant in my reflective journal during the interviews were documented. I used the responses to the interviews to clarify and bring more depth and understanding of the participants' perceptions of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions.

When the interviews came to an end, I immediately debriefed each participant. I reminded the participant that their interview responses would remain confidential. I asked the participant whether they had any questions regarding the interview process before the interview began and after it ended. I answered any questions if the participant had questions, and I thanked them for their time and participation. I documented each step of the data collection process in detail in case there was a need to verify the data with the participants and to monitor and maintain the thoroughness and quality of data collection. After completion of each interview, I used the transcription feature of Zoom to transcribe the interviews, and I made corrections to words or phrases from the interview that were not transcribed correctly.

Data Analysis Plan

Using Saldana's (2016) approach, I closely examined the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that came up repeatedly. Because the data collected for this study were interviews, I conducted qualitative data analysis to confirm or refute ideas with a detailed examination of the interview responses. Data analysis

included organizing and preparing data, reading and reflecting on overall meaning, conducting analysis based on method, producing a description of the people and emerging themes, representing data, and interpreting the larger meaning of data (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The qualitative data analysis for this study was simultaneous and began with the interviews. When the interviews were complete, I used the transcription feature of Zoom to transcribe the interviews, and I made corrections to words or phrases from the interview that were not transcribed correctly. The transcriptions of the interviews were produced electronically. Documented reports of the transcriptions were available to me in a password-protected online account. I read the documents of interview transcriptions a minimum of three times. Qualitative data analysis is an inductive strategy that begins with a unit of data, such as meaningful word or phrase, which is then compared against another unit of data. I used open coding for initial data analysis. I read my data line by line and coded keywords and phrases that stood out (see Saldana, 2016). I manually used different colored highlighters to distinguish the open codes. In the subsequent rounds of coding, I focused on aspects of the research question until I coded all data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used open codes to help me organize my data into manageable units or chunks to help me discover ideas, concepts, and theories through the analysis of the written text (see Saldana, 2016).

Once I established the open codes, I used axial coding to move the similar terms and highlighting colors into categories. These categories helped me identify emerging themes. I used thematic analysis to develop themes. Thematic analysis is the process of

identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). As the terms were categorized and further analyzed, three themes emerged which were used to answer the research question. I reviewed data until the point of saturation, which occurred when continued data collection did not add new themes or patterns but, instead, reinforced what had already been derived from prior data analysis (see Burkholder et al., 2016).

The continuous assessment of interview transcripts allowed a comprehensive, systematic search to determine common patterns and themes of novice teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. No discrepant cases were found in my data analysis.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers rely on trustworthiness criteria to ensure the rigor of qualitative findings (see Burkholder et al., 2016). Validity refers to procedures that researchers use to affirm that their findings are accurate to the participants' experiences, and it refers to the quality and rigor of a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). When combined, the notions of confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability assisted with the validity of the study.

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the research findings, and it establishes the research findings represent reasonable information drawn from the participants' original data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I ensured credibility and transferability by ensuring that interview participants had the experience to discuss the

subject matter that I aimed to explore (see Birt et al., 2016). This was accomplished by adding parameters to the participant selection criteria, such as teaching the same grade level for at least three years in the same school.

Dependability refers to the stability of findings over time (Burkholder et al., 2016). I gained dependability by implementing member checking. Member checking is a process of sharing a summary of the findings with the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I asked participants to take about 15-20 minutes to read the summary and email me within 48 hours if they had any questions or concerns. If participants had questions, we took 15 minutes to discuss their questions via the telephone. If I did not hear from participants within 48 hours after emailing the two-page summary, I concluded that the participants had no questions or concerns.

Member checking is a strategy used to ensure that content in the study is trustworthy and to rule out misinterpretation of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These measures helped to support credible results and conclusions of this study. I asked the novice teachers if the summaries were complete and realistic (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking contributed to dependability of my study.

Transferability is the extent that qualitative studies can apply or transfer to broader contexts even though the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize from a sample to a population (Burkholder et al., 2016). I provided a thick description, which is the process of providing an extensive detailed description of the data and the context. Through my thick description, readers will be able to judge the appropriateness of

transferring my findings to future research, or to make comparisons to other contexts using extensive detailed description of the data (see Creswell, 2012).

Confirmability refers to the degree that a study is confirmed or corroborated by other researchers and that data and interpretations of the findings derive from the data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I achieved confirmability through reflexivity by documenting in a reflective personal journal a self-critical analysis of my biases, my role in and responses to the research process, and adjustments that I made to the study based on ongoing analysis (see Burkholder et al., 2016). After completion of each interview, I used the transcription feature of Zoom to transcribe the interviews and made any corrections to words or phrases from the interview that were not transcribed correctly. I manually coded the transcription texts to gain a deep understanding of the intent of the participants. I did not use software to code any of my data.

Ethical Procedures

To ensure the study includes only ethical procedures, approval of this study was sought and ethical requirements followed according to the Walden University IRB. Ethical concerns related to recruitment materials and processes were put into place. A letter of invitation and informed consent form was emailed to potential participants after they contacted me after being solicited by the first individual who began the snowball sampling process. The email described the procedures for data collection, confidentiality protection, and time required for the interview. Participants replied to indicate their consent. A follow-up email was sent after 24 hours if there was no response to the initial

request to interview. A third and final request was sent by email for response to interview request after 48 hours of no response to initial request.

Ethical concerns related to data collection and possible intervention activities were established. Participants reserved the right to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or penalty. Participants could have ended the interview if at any time they refuse to answer questions, had a desire to discontinue the interview, or should the interview have been interrupted. Data from any discontinued interviews was erased or shredded unless participant agreed to allow the information provided to be used in the study. Participants had the option to take breaks or reschedule the interview should they become anxious or have the need reschedule. Participants' information and data shared between each participant and me remained confidential. All of this was shared with the participants prior to the beginning of the interview. I used password-protected meetings through the Zoom software or shared my personal cell phone number for participants to call.

All personal identifiers were removed and replaced with words, letters, or numbers to protect the identity of the individual, such as A1, A2, and A3. The identifiers were used in describing the findings. I am the only person with access to the data. The data from the interviews is stored in my home office on a password-protected computer. All data will be erased after five years beyond the completion of the study.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the method I plan to use in the research study and the rationale for selecting a basic qualitative research design. I described the role of the

researcher as well as the criteria I used for selecting and finding participants. This chapter included a rationale for data collection and analysis, as well as the types of data and procedures used to collect, store, and analyze data. This chapter also included strategies to improve the trustworthiness of the study. I identified the measures for the ethical protection of the participants and the data. In Chapter 4, I share the results, including the data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques to use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. In this chapter, I address the research question and explain how it helped guide this study. I then describe the setting, participant selection, processes for data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness. Finally, I present the results of the study.

Research Question

The research question for this basic qualitative study was as follows: What are novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques to use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions?

Setting

Participants were given the option to participate via telephone or Zoom. Participants all chose to use Zoom and were given the option to interview with or without video. I recorded only the audio content of the interview. I interviewed 10 participants who met the qualifications parameters of my target population. All 10 participants were interviewed in their home office using the Zoom audio feature and not the video feature. All of the teachers who were interviewed were women within their first 5 years of teaching in kindergarten through third grade.

Prior to data collection, negative circumstances potentially affected the personal and professional lives of each participant. A worldwide pandemic shut the United States

down, and most public and private education institutions transitioned to remote learning (Arquilla & Guzdial, 2020; Băcă, 2020; Bradley et al., 2020). Participation was wholly voluntary, and interested participants initiated contact with me. I posted invitations to participate on Facebook groups that included literacy educators, and 10 participants contacted me for more information about an interview. During the interviews, participants shared their perspectives about their self-efficacy of using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions.

No unplanned occurrences affected the interpretation of the study results. Data were collected through semistructured interviews conducted by Zoom with 10 novice teachers. I collected perspectives of the novice teachers about their self-efficacy to use literacy assessment data to make instructional decisions. I transcribed the interviews through Zoom and began the coding and analysis process.

Demographics

The participants of the study were novice teachers in their first 5 years of teaching who had been teaching kindergarten through third grade at the same grade level for at least 2 full years in the same school. Their instructional responsibilities must have included reading instruction. The participants included teachers in their third, fourth, and fifth years of teaching. The participants were chosen from all over the United States in school districts using snowball sampling. For the purposes of this study, novice teachers were defined as having 3 to 5 years of experience in Grades K-3. Due to challenges of COVID-19, teachers in their second year were unable to complete the previous school year and collect data in a normal setting. First-year teachers were not included because

they did not have adequate experience with reading assessments and data. A total of 10 teachers responded to the request on social media to contact me if they were interested in participating in my study. Before I interviewed any of them, I made sure that their experience fit the demographic targets. Table 1 presents the demographic data.

Table 1*Demographics*

| Teacher | Grade level/ years of experience | Undergraduate coursework related to literacy instruction and/or assessment | Current literacy assessments used in classroom |
|---------|--|---|--|
| A-1 | 2 nd grade- 3 years | General assessment/ instruction course; Literacy in culturally relevant environments; Language Arts methods; General writing course (not methods) | I-Stations; ISIP; Running Records; Jan Richardson Guided Reading assessments |
| A-2 | 1 st grade- 3 years | Language Arts methods course (choose K-2 or 3-6); Teaching exceptional learners | DIBELS Running Records Phonics Foundations I-Ready Gen Bear Phonics Solesbee Assessment |
| A-3 | Kindergarten- .5 years; 1 st grade- 3 years | Literacy assessment; Language Arts methods | MAP Testing Wonders Testing |
| A-4 | 2 nd grade- 4 years | Literacy instruction, assessment intervention (6 credit hour combined course) | PSI Phonological screening Letter identification AIMS Web Fidelity |
| A-5 | Preschool- 1.5 years; Kindergarten- 3 years | Together with a cohort of 21 peers; Children's Literature; Literacy assessment and instruction | iReady State tests for Language Arts School City (computerized) |
| A-6 | 3 rd grade- 3 years | English/Language Arts methods | AIMSWeb ORF Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Running Records Pioneer Valley |
| A-7 | Kindergarten- 1 year; First grade- 3 years | Children's Literature; General intervention course for all subject areas | Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark MAP Testing Running Records |
| A-8 | 1 st grade- 3 years | K-3 Reading methods; 4-6 Reading methods | Acadience Reading Phonics Screeners Sight words exams MAP Testing |
| A-9 | 1 st grade- 1 year; 2 nd grade- 1 year; 3 rd grade- 3 years | K-2 Reading methods; 3-6 reading methods; History/ foundations of literacy; General assessment and instruction course | Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Informal running records |
| A-10 | 1 st grade- 4 years 5 th grade- 1 year | K-6 Reading methods | |

Data Collection

The data collection process commenced once approval was obtained from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (# 02-10-22-0743382). I used social media literacy educator groups and snowball sampling to recruit participants. Participants received an electronic invitation to participate in the study on the social media group home page. After they contacted me through email, they were provided with a consent form that informed them about the purpose of the study, the interview process, treatment of data, participants' rights, and maintenance of confidentiality. Participants typed, "I consent" if they agreed to participate in the study and emailed it back to me. Data were collected from 10 novice teachers using the interview protocol guide that I created. I collected data through semistructured interviews via Zoom that addressed the research question developed for the study.

Data collection occurred over 2 weeks with an average of 4.5 interviews each week. All 10 participants utilized Zoom and the audio feature to conduct the interview. Participants provided a day and time that was most suitable for their schedule. The length of each interview varied based on the amount of information shared by the participant and lasted between 45 and 52 minutes. I interviewed each participant once. I asked each participant the same questions to guarantee the same general information from each interviewee. During the semistructured interviews, I explored participants' perspectives, experiences, and self-efficacy regarding the use of literacy assessment data to inform instructional practices. I recorded the responses from the semistructured interview on the

Zoom audio feature, which I also used to transcribe the interview into a written document. I did not deviate from the planned data collection process outlined in Chapter 3, and there were no unusual circumstances encountered in the data collection process. All data collected for the study will be secured in a locked cabinet in my home for 5 years. All electronic data will be password protected on a personal computer. I am the only person with access to the locked cabinet and password.

Data Analysis

In this basic qualitative study using semistructured interviews, I examined novice teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using literacy assessment data to make instructional decisions. I asked each participant the same nine open-ended interview questions. I transcribed each Zoom audio interview before analyzing the data and compared the written interview to the audio interview to ensure accuracy. I printed the transcripts of the interviews to read each line by line three times. During the transcription process, I became more familiar with the data. I first analyzed the data based on the study's conceptual framework and the literature, which included the key concepts and variables from the literature review. Next, I applied open coding to the raw data to search for repeated words, phrases, and concepts that could answer the research question. Then, I applied axial coding by organizing the open codes into categories according to their similarities.

Interview Analysis

I used Saldana's (2016) approach for qualitative data analysis. I followed steps that included (a) organizing and preparing the data, (b) reviewing and becoming familiar

with the data, (c) beginning to code the data, (d) generating themes, (e) discussing the findings, and (f) validating the findings.

Organize and Prepare Data

I compared the written transcripts with the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. I printed all of the interview transcripts and organized them in the order the interviews took place. I matched the interview protocol guide (see Appendix) and the transcript to the participant's alphabetical identifier. Next, I paired the participant with the numerical identifier.

Review and Become Familiar With Data

I listened to the recordings two times without taking notes. I read the written interview data three times to become familiar with the data again without taking notes. To gain a renewed perspective, I did not reread the transcripts for 24 hours.

Begin to Code the Data

I used two phases to code the data: (a) open coding and (b) axial coding. In the first phase (open coding), I read the transcripts and made a notation in the margins. I reread the transcripts line by line and used highlighters to identify words, phrases, and concepts relevant to the conceptual framework and key concepts/variables. I made a list of all highlighted words, phrases, and concepts. I used my highlighting system to regroup the word, phrases, and concepts into codes by similarities. From the data, 36 open codes emerged. Table 2 shows an example of seven of the open codes, participant identifiers, and examples of excerpts from the data that fit each code.

Table 2*Examples of Codes*

| Code | Participants | Excerpt |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Curriculum | A-8 | "The curriculum was a little bit overwhelming my first year because all of the curriculum in the district where I am is so different than what I student taught with, so the curriculum was overwhelming because it was so new." |
| | A-5 | "As a new teacher, curriculum can leave you in a tricky place because you can't really be left to what you know if you only know the curriculum, or if you haven't had the experience of someone who has been using something similar for 20 or more years." |
| Colleagues | A-6 | "I have a colleague who will come alongside me and she has been very encouraging and we actually have decided to do planning together, so we can share the workload and we write our weekly modules together. No one else on the team has made themselves available to me like that." |
| | A-9 | "I have had an amazing reading specialist. I learned so much about reading from her. She's very knowledgeable and so that's really helpful to have somebody like that, in your own building, to really learn about literacy from them so you can intervene." |
| Undergraduate coursework | A-8 | "I don't really remember getting a lot of literacy assessment instruction at all, we were just taught to hook students at the beginning of our lesson. We were taught about assessment, but we weren't really taught like what you do with the scores. We just made our lesson plans and submitted them and then moved on to the next thing." |
| | A-9 | "I feel like my professors did not really prepare me for curriculum- I mean, it's hard- every curriculum is different, but I really feel like they didn't prepare us well for how to use curriculum. I feel like I really didn't know anything about that until I got to student teaching." |
| Field experience | A-2 | "We had to practice giving running records, and we had to practice getting to know our students like talking about the books they like and their reading habits, and I learned a lot about assessment by doing that." |
| | A-3 | "We got assigned a student to work with all semester and we tracked their reading growth. We pretty much did tutoring with them one-on-one 20 minutes a week, which isn't much, but it is so neat to see growth and we were instructed each time to do different lessons with them and track their growth and all of their assessments. And it gave me a lot of practice for coming into the real world of teaching." |
| Student teaching | A-3 | "Being in two different grade levels for student teaching really helped me. I got to see kindergarten and then I got to see third grade. And seeing okay, here's what these students needed by third grade was really important so I know now where students are going to end up eventually. Seeing a span of grade levels helped me so much." |
| | A-5 | "I kind of had this moment where even during student teaching and into my first year, these moments where I went, Okay... you don't realize that you've been observing people that have been doing this for so many years. So when they're doing it, it looks easy for them because they've done it so many times and they were doing it even before the curriculum was pushed down on them." |
| Professional learning community (PLC) | A-1 | "We used to have a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and we met weekly with them and the instructional coach and we would get together and look at grade levels below us and above us so we could get a good idea of where our kids need to be." |
| | A-3 | "We have reading specialists and instructional coaches and they are incredible. They meet with our teams weekly to talk about Professional Learning Community (PLC) data and just to brainstorm things together. My principal kind of dove in on this, too." |
| Instinctive knowledge | A-2 | "I'm a huge supporter of learning so I felt like a ton of content knowledge going into my first year, which was both good and bad. I feel like I definitely took a slice of humble pie when I started actually teaching." |
| | A-3 | "If they're all given the same tests, I don't use that data. That's just a number I'm required to do. I use informal assessments I do on my own to really get the bigger picture." |

For the second phase of coding, I organized the codes into categories according to their similarities. Seven categories emerged from the first round of axial coding. I combined similar concepts and ideas and completed a second round of axial coding, after which four categories emerged. I recorded the categories and codes on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and searched for patterns. I compared and arranged the codes into categories to discover connections between the data. Table 3 shows an example of seven codes and the four categories along with participant identifiers, and excerpts from the interview transcripts.

Table 3

Examples of Open Coding and Categories

| Code | Category | Participants | Excerpt |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------|--|
| Curriculum | Hindered self-efficacy | A-1 | “The curriculum is very different and so I would be so thankful if we had somebody who would be able to tie up the curriculum we had to use with what we learned in undergrad, so that new teachers are not blindsided by new curriculum or new content.” |
| | | A-2 | “The curriculum was very different than anything I had experienced in undergrad or fieldwork.” |
| Colleagues | Support | A-3 | “I realized through my mentors and my team, I have an amazing team, and we are better together. We talk to each other about pulling groups and it really helps to understand how to use our data.” |
| | | A-4 | “I appreciate that at our school, we work as a team to put plans into actions to support our readers. With that being said, administration leaves a lot of decisions to the classroom teachers.” |
| Undergraduate coursework | Frustrations | A-5 | “Instead of a professor who has been out of the classroom so long, I really would have liked to hear from teachers that were in the district doing the work and giving us advice. I just wish I could have seen someone do what I had to attempt to do my first year.” |
| | | A-6 | “I remember learning a lot about educational psychology but not a lot about data and what you are supposed to do with it.” |
| Field experience | Support | A-7 | “She was a fantastic teacher who really like had me jump in immediately, and I did things along with her and then she had me take over pretty early, so it was very much on the job training for me, especially when it came to figuring out which group needed what.” |

| Code | Category | Participants | Excerpt |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|--|
| Field experience | Support | A-3 | “Even though we were with one child a short amount of time each week for a field experience, it was such valuable one-on-one exposure to the literacy concepts in context and I got to see growth. My student was at a plateau for a while, and so I then got to talk to their teacher and talk to them about data and work together with them. It was really neat to see that and kind of tailor the tutoring experience to the student’s needs.” |
| Student teaching | Helped self-efficacy | A-9 | “I learned a lot about literacy and phonics from my student teaching experience- I feel like looking back now my first year, I’m like- Oh, my gosh, I did not know that much, and I learned the most about how to teach my low kids well from my student teaching.” |
| | | A-5 | “She was a fantastic teacher who really like had me jump in immediately, and I did things along with her and then she had me take over pretty early, so it was very much on the job training for me, especially when it came to figuring out which group needed what.” |
| Assessment data | Frustration | A-1 | “Even through my college time you know, everybody can say take the data and teach to it, teach to what the students need and while I think they gave a lot of information about how to do that, going into my first year and making it automatically all click together was a challenge.” |
| | | A-10 | “If I used curriculum and used the assessments that went with it, it helped me with the curriculum. But other assessments didn’t help because there was no lesson tied to them to work on.” |
| Instinctive knowledge | Helped self-efficacy | A-6 | “I just want to know my kids. I want to know what they’re struggling with so I can hopefully prepare them for what’s coming, especially when there’s pressure on the teachers.” |
| | | A-7 | “I’m naturally very inquisitive- like you know, I’ll do what they ask me to do, but I always want to know the reasoning behind it. I know that we do assessments to gather data, but if the data really doesn’t go anywhere, I might push back and say is this really necessary?” |

Generate Themes

I reviewed and combined the categories that emerged during the axial coding process. I ensured participants’ interview responses answered the research question. I studied the codes and added any similar new codes that emerged and grouped the codes into categories. I matched the themes to the corresponding research question. I confirmed alignment between the themes and the conceptual framework, related literature, and the research question. Three themes emerged: (a) collegiate support and high-quality field

experiences contributed to self-efficacy of data use for decisions, (b) reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions, and (c) novice teachers relied on instincts to strengthen self-efficacy when using data. Table 4 shows the themes along with the number of excerpts included in each category.

Table 4

Axial Coding Categories and Themes

| Category | Number of participant responses | Theme |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| Support | | Collegiate support and high quality field experiences contributed to self-efficacy of data usage for decisions |
| From colleagues | 33 | |
| From field experiences and student teaching | 16 | |
| Hindered self-efficacy | | Reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions |
| Curriculum | 14 | |
| Frustration | | Reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions |
| With curriculum | 12 | |
| With undergraduate coursework | 15 | |
| Helped self-efficacy | | When self-efficacy of using data was weak, novice teachers relied on instincts to strengthen it |
| Instinctive knowledge | 36 | |

Discuss the Findings

The results of the data revealed three themes that answered the research question. I compiled the information into results based on the themes that emerged from the data.

Validate the Findings

I compared emerging themes to the current literature to validate the findings. I utilized an out of state veteran educator to review the codes, categories, themes, and findings. The feedback from the outside educator validated the findings. I compiled and shared a two-page summary of the results in Chapter 4 with the participants and gave them time to review the findings. No one disputed the findings or contributed any additional information.

Specific Categories and Themes

The responses from the participants were beneficial in acquiring information on their perspectives on their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Several categories emerged from the grouping of similar codes that originated from the interview transcripts. The most common category for participants was their instinctive knowledge to do what was best for students, regardless of the frustrations and the hindrances they faced. I did not have an interview question about instinctive knowledge, nor did I include it in my literature review. It appeared 36 times throughout participant's answers to the interview questions. Of the 10 participants interviewed, eight included it in their responses.

While speaking of hindrances to their self-efficacy, instinctive knowledge was a continual factor that pushed participants forward. Participant A1 said, "I am typically somebody who, when I fail the first time, I tell myself I can do this and I figure my way through it and so I've been able to do that." A2 said, "I definitely think I have gotten a lot better about using data... It became my goal. Be more well read in assessment data and

it's a conversation I have with my principal, and I want to say to everyone: How can we better service those struggling readers?" A10 said, "I'm not tired of learning about literacy and phonics and all of that- We just barely scratched the surface of all of that stuff in my teacher preparation program."

Participants also used their instinctive knowledge to question some of the practices they learned in undergraduate coursework and expectations given to them by their administrators and their district. A6 said, "Making kids take tests for so many days in a row- I wonder- how accurate is that data? I mean, if a kid didn't sleep well the night before, that data won't be as good." A7 said, "I know that we do assessments to gather data, but if the data really doesn't go anywhere, I might push back and say is this really necessary?" Additionally, A3 added, "I just repeat... I am a professional, I have professional opinions, I know what I'm doing, you know?"

Instinctive knowledge about how students' home lives also raised concerns for novice teachers about accuracy of data, and caused them to be mindful of the accuracy of some of the assessments they are required to give. A3 said, "Assessments don't see what I see... and that's what happens in home life. What happens in home life doesn't matter to assessment makers. I just wish my eyes could have been opened to that sooner." A5 said, "From a logistical to an emotional standpoint, it is hard... last year I was doing like three of my students' laundry... And nobody ever talked about that in any college classes. But I do it because they need it." A6 related this to the pressure felt, saying, "I just want to know my kids. I want to know what they're struggling with so I can

hopefully prepare them for what's coming, especially when there's pressure on the teachers."

Participants expressed their appreciation of the support they received from mentor teachers and from their PLC, which are teams of teachers in their grade level that meet at least once a week to discuss classroom practices. A3 said, "It helps to have an experienced teacher on my team. We can pick her brain about things, but we also have a strict, balanced literacy approach at our school." A6 said,

"I have a colleague who will come alongside me and she has been very encouraging and we actually have decided to do planning together, so we can share the workload and we write our weekly modules together. No one else on the team has made themselves available to me like that."

A8 said, "My first year I had a mentor teacher and also an instructional coach that checked in with me once a month, so those two people also really helped build my confidence." Participant A6 said, "I don't have a mentor teacher anymore. I wish I did. I remember having one when I first started teaching and she was invaluable to me."

Unpreparedness and unfamiliarity with different curriculum and its components were a hindrance of self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make decisions by novice teachers. A2 said, "The curriculum was very different than anything I had experienced in undergrad or fieldwork." A5 said, "Sometimes the curriculum can be very rigid and we're supposed to use it that way," and, "If it says you do it in B-C-D- order, you better do it in B-C-D order." A6 said, "If the curriculum included some sort of road

map so I knew where students were supposed to go in the future, it would make things easier.”

Results

I examined teachers’ perspectives on their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions through a basic qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. In this section, I described the results of the responses that I collected during the interviews with 10 participants. I used nine open-ended interview questions to help answer the research question (see Appendix). I used the interview method to develop an understanding of the novice teachers’ perspectives.

Teachers were able to provide in-depth and thorough responses through interviews. The following is a summary of findings based on the research question that was used to guide this study: What are novice teachers’ perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions? Through interviews, participants identified feelings of support from their mentor teachers and colleagues; their reliance on their instinctive knowledge to do what is best and right for their students; the benefits of meaningful field experiences where they could observe and practice assessing students and making use of the data; and frustrations with the disconnect between their undergraduate coursework and the curriculum they were expected to use in their first years of teaching. Three themes emerged: (a) collegiate support and high quality field experiences contributed to self-efficacy of data usage for decisions, (b) reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions, (c) when self-

efficacy of using data was weak, novice teachers relied on instincts to strengthen it. I present each of the themes in this section.

Theme 1

When asked about field experiences tied to undergraduate coursework or their student teaching/pre-clinical placements, eight participants described the opportunities as advantages, which helped their self-efficacy in their ability to use literacy assessment data to inform instruction. Of these eight participants, six identified practicum work with small groups or individual students that helped their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data, while six also described student teaching to be beneficial. When asked about collegiate support, nine participants identified at least one individual in their first few years who helped strengthen their self-efficacy. Of these nine participants, individuals who supported novice teachers were identified as team teachers, mentor teachers, Professional Learning Communities, administrators, reading specialists, or literacy coaches. Collegiate support and high quality field experiences contributed to self-efficacy of data usage for decisions.

Seven participants described support they received from an instructional coach; eight participants described support from their team of teachers/PLC; and five described support they received from a mentor teacher their first and second years of teaching. Reflecting on support from instructional coaches in relation to literacy instruction and assessment data, A10 said, “The reading coach is very smart and good at her job and she really has an open door for anything and we are collaborative in nature, I think.” In conjunction with the reading coach, A10 also describes support she has received from

other special education teachers in her building, “I often kind of piggyback ideas or throw ideas at them and say how do you feel about this question- You’ve both given this assessment many times before.”

Reflecting on their first few years, A9 expressed regret in not using the instructional coach more, especially during the first year.

Looking back I would have asked the reading coach for more guidance and help my first year of teaching. I was just so nervous. I had just... I had a really, really hard class and so honestly I felt like my main goal that year was really just to survive because it was a hard year. I didn’t even know if I could be a teacher after my first year because the behavior challenges were so difficult.

A9 still relies on the coach, saying, “I learn so much about reading from her. She’s very knowledgeable and so that’s really helpful to have somebody like that, in your own building, to really learn about literacy from them so you can intervene.”

Participant A8 said, “For professional development, it helps just to have a reading coach in my building so if I need a refresher on something, I can go to her versus sitting in a workshop learning about it.” Describing support, A7 said, “We are highly collaborative and we have a lot of time set aside for collaboration with our reading Coach and with our grade level team and support staff.”

Working together in PLCs is also beneficial. When describing the work they do together, A1 said, “We used to have a PLC and we met weekly with them and the instructional coach and we would get together and look at grade levels below us and above us so we could get a good idea of where our kids need to be.” Participant A5 said,

“I rely on my team a lot, which is very helpful. I’ve had moments where I say, ‘Hey, can you listen to this kid do these things because I’m thinking this might be the problem, but I’m not 100% correct or confident.’” Collaboration with a team teacher was valuable to A3 who said, “It helps to have an experienced teacher on my team We can pick her brain about things, but we also have a strict, balanced literacy approach at our school.”

Mentor teachers were also described as valuable individuals to the novice teachers’ self-efficacy. Looking back, A1 said, “I’m thankful that I’ve had a mentor teacher that I was able to ask for help and kind of turn to for help and advice as a first year teacher.” Participant A5 said,

My first year was wonderful, I had a mentor who was in the building as often as you could be. If I was having troubles with a student, I would say, ‘Hey, can you watch what I do with this student and watch what the student does on their own and tell me if I am crazy or if I am doing something wrong.’ Lots of times she was able to make resources for me.

A6 misses the mentor relationship, as they said, “I don’t have a mentor teacher anymore. I wish I did. I remember having one when I first started teaching and she was invaluable to me.” Not only did A7 have a mentor teacher, they were able to watch other teachers together, as she said,

My first two years I did have a mentor teacher. We got to go with our mentor for two full days and visit as many classrooms as we wanted and then there’s one day of us observing our mentor teach so it was a lot of reciprocal feedback and learning and discussion.

A8 also said, “My first year I had a mentor teacher and also an instructional coach that checked in with me once a month, so those two people also really helped build my confidence.”

Meaningful field experiences and student teaching opportunities where novice teachers remember being able to witness and practice using literacy assessment data also led to strong feelings of self-efficacy. A2 described the experience as, “We had to practice giving running records, and we had to practice getting to know our students like talking about the books they like and their reading habits, and I learned a lot about assessment by doing that.” Reflecting on another experience, A2 also said,

My junior year I was in a first grade classroom and I had a phenomenal cooperating teacher who really took me under her wing, and she taught me about workshop, taught me how to do running records, she sat by me and did one, and then she let me do one by myself. It was so nice to practice doing it.

Opportunities to practice with just one student were beneficial as described by A3,

We got assigned a student to work with all semester and we tracked their reading growth. We pretty much did tutoring with them one-on-one 20 minutes a week, which isn't much, but it is so neat to see growth and we were instructed each time to do different lessons with them and track their growth and all of their assessments. And it gave me a lot of practice for coming into the real world of teaching.

Participant A7 described their experience with their cooperating teacher as,

She was a fantastic teacher who really like had me jump in immediately, and I did things along with her and then she had me take over pretty early, so it was very much on the job training for me, especially when it came to figuring out which group needed what.

Another observation made by A7 was, “The student teaching experience gave me an opportunity to understand what students needed and how those needs kind of shaped my instruction. Like, you wouldn’t do a book study with students who can’t decode.”

Participant A8 said, “I learned a lot just from doing.” The cooperating teacher also provided A9 with many opportunities to practice, “I learned a lot on how to be a really effective teacher and manage literacy instruction- I feel like I learned so much through my cooperating teacher especially with literacy and phonics- She had such a strong foundation.” Without such experience, A7 would have never taught with intervention in mind, as they said, “Without that hands on practice like had I Just been released to my own classroom without it, I have no idea how I would have taught... I certainly wouldn’t have taught with intervention in mind.” Participant A4 said, “I still reflect on my capstone experience when creating my lesson plans and assessments even today.”

Theme 2

When asked about the curriculum expectations and the support provided, all 10 participants expressed frustrations. Reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Of the 10, six participants expressed that the frustration was because the

curriculum they were asked to use was so overwhelming, and no experiences in undergraduate coursework or field experiences provided them the practice or support they needed to strengthen their self-efficacy of using literacy assessment data.

Comparing undergraduate experiences with curriculum expectations, A1 said, "The curriculum is very different and so I would be so thankful if we had somebody who would be able to tie up the curriculum we had to use with what we learned in undergrad, so that new teachers are not blindsided by new curriculum or new content."

Participant A2 said, "The curriculum was very different than anything I had experienced in undergrad or fieldwork." Describing their experience, A3 said,

"The curriculum was a lot to take on because it was everything I thought I knew how to teach. I had to reframe it and didn't start that until late in the school year. So I spent the beginning portion of my first year just relying on what I knew and didn't even try to dive into the curriculum."

Participant A8 said, "The curriculum was a little bit overwhelming my first year because all of the curriculum in the district where I am is so different than what I student taught with, so the curriculum was overwhelming because it was so new," adding, "The curriculum shot my nerves because I had to do it by myself and I had no cooperating teacher to fall back on like I did in my student teaching." In an effort to make things easy, A9 was advised, "My first year I was told to just use the curriculum and really utilize it because it kind of sets you up to understand the flow and how to use it as your guide for teaching."

Though curriculum was a hindrance, novice teachers relied on their instinctive knowledge to add to it and ease some frustration. Knowing what a challenge it would be, A3 said,

The curriculum was a lot to take on because it was everything I thought I knew how to teach. I had to reframe it and didn't start that until later in the school year. So I spent the beginning portion of my first year just relying on what I knew and didn't even try to dive into the curriculum.

Participant A5 enhances the curriculum themselves, "So, I'm like, okay, I know this curriculum is not the best, but maybe I should add other stuff to the lessons and maybe their scores would be a little better." Participant A8 said,

As a new teacher, curriculum can leave you in a tricky place because you can't really be left to what you know if you only know the curriculum, or if you haven't had the experience of someone who has been using something similar for 20 or more years.

While the curriculum itself was frustrating, the lack of administrative support added to the frustrations and the hindrances of self-efficacy. This was evident when A5 said, "Sometimes the curriculum can be very rigid and we're supposed to use it that way," adding, "My school is so curriculum heavy and the program that was picked was picked for us and it doesn't give me a lot of answers or help and it seems like there are more options outside of the curriculum we were given," also adding, "My administrator always makes sure I am following the curriculum as it is given, and if it is a five day unit and we are on day three, we should be on the day three lessons." Participant A3

expressed, “I wish curriculum was more related to what students need rather than trying to pull teeth when the majority of my class was not ready for the content.” Participant A2 said, “We use the curriculum as whole group, but I have a handful that could definitely go way faster than the rest of the class.”

Theme 3

The most prevalent category throughout the body of interview responses emerged through responses to other questions. When self-efficacy of using data was weak, novice teachers relied on instincts to strengthen it. Whether it was frustrations with curriculum, disconnects between undergraduate coursework, field experiences and the realities of being a novice teacher, instinctive knowledge played a major role in feelings of strong self-efficacy using literacy assessment data. Since A1 went to undergraduate school in a different state than where they began teaching, some confusion occurred. However, A1 said, “I am typically somebody who, when I fail the first time, I tell myself I can do this and I figure my way through it and so I’ve been able to do that,” adding,

I am a pretty reflective person by nature. Adopting the practice of reflecting on professional actions, and you know, how you handle things and how you assess what works and what doesn’t is something that works for me that could really make a big change for people.

For A2, the use of data became a personal goal,

I definitely think I have gotten a lot better about using data than when I first started... It became my goal. Be more well read in assessment data and it’s a

conversation I have with my principal and I want to say to everyone, “How can we better service those struggling readers?”

Participant A3 said, “As a teacher, it’s always about what’s best for your students, you know... It’s my job to do that,” adding,

It took me a semester to realize that you know what... no, I’m not going to let some assessment score number be something that defines my work or my students. I’m finding so much more that tells what a child can do that is not an assessment number.

Using their instinctive knowledge, A5 said, “I think all teachers need to take freedoms that they need to... that’s the missing piece,” adding, “So, I’m like, okay, I know this curriculum is not the best, but maybe I should add other stuff to the lessons and maybe their scores would be a little better.” Participant A1 said, “I had to take the knowledge that I learned at school and then what I know what’s right for students and process that and put it together.”

In order to best prepare for student needs, A6 said, “When I started teaching I remember reading parenting books my first two years because I felt like I was doing more parenting than I was teaching,” also adding, “I’m not here to say what’s wrong with kids... I’m here to say, what can I do to help them?” To ensure students kept reading at home, A3 said, ““I send books of mine home with the kids all the time. I made sure that they all got 10 free books that were high quality books that they could keep forever. I just think doing things that exposes them to literature creates the love of reading.”

The novice teachers also discussed their desire to know their students and their concerns that assessment data does not always provide an accurate picture of what is happening in the lives of their students. This was apparent when A2 said,

Having data that is non-quantifiable- Like, does a kid actually like to read, you know. Numerical data can't tell you that. So I can look at data and I'm not pleased with it, but then I think about how maybe I just spent an afternoon book shopping and to see kids just get their hands on books and be excited to look at pictures.

There's more to the data than the numbers,

A2 added,

One of my little friends was having a rough day and she just sat in my chair and started tapping out words she doesn't know... and those kinds of moments aren't assessed, but they're so important and I get to see things with my eyes that aren't on the tests.

Participant A3 said, "Assessments don't see what I see... and that's what happens in home life. What happens in home life doesn't matter to assessment makers. I just wish my eyes could have been opened to that sooner." Participant A5 said, "From a logistical to an emotional standpoint, it is hard... last year I was doing like three of my students' laundry... And nobody ever talked about that in any college classes. But I do it because they need it," adding, "No one listens to us when we say there are other factors that affect the data. I mean, I've had a kid throw up in the middle of a timed test... Of course that's not going to be good data for anyone." Other concerns were expressed by A6 who said, "I don't love the testing. I know there is necessity to have some data, but

making kids take tests for so many days in a row, I wonder... how accurate is that data? I mean, if a kid didn't sleep well the night before, that data won't be as good."

A desire to learn more about the profession and its practices led many novice teachers to take professional development actions as their own responsibilities. Knowing there is more to learn, A10 said, "I'm not tired of learning about literacy and phonics and all of that... We just barely scratched the surface of all of that stuff in my teacher preparation program," adding, "It's just our job to make sure that we give them time to read... to read worthy materials, interesting stuff, and new books, and books about whatever they want... they deserve all of that." Participant A1 said, "When I run into a problem or when I've run into something like this child needs support in three or four different areas, I do the extra work to figure out what is most important for me to focus on."

Natural inquisition about certain assessment practices was described by A7, "I'm naturally very inquisitive... like you know, I'll do what they ask me to do, but I always want to know the reasoning behind it. I know that we do assessments to gather data, but if the data really doesn't go anywhere, I might push back and say is this really necessary?" adding, "If they tell me I have to do it, I just ask, Okay, how can I make it worthwhile, both for myself and for my students so we all end up in a good spot," also adding, "Are we getting guided reading levels because we just have to get those levels and show that we did, or, are we doing it so we can tailor instruction to individual students." Participant A5 described being an advocate for students saying,

We ask too much of young students, and I'm an advocate... I say, Hey, you can just roll all of this up into a seven year old. Hearing we're not teaching enough or they're not learning enough gets tiring when you compare it with reality.

A5 added, "For my students I needed more than what the curriculum was giving me so it left me to try and figure out my own answers."

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers rely on trustworthiness criteria to ensure the rigor of qualitative findings (Burkholder et al., 2016). I employed credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability strategies for evidence of trustworthiness. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews. To address content validity, I asked two nonparticipating veteran elementary teachers to review the interview questions for clarity and to ensure that the design of the questions would answer the research questions. I also conducted a mock interview with two nonparticipants as part of a research course to become familiar with the interview protocol guide. Semi-structured questions allowed the participants to share their perspectives on their efficacy in using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the research findings, and it establishes whether the research findings represent reasonable information drawn from the participants' original data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I ensured credibility by interviewing novice teachers. I interviewed 10 kindergarten through third grade teachers who were in their first five years of teaching and had been teaching the same grade level

for a minimum of three years. I gained credibility by implementing member checking. Participants received a two-page summary of the findings. All participants agreed with the results and did not have any questions or concerns about the findings.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of the study might apply to other groups or settings (Burkholder et al., 2016). I provided a detailed, thick description of the data to describe the findings (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through my thick description, readers will be able to judge the appropriateness of transferring my findings to future research on novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy, or to make generalization. The context of the study was described to assist the reader in determining the transferability of the results from the study to other novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of findings over time (Burkholder et al., 2016). I gained dependability by audiotaping and checking the accuracy of the Zoom transcriptions of all interviews verbatim to ensure the data was collected accurately. I did not need to conduct follow-up interviews. I also kept a reflective journal to record my thoughts as the study progressed and to limit personal biases with data collection and analysis. I utilized the interview protocol guide to ask the participants the same questions and in the same order. Before each interview, I reminded participants of their rights, including the fact that they were volunteering their services and that they had the right to

withdraw from the study at any time without cause. I compared the emerging themes to the current literature to validate the findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree that a study is confirmed or corroborated by other researchers and that data and interpretations of the findings derive from the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability certifies that the findings are generated from the participants' responses, and not researcher biases. Each participant brings his or her own unique perspective to a study; therefore, confirmability depends on whether participants' perspectives can be validated. Throughout the research, I kept a reflective journal and used it to document my thoughts and feelings as they arose, and my personal biases as they were recognized. I established confirmability by comparing the findings to the themes and the research questions. The goal was to ensure that there were no researcher biases by interpreting the data in an impartial way (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Summary

This section addressed the data analysis and the results of the study. My study was constructed on one research question and explored novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. A total of 10 participants from all over the United States presented their perspectives for this basic qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. During data analysis, I used Saldana's (2016) approach to analyze the findings. Three themes emerged (see Table 4) that reflected the perspectives of the participants. The participants' responses from their interviews revealed a range of perspectives regarding their self-

efficacy of using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Three themes emerged: (a) collegiate support and high quality field experiences contributed to self-efficacy of data usage for decisions, (b) reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions, (c) when self-efficacy of using data was weak, novice teachers relied on instincts to strengthen it.

Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of the findings. I compare the findings to what was found in the peer-reviewed literature in Chapter 2. I interpret the findings in the context of the conceptual framework. I describe the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for further research based on the research found in Chapter 2. I end Chapter 5 by describing the potential impact for positive social change in literacy instruction for novice teachers, their students, their colleagues, their administrators, their professors, and their supervisors.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

I conducted a basic qualitative study with semistructured interviews to examine novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy in using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. A total of 10 novice teachers from around the United States participated in the study. I conducted interviews by Zoom. Through the analysis of data, three themes emerged: (a) collegiate support and high-quality field experiences contributed to self-efficacy of data use for decisions, (b) reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions, and (c) novice teachers relied on instincts to strengthen self-efficacy when using data. Understanding the participants' perspectives of their self-efficacy in using literacy assessment data to inform instructional and intervention decisions may lead to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

Chapter 5 includes the research findings with a connection to the current literature and conceptual framework. I also provide implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research. I used a qualitative method for this study because qualitative research focuses on understanding, interpreting, and explaining phenomena (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Participants shared their perspectives regarding their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Through the qualitative approach, I gained a deeper understanding of novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions.

Interpretation of the Findings

I obtained approval from the Walden University IRB before data collection began. I used the following research question to guide this study: What are novice elementary teachers' perspectives of their efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques to use literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions? I asked participants nine questions about their perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Three themes emerged to answer the research question. The findings indicated that the participants felt that collegiate support and high-quality field experiences contributed to self-efficacy of data usage for decisions, reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions, and novice teachers relied on instincts to strengthen self-efficacy when using data.

I evaluated the interpretations of the findings through current literature and the constructs of my conceptual framework. I used Brookhart's (2004) assessment theory to explore the novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to inform their instructional and intervention decisions. Assessment data should inform student study and work patterns, students' understanding of what they are learning, and teachers' instructional and grading decisions (Brookhart, 2004). Through semistructured interviews, I asked 10 novice teachers whether they used literacy assessment data to make decisions, and what influences either helped or hindered their perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data. Their responses revealed that collegiate support, meaningful field experiences, opportunities to practice

using data, and instinctive knowledge strengthened their self-efficacy. Curriculum expectations and disconnects between curriculum and undergraduate coursework hindered their self-efficacy.

Theme 1

Collegiate support and high-quality field experiences contributed to self-efficacy of data use for decisions. Data discussion between fellow teachers and team members can lead to new ways of thinking about student learning and examine a broader, holistic range of data (Datnow et al., 2018). Participant A3 said, “I realized through my mentors and my team, I have an amazing team, and we are better together. We talk to each other about pulling groups and it really helps to understand how to use our data.” Participant A4 said, “I appreciate that at our school, we work as a team to put plans into actions to support our readers.” When teams work together to design curriculum, assessment, and instruction around data to improve student growth and achievement, the chances for student success are higher (Lai & McNaughton, 2016).

Mentor teachers are some of the most influential people on novice teachers (Kippers et al., 2018). Participant A1 said, “I’m thankful that I’ve had a mentor teacher that I was able to ask for help and kind of turn to for help and advice as a first-year teacher.” Participant A5 said, “My first year was wonderful. I had a mentor who was in the building as often as you could be... Lots of times she was able to make resources for me.” Participant A8 said, “My first year I had a mentor teacher and also an instructional coach that checked in with me once a month, so those two people also really helped build my confidence.” Mentor teachers help novice teachers with advice about pedagogy,

planning, strategies, and management (Kippers et al., 2018). A specific faculty member in a school district often known as a data coach can be influential in helping novice teachers learn skills and practices to use data to inform instructional decisions (Kippers et al., 2018).

Creating a culture of using data is necessary to support effective data use (Berebitsky et al., 2014; Lasater et al., 2020). Participant A2 said, “I have my grade level partner who is fantastic; we bounce ideas off of each other. If I need something, I can go to her.” Participant A3 said, “We have reading specialists and instructional coaches and they are incredible. They meet with our teams weekly to talk about professional learning community data and just to brainstorm things together.” Participant A6 said, “I have a colleague who will come alongside me and she has been very encouraging and we actually have decided to do planning together, so we can share the workload.”

When knowledge of teaching practices combines with opportunities for preservice teachers to think about the complexity of classrooms and their participants, they are able to engage in effective metacognitive decision making that includes data to inform their instructional and intervention decisions (R. Griffith, 2017). Participant A2 said, “Being in the classroom as much as we could and just exposing ourselves to the day to day of a classroom really helped.” Participant A7 said, “The student teaching experience gave me an opportunity to understand what students needed and how those needs kind of shaped my instruction,” and added, “without that hands on practice like had I just been released to my own classroom without it, I have no idea how I would have taught... I certainly

wouldn't have taught with intervention in mind." Participant A10 said, "In my field experience, I got to try out a lot more things than I was being taught in my program."

Frequent opportunities to practice what is taught in literacy methods courses about assessment data to inform instruction and intervention is important to bridge the gaps between theory and practice and the university and the schools in which novice teachers begin their careers (Anderson & Fauconer, 2016; DeGraff et al., 2015; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016; Paquette & Laverick, 2017; Sanden, 2016). Participant A3 said,

We got assigned a student to work with all semester and we tracked their reading growth. We pretty much did tutoring with them one-on-one 20 minutes a week, which isn't much, but it is so neat to see growth and we were instructed each time to do different lessons with them and track their growth and all of their assessments. And it gave me a lot of practice for coming into the real world of teaching.

Participant A4 said, "I still reflect on my capstone experience when creating my lesson plans and assessments even today." Participant A2 said,

My junior year I was in a first-grade classroom and I had a phenomenal cooperating teacher who really took me under her wing, and she taught me about workshop, taught me how to do running records, she sat by me and did one, and then she let me do one by myself. It was so nice to practice doing it.

It is important that opportunities for preservice teachers to practice using data to make instructional decisions are paired with careful supervision and reflective dialogue about successes and opportunities for improvement (Gardiner, 2018; Hail et al., 2015;

Zehms-Angell & Iwai, 2016). Participant A1 said, “We’d have to turn in a short reflection in undergrad, but nowadays, I find myself doing it quite regularly. Just reflecting in a journal... this is working, this is what the student needs, I found this to be beneficial.” Participant A7 said, “In student teaching, the teacher embraced literacy, and so again, that was something I got to be a part of.” Similar collaboration occurred between the participants and their colleagues. Participant A3 said, “We have book clubs in my school and we dive into the professional development books together and talk about how we implement ideas in our classroom.”

Theme 2

Reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Young children learning to read were more likely to be successful when teachers had a strong sense of comprehension in literacy instruction and used that knowledge to craft and create highly organized activities and cognitively stimulating instruction by using both their knowledge about pedagogy and the curriculum provided by the school (Pakarinen et al., 2017).

Current participants described feeling overwhelmed and underprepared to teach the curriculum that they were expected to use. Participant A1 said,

The curriculum is very different and so I would be so thankful if we had somebody who would be able to tie up the curriculum we had to use with what we learned in undergrad, so that new teachers are not blindsided by new curriculum or new content.

Participant A3 said, “The curriculum was a lot to take on because it was everything I thought I knew how to teach.” Participant A5 said,

As a new teacher, curriculum can leave you in a tricky place because you can’t really be left to what you know... if you haven’t had the experience of someone who has been using something similar for 20 or more years.

Participant A8 said, “The curriculum shot my nerves.”

Using curriculum and adaptive teaching strategies is critical for effective literacy teaching (Vaughn, 2019). It is important that novice teachers have knowledge of the concepts they are teaching and appropriate interventions for students who need additional support (Cartwright & Duke, 2019; Cech et al., 2018; Nevenglosky et al., 2018).

Participant A9 said, “My first year I was told to just use the curriculum and really utilize it because it kind of sets you up to understand the flow and how to use it as your guide for teaching.” Participant A5 said, “My school is so curriculum heavy and the program that was picked was picked for us and it doesn’t give me a lot of answers or help,” and added, “I needed more than what the curriculum was giving me so it left me to try and figure out my own answers, which was very frustrating.”

Even more important than the content of curriculum is the ability of novice teachers to use what they know about high-quality instruction to support their students (Valencia et al., 2006). Whole-class teaching should be coupled with appropriate interventions, including small group and individual meetings, to supplement the instruction and provide support for the students who need additional time and practice to master the skills (Filderman et al., 2018; Jaeger, 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Vaughn, 2019;

Vernon-Feagans et al., 2018). Participant A2 recognized this and expressed, “We use the curriculum as whole group, but I have a handful that could definitely go way faster than the rest of the class.” Participant A3 said, “I wish curriculum was more related to what students need rather than trying to pull teeth when the majority of my class was not ready for the content.” Participant A5 also recognized this, saying, “I know this curriculum is not the best, but maybe I should add other stuff to the lessons and maybe their scores would be a little better.”

Theme 3

When self-efficacy of using data was weak, novice teachers relied on instincts to strengthen it. Although instinctive knowledge was not part of my literature review or research questions, it came through in responses from all 10 participants. Instinctive knowledge in the classroom is an ability to realize what is happening in a situation and make a decision that would lead to the best result or outcome for the situation in the classroom (Calero et al., 2018; Sipman et al., 2019; Valle, 2017; Vanlommel et al., 2017).

Instructional leaders need to stay attuned to teachers’ needs and perspectives, such as what teachers value in data and how data lead to meaningful changes in instructional and intervention decisions (Farrell & Marsh, 2016). When policymakers and administrators look at literacy assessment data, they look at the numbers to judge performance, and novice teachers often are not given credit for their instinctive knowledge (Clark, 2015; Curry et al., 2016; Davis et al., 2018). When interviewed, novice teachers in their first year expressed concerns about their students, feeling overwhelmed, relationships with others, the quality of their teaching, and excessive

accountability from administrators (Curry et al., 2016). However, in the current study administrators were identified as individuals who frustrated novice teachers when it came to support and were described as hindrances to self-efficacy in using literacy assessment data. Participant A1 said,

My administrator and I meet so infrequently because it's a matter of time and we're short-handed, so it becomes more of getting a checklist from my administrator, I get more of a 'Here's a bigger picture of what we need to do.'

Participant A5 said,

The district doesn't know my students like I do. They don't know this kid misses three days of school every week. They don't know how many times I've tried for special education referrals. They don't know that these students sleep through the literacy block every morning so it's frustrating when they are trying to evaluate me by numbers.

Participant A6 said,

There is a gap in communication. I don't know who is responsible. I wonder if the administration is hearing from the superintendent that they need to do one thing and then by the time it trickles down to us it hasn't been communicated effectively or the same and then we don't do things right. Like, it will come up later that we should have done things one way but nobody ever told us we should have done it that way.

In an effort to collaborate with administrators, novice teachers often use their instinctive knowledge to reconcile what they are being asked to do with what they know

is best practice for their students. Participant A7 said, “If they tell me I have to do it, I just ask, ‘Okay, how can I make it worthwhile, both for myself and for my students so we all end up in a good spot.’” Participant A2 said,

I definitely think I have gotten a lot better about using data than when I first started... It became my goal. Be more well read in assessment data and it’s a conversation I have with my principal and I want to say to everyone, “How can we better service those struggling readers/”

Since using assessment data is so beneficial to student growth and development (Cech et al., 2018; Jimerson et al., 2016; Vaughn, 2019), it is important that novice teachers are able to share their perspectives about using assessment data to inform literacy practices, especially to administrators and policymakers. Rather than focusing solely on using assessment data for compliance purposes, school administrators and leaders need to focus on using data for improving student achievement and growth (Lasater et al., 2020). A critical piece to using data to improve instruction is when school leadership engages in meaningful discourse with all teachers about data use and shares ownership of data with the teachers (Lasater et al., 2020; Wilhelm et al., 2020).

Resiliency is another important component for novice teachers (Dial, 2015). Participant A1 said, “I am typically somebody who, when I fail the first time, I tell myself I can do this and I figure my way through it and so I’ve been able to do that.” Participant A10 said, “I’m not tired of learning about literacy and phonics and all of that... We just barely scratched the surface of all of that stuff in my teacher preparation program.” Participant A3 said, “It took me a semester to realize that you know what...

no, I'm not going to let some assessment score number be something that defines my work or my students. I'm finding so much more that tells what a child can do that is not an assessment number.”

Limitations of the Study

Possible limitations in this study included sample size, the coronavirus pandemic, participants' willingness to participate, and researcher bias. This study was limited to novice teachers who have been teaching literacy in grades kindergarten through third grade in their first five years of teaching who have been teaching the same grade level for at least three years. I excluded first and second year teachers because the global pandemic significantly shifted instructional practices from normal expectations and routines (see Arquilla & Guzdial, 2020; see Băcă, 2020, see Bradley et al., 2020).

Another limitation was the sample size. I limited the number of participants and used elementary schools across the United States. I used a social media invitation on literacy groups to recruit participants. I ended up with 10 participants. The low number of participants and schools might limit the overall perspectives of self-efficacy. More teachers might have participated if the study had occurred during a normal school year without a global pandemic affecting workload and schedules.

The coronavirus virus is a respiratory illness that can easily spread from person to person. The spreading of the virus so quickly led to a worldwide health pandemic during the evolution of my study. I collected my data for health and safety reasons virtually and interviewed participants by Zoom. I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews through Zoom.

Another possible limitation was the honesty of the participants in sharing their perspectives with me since they were sharing confidential information. I did not have any personal or professional affiliations with the study site schools or the teachers in the schools. I reassured participants that my role was that of a researcher and also assured them that their identities would remain anonymous. I did not coerce participants to join the study and job security was not a factor in participation or non-participation. I reiterated that all responses were confidential and that no one in the district, including the superintendent and principals of the elementary schools, would know the identity of the participants. I informed the participants that I was not acting on behalf of the school district and that this study was not a job requirement.

Researcher bias was also a limitation. I reflected upon my experiences as a teacher, a teacher educator, and a passionate reader. My work with novice teachers was the impetus for this study. It was important to report the participant's responses to the interview questions accurately and without prejudice. I searched for biases while I conducted my study and documented any potential biases throughout the study in a personal journal (see Creswell, 2012). A journal sensitizes interviewers to their subjectivities and informs them of the impact that these influences have on research outcomes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher is a significant part of qualitative research and must be able to describe relevant biases, assumptions, expectations, and experiences that qualify him or her to conduct the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also explained data collection and analysis in detail. This study confirmed some of the research findings and major tenets from the conceptual framework regarding novice

teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine novice teachers' perspectives on their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decision. Participants in the current study identified collegiate support and high quality field experiences contributed to self-efficacy of data usage for decisions; reading curriculum in classrooms hindered self-efficacy when using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions; and when self-efficacy of using data was weak, novice teachers relied on instincts to strengthen it. Participants relied on opportunities to practice using literacy assessment data in field experiences and support from mentor teachers and team teachers to enhance their self-efficacy. Participants also relied on their instinctive knowledge to strengthen their self-efficacy, especially when curriculum expectations caused frustrations. These findings confirm the body of knowledge concerning novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data. The following are recommendations for future research.

The first recommendation is to perform this study with teachers who may not have instinctive knowledge on which they rely. While all participants in this study referenced their instinctive knowledge, there may be other novice teachers who do not have similar instinctive knowledge and their perspectives of their self-efficacy may be different or strengthened by other factors. It may also be worthwhile to further explore

instinctive knowledge in novice teachers (Calero et al., 2018; Marrit Valle, 2017; Sipman et al., 2019; Vanlommel et al., 2017) and how it is developed and strengthened.

The second recommendation is to perform a similar study a few years after classrooms have adapted to a new normal after the ramifications of the global pandemic have settled down. Many teachers had to work quickly to modify instruction to teach remotely and while all participants in this study were able to reflect on their time in the classroom prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is possible that the pandemic will have long term ramifications on teaching practices and on self-efficacy. Pre-service teachers and student teachers have had unique field experiences and challenges that may have hindered their perceptions of what their classroom will look like in their first year.

The third recommendation is to closely examine the content and outcomes of literacy methods courses across the United States. Since many of the participants in this study expressed frustration that their undergraduate coursework did not adequately prepare them for the curriculum that they were given in their first few years, it may be worthwhile exploring ways instructors can seamlessly weave in strategies in which novice teachers can adapt to any curriculum they are expected to use. Further coursework may be designed and included which introduces pre-service teachers to instructional shifts and interventions that can be applied to any curriculum.

The fourth recommendation is to continue to research and implement pairings of appropriate field experiences and student teaching experiences with cooperating teachers who are effectively using informal assessments along with their curriculum to provide high quality experiences for their students. The instruction, assessment, and interventions

that pre-service teachers witness in these experiences should strongly align with what they have learned in their coursework (Scales et al., 2017).

The fifth recommendation is to encourage all districts to provide opportunities for high quality, meaningful professional development for novice teachers and all other teachers. As the realm of literacy education changes and novice teachers rely on mentor teachers and team teachers for support, it is critical that the understanding of practices and interventions is shared by all those who are working together. School districts need to provide ongoing professional development to make up for the gap in practices and understanding of using data to inform instruction and intervention (Bocala & Parker Boudett, 2015; Dobbs et al., 2017). While data-based decision-making has been found to improve student skills and proficiency, there are very limited opportunities for teachers to engage in ongoing professional development (Glover, 2017). Providing opportunities for professional development in using data to make instructional and intervention decisions is likely to lead to a positive impact on teachers' self-efficacy, perceptions, and practices pertaining to using data to inform practices (Glover, 2017; Gupta & Lee, 2020).

Implications

A goal of the study was to understand novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Participants in the current study expressed frustrations with the curriculum expectations in their classroom, lack of support from their administrators, and disconnect of undergraduate coursework to the curriculum they are expected to use. The results of the current study have implications for administrators and undergraduate teacher preparation

programs. Teacher educators might use the outcomes of the study to provide support for pre-service teachers and better equip them to use various types of curriculum and enhance the curriculum with appropriate instructional and intervention strategies when the curriculum is not providing sufficient materials and support for striving readers. Administrators might use the outcomes of this study to develop action plans and scaffolding opportunities for novice teachers who are overwhelmed and confused with the curriculum they are expected to use. This could include more intentional support from mentor teachers and team teachers to help the novice teachers specifically with management and implementation of the curriculum in their classroom.

Implications for positive social change may also include practices to improve novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy in using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. Strong self-efficacy coupled with confidence in the implementation of literacy curriculum and appropriate interventions may lead to an increase in the number of proficient readers by third grade in low-performing schools. In addition, implications for positive social change include an awareness of the importance of ongoing support for novice teachers in their first year and beyond as they strengthen their resilience and boost their confidence.

Based on the findings of the current study, instinctive knowledge was key to developing a strong sense of self-efficacy using literacy assessment data. The results of the current study could provide information about the importance of instinctive knowledge and encourage teacher preparation programs to nurture and continue to develop instinctive knowledge among pre-service teachers so they have a strong

instinctive knowledge on which they can rely when they enter their classrooms for the first time.

The findings from this current study may provide direction and guidance for mentor teachers, team teachers, and reading specialists and coaches with identifying ways they can best support novice teachers in their building, particularly with the challenges associated with curriculum. The teachers' perspectives provided new insight into the challenges they face with the literacy curriculum in their classrooms.

Conclusion

Novice teachers' perspectives on their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions is significant, and an essential element of this study. The results of my study filled a gap in the literature. Research exists on the importance of using literacy assessment data to modify instruction and make intervention plans, but little research exists regarding novice teachers' perspectives on their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data and why many do not adopt this practice. Thus, the impetus for this study topic was to examine the factors that strengthen feelings of self-efficacy and factors that hinder feelings of self-efficacy. The results of this study demonstrated the importance of collegiate support and meaningful field experiences. Novice teachers indicated that their instinctive knowledge helped guide them to do best practices, even when curriculum and administrator expectations did not align with their beliefs or their undergraduate coursework experiences.

The results of the study present evidence that novice teachers need support from their undergraduate coursework, administrators, and literacy specialists and reading

coaches specifically tailored toward adapting rigid curriculum and expectations to the realities of their student needs. Teacher preparation programs must continue to provide meaningful experience and ample opportunities for teacher candidates to gather literacy assessment data, analyze the data, and practice modifying data to meet student needs. The results of the study demonstrated the instinctive knowledge novice teachers had within, and how they relied on it to support them in areas where they felt confused or frustrated.

I hope that results from my study will lead to a greater understanding of novice teachers' perspectives of their self-efficacy using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions. The expectation is that policymakers, administrators, and teacher preparation programs will use the information to support novice teachers and provide them additional resources and opportunities to practice. I also expect they will use this information to continue to encourage and build instinctive knowledge in novice teachers believe that school administrators, reading support staff, and teachers could use the information from my study to make school-based decisions about supporting novice teachers. I hope that districts use the results to help them plan meaningful opportunities to learn, grow, and practice so they can use resources to continue to strengthen their self-efficacy in using literacy assessment data to ensure all students are receiving the instruction and support they need and deserve.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol Guide

Interviewee: _____ Location: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

School: _____ Grade level: _____

The purpose of this interview is to examine your perspectives of your efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques using literacy assessment data to make instructional and interventional decisions for your classroom literacy curriculum.

Your participation in this interview is important and voluntary. This means that I will respect your decision of whether or not you want to participate. If you decide to participate now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal. I do not intend to inflict any harm. This audio only recorded interview is scheduled to last about 45-60 minutes.

Introduction and Background Information: Thank you for volunteering to share your insights and experiences about using literacy assessment data to make decisions. I would like you to answer these questions based on your practices of using literacy assessment data **prior** to the beginning of COVID-19 in March 2020.

I would like to begin by asking you some background questions to get to know you better.

A. Participant's Background

1) How long have you been teaching ___ grade literacy at this school? _____
How many total years have you been teaching full time? _____

B. Interview Questions

2) Which literacy assessments do you use to get an understanding of student mastery of skills/benchmarks expected of students at your grade level?

3) How do you use the data you obtain from the literacy assessments you use?

4) What coursework was included in your undergraduate experience related to literacy instruction, assessment, and intervention in your teacher preparation program?

- 5) What field experiences and student teaching/clinical experiences related to literacy instruction, assessment, and intervention were expected as part of your undergraduate coursework?
- 6) What are your experiences in using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions in your first few years of teaching?
- 7) Describe your feelings of self-efficacy about using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions in the last few years of your teaching.
- 8) Describe how your administrator expects or does not expect you to use data to make instructional and intervention decisions.
- 9) What types of experiences or support would help improve your perspectives of your efficacy in using adaptive instructional techniques using literacy assessment data to make instructional and intervention decisions?
- 10) Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Possible follow up prompts that I will keep visible as I interview each participant:

- What did you mean by.....?
- Tell me more about....
- You mentioned.... Tell me more.
- Can you expand more on?