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Teacher Perceptions Regarding The Impact of Multicultural Literature, When It Is Implemented During Guided Reading Instruction, On Reading Comprehension For African American Male Students In Early Childhood

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF
MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE, WHEN IT IS IMPLEMENTED DURING
GUIDED READING INSTRUCTION, ON READING COMPREHENSION FOR
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

By
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This dissertation was submitted by Cassandra Gregory under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Abstract

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF MULTICULTURAL

LITERATURE, WHEN IT IS IMPLEMENTED DURING GUIDED READING

INSTRUCTION, ON READING COMPREHENSION FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN

MALE STUDENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION. Cassandra Gregory:

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Reading is an essential skill, used in every aspect of daily life. It is the foundation for every other form of learning (Alberti, 2010). Over the years, there has been a gap in reading achievement between African American male students and other demographic groups (Milner et al., 2013). This study examined the effectiveness of small group reading using multicultural literature in kindergarten through third grade, especially for the African American male student. A framework based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive development provides support for a systematic literacy approach. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine teacher perceptions regarding how the use of guided reading and multicultural literature impacted the learning of all students, specifically the African American male student. The recommendations from this study suggest various ways for colleges and universities, school districts, and educators to help develop teachers in the areas of guided reading with the use of phonics, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and fluency instruction, along with the use of multicultural literature and culturally responsive teaching approaches.

Keywords: guided reading, multicultural literature, Lev Vygotsky, zone of proximal development, scaffolding, reading comprehension, culturally responsive

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

The educational issues students in this country face are extremely critical (Wiley, 2011). Students in the United States are not where they need to be in reading (Race Matters Institute, 2013). It is even more critical for African American male students in the United States (Lewis et al., 2013). Our nation's future is in the hands of all our children and their academic ability to effectively read and write (Clifton, 2011).

Over the years, there has been an overwhelming gap in equitable schools and school instruction for African American males (Milner et al., 2013). Public schools are not preparing students well academically, the way some private schools are, especially for the African American student (Race Matters Institute, 2013). In 2012, only 12% of African American male students were proficient in reading (Kunjufu, 2013). African American male youth are most likely to be placed in special education classes than any other subgroups in schools (Lynch, 2017).

Kunjufu (2010) conducted research acknowledging that African American males may not have had the opportunities to enter an effective preschool. This may have caused them to need early interventions to help improve in reading over the years or once they enter kindergarten (Kunjufu, 2010). Paige and Witty (2010) discussed research on the achievement gap in the United States with African American and White students entering kindergarten. They stated that African American students knew fewer sight words than White students once they finished kindergarten, and they were outperformed in school by their White peers in kindergarten and first grade. The recommendation from the research was that having opportunities for African American males to attend school as early as preschool will help them improve academically in reading and other academic areas

(Paige & Witty, 2010).

Gordon (2010) stated that the foundation of learning to read should happen during the early grades of kindergarten through third grade (Talley, 2017). The type of instructional support teachers give in the early grades for students will determine a student's reading ability (Halladay, 2012). When students end third grade, they should be reading on a proficient grade level to succeed in future grades (Talley, 2017). If students who have reading difficulties receive explicit phonemic interventions, awareness of print, knowledge to decipher a letter and a word, phonics instruction, fluency instruction, and phonological instruction, their reading should improve (Talley, 2017). This is not always the case with African American male students (Talley, 2017).

The gap between African American males and their peers continues to be an ongoing issue for the educational system (Gordon, 2010). There have been some gains with African American males and their literacy achievement. It is not significant enough to make a difference among the different subgroups (Gordon, 2010). The gap between African American males and other subgroups has continued for many decades (Gordon, 2010). Raising the achievement reading level of African American male students will help to close the achievement gap (Baruti, 2010). There must be a focus on the African American male youth because if they continue to lack in reading and writing skills that are needed and deserved, it will place some of them further at risk later in society (Swanson et al., 2010).

Over 70% of all students struggle with reading and even learning how to read (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2019). In 2019, the average reading scores were lower for fourth-grade students compared to 2017. According to

NAEP (2015), African American students scored lower than any other ethnic group on a reading assessment that measures reading abilities.

Although there have been researchers who identified some success with African American male literacy and academics (Bonner, 2014; Harper & Wood, 2016; Howard, 2014; Moore & Lewis; 2014; Warren, 2016), there continues to be little success with closing the achievement gap for African American males in reading. The reading scores of African American males continue to be a major issue throughout the United States. The failing gap of African American males is bigger than that of White students and girls (NAEP, 2013, 2017, 2019). NAEP (2019) data showed only 17% of African American males read at the proficient or above level. In 2019, the average reading score for African American males was lower when compared to 2017 (NAEP, 2017, 2019). The national reading scores for African American males have not increased since 1992 (NAEP, 1992, 2017, 2019). This trend continues to create a large gap in reading between the African American male and White male in fourth grade. The gap is even higher in eighth grade between the White male and African American male students (NAEP, 2019).

There are many reasons why learning to read and knowing how to read are important. Literacy is the most important interdisciplinary skill for academic success (Howard, 2010). Reading is one of the main ways to access knowledge (Edelman, 2012). Knowing how to read effectively helps with memory processing and is important in language development of all students (Davis, 2014). Reading helps with listening and communication skills. It helps students become innovators and thinkers (Davis, 2014). Improving one's vocabulary is an essential learning skill. Knowing how to read effectively will provoke new ideas, and it is the key to a successful life. Unfortunately,

Black males often experience a disconnection in schools when it comes to who is teaching them as well as who is disciplining them (Davis, 2014). The teaching profession today is dominated by White females who lack the training and experience to help the African American male youth (Landsman & Lewis, 2010).

Knowledge is power, and people who are educated can change their life circumstances (Edelman, 2012). When students are proficient readers, they are more likely to obtain college degrees, which is one key to financial stability (Casey, 2010).

African American males continue to fall behind White males when it comes to finishing college (McDaniel, 2011). In the foreseeable future, it is said that a college degree or some sort of college training will be required to fill approximately 63% of the jobs (Amdur, 2013; Wallace, 2010); therefore, a high school diploma will do little to help African American males in the future, even if they receive a high school diploma (Wallace, 2010). Graduation rates in 2012-2013 were 59% for African American males, 56% for Latino males, and 80% for White males (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Table l shows the graduation rates of African American males and other subgroups from 2012-2013 as reported by the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015) school data from four southeastern states. The table also shows the educational gap between the subgroups of African American males and White and Latino males.

Table 1

High School Graduation Percentages

State	African American male	White male	Gap
North Carolina	61%	77%	16%
South Carolina	51%	68%	17%
Tennessee	70%	81%	11%
Georgia	55%	71%	16%
	African American male	Latino male	
North Carolina	61%	63%	2%
South Carolina	51%	62%	11%
Tennessee	70%	74%	4%
Georgia	55%	57%	3%

Note. Source: Schott Foundation for Public Education (2015).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that I used for this study was Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive development with an emphasis on his discovery of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and his concept theory of scaffolding while students are in the ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) said that social interaction plays an important factor in a child's cognitive development. He stated that students must have social interactions to fully develop cognitively (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) explained that children are born with certain elementary functions: attention, sensation, perception, and memory. As they get older, Vygotsky (1978) explained that they develop higher mental functions that are provided in the ZPD with the assistance of a tutor, most likely the teacher.

The ZPD is what a student can achieve independently and what they can accomplish if they receive assistance from a teacher (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD is where students build the knowledge and skills needed to go beyond their normal limits (Vygotsky, 1978). This area of the ZPD is where the teachers can assist students with

developing new concepts (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD can take place in any situation as

students work towards mastering a skill or a new task (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky

(1978) explained that students will have a deeper understanding of their reading when

they have the support and guidance of teachers or when they can understand the learning

on their own. The figure shows the ZPD.

Figure

ZPD
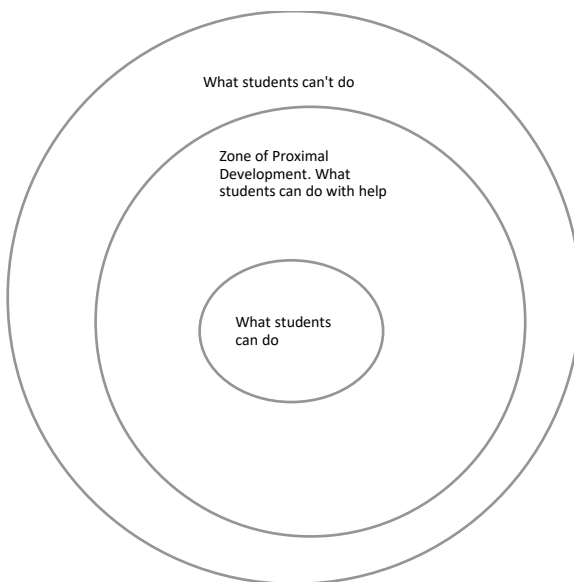
Note. Source: Wheeler (2013).

The figure shows a portion of what students cannot academically accomplish

independently and what they can accomplish while in the ZPD. The ZPD is a sensitive

learning area where learning is maximized for the students with the help of the teacher.

After the instruction is developed in the ZPD, students can take what they learned and

apply it to other areas of learning independently (Vygotsky, 1978).

For teachers to help students during the ZPD, they must be able to discern what

students can do alone and what they can do with the help of an instructor (Vygotsky,

1978). When children can learn without help, they are outside of their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). If a child requires assistance during learning, they are within their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). To assist students while they are in their ZPD, teachers must also acknowledge and understand a student's social environment (Chaiklin, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Understanding the prior background knowledge that a student must bring into the classroom can help the teacher with scaffolding, and the student will eventually be working outside of their ZPD (Chaiklin, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher provides scaffolding at this stage, and the student uses background knowledge from group and personal social interactions to help them learn (Vygotsky, 1978). With continuous scaffolding and guided instruction from the teacher, eventually, the students will be independent learners (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1978) developed the term scaffolding as part of his theory of cognitive development. Some years later, in the 1970s, psychologist Jerome Burner, and other fellow psychologists resurfaced the term scaffolding. Wood and Middleton (1990) came up with the term scaffolding after their observation of younger children, with the help of a tutor, attempting to build a tower. They described scaffolding in this scenario as strategies that the children had to use to accomplish said task (Wood & Middleton, 1990). During this observation, the tutor helped the students with maintaining focus and making corrections to the errors that were told to them by the tutor (Wood & Middleton, 1990).

Wood and Middleton (1990) explained how scaffolding assists students with their learning and thinking. When teachers are assisting students, the teacher can adjust the instruction according to student responses and engagement (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013). This level of scaffolding is connected to Vygotsky's ZPD (Mackiewicz &

Thompson, 2013). When students come out of the ZPD without scaffolding and are performing tasks without assistance (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013), they can take charge of their own learning (Puntan, 2010).

Purpose

Reading strategies and interventions can help students improve their reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). One strategy that helps students improve in reading and reading comprehension is the guided reading program. Guided reading has been around since the 1930s, mostly in primary grades, kindergarten through second grade, and now more in elementary Grades 3-5 (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010).

The guided reading concept started in the 1940s when Emmett Betts, a reading educator, introduced direct reading (Ford & Optiz, 2011a). Betts (1946) explained how students needed direction and support to be the best readers (Ford & Opitz, 2011b). The guided reading concept was one of the principles Betts outlined in his directed reading activity (Ford & Opitz, 2011b). Betts never mentioned the term guided reading; just the concept (Ford & Opitz, 2011a). In 1957, Gray and Reese used the term guided reading in their research on how to implement a reading lesson (Ford & Opitz, 2011a). In 1996, Fountas and Pinnell reintroduced the concept of guided reading instruction.

The purpose of guided reading is to teach students how to apply effective reading strategies without the assistance of a teacher (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017; Johnson & Keier, 2010). The strategies taught are the ones teachers model and demonstrate during small group instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011, 2017). The guided reading sessions are focused on the reading strategies taught to the student for them to comprehend the text (Burkins & Croft, 2010; Fountas & Pinnell, 2011).

The groups for guided reading are not too large and allow all students to participate (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011, 2017). Guided reading instruction is an instructional strategy used for groups of five or less to help target the various skills, abilities, and needs of students (Richardson, 2010). Guided reading instruction provides purpose and meaning for students (Richardson, 2010).

Students enter school at various levels; therefore, guided reading instruction can be used to meet those needs with teacher guidance (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011). Guided reading instruction helps students with a variety of learning objectives and goals (Gregory & Cahill, 2010). Guided reading can assist with instruction at an interest level and a student's ability level (Gregory & Cahill, 2010).

The U.S. Department of Education (2016) reported that 85% of African American males were not reading on grade level. One way to increase reading skills in African American males at an early age is to introduce them to reading that is of interest and text to which they can relate. Research shows that in the year 2013, only 3% of books published for children featured African American characters (Christian Science Monitor, 2013). In 2016, approximately 12% of books published featured African Americans, still not enough to impact student learning and growth (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2019).

When teachers in elementary school choose books that reflect a positive representation of African American children, this can help increase the learning. This will also show that teachers care about all children (White, 2010). This strategy of text selection should start in elementary school to help African American males develop important reading skills that will continue throughout college and beyond (Tatum, 2010).

Also, when a child has supportive home structures to assist with reading and writing and effective schools early on, this could help ensure success of generations to come (Race Matters Institute, 2013).

Multicultural Literature

Multicultural literature came about in the 1960s and 1970s (Morrell, 2008). When attempting to define multicultural literature, several words are used: ethnicity, language culture, and social status (Mongillo & Holland, 2016). There is an absence of multicultural texts in the classroom specifically to engage African American males (Tatum, 2010). Multicultural text is particularly important in the primary classroom (Mongillo & Holland, 2016; Knoblaugh, 2016; Robinson, 2013). Children make connections to text and literature at noticeably young ages (Morrell, 2008). Having multicultural textbooks in the classroom allows students to build critical thinking skills by connecting the multicultural current events to their learning (Norton, 2009).

Ethnic groups in the United States are changing and growing rapidly (Council of Great City Schools, 2011). Schools are remarkably diverse, with over 45% of students in the schools being non-White (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). When students can see themselves in the curriculum, they can most likely understand the world in which they live (Yoon, 2015). When students are exposed to multicultural literature in schools, it allows them to be well-informed about the world around them (Wasserburg, 2019).

In a study conducted by López-Robertson (2017), multicultural literature was used in a way for third-grade students to find similarities and differences in one another. The researcher had students read the book *The Best Part of Me*, a book that depicts

students from different cultural, race, and ethnic backgrounds. Students participated in a discussion about the book, during and after the story. They shared the best part of themselves as related to the story. This discussion allowed the students to feel wanted and appreciated. The students were well engaged in the story and in the activity that followed. In this case study, the teacher carefully selected multicultural literature text to which all students in the classroom could relate (López-Robertson, 2017). Some of the teachers who teach African American males lack strategies and curriculum resources to increase their engagement in the classroom and in choosing the right text to engage all students (Tatum, 2010).

The overall achievement of African American males is strengthened when they have a strong background in literacy and reading (Howard, 2010). It was stated that by the year 2022, classrooms will include over 50% of students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Kyles & Olafson, 2008). Unfortunately, the diversity of literature is not as prevalent in the classrooms as the diversity of the students. Basically, multicultural literature remains limited for classrooms and children of color (Horning et al., 2011). Marinak and Gambell (2008) concluded that based on the interest of boys and girls in reading, this could be a possible reason why African American males are not enjoying reading or seeing value in it. Marinak and Gambell (2008) discovered that boys enjoy reading texts that have graphics or books where they see themselves as the protagonist. Boys enjoy books about sports, dinosaurs, horror, and adventure and books they can relate to (Marinak & Gambell, 2008). This could also be one reason why there is such resistance towards reading outcomes for African American males, because those types of texts are not available in the classrooms or school libraries (Logan & Johnston, 2009).

Multicultural literature has benefits for African American male students beyond the book context (Ford et al., 2019). When teachers are trained on how all children learn, they can engage students in meaningful and purposeful multicultural literacy. Student academics and engagement will increase due to the cultural connections made through the text as well as the training of teachers (Ford et al., 2019). Teachers should provide opportunities early on for students to see themselves in text. This will begin to build a love and motivation for reading early on (Graves, 2010). They will also want to read more text beyond the classroom (Graves, 2010).

In this study, I examined how the use of multicultural literature, when it is implemented during guided reading instruction, impacts reading comprehension for African American male students in early childhood education.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers implement guided reading in their classrooms?

2. How do teachers implement the use of multicultural literature in their classroom?

3. How do teachers perceive the impact of multicultural literature on the reading comprehension of African American male students when used in guided reading?

Significance of the Study

Reading deficiencies among African American males have been a national issue for many years. African American males in elementary school continue to fall short in reading achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2011a). Research shows that even the highest achieving African American males are behind their peers (Plucker et al., 2010). Eighty

percent of African American males age 25 or older have only a high school diploma (NCES, 2014). This study sought to determine if using multicultural literacy as a reading strategy increases reading proficiency for many of the African American males in early grades. This study also shows how a teacher's perception when selecting literature in the classroom for students to read can have a significant effect on the African American male student.

If students are not reading on grade level by third grade, they will most likely struggle through the remaining years of their schooling; therefore, it is important to ensure that African American male youth are given reading literature they are interested in to help increase their reading proficiency. It is also important that teachers are qualified to teach all students, not just one group, well. In 2015, White students were 49% of the public school population. In 2010, White students were 61% of the public school population.

The resources and texts provided in schools must reflect all students. When children do not find themselves reflected in books, they are less likely to be engaged in the reading process. In 2016, only 15% of literature published was multicultural (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2019).

Methodology Overview

A qualitative case study research design was implemented for this study, which included data collection through open-ended qualitative research questions (Creswell, 2011). The qualitative research included data analysis, which included a focus group for teachers and teacher surveys. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research involves understanding how groups or individuals attribute to a social problem. In this study, the

social problem was the lack of reading comprehension ability of African American male students.

Qualitative research offers a variety of approaches (Creswell, 2014). Its research design allows for the development of deep understanding of the research questions. Qualitative research relies on data analysis based on the personal experiences and perspectives of the participants.

The qualitative research will give insight to teacher perceptions of guided reading instruction using multicultural literature to help African American male students. There was also audio taping of the focus group and transcribing. Teachers in Grades K-3 had their answers recorded and documented accordingly.

Case studies are inquiry based. Case studies allow for a complex situation to be studied. They also allow the researcher to study real life and significant conditions (Schramm, 2006) while considering the knowledge and feelings of the participants being studied (Westheimer, 1998). In case studies, the researcher analyzes a case in-depth and data are collected through a series of data collections with multiple sources. Researchers in case studies do not rely on one data source to conduct the findings of the research; instead, they gather multiple forms of data sources (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009, 2012). This qualitative research case study used surveys, multicultural checklists, and a teacher focus group.

Definition of Terms

This study utilizes several terms. These definitions provide clarity regarding the meaning and use of these terms within the study.

Multicultural Literature

Literature about people who are outside of the mainstream of society and have

been marginalized in some way (Canales, 2002). Multicultural literature includes culture

ethnicity, and language (Mongillo & Holland, 2016).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Those teaching practices grounded in understanding culture in the teaching and

learning environment (Adams et al., 2005).

Lev Vygotsky

A psychologist who was known for his social cultural theory that included the

concept of the ZPD and scaffolding for students to achieve academic success (Vygotsky,

1978).

ZPD

What a student can do without the help of a tutor and what a student can

successfully achieve with guiding support from a tutor (Vygotsky, 1978).

Scaffolding

The strategies used by the tutor to support students through the ZPD. As

scaffolding is slowly taken away from the student, they will be able to successfully

complete a task on their own (Vygotsky, 1978).

Race

A person's self-identification with one or more social groups. An individual can

report as White, Black or African American, Asian, America Indian, Native Hawaiian,

Alaska native, or some other race (Frye, 2010).

Ethnicity

The fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition (Frye, 2010).

Achievement Gap

The test score difference between White and Asian students and other students (NAEP, 2017).

Literacy

The ability to read and write effectively on grade level (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Guided Reading

Teachers will meet with groups of students, normally between 30-45 minutes. The sessions focus on teaching readers the strategies and skills students need to think their way through texts with the teacher's assistance. The students within the groups are normally reading on similar Lexile text levels. The students work on a guided reading lesson designed for their academic needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010).

Phonemic Awareness

The ability to hear, decipher, and manipulate sounds in the English language. Phonemic awareness focuses on sounds only. It is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds of spoken words; for example, to know that hat consists of three sounds, /h/, /a/, /t/. It is also understanding that those last two sounds are part of other word family words such as cat, sat, pat, bat, and that (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Phonics

Deals with the sound/symbol relationship. Students understand that each letter is a symbol that represents a sound. For example, students will learn that the three sounds of hat correspond to the three letters h, a, and t. Phonics focuses on letters and sounds (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Fluency

Oral reading fluency is the ability to read a text with accuracy, speed, and proper expression. Fluent readers read aloud effortlessly and with expression, as if they are having a conversation. However, those who are not fluent read word to word very slowly and unsure. Being able to read fluently also helps with reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Vocabulary

Refers to words known to communicate effectively. There is oral vocabulary and reading vocabulary that students should learn through direct instruction and in print (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Reading Comprehension

Reading is built on the ability of students to understand what is read. The text comprehension instructional strategy helps students understand what is being read. This is done through direct instruction and the teaching of a variety of strategies to help students comprehend what is being read (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Summary

This study contains five chapters. Chapter 1 was the introduction to the entire study and introduced the problem and purpose of the research. Chapter 2 is the literature

review, in which there is a discussion on the reading results of African American male students and the impact reading comprehension has on academic achievement. The literature review chapter continues with research and discussion on Vygotsky and his theoretical concepts of the ZPD and scaffolding. The chapter continues with a detailed discussion on culturally responsive teaching and an in-depth look at guided reading instruction. There is research explaining how guided reading benefits students in a small group setting along with teacher guided instruction and how it connects to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive development. The literature review closes with a discussion on the academic needs of African American males, which include the social needs as well as areas of reading interests. The final section in the literature review is on multicultural literature and reading comprehension for young African American males. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for the study, including the description of the participants as well as the approaches used to collect and analyze the data. Chapter 4 provides the results of the data collection. The study closes with Chapter 5 summarizing the entire study with an analysis of the results of the study's research and its implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study examined how teacher perceptions regarding the use of multicultural literature when it is implemented during guided reading instruction impacts reading comprehension for African American male students in early childhood education. The study is related to the framework and theory of Vygotsky's (1978), sociocultural theory of cognitive development.

The review of the literature focuses on several important aspects of the comprehensive research using his theory. Each section is important in the development of the reading research. The first section of the literature review includes some of the most recent primary reading scores of African American males. The literature review continues with an in-depth discussion of Vygotsky's(1978) sociocultural theory and an explanation of his ZPD concept. The next section in the literature review discusses guided reading instruction and how it can benefit students during small groups with teachers, along with how guided reading connects to Vygotsky's(1978) concept of scaffolding. Guided reading is defined and discussed, explaining how this reading strategy is said to help improve reading comprehension in students, particularly African American male students. There is a thorough discussion on the reading difficulties African American males have faced throughout the years and what can be done to help improve their reading comprehension skills. The study continues with a discussion regarding how African American males continue to struggle with reading and comprehending certain text. There is specific research on multicultural literature and how, when permeated in guided reading sessions, it can improve reading comprehension for African American males.

African American Reading Results

African American students often begin school in early grades, kindergarten and first, performing behind their White counterparts; and the gap continues throughout high school (Conley, 2010; Paige & Witty, 2010). African American male students continue to face inequalities in educational institutions (Fergus et al., 2014). This has caused an even wider achievement gap between African American males and their counterparts (Fergus et al., 2014; Harper, 2012; Noguera, 2000). African American males normally score at the lowest academic achievement level in schools for reading achievement (Ford, 2010). By fourth grade, African American males perform lower than any other subgroup on reading standardized assessments throughout the nation (Husband, 2012). Some African American males in 12th-grade literacy perform at the same academic level as an average White male eighth grader (Sambonsugi, 2011).

In 2013, on the state assessment in South Carolina for Grades 3-5, African American male students performed behind all other subgroups on the assessment in reading. Table 2 shows the average scale score in reading for White males, African American males, African America females, and White females. Table 2 shows that all subgroups scored higher averages in reading than the African American male student (NCES, 2015).

Table 2

NCES (2015)

Gender	Race	Reading average score 2013
Male	White	630
Male	African American	608
Female	White	644
Female	African American	620

Note. Source: NCES (2015).

Some African America males in middle and high school achieve at the fourth- and fifth-grade levels in reading and reading comprehension (Sambonsugi, 2011). Since 1969, NAEP has conducted our Nation's Report Card for students in Grades 4 and 8. NAEP measures how well United States students are learning in various subject areas (NAEP, 2019). Table 3 and Table 4 show the most recent reading data for the years 2013 and 2015 in Grades 4 and 8. Table 5 and Table 6 show the most recent reading data for the years 2017 and 2019 from NAEP for students in Grades 4 and 8.

Table 3

NAEP Nation's Report Card Fourth Grade for Years 2013 and 2015

	Reading average 2013	Reading average 2015
Race		
White	232	232
Black	206	206
Hispanic	207	208
Asian	235	239
Native	205	205
Gender		
Male	219	219
Female	225	226

Note. Source: NAEP (2013, 2015).

Table 4

NAEP Nation's Report Card Eighth Grade for Years 2013 and 2015

	Reading average 2013	Reading average 2015
Race		
White	276	274
Black	250	248
Hispanic	256	253
Asian	282	281
Native	259	255
Gender		
Male	263	261
Female	273	270

Note. Source: NAEP (2013, 2015).

Table 5

NAEP Nation's Report Card Fourth Grade for Years 2017 and 2019

	Reading average 2017	Reading average 2019
Race		
White	232	230
Black	206	204
Hispanic	209	209
Asian	239	237
Native	202	204
Gender		
Male	219	207
Female	225	217

Note. Source: NAEP (2017, 2019).

Table 6

NAEP Nation's Report Card Eighth Grade for Years 2017 and 2019

	Reading average 2017	Reading average 2019
Race		
White	275	272
Black	249	244
Hispanic	255	252
Asian	284	284
Native	253	248
Gender		
Male	262	258
Female	272	269

Note. Source: NAEP (2017, 2019).

The national reading average scale score for fourth grade in 2013 was 222, compared to 223 in 2015. The average scale score for eighth grade reading in 2013 was 268; and in 2015, it decreased to 265. There was a decrease in reading scores from 2013-2015 and from 2017-2019. NAEP showed that the average reading scores of students in the fourth grade in 2019 were higher than the scores in 2013 but no different in 2015 (NAEP, 2019). For the eighth-grade students, the average score in 2017 on the NAEP was higher than both 2013 and 2015 school years. There was a decline in both fourth- and eighth-grade reading in 2019 (NAEP, 2020).

African American Males and High School

Preparing a child for school as early as kindergarten is an indicator for future academic school success leading up to high school and adulthood (Fitzpatrick, 2012). When schools implement early interventions in kindergarten, they can help students gain academic school readiness and can help them avoid academic deficiencies in learning (Fitzpatrick, 2012). When students start school equipped with the tools to keep them from

falling behind academically, it will ensure proficiency throughout their schooling

(Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care, 2008). When students

underachieve in early elementary, there is a high indication of them becoming a high

school dropout (Entwisle et al., 2005; MELS, 2010).

Li-Grining et al. (2010) wanted to see if kindergarten students exhibited certain

learning behaviors that would act as an indicator or predicator for future academic

success. They found that certain learning skills in young children were connected to later

achievement and academic success in school and in life. They discovered that students

who were aware of their learning environment would most likely be successful later in

school, as well as students who exhibited self-determination and independence and those

who could carry out certain academic tasks. From the study, they also determined that it

did not matter if students were from various socioeconomic statuses; what mattered was

the learning that these students received at an early age (Li-Grining et al., 2010).

Therefore, students who experience academic deficiencies in early elementary school are

more likely to increase their risk of dropping out of high school (Alexander et al., 2001).

Schulz and Rubel (2011) completed a study on why a large portion of African

American males do not finish high school. They completed the study with five African

American male students. They found common reasons why they did not complete high

school. One reason was they did not feel a part of the school culture. They also shared

that they did not trust the school culture and did not trust the school or the adults in the

school. With parent involvement being a large part of student achievement, the parents

from this study expressed how they felt they had no voice in their child's schooling

(Schulz & Rubel, 2011). Parents often feel as if their concerns are not taken seriously by

administration, which is found at many schools with African American male students (Harper & Davis, 2012; Long-Coleman, 2009; Reynolds, 2010). The African American male participants in this study expressed how they needed more support from the school and the teachers (Schulz & Rubel, 2011). They felt that no one really cared about them and their future. They eventually dropped out of high school (Schulz & Rubel, 2011).

Many African American male students have achieved success and have graduated from high school (Kafele, 2012); however, the statistics continue to show that African American male students are behind academically, especially in literacy achievement, and are still behind most of their counterparts (Kafele, 2012).

African American Males and College

When students develop the skills and abilities of making inferences, thinking critically about text, interpreting text, and conducting research, they are developing college ready knowledge and skills (Conley, 2010). These academic, college ready prerequisites should be developed in children at an exceedingly early age (Conley, 2010). Educators should promote college readiness in elementary schools because middle school is too late (Conley, 2010).

Poor academic performance with reading comprehension and other academic indicators of African American males give a strong indication of whether they will enter college (Strayhorn, 2010). Even if African American males enter college, they are less prepared in reading than their other subgroups (Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011).

College enrollment among African American males continues to decline nationally (Harper, 2012). African American men make up only 4.3% of the students in college, if they even decide to enter college (Strayhorn, 2010). In 2011, the number of

African Americans who earned college degrees increased by 20%; however, in 2013, 34% of African American males graduated from college with a degree compared to 62% of White males, 50% of Hispanics, and 69% of Asians (Keels, 2013).

Lev Vygotsky

The theoretical framework guiding this study is based on Vygotsky's(1978) cognitive development theory. Vygotsky was a young scientist in the early 20th century. He was born in the Soviet Union in 1896. He attended Moscow State University. This is where he created a considerable amount of research on mental functioning and later, with the help of other psychologists, developed the sociocultural theory (Engeström, 1999). He created new strategies to help children with learning disabilities. Two years after his death, in 1934, his research was banned in the Soviet Union; however, since 1960, the influence of his sociocultural theory continues to grow, especially in American education.

Vygotsky's work has a significant impact on the field of education and the field of psychology even today. His works have been interpreted in English and books such as *Mind in Society* (Vygotsky, 1978) and *Thought and Language* (Vygotsky, 1986) have been written explaining Vygotsky's important essays concerning psychology and education.

Vygotsky believed that early on, children's language of communicating was intended to connect to others in social conversation (Vygotsky, 1986). Through these experiences of social language, he believed the child's thinking capacity was developed (Vygotsky, 1986). He believed that children learn best through social interaction and that language development is necessary for cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978).

As related to education, Vygotsky (1986) studied how teaching and a child's

learning development were related. Vygotsky (1978) believed that the development level is what a child can accomplish independently. He believed that the objective of education was to address what the child is not yet capable of doing and afford them the methods to develop (Vygotsky, 1986).

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory implies that knowledge is constructed through learning and social interaction with others. This learning takes place in what is called the ZPD. The ZPD is another way to think about the development of a child's learning with help from a teacher (Antonacci, 2000). Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as the "actual" development level as determined by independent problem-solving under adult guidance (p. 81).

When working with the ZPD, the teacher must understand the child's level of development (Vygotsky, 1978). When teaching in the ZPD, teachers must be able to pull out what students know and enhance their potential of what can be learned (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). The instruction and lessons in the ZPD must be tailored to the child's learning needs; and scaffolding must be provided, along with additional strategies (Antonacci, 2000).

When teachers are working with students in the ZPD, teachers can monitor student progress and adjust instruction as needed (Vygotsky, 1978). If a child is struggling, the teacher should use appropriate scaffolding strategies to help them improve (Vygotsky, 1978). If the learning is implemented effectively and appropriately within the ZPD, the child can use the concept without the help of the teacher (Antonacci, 2000).

The ZPD is where the student can "almost" do something (Deford, 2013). An example of this is when a child can almost tie his shoestring. Through coaching and

scaffolding from an expert, the child eventually learns how to tie their shoestring.

(DeFord, 2013). With continued support and challenging strategies from the teacher, the

student will make progress while in the ZPD (DeFord, 2013). During this time, the

concept that the child was almost accomplishing becomes an independent concept that

they can now perform without assistance. The almost task starts to unfold with the

appropriate guidance from the teacher or tutor as students work in the ZDP (DeFord,

2013).

Leslie and Allen (1999) conducted a study with at-risk students in elementary on

word recognition and reading comprehension strategies. Leslie and Allen wanted to see if

students would improve if teachers worked with them in their ZPD. During a 4-week

period with three sessions per week, the teachers worked with the students in small

groups. While the teacher worked with the students within their ZPD, they were able to

use strategies that instructed students on where their skill levels needed to be with word

recognition and reading comprehension. As the teachers worked with the students, they

noticed how students in the small groups went from emergent readers to on grade level

readers. Student word recognition increased, and they became more fluent in reading.

The study showed that teachers can help students improve academically if they work with

them within their ZPD (Leslie & Allen, 1999).

There are some important factors that are critical to the ZPD theory (Wood et al.,

1976). Vygotsky (1978) explained how a qualified or certified specialist must be there to

assist the student with the learning in a small group setting. During this time, the

specialist must model the expectations to students and have them practice on their own.

During the modeling process, the specialist will use scaffolding as one of the supportive

strategies to help the student learn the material or task (Wood et al., 1976).

In another study conducted for 120 middle school students, Rezaee and Azizi (2012) wanted to see if the effectiveness of working in the ZPD would help students learn more about adverbs. There were three small groups of students who participated in the study for a 4-week period with two sessions per week. In the study, students were learning about adverbs. The control group was taught adverbs the traditional way with drills and workbook exercises. The two experimental groups received teaching instruction on adverbs twice a week, while working within their ZPD. Both experimental groups received instructional assistance from the teacher. The control group did not receive assistance from the teacher. Both experimental groups read about adverbs, responded to questions from the teacher, and participated in the group discussions concerning adverbs. Scaffolding strategies were given to the experimental groups during the ZDP. Once the teachers determined that students no longer needed scaffolding assistance or the additional strategies to learn about adverbs, they were taken away. The control group did not receive any of the instructional support and strategies as the experimental groups did. The result of the study showed that working with the students while in their ZPD helped them to score higher than the control group on the final assessment. The experimental group was able to internalize what adverbs were and how to use them appropriately, and this helped to increase their assessment score (Rezaee & Azizi, 2012).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

All students, regardless of color, socioeconomic status, religion, or ethnicity, should have a safe and secure educational foundation (Banks, 2010). Incorporating

culturally responsive pedagogies in the classroom will allow students from diverse

backgrounds to achieve academic success in reading and other academic subject areas

(Gay, 2010b; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally responsive teaching includes every

student's background in every aspect of learning within a teacher's classroom (Gay,

2002, 2009, 2010a; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2000). Culture, language, and learning

styles play an important role in a culturally responsive classroom. In a culturally

responsive classroom, there is a culture of respect and sensitivity for diversity. The

curriculum represents cultural diversity, and the communication inside the classroom is

effective and caring (Gay, 2010a). Culturally responsive teaching is based on the

relationship between the teacher and the students. When students believe their teachers

care and are attentive to their needs, a positive student-teacher relationship will develop

and students will most likely achieve academic success (Organisation for Economic

Cooperation and Development, 2011). This relationship is created by the teachers' deep

understanding of the culture of their students.

Achinstein and Oqawa (2012) wanted to see how the obstacles teachers faced

when attempting to create a caring, collaborative, and nurturing environment for students

affected their learning. One teacher participant stated that she wanted to create a space

where students could speak up and where their opinions mattered. The teachers argued

that because they had to follow district protocols, ignore the effect the curriculum had on

the students' culture, and follow pacing guides and basically teach to the test, there was

no time to cause a great effect on the students' academic performance.

Culturally responsive teachers teach to the whole child (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Hammond (2015) described the different levels of culture that a culturally responsive

teacher must be aware of to cause change for all students' academic success.

1. Surface culture: occurs when teachers are knowledgeable through observations of student patterns–food, clothes, hairstyles, music, art language and holidays. At this stage, there is low emotional impact or trust.

2. Shallow culture: Strong emotion is made up of unspoken rules around everyday interactions and norms. This is the level where teachers build rapport and trust between their students.

3. Deep culture: This is the level all culturally responsive teachers must reach. This is the level that guides how new information is learned.

The culturally responsive environment responds to the academic needs of all students (Irvine, 1990). Culturally responsive teaching requires that all teachers have high expectations for all students (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The culturally responsive teacher provides researched best practices for all students and connects the learning to individual cultures of the students.

African American Males and Culturally Responsive Teaching

There is a disconnect between instructional approaches and African American male students. This can cause students to be resistant, and some teachers may perceive this as defiance, or they may misjudge it in a negative way (Tatum, 2005). Culturally responsive teaching will help to increase the academic achievement of all students, especially the African American male students (Pitre, 2014).

There is a lack of culturally responsive practices that have created equitable learning conditions for African American male students (Gay, 2010b). African American male students are normally placed in the lowest achieving reading groups (Ferguson &

Mehta, 2004). A large portion of these students are inside special education classes and programs (Sleeter, 2011). Instructional methods must change to accommodate the demographic changes and academic needs in public schools across the U.S. (Achinstein et al., 2010).

Banks (2009) stated that by the year 2020, nearly half of the nation's school-age youth will be students of color. When teachers connect with African American students by providing them with a more rigorous learning environment related to their culture, they perform well academically (Pitre, 2014). The culturally responsive teacher provides African American students with a warm approach that, regardless of their race or gender, helps them to excel academically (Pitre, 2014).

Vygotsky's Theory in Relation to Culturally Responsive Teaching

In order to understand how students gain knowledge, one must fully understand the different social environments they inhabit and the experiences they bring into the classroom (Bruner, 1986; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Eisner, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). Culturally responsive teaching supports a constructivist viewpoint in believing that learners are active participants of their own knowledge within a particular environment (Rogoff, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Culturally responsive teaching includes prior knowledge, life experiences, and learning styles (Gay, 2009; Sleeter, 2005).

A culturally responsive teacher uses scaffolding and Bloom's taxonomy for students as they work in the ZPD (Cole, 1996; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Santamaria et al., 2002; Sleeter, 2005).

There are four stages of the ZPD as related to the culturally responsive teacher:

1. The teacher assists the student in performing the task through modeling and

providing explicit directions, questioning, and scaffolding.

2. Interventions for students are in the form of feedback and guidance.

3. The child has emerged from the ZPD and now students are performing at a higher level. They do not need teacher assistance for the concept they are learning.

4. The students will now learn a new concept and strategy at a higher level while working in the ZPD. For instance, if the students were learning the basic vowel spelling patterns of reading and they can now master on their own, they will continue working in the ZPD with the reading strategy at a higher level (Sleeter, 2005).

Shealy (2007) conducted a study to examine culturally responsive instruction on reading. Shealy used Vygotsky's social cultural theory argument concerning how knowledge is constructed through learning and social interactions while students are working in the ZPD. Shealy wanted to see what methods were used to increase the reading of students. The study was conducted in the elementary urban school setting. The participating school served 700 students with 90% being from a diverse background. The research from the study concluded that students were not growing in reading academically, mainly because there was a disconnection with culture differences between the teachers and the students. Teachers were found not to be prepared to teach such a diverse background. They did not know the best instructional methods to use to teach the group of students. Shealy also concluded that teachers and school leaders needed to be held accountable in addressing cultural competence.

The cultural differences children bring to school can impact their linguistic and

reading skills and abilities (Haynes, 2012). Culturally responsive literature can encourage Black males to value reading. In a culturally responsive classroom, students learn from other students as well as from their own learning (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) outlined six strands in preparation of culturally responsive teaching that are helpful for teachers to use as students work in the ZPD:

1. Sociocultural consciousness is understanding that people's ways of thinking and behaving are deeply influenced by their race, social class, and environment. Teachers must consider student backgrounds.

2. High academic expectations must be afforded to all students regardless of their backgrounds and race. All students must believe that they bring value to the classroom community.

3. Teachers must be willing to advocate for all students for educational equality.

4. Teachers must be able to assist students in facilitating knowledge through scaffolding strategies and by building on what students do know.

5. Teachers must understand the students and their backgrounds.

6. Teachers must use all the above techniques and teach effectively for all students.

Guided Reading

Students who fall behind in reading comprehension may be in jeopardy of not catching up with their peers (Iaquinta, 2006). The effective reading strategies used as teachers work in guided reading groups, like the Reading Recovery program, help to improve reading comprehension skills (Clay, 2000; Lyons & Thompson, 2011).

Guided reading is a known reading strategy that is said to help improve reading achievement and increase reading comprehension (Fountas, 2010). Guided reading has been around for over 50 years, and it is an instructional program tailored to individual student needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). The guided reading process started as the direct reading program introduced by Emmet Betts in 1946 (Ford & Opitz, 2011b). The program has evolved over the years. Today, guided reading is patterned after Clay's (1993) Reading Recovery. In 1970, Clay started her children's literacy research. After the completion of extensive research and detailed observations on proficient and nonproficient readers, Clay started the Reading Recovery program. The program was designed to help struggling readers (Clay, 1993). In the Reading Recovery program, during pullout sessions like guided reading, students who were struggling in reading were tutored for 30 minutes a day for a certain number of weeks (Clay, 2001). In the Reading Recovery program, there were six tasks used to assist struggling readers to improve in reading: letter identification, concepts about print, a word test, writing vocabulary, hearing sounds in words, and running records (Clay, 2002). The pullout session is one of the most common reading components still used in most literacy programs (Cunningham, 2000).

Many schools used guided reading instruction as one strategy to teach students with reading comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). There are four steps to the guided reading program: prepare students for the selection, silent reading, rereading, and follow-up activities (Ford & Opitz, 2011a). Following the beginning cycles and experiments with guided reading during the 1990s, Mooney and Fountas and Pinnell came out with more research and discovery concerning reading instruction (Ford &

Opitz, 2011a). Guided reading groups are mostly active in elementary classroom settings (Hanke, 2014). Most schools have guided reading to help students improve their reading through teacher guidance (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012) or scaffolding (Temple et al., 2011). Each group has appropriately selected text, and the work done in the guided reading groups is intentional (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Tyner, 2014). The text chosen for each group is based on student levels and abilities (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Teachers must prepare for each group with higher order level questioning and specific strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

In guided reading groups, texts that are chosen are normally intended to last for one group meeting (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Tyner, 2014). During each session of guided reading, students participate in reading comprehension skills and strategy lessons (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008, 2010). Planning must be done with each student in mind. Writing may also be included. Teachers must think about the various ability levels to target each student's ZPD level (Vygotsky, 1978). During the guided reading lessons, teachers can listen to the students read (Mooney, 1995; Tompkins, 2001). The teacher can demonstrate modeling and vocabulary building and implement interactive reading activities (Allen, 2002; Fisher, 2000; Parkes, 2000).

Washington (2018) studied a group of third graders to see if guided reading instruction helped to improve a student's overall reading ability. The study took place in February and March and then again the following year in January and February. Running records were used as well as a variety of strategies during guided reading lessons with the students (Washington, 2018). There were five leveled, homogeneous groups that participated in the study. Each group had specific skills that were targeted for each group

during the week. At the end of each week, teachers would look at the strategies being taught (Washington, 2018). Teachers looked for patterns and different behaviors of the students during each guided reading session. If adjustments needed to be made to the lesson, based on the analysis, teachers implemented them immediately. From the weekly analysis, teachers discovered that some of the groups struggled with blending, and some showed a specific area of concern that needed to be addressed with a skill or strategy (Washington, 2018). The analysis continued for 20 days. Afterwards, data showed how guided reading instruction helped all five groups of students improve in the areas of reading comprehension and fluency, which increased their overall academic achievement in reading (Washington, 2018). It was recommended to continue to research the best strategies to use with students during guided reading to help increase reading comprehension skills (Washington, 2018).

Guided reading allows students the direct instruction needed to comprehend texts and increase fluency (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). In another study conducted by Basaran (2013), 90 fourth-grade students participated. The purpose of the study was to determine if working with the teacher in the guided reading group would increase student fluency and comprehension. The students were given a narrative of choice to read in the guided reading groups. The narrative was on their reading levels. After reading the narrative and after teacher scaffolding and guidance, students were asked to analyze the narrative to show the relationship between fluency and comprehension in students (Basaran, 2013). The students were also tested on the narrative, by a variety of exam styles. The study concluded that guided reading can fundamentally help to increase independent thinking and processing of students when reading literature or higher level texts of interest are

included in the lesson (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010; Shang, 2015).

Guided reading instruction helps to target reading deficiencies in students that may have started showing up in early grades. Guided reading instruction offers challenging learning experiences (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). When implemented with fidelity, guided reading helps students develop increased fluency and reading comprehension (Denton & Al Otaiba, 2011). This is due to the strategies and skills taught, such as questioning and scaffolding, as teachers work with their students individually during the guided reading instructional time (Denton & Al Otaiba, 2011).

Building a strong reading foundation for students should start in kindergarten. Abbott et al. (2012) conducted a study with kindergarten and first-grade students to see if their reading ability would improve during guided reading sessions. The results showed that because of the use of guided reading instruction, the overall reading ability of the first-grade students improved. This was all due to the small groups, interaction during the guided reading groups with teacher scaffolding support, and the teaching of new reading strategies.

Researchers of guided reading agree that there must be small group instruction that is planned and well organized to address the many needs of the students (Ford & Opitz, 2011b). Most reading experts also agree that the instruction is the main ingredient of an effective guided reading program (Fountas & Pinnell, 2011; Schuman et al., 2000). The instruction during guided reading should provide students with a clear focus of the reading strategies they need to comprehend the texts (Burkins & Croft, 2010; Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). The teacher's job is to coach the students through the guided reading lesson during their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). It is difficult for a teacher to work with every

student in the classroom at one time. Therefore, small group instruction is needed (Lewis, 2017). When students are working in the guided reading groups, the conditional changes and the results during the ZPD may be different depending on the child (Vygotsky, 1978). As teachers work in the ZPD during guided reading groups, students are provided with guidance of different reading strategies, comprehension strategies, and the spark of interest needed to increase a love for reading (Huang et al., 2010).

There are three major big ideas from Vygotsky's (1978) theory of ZPD to assist with guided reading.

1. Learning will occur during social interaction as students and teachers work through the planned activities (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky, 1986).

2. Learning is communicated by language as the student and teacher dialogue about a particular text or answer questions in a variety of ways (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky, 1986).

3. Higher level thinking and learning occurs during an individual student's ZPD. This will ensure that students have opportunities to gain higher order thinking skills to be able to better comprehend the text (Taylor et al., 2013).

Research shows that guided reading impacts literacy in all students but especially in African American males (Hulan, 2010). Many African American males did not receive early reading instruction before starting school. This is linked to academic failure (McTague & Abrams, 2011). This makes their reading experience less enjoyable and could possibly decrease reading ability (Feeney & Moravick, 2015). However, if guided reading instruction is introduced to them in early grades, their reading will be improved (Bishop, 1990).

African American male students benefit academically when they can work in small groups with their teachers and receive help (Edwards, 2012). Edwards (2012) wanted to see why a group of Black males ages 10-22 struggled in school. He asked a series of questions to the participants and documented their responses. He found that the number one reason African American males struggled in school was because they needed more teacher support to understand certain concepts rather than the concepts being taught in whole groups or larger small groups. They needed information repeated and broken down several times (Edwards, 2012). The participants also stated that in large class discussions, they did not have opportunities to ask questions for clarity or to continue working until they understood the answer, which caused them to get behind on the work (Edwards, 2012). When African American males fall behind, they become disinterested with school, often resulting in a decrease in academic achievement (Edwards, 2012). Recommendations from the study include allowing the African American male students to work in small groups and allowing them an opportunity to master the work before moving on to new concepts (Edwards, 2012).

Overall, guided reading instruction allows all students to develop into strong independent readers. While being supported by their teachers, students will develop strategies to be able to read and comprehend difficult text (Baumann et al., 2000). Guided reading is viewed as one of the best instructional practices in literacy (Ford & Opitz. 2008; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Scaffolding

The term scaffolding was introduced by Wood et al. (1976) as a major framework for Vygotsky's ZPD. Scaffolding is a strategy that provides students in small, guided

reading groups assistance as they work through their ZPD (Wang & Li, 2011). Wood (2010) defined scaffolding as a process that allows a child to solve a task or achieve a goal they would not otherwise be able to without help (Wood, 2010). Scaffolding is the help adults give students during instructional time (Temple et al., 2011). When teachers are working with students in guided reading groups, the level of scaffolding that is implemented during the lesson will determine the level of growth for the student (Wood, 2010).

A study was conducted by Mackiewicz and Thompson (2013) on the examination of scaffolding used by 10 experienced tutors with a group of students during literacy groups. Mackiewicz and Thompson analyzed three categories of scaffolding strategies tutors could use to help guide the students during the lesson: instructional, cognitive, and motivational. During the instructional scaffolding strategy, the tutors used instruction to tell or explain what the students need to do. Stichting Landbouwkundig Onderzoek (2013) stated that when students are struggling instructionally, especially if they are low performing, remediation does not help. Instructional scaffolding strategies will bring the best results. When students and teachers work together during instructional scaffolding, they are impacted by one another (Kunnen & Van Geert, 2011).

Instructional scaffolding is different for each teacher. The ZPD will emerge for the child through the appropriate scaffolding sessions (Stevenson, 2012). Instructional techniques assist the teacher in deciding which strategy is the most helpful for each individual student (Kunnen & Van Geert, 2011). During instructional scaffolding sessions, after a child shows they need help, the teacher should provide help through explaining, providing hints, and questioning (Van de Pol et al., 2011).

In the cognitive scaffolding strategy, the tutors used question starters to assist the students as they worked with them in groups. Under the cognitive scaffolding categories, tutors used five strategies.

1. Pumping for thinking: Questions were asked to the students such as, "Where does the quotation marks belong" or "What does this narrative mean to you?"

2. Read aloud: During this time, tutors read aloud directions or pieces of student writing, while working with them in small groups.

3. Responding as a reader: Tutors read a draft and responded to students with their takeaway. Students could talk one on one with the tutor on the responses.

4. Referring to a previous topic: Tutors saw that the student continued to make the same mistake as in previous work and helped the students correct it through scaffolding and modeling.

5. Forcing a choice: When students were presented with a variety of answer choices, and they had to choose the right one. Questions were posed by the teacher or tutor to students to make a choice.

Prompting, hinting, and demonstrating were the last three cognitive strategies that were not often used during this study and did not provide many details.

The final category of scaffolding used was motivational scaffolding. This type of scaffolding was used when students found interest in the task in which the tutors worked with them. There were five strategies used during motivational scaffolding.

1. Showing concern: Occurs when a tutor focuses on a student's well-being. During the small group lesson, the tutor might continue to ask the student if they were ok or if they needed more time to think about a response.

2. Praising: Praise is given from the tutor to the students such as, "That's good" or "awesome job."

3. Reinforcing student ownership and control: Allows the student to make their own decisions.

4. Using humor and being optimistic: Tutor continues to keep student spirits up with laughter in hopes that the student will complete the task.

5. Giving sympathy and empathy: The tutors express to the students how they understand the task may be difficult and how they are there to support them.

During the motivational scaffolding, the tutors actively motivated and engaged the students. The tutors showed empathy throughout, while students solved the task. There was ongoing praise and compassion, which helped students accomplish the tasks. Mackiewicz and Thompson (2013) documented that of all the types of scaffolding used in the sessions, the instructional scaffolding was the most successfully used. They also discovered that under each of the three categories of scaffolding, the tutors used four of the strategies more frequently: telling, pumping, suggesting, and showing concern (Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013).

In a study using a complex learning task for first and second graders, Danish et al. (2014) studied how, with the use of Vygotsky's ZPD and scaffolding with questioning strategies, students were helped to understand complex systems that are in place inside of the classroom. The study showed how the level of questioning might have an impact on student academic ability. The researchers looked at how the leveling of questions asked to the students supported their reasoning (Andrade et al., 2016). While students worked in the small groups, they were asked different styles and levels of questions to help them

complete the task. The students responded but not with much detail until they were asked the question, "Can you tell me more"? This question allowed students a chance to elaborate on their responses and think about what else to say, which allowed them to understand the task better (Andrade et al., 2016).

In a study conducted by Danish (2014), there were three groups of five students who were engaged in a scaffolding activity with a teacher. There were instructional activities delivered to the students during 30- to 40-minute sessions. After each session, there was a 10- to 15-minute posttest interview on the material to be taught for the next session. The goal of the scaffolding was to analyze how students reacted or performed to the prompts given by the teacher (Danish, 2014). While students were in the ZPD, there was a list of scaffolding questions the teacher used to allow the students to think, respond, and solve the task. There were also task cards the teacher used as they asked a series of scaffolding questions. The purpose of the questions was to encourage the students to engage in conversation (Danish, 2014). The results of the study showed that by using scaffolding with students in early elementary, while they work in the ZPD, students can be better identified by their ability. Teachers were able to see the level of student knowledge about the topic, student ability to solve the task in an engaging manner, and how the ZPD provided a framework for how young children learned (Danish, 2014).

African American Males and Reading Comprehension Needs

There has been a plethora of research over past decades concerning issues with reading comprehension (Caldwell & Ford, 2002). Reading researchers have discovered over the years that students come to the classroom with different levels of knowledge and

background information (Clay, 2000). Students at every grade level face many issues and difficulties with reading (Desher, 2007). Most of the problems range from phonics and decoding to fluency and reading comprehension struggles (Cirino et al., 2013).

Learning to read and comprehend is an important aspect of learning and is very complex (Cain, 2016), However, learning to read words will not assure that students will be able to read and comprehend (Cain, 2016), There must be a solid foundation of reading set in order for students to be able to read and comprehend effectively (Clay, 2000). There must be other interventions put into place for students to be successful readers (Cain, 2016). Student academic reading can be enhanced if they receive effective reading instruction in the classroom on a regular basis (Mathes & Torgesen, 2005; Slavin et al., 2011). It starts as early as preschool. Poor academic reading performance can be traced in preschool (Cain, 2016).

Reading comprehension involves a variety of strategies from activating schema and activating prior knowledge to understanding important details and processing of text order to be able to read and comprehend before, during, and after reading (Blachowicz et al., 2010). Children must also possess phonological awareness skills and be able to manipulate words in language (Cain, 2016). They must have semantic and language processing where they can understand and appropriately use words in sentences (Clay, 2000).

The National Reading Panel (2000) named five essential components for reading: comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, phonics, and phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and decipher sounds in the English language. It is the ability to remember, notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds of spoken

words. Phonics deals with the sound and symbol relationship, with students understanding that each letter is a symbol that represents a sound. Oral reading fluency is the ability to read a text with accuracy, speed, and proper expression. Fluent readers read aloud effortlessly and with expression as if they are having a conversation (National Reading Panel, 2000). Being able to read fluently helps students with reading comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). Vocabulary includes words needed to be able to communicate effectively. This includes oral vocabulary and reading vocabulary students should learn through direct instruction and in print. Comprehension reading is built on the ability of students to understand what they read. This is done through direct instruction and through instructional strategies that are taught to help students comprehend what is being read (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Wood and Jocius (2013) conducted a study and discovered that African American males do not often feel that they fit inside the literacy classroom. African American males have more needs when it comes to literacy, including cultural, emotional, academic, and social needs (Tatum, 2005). There is very limited exposure to those learning needs for the African American male inside the classroom, and this is one reason why they continue to struggle in the areas of reading and reading comprehension skills (Tatum, 2010).

If students are not reading and comprehending on grade level, it can inhibit their academic success from elementary to high school (Morris, 2015). Males underperform in reading more than female readers, and African American males score even lower than females and White counterparts (Coddington & Guthrie, 2009). In a study done by Serafini (2013) to see what interests would help males improve their reading, it was

suggested that including reading visuals that interest males may help to improve their reading comprehension. They discovered that males relate to visuals and graphics in text instead of plain text. The visuals bring excitement to them and inspire them to want to read the text (Serafini, 2013). Others believe that visual enhancements may spark interest in males wanting to read more (Johnson & Gooliaff, 2013).

Marinak and Gambrell (2010) found that boys and girls share different perspectives on reading. Boys prefer violent texts, superheroes, and humor; while girls enjoy fantasy, romance, and novels (Wholey et al., 2010). Boys, especially African American males, are less engaged in reading and reading activities (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010). Most African American males underperform in reading due to the texts they may have to choose from in the classroom (Tatum, 2010). African American males need texts that are representative of themselves (Tatum, 2010).

In elementary and middles schools, if teachers have a better understanding of the standards, they can help by selecting texts that are of interest to the African American male student (Kirkland, 2011). African American males have four needs when it comes to literacy and comprehending text: cultural relevance, emotional connection, academic learning, and social connection (Tatum, 2005). There is extremely limited reading exposure for the African American male student, and this helps to explain why this group continues to struggle in reading and with reading comprehension skills (Tatum, 2010).

African American literature can address issues that African American males may have faced or know others who have faced. Myers (2019) wrote a book entitled *Lockdown.* The book was written to show the vulnerability of Black males who face adversity in the juvenile detention facilities. The book also showed the human sufferings

of depression and mental impacts some African American males are exposed to while being "locked up" (Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1977). This book helped youth in the Juvenile facility (Williams, 2008). When African American males choose their literature to read, they will most likely choose books with male characters with whom they can identify (Williams, 2008).

There is a concern about disengagement when it comes to the African American males and reading (Kirkland, 2011). Many African American males need to connect with books that are engaging and connected to their learning style (Boykin & Cunningham, 2011). As an alternative to the viable learning instruction they need, African American male students are taught in ways that are not consistent with their learning needs (Ladson-Billings, 2011a). Tatum and Muhammad (2012) described those needs as simply asking the African American males what it is they would like to read or putting together a survey that would gather data about their reading interest or a suggestion box. Tatum and Muhammad explained that it would be in the best interest of the African American male students if teachers could offer books about overcoming obstacles or making their way out of poverty and getting away from violence. For the reading achievement gap to be closed, meaningful texts must be available and at the forefront (Tatum & Muhammad, 2012).

Multicultural Literature

Some of the first books introduced to young children are picture books. These types of books help children's cognitive development (Vox, 2011). Through picture books, children can learn to develop basic skills, such as language and vocabulary skills, that are needed for them to be able to read and comprehend text (Vox, 2011). Most

importantly, picture books help students appreciate self (Vox, 2011).

As early as 6 months old, infants can notice human skin and faces. They notice color differences in books, and they begin to develop an appreciation for books and for the characters who are depicted in those books (Vox, 2011). Children as young as 3 years old notice race and gender.

It is important for African American children to be exposed to positive multicultural literature in picture books at an early developmental stage. This is time when they are understanding and developing self-concept and self-esteem. Self-concept is when a child can describe and define their abilities and attributes. For example, the child may say, "I am 3," "I am a girl," "I am good," or "I like to play outside." Self-esteem appears in young children as confidence, curiosity, and independence. During this stage, they learn to handle conflict and adjust to change (Vox, 2011).

It is important for African American children to develop positive feelings of worth and self as they grow older (Tatum, 2010). When children are exposed to misinformation in books, this causes them to internalize that information and form negative assumptions about themselves (Tatum, 2010). The negative messages received from society concerning African American children as inferior to Whites or White superiority must be changed. One way to change this can be through the types of multicultural literature books used inside the classrooms of young children (Vox, 2011).

Sullivan (2010) conducted a study to see how many picture books featured African American infants, toddlers, and families. Between 2003-2008, there were 218 picture books published that contained people; only 11 of those books featured African American people, and 50 of those books contained children and adults from multiple

racial and ethnic groups. Of those 50 books, 32 contained some African American characters (Sullivan, 2010).

Multicultural literature is defined as representing people from diverse backgrounds representative of race, culture, and nationality (Mongillo & Holland, 2016). Multicultural education is designed to help all students understand how to adapt to where they live (Banks, 1994). Multicultural literature helps to open the minds of all children so they can understand the lifestyles of others (Katz, 2003).

It is necessary to use multicultural books for children starting in the early grades. Preschool students look for a classroom library that is inviting for both boys and girls when they enter school (Zambo & Bronzo, 2009). Having multicultural books in primary classrooms is especially important to the reading comprehension of all students (Mongillo & Holland, 2016; Robinson, 2013; Knoblaugh, 2016).

All children must see themselves in books they are required to read within the classroom (Mongillo & Holland, 2016). When students do not see themselves in the books that are inside the classroom, they do not feel a part of that classroom community (Milner, 2016).

The authentic representation of all children, without stereotyping, has been a major issue in books, especially with African American children (Horning et al., 2011). Authentic multicultural literature will include some of the following criteria:

- historical accuracy
- true portrayal of lifestyles
- standards of success
- illustrations

- authentic dialogue

- relationships of characters of different cultures (Bishop, 1990; Harada, 1995).

Although multicultural literature has had some improvements over the years, the stereotypes are still in certain books (Sullivan, 2010). These types of reinforced stereotypes cause confusion for young children and can harm their self-concept and self-esteem (Banks, 2009). *Country Babies Wear Plaid* (Colman, 2006) is an example of how stereotypes causes misconceptions with children. In the story, the illustrator uses a slender tall figure to depict all the mothers, of different races, in the story. The issue with that is that some African American moms as well as other ethnic group mothers may have features that are different than what is depicted in the book (Vox, 2011).

Multicultural literature, if provided, will have people from diverse cultural backgrounds featured and represented in books (Canales, 2002). It will provide all students an opportunity to learn about different cultures (Mongillo & Holland, 2016). Robinson (2013) conducted a study to see if students in a third-grade classroom could learn more about themselves while interacting with multicultural literature. Twenty students from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds participated in the study. The students read various multicultural text. During small group instruction, the teacher asked the students to reflect on what they had read. The students responded in small group sessions concerning the text, while the teacher recorded their reactions. Student responses included empathy towards some of the characters in the story, and they talked about how they could relate to some of the scenarios in the story. The students also discussed how the characters were like them in some ways and how they had experienced some of the same personal situations as some of the characters in the story. After the

discussions, the students asked the teachers for more multicultural literature to read in the classroom. During the study, students were able to see their authentic self from the books that were chosen for them to read. They learned about how the experiences and cultures of others helped them to learn more about who they really were (Robinson, 2013). Multicultural education is structured where people can learn about themselves as well as others and to appreciate the differences that are shared (Butler, 2010). Individuals can become aware of themselves through this multicultural teaching and learning process (Butler, 2010).

Multicultural literature needs to be brought into the classrooms to increase the learning of the African American male student (Tatum, 2006, 2010). The texts selected for African American males are not usually of interest. When choosing multicultural literature for students, schools need to consider the African American male by finding out what interests them and the type of texts they like to read (Gibson, 2010; Graves, 2012; Kafele, 2010).

Table 7 shows some typical titles that could increase the reading interest of African American students, especially the African American male student (Colours of Us, 2020). Exposing children to multicultural literature that is about friendship, superheroes, love, children around the world, and family and are just fun books to read will help them to appreciate self and make reading fun (Tatum & Muhammad, 2012).

Table 7

Multicultural Book Titles

Book title	Author	Description	Grade level
Brown Like Me	Noelle Lampert	Picture book that will help black children build a strong positive self-image	Pre-K- 1st grade
A Beach Tail	Karen L. Williams	Tells of Little Gregory's adventures at the beach	Pre-K- 1st grade
Squeak, Rumble, Whomp! Whomp! Whomp!	Wynton Marsalis	Sounds of an urban neighborhood	Pre-K-1st grade
Peter's Chair	Ezra Jack Keats	Peter does not want his blue chair to be painted pink for his little sister	Pre-K-2nd grade
Lola at the Library	Anna McQuinn	Lola has an adventure at the Public Library	Pre-K-1st grade
Skin Like Mine	Latasha Perry	A creative way to show diversity among children	Pre-K-2nd Grade
Bippity Bop Barbershop	Natasha A. Tarpley	Miles gets his first haircut	Pre-K-Kindergarten
Chicken Sunday	Patricia Polacco	Grandchildren would like to buy their Grandmother a hat	Kindergarten-5th grade
The Book Itch	Vaunda Micheaux Nelson	Tells of the Famous Harlem Bookstore	Grade 4th-Middle School
A Father Like That	Charlotte Zolotow	His father left when he was young. He images what it would be like to have a family like that	3rd -Middle School
Hair for Mama	Kelly Tinkham	His mom has cancer and her son wants to get her hair	K-6th grade
Googles	Ezra Jack Keats	How to overcome bullies	K-5th grade
Nelson Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom	Chris Van Wyk	Nelson Mandela's life from a child's perspective	3rd- 5th grade
Juneteenth for Maze	Floyd Cooper	Struggles of slavery had to be explained to Mazie to help her understand how her life is not so bad	2nd-5th grade
Bud not Buddy	Christopher Paul Curtis	Bud is a 10-year-old orphan who runs away from his abusive foster family and believes his real father is still alive.	4th-7th grade

Book title	Author	Description	Grade level
Toothpaste Millionaire	Jean Merrill	6th Grader Rufus bets he can make a gallon of his own toothpaste for the price of one store bought tube.	5th-8th grade
New Kid	Jerry Craft	7th Grader Jordan loves to draw. His parents send him to a private school for academics not Art. He is torn.	5th-8th grade

Note. Source: Colours of Us (2020).

When there is multicultural literature presented to African American males with characters who look like them, it often has a negative focus (Brandt, 2001; Lee & Ransom, 2011). The list presented in Table 7 provides a more positive selection of books and will help African American males see themselves as important and significant (Feeney & Moravick, 2015; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). If the literature is about history and experiences of Blacks, this will sometimes enhance the thinking of the students through critical-thinking skills as well as help students analyze the text. This will also help to increase the reading comprehension and fluency of the students (Tatum, 2010).

Multicultural Literature and Guided Reading Instruction

To provide instructional support for teachers using guided reading, they must be provided with books sorted by levels to target individual student reading interests (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). They must also have books filled with pictures and images all children can relate to during the early stages of reading (Freeney & Moravcik, 2005). These books must be available in the classrooms during guided reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). African American males normally disconnect from reading that has no significance to their lives (Tatum, 2006, 2010).

Multicultural literature is lacking in the classrooms during guided reading instruction. African American males rarely see themselves in text, which is causing those

African American males to be at risk of failing (Tomlinson, 2011). Books that depict

African American children and their culture can benefit all children (Collier, 2000).

Utilizing multicultural literature in guided reading groups for African American

males will allow them to see themselves in the books they read (Freeney & Moravcik,

2005). This can enhance their understanding of the text by allowing them to relate to their

own experiences and cultures (Temple, 2012). If this is done at an early age, it will help

them value and appreciate race and culture and to improve in reading (Morgan, 2010).

Studies have shown how there needs to be new ways to address the literacy gap of

African American males (Woods & Jocius, 2013). Tatum (2010) suggested that literacy

instruction for Black males should include culturally engaging material. In a study

conducted by Gordon (2010), four African American fifth-grade boys participated in

guided reading with multicultural literature that was culturally engaging. During the

guided reading sessions, the reading and critical thinking of the African American boys

improved due to the selection of the literature. The boys were excited about discussing

the text during the sessions, and they were actively engaged during each session (Gordon,

2010). In another study conducted by Alberti (2010), African American males

participated in a guided reading discussion about stories they were reading. These stories

shared critical issues about their race as well as experiences some of them were facing or

knew someone who had faced those same issues. The participants were able to

understand and relatd to what they were reading. This made the conversations during the

guided reading time engaging and enlightening. It also helped their reading to improve,

and it sparked an interest for more reading (Alberti, 2010).

Fox (2018) conducted a study on the importance of having multicultural literature

in the classroom for guided reading groups and found that a particular teacher discovered

that she never really thought about the types of books she was choosing for her students

to read during guided reading. During guided reading time, the teacher was choosing

books solely based on student reading levels (Fox, 2018). It was not until she decided to

pull the book *Little Bill,* made up of mostly African American males, for a group of

students that she noticed interest levels. During the guided reading group, the boys were

activity engaged and were interested in the reading. They answered questions correctly

about the story and became attentive to the teacher. After the lesson, the teacher asked the

group to talk about why they enjoyed the book, and one of her African American male

students simply said it was because the boy in the story looked like them (Fox, 2018).

In most books for children, there are very few people of color who play the role

of the protagonist (Guifoyle, 2015). After the comment from the student, the teacher

began to reflect on her classroom library. She noticed that most of her books in her

library were about White characters, or even animals as protagonist. She knew she

needed to support all students in reading, especially the African American male student

who was behind in reading. She changed her classroom library to reflect multiple cultures

(Fox, 2018). African American males need characters they read about in stories to be

believable and representative of themselves (Colby & Lyon, 2004). Having diverse books

in the classroom that students can read during guided reading allows them opportunities

to connect to their culture and to the reading (McNair, 2016). It also allows for reading

growth (Tatum, 2010).

Summary

If African American male students are engaged in reading using multicultural

books, they can improve their reading comprehension as well as critical-thinking skills

(Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). Studies have shown

that African American males are likely to become interested in reading when the events

that take place in the stories are more like the events they deal with daily (Jackson &

Boutte, 2010; Tatum, 2010). If the characters in the stories are more like the African

American males themselves or people who they know, they would be more than likely to

read and become engaged with the reading (Tatum, 2010). The text being used during the

guided reading groups for African American males should not include lots of technical

reading. There should be reading material that will allow for critical-thinking skills for

them to flourish. During reading instruction, the learning styles of the African American

males should be acknowledged (Husband, 2012). This will help to improve their reading

(Husband, 2012).

   Most African American males need interactive reading strategies and activities

implemented while reading during their small group instructional time (Vasquez, 2010).

If teachers differentiate reading for African American male students that is fun and

engaging, these students will better understand the material being taught during guided

reading group lessons (Christensen et al., 2011).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study implemented a qualitative case study methodology approach to address the research design, statement of the problem, and the process of how the data were collected and analyzed. Data were collected from multiple sources in the form of artifacts, observations, and surveys. The purpose of the study was to examine how the use of multicultural literature, when it is implemented during guided reading instruction, impacts the reading comprehension of African American male students in early childhood education.

Statement of Problem

Males, unlike females, are more likely to struggle with reading (Quinn, 2018). Reading deficiencies among African American males have been a national issue for many years and continue to be a major topic of concern (Badian, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Spencer, 2014). African American males in elementary school continue to fall short in reading achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2011b). African American males experience greater struggles in reading than any other subgroup (Haddix, 2009; Tatum, 2010). Guided reading instruction impacts all students, especially the African American males (Hulan, 2010). When African American males can work in small groups, they benefit academically (Edwards, 2012). During guided reading instruction, it is important that African American male students are exposed to positive multicultural literature (Vox, 2011). Multicultural literature is lacking in the classrooms during guided reading instruction. African American males rarely see themselves in text, which is causing those African American males to be at risk of failing (Tomlinson, 2011). This study examined teacher perceptions regarding the integration of guided reading and multicultural

literature on the reading comprehension of African American male students.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers implement guided reading in their classrooms?

2. How do teachers implement the use of multicultural literature in their classrooms?

3. How do teachers perceive the impact of multicultural literature on the reading comprehension of African American male students when used in guided reading?

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research design was implemented for this study and included data collection through open-ended qualitative research questions (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative research included data analysis which included a focus group for teachers and teacher surveys. Qualitative research focuses on the complications of the social culture world experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research involves understanding how groups or individuals attribute to a social problem. In this study, the social problem is the lack of reading comprehension ability of African American male students.

Qualitative research offers a variety of approaches (Creswell, 2014). Its research design allows for the development of deep understanding of the research questions. Qualitative research relies on data analysis based on participant personal experiences and perspectives. In this case study, the experience is the integration of guided reading and multicultural literature instruction with African American male students (Yin, 2012). The participants in this qualitative research study allowed the researcher an opportunity to

develop a theory based on perspectives (Creswell, 2012).

In a qualitative study, the researcher does not state the objectives or the hypothesis. The researcher states research questions in the form of central questions that begin with *how* and focus on a single concept (Creswell, 2012). The researcher conducts a complex and thorough collection of data (Yin, 2012). The main objective of qualitative research is to depict an accurate representation of the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2012). It allows the voice of the participants to be heard (Coleman, 2001). In this case study, the qualitative research will deepen the understanding of others on the topic of multicultural literature and guided reading instruction and how they can benefit African American male students with reading comprehension skills (Coleman, 2001).

Qualitative research is involved with the trustworthiness of the investigation (Anfara et al., 2002). It relies on the skills and competency of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Creswell and Miller (2000) listed four types of trustworthiness involved in qualitative research:

1. Truth value: finding the accuracy in the research

2. Applicability: comprehensive and complete to others

3. Consistency: dependable

4. Neutrality: impartial to biases

Qualitative research focuses on the human side of the participants. No controlled measures are needed, and the data are directly influenced by the interviewing, observation, and interpretation (Creswell, 2010).

Case Study Research

The approach for this qualitative research was a case study. From the

constructivist view, qualitative research allows the participants to articulate their

perspective or views of reality (Creswell, 2015). Case study research is a valid form of

investigation or exploration. It is a justifiable and informative approach to research

(Creswell, 2012). It is often referred to as fieldwork, which is understanding a person

from their own perspective (Stake, 2005). It brings new discovery and meaning and

confirms what was not known (Shank, 2006).

Case study research takes on a descriptive approach to real life and significant

contexts where there is a focus on description rather than exploration (Schramm, 2006;

Yin, 2009). Qualitative case study is implemented to gain a thorough understanding of a

situation. In this case, it is the understanding of how to help African American male

students in reading and what methods can help them achieve academic success (Stake,

2005).

Participants

A homogeneous type of purposive sampling that is focused on achieving research

results was chosen for this study. A purposive sampling objective is used in studies to

focus on persons who will enable the researcher to answer the research questions.

Participants will have similar backgrounds and occupations. In this case, the population

chosen were teachers with similar educational teaching and background knowledge on

the research topic. Homogeneous research was chosen because the research questions are

specific to the characteristics of the group of teachers.

The participants chosen were those individuals who served in the capacity of

guided reading teachers in an elementary school setting. There were three teachers from

each grade level intentionally chosen from kindergarten through third grade. This

approach helped with understanding and answering the research questions. The study

included participants from both suburban and rural parts of North Carolina. Two of the

schools selected for this study are Title I schools. Data from NCES show the participating

district has the following ethnicities.

Table 8

District Ethnic Data

Data	Ethnicity
Total students	41,488
Classroom teachers	2,509
Student/teacher ratio	16.53
English language learners	2,632
Individualized Education Plans	4,286
Black	4971
White	24,644
Hispanic	7827
Asian	2160
Multi	1880
Pacific Island	23
American Indian	73

Table 9

Participating Grade Levels

Participating school	Kindergarten	First grade	Second grade	Third grade
Elementary School A	57	56	67	68
Elementary School B	81	70	86	87
Elementary School C	99	109	111	138

Table 10

Participating Schools

Participating school	Black	White	Hispanic	Multi
Elementary School A	146	132	84	15
Elementary School B	188	44	282	21
Elementary School C	46	455	36	33

The research took place in three elementary schools. Table 9 shows grade level information that displays the average number of students each school has per grade level. Table 10 shows the ethnicity of the students at each grade level and in each participating school.

Once permission for this study was granted from the dissertation committee, chair, and Gardner-Webb University's IRB, I requested permission from the school district's central office, which notified the participating schools about the research study and of the participants needed. Appendix A contains Gardner-Webb University's IRB Informed Consent Form needed for participating teachers. After IRB permission was granted, letters were sent to kindergarten through third-grade teachers in the participating sites explaining fully the purposes of this study. If teachers accepted the terms of the research, the online survey was available to access immediately. The participants had access to the researcher through phone and email if questions arose throughout the process.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected throughout the study. Collected data are a series of survey results, a multicultural literature book checklist, and the teacher focus group responses.

Instrumentation

This section explains the two instruments that were designed for the data collection in this study: surveys on guided reading and multicultural literature and focus group panel discussion.

Teacher Surveys

An open-ended qualitative survey was given to participating teachers. Surveys

allow data to be available to the researcher in rapid time (Fowler, 2009). Surveys can be cost effective, depending on the type (Creswell, 2011).

Each of the teachers selected for the study individually completed a survey on teacher perceptions regarding the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. The survey questions can be found in Appendix B. This survey was created by Geraldine Mongillo, Ph.D., and Karen Holland. Permission has been given to the researcher to use this survey. Teachers also completed a guided reading survey. The Lawshe content validity ratio (CVR) method was used to validate the guided reading survey, which can be found in Appendix C. The Lawshe method is a familiar method used by researchers to ensure authenticity of the instruments being used for data collection. This is implemented by using a content panel of experts (Gilbert & Prion, 2016).

Technology has had a profound impact on the way research is conducted (Stancanelli, 2010); therefore, an online version of the guided reading survey was available for teachers upon approval of release. All surveys used for this study asked questions that are centered on multicultural literature, reading comprehension of African American male students, and guided reading instruction. The multicultural survey consisted of two parts. The first part of the survey was 13 open-ended questions. The second part of the survey consisted of a multicultural book selection survey where teachers check marked titles they had in their classroom as a read aloud, library selection, or favorites. They indicated the use by using the instructions from the provided chart.

The second survey was a 10-question, 6-point Likert scale survey that focused primarily on guided reading and the guided reading instruction being implemented inside the classroom with their students (Appendix C). The survey completion option was

through a google survey form. Google is a primary platform for this school district and teachers are familiar with Google tools, such as Google classroom; Google meets; Google docs; and for this research, Google forms. The survey window remained open for a total of 2 weeks. After Week 1, an email notification went out to all participants to remind them to complete that survey. The email also notified them of the remaining time allotted for survey completion and how important the collection of the surveys was for accurate data collection. Survey results were anonymously collected. Creswell (2015) suggests ensuring participant privacy as an important component of good instrument design.

Teacher Focus Group

The second portion of the data collection consisted of focus groups. The purpose of a focus group is to gain information about the views or interests of the participants. A focus group is a way to collect data that brings together a small group of individuals (Cryer, 2016). A focus group encourages discussion about a topic. Focus groups allow the researcher to learn more about the participants (Sharken Simon, 1999). Focus groups generate data at three levels of analysis: (a) discrete individual response to questions–data collection at the individual level; (b) analysis of group consensus by collecting data at the group level; and (c) the analysis of new ideas (Cryer, 2016).

Sharken Simon (1999) proposed an outline to conduct focus groups, which was implemented for this study.

- Six to 8 weeks prior to the study, the researcher identified the participants for the study and gathered contact information for all participants.
- Four to 5 weeks prior to the study, the researcher created the questions and

developed a script (see Appendix D). The researcher also reserved the site.

Barbour (2007) stated that it is especially important to be flexible when

choosing where to conduct the focus groups. The ideal research location may

not be available. Due to the COVID pandemic, the location of the focus group

was through Zoom.

- Two days prior to the focus group, the researcher gathered materials and

  texted all participants to remind them of the focus group session.

- After conducting the focus group, the researcher sent an email to thank all

  participants and a transcribed copy of the notes from the session.

- After the transcription was complete, the participants were mailed a summary

  of the session and a write-up was completed by the researcher.

For this study, the focus group was comprised of 12 teacher participants from the

selected schools, four teachers from each school. Focus groups should be small enough

so everyone feels comfortable (Krueger, 1988; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Linville et al.,

2003; Smithson, 2008). The participants were divided into two groups: the kindergarten

and first-grade teachers and the second- through third-grade teachers. Group participants

in a focus group should be selected based on similar characteristics (Krueger & Casey,

2000).

The researcher was the moderator for the focus group because of her familiarity

with the topic of discussion and commonalities with the participants (Krueger & Raibee,

2004). The researcher asked the questions and also facilitated the discussion. Appendix D

shows the focus group questions. The questions were validated using the Lawshe CVR

method. The focus group format is based on the works of Krueger and Casey (2000).

There are two types of questions for focus groups: warm-up questions and research

questions (Barbour, 2007). The goal of this focus group was to analyze how teachers

perceive the use of multicultural literature in guided reading sessions to help African

American male students learn to read and comprehend at or above grade level.

The focus group session lasted for approximately 60 minutes. This information

was provided in the informed consent provided to participants (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed according to each instrument utilized during the research.

Notes from the teacher focus group were carefully analyzed.

Table 11

Data Analysis Chart

Research questions	Data sources	Data analysis
How do teachers implement guided reading in their classrooms?	Guided reading surveys and teacher focus group	Look for themes in responses by coding for recurring words and phrases
How do teachers implement the use of multicultural literature in their classrooms?	Survey, multicultural book list, and teacher focus group	Trends in data and recurring themes
How do teachers perceive the impact of multicultural literature on the reading comprehension of African American male students when using guided reading?	Teacher focus group	Reviewing themes

Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on outlining the methods of the research that were used in

this study. The procedures for data analysis were included. Coding was used for the

surveys, looking for reoccurring words and phrases. Likert scale responses were analyzed

through charting and examining trends in the data. The focus groups was audio-recorded

and transcribed. Themes were looked for and interpreted, and the procedures for the

research as well as teacher and student selection were outlined. This research was shared

with the district leaders and teachers.

Chapter 4: Results

This case study examined the influence that multicultural literature and guided reading has on African American male students during small group instruction. Twelve elementary teachers participated in the first part of the research, which involved an anonymous survey that examined both multicultural literature and guided reading. The second part of the research involved a focus group session with five of the 12 elementary teacher participants who answered and discussed a variety of questions that were focused on guided reading, multicultural literature, and culturally responsive teaching.

The data are displayed with each leading research question for the study, followed by each survey question and results. The focus group questions were documented and organized under five main themes after the teacher responses were recorded.

Research Questions

This study was designed to explore teacher perceptions regarding the impact of multicultural literature in guided reading groups with African American male students. The following research questions serve as the leading questions of this study:

1. How do teachers implement guided reading in their classrooms?

2. How do teachers implement the use of multicultural literature in their classrooms?

3. How do teachers perceive the impact of multicultural literature on the reading comprehension of African American Male students when used in guided reading?

Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to identify 15 elementary school teachers

to participate in this case study research. Of the 15 identified, 12 participated with the online survey, and five of the 12 participated in the focus group discussion. The collected data also detail the years of experience, educational levels, and ethnicity and are summarized in Tables 12-14.

Table 12

Participant Experience

Number of teachers	Years of experience
3	1-5 years
2	6-10 years
5	10-20 years
2	25-30 years

Table 13

Educational Levels

Number of teachers	Degree level
7	Bachelor's degree
4	Master's degree
1	Doctorate degree

Table 14

Ethnicity

Number of teachers	Race
7	Black
5	White

This research was focused on the African American male student and their reading needs; therefore, Table 15 shows the number of African American students in each classroom of the 12 teacher participants, along with the number of White and Hispanic males.

Table 15

Number of Male Students in the Classrooms by Ethnicity

Number of Classrooms	Students
	African American
2	0
1	14
1	13
1	11
1	9
2	6
1	3
3	2
	White
8	0
1	1
1	4
1	5
1	9
	Hispanic
3	3
2	2
3	1
2	0
1	9
1	6

Instrumentation

Two instruments were designed to investigate the three research questions: a 2-part anonymous survey and the focus group protocol. The first part of the survey given was on guided reading instruction. The second part of the online survey was on an approved research-based survey of multicultural literature. Prior permission was granted to use the survey for this research. The Lawshe method of content validity was used to determine a CVR for each research question in the first part of the survey on guided reading instruction and for the focus group discussion questions. Items with a CVR of

0.78 or greater were used in the survey and for the focus group questions.

Survey

An initial survey (Appendices B and C) was administered to each participant

consisting of two parts. A portion of the online survey consisted of questions concerning

race, gender, classroom size, types of schools, and experience of the teacher participants.

There were also questions concerning the ethnicity of the male students within their

classrooms. The online survey also consisted of 11 questions related mostly to guided

reading instruction, and those questions followed the guidelines under the 6-point Likert

rating scale. The last part of the online survey questions was related to multicultural

literature. The Likert scale was used for seven of those questions. There were some open-

ended questions on the online survey that focused on multicultural literature, and the last

question on the online survey was a multicultural book checklist. All three research

questions were investigated throughout the online survey and are correlated in Table 16.

Table 16

Survey Item Correlation to Research Questions

Research question	Part 1: Correlating survey items	Part 2: Correlating survey items
1	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	
2	8	12, 13, 16, 17, 18
3	3, 11	

The first section of the survey questions focused on teacher perceptions regarding

guided reading instruction including such topics as skills and strategies, scaffolding,

effective lesson planning, ZPD, and the text that is chosen for the guided reading group.

The responses were given by using the 6-point Likert scale. The rubric for the questions

is below, along with each question and teacher responses. The survey questions were

answered using the following Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat

disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree.

Online Survey Questions

Research Question 1: How Do Teachers Implement Guided Reading in Their

Classrooms?

Table 17

Number of Teacher Participants With Survey Responses

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The purpose of guided reading is to provide students with the skills and strategies needed to be able to read and comprehend.	1				1	10
2. The purpose of guided reading instruction is to provide scaffolding instruction		1			1	10
3. The purpose of guided reading instruction is to help students out of their ZPD level (what students can accomplish when receiving assistance from their teacher).	1				3	8
4. Providing an effective and thorough guided reading lesson plan will allow for an effective learning.	1				3	8
5. It is important for students to spend at least 30 minutes in a guided reading session.		3	3		2	4
6. The type of student text chosen for guided reading lessons will help to improve academic success.		1	4		4	3
7. Level readers should be used in a guided reading lesson for all students.		3	1		3	5
8. Multicultural books should be used in Guided reading lessons.			1		7	4

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
9. There should only be 4-5 students in a guided reading group.			1		6	5
10. It is important to group students homogenously based on reading levels for guided reading instruction.			4		5	3
11. Assessing reading comprehension is an important component in guided reading instruction.					4	8

The second portion of the online survey dealt with questions that were focused on multicultural literature. Multicultural literature should address gender, culture, age, and class (Ford & Quinn, 2010; Singleton, 1996).

Research suggests that by using multicultural literature in schools, it becomes a powerful tool for students to understand a variety of perspectives about cultures, customs, values, and people (Hefflin, 2003). Teachers were asked in Question 12 to define multicultural literature. Their responses are below.

Teacher 1: "Multicultural literature is any literature that focuses on customs, cultures characters, and settings that show different ethnicity."

Teacher 2:

Multicultural literature that encompasses all cultures, books read in class or available for students to read on their own should be windows, mirrors, and doors to all that pick up. Educators need to be purposeful in not just providing the books that look like them but also represent authors from different cultures as well. I also think that it is important not to neglect providing books with White characters and authors as well, even when your class may not have any in it.

Teacher 3: "Literature that is diverse in which all children in your class can identify with the characters."

Teacher 4: "Understanding cultural differences between customs, values, and beliefs."

Teacher 5: "Literature that includes a variety of diverse cultural aspects."

Teacher 6: "Literature that shares characters from a diverse background."

Teacher 7: "Texts that include people of diverse cultures, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic backgrounds."

Teacher 8: "Multicultural literature–literature that is geared to the African American Culture."

Teacher 9: "Literature that covers multiple genres and cultures."

Teacher 10: "Books, poems, and stories that shows a variety of cultures."

Teacher 11: No response.

Teacher 12: No response.

Question Items 13, 16, 17, and 18 in the second part of the online survey investigated how teachers implement the use of multicultural literature in their classrooms. The qualitative data were used to expound on the survey responses. There were clear themes that emerged from the final data that gave a clear view of teacher perceptions.

Table 18

How Do Teachers Implement the Use of Multicultural Literature in Their Classrooms?

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
13. I use multicultural literature in my classroom.	3				6	3
14. I believe my District mandates that all schools use multicultural literature in the classroom.	2	1			8	1
15. I believe my principal supports teachers who use multicultural literature in the Classroom			2	1	5	4

From the teachers who were surveyed, it was apparent from the results that most classrooms did not have multicultural literature readily accessible for student use. It was also evident that most of the teacher participants did not know how to select or search for multicultural literature to use inside the classroom or it was not a high priority for their classrooms. When asked, "How do you select and locate multicultural literature books for the students in the classroom," seven of the nine participants responded with one way they researched for multicultural literature for students. Two of the nine participants were neutral, and one did not give a response. Table 19 has nine respondents, with two being neutral respondents.

Table 19

Question 16: How Do You Select and Locate Multicultural Literature Books for Students

in the Classroom?

Multicultural classroom selection	Teacher respondents
Classroom library	1
Epic	1
Sora	1
Internet search	1
Scholastic	1
Amazon	1
Online school library	1
Neutral	2

Using multicultural literature in schools makes it a powerful resource for students.

It allows for a variety of perspectives about different cultures and other people (Hefflin &

Barksdale-Ladd, 2001).

Table 20

Question 17: How Many Multicultural Books Do You Have in the Classroom?

Number of multicultural books	Teacher responses
Less than 10	4
11-15	6
16-20	1
21-25	1
26-30	0
30-35	0
Other	0

The last question displayed a list of multicultural literature for elementary

teachers. The teachers were asked to checkmark those titles that they may have in their

classrooms as a read aloud, a library selection, or as a favorite. The following data were

discovered.

Table 21

Question 18: Classroom Libraries of Multicultural Literature

Multicultural book title	Read aloud	Library selection	Favorite
Molly's Pilgrim	2	4	0
The Giver	3	4	2
A Chair for My Mother	6	5	1
Meet Danita Brown	0	3	2
Mirandy and Brother Wind	1	3	0
Father's Rubber Shoes	0	4	0
Tar Beach	2	4	0
Hair/Pelitos	2	3	0
Martin Luther Jr. King Day	5	2	2
The House You Pass on the Way	1	3	0
Anastasia	1	3	1
Fox Song	1	4	0
Remember That	2	3	0
Just Juice	1	3	0
The Heart of a Chief	3	1	0
A Boys Own Story	4	0	0
Friends from the Other Side	3	2	0
Night	1	4	0
Mama Eat Ant, Yuck!	1	3	0

Some of the book titles were unfamiliar and therefore a description of each book title the teachers were asked to choose from is listed.

Molly's Pilgrim by Barbara Cohen is a modern Thanksgiving classic about an immigrant girl who comes to identify with the story of the pilgrims. She too is seeking a new home and freedom of religion in a new land.

The Giver by Lois Lowry is about a boy named Jonas who lived in a Dystopian society free of sadness, war, crime, and hatred.

A Chair for My Mother by Vera B. Williams is about a young girl, her mom, and her grandmother who lost everything in a fire; and the little girl saves money to buy her mom a comfortable chair.

Meet Danitra Brown by Nikki Grimes is a book of poems that introduces young readers to Danita Brown, told by her friend Zuri Jackson.

Mirandy and Brother Wind by Patricia McKissack is about a little girl named Mirandy who wants to catch the Wind so she can win an upcoming junior cakewalk.

Father's Rubber Shoes by Yumi Heo is about a boy named Yungsu who is lonely being in American. His father explains why they are in America by describing the rubber shoes he wore as a child.

Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold is about a girl named Cassie Louise Lightfoot who spends one night on Tar Beach, the rooftop of her family's Harlem Apartment Building, and all her dreams come true.

Hair/Pelitos by Sandra Cisneros is about a girl who describes how her family members have hair that is so different from each other.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day by Margaret McNamara teaches young people about who Martin Luther King Jr. was and what he stood for.

The House You Pass on the Way by J. Woodson is about 13-year-old Staggerlee who has been through a lot including her grandparents' death, her parents' interracial marriage, and her confusion about being a teen. However, there is some hope when her cousin comes to visit.

Fox Song by Joseph Bruchac recalls how after the death of Jamie's Indian great-grandmother, she remembers all the special things she taught her about the world.

Remember That by Lealea Newman introduces Bubbe and how she finds herself living alone and then with her daughter and granddaughter. Eventually, Bubbe must live in a nursing home.

Just Juice by Karen Hesse: Juice cannot read. She was held back in third grade. Her family is poor and lives in an Appalachian mountain town. Now her family needs her help at home and she can no longer go to school. What does she do?

The Heart of a Chief by Joseph Brucha introduces 11-year-old Chris, a Penacook Indian who learns to become a leader.

A Boys Own Story by Edmund White is about a boy who discovers who he is; a boy's coming of age story.

Friends From the Other Side/Amigos Del OtroLado by Gloria Anzaldua is about a friendship that blossoms between Prietita and Joaquin, the boy who came from Mexico with his mother.

Night by Elie Wiesel is a memoir about the life of Elie as he lived in the Nazi death camps and all the daily terrors he endured and lived to tell.

Mama Eat Ant, Yuck! by Barbara Edmonds is about how Baby Emma says her first words and her Mama accidently eats some ants that are in raisins.

Research Question 3: How Do Teachers Perceive the Impact of Multicultural Literature on the Reading Comprehension of African American Male Students When Using Guided Reading?

Question 3 and Question 11 from the online survey examined this research question. The questions and responses were previously detailed in Table 19.

Themes From the Online Survey

After careful analysis of the data presented in the two-part surveys of the study, three clear themes surfaced. The themes allowed for a clearer understanding of teacher perceptions around guided reading instruction involving the use of multicultural literature

in their classrooms, in particularly with African American male students.

Reading Comprehension and Guided Reading

Ten of 12 teachers (83%) who participated in the survey, strongly agreed that guided reading helps students instructionally by

- providing students with skills and strategies needed to be able to read and comprehend,

- providing scaffolding opportunities for students during guided reading instruction time.

- helping students out of the first stage of the ZPD, and

- allowing for effective learning by providing a thorough guided reading lesson plan.

Most of the teachers understand how guided reading instruction is a key factor in reading comprehension skills.

The Use of Multicultural Literature During Guided Reading

Seven of 12 participants (58%) agreed that multicultural books should be used in guided reading lessons. Four of the 12 participants (38%) strongly agreed that multicultural books should be used during guided reading lessons, and one participant was neutral.

The Number of Male Students in the Classroom by Ethnicity

This was especially important to investigate for the purpose of the study that focuses on the African American male student. The number of African American male students in the classrooms of the 12 teacher participants was 58. There were 19 White male students of the teacher participants and 21 Hispanic male students.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group probes were designed to go deeper into the themes presented through the survey data collection and to assist in developing a clearer understanding of the perception of teachers when it came to the implementation of multicultural literature in guided reading groups, specifically with African American male students. Five of the 12 participants (42%) participated in the focus group discussion. The focus group discussion was recorded and transcribed, and the results are displayed below.

Question 1: How Do You Use Multicultural Literature in Your Classroom?

Teacher 1: "Shared reading and whole group or small group."

Teacher 2:

I am so excited to be in this meeting. I had no idea there was so much multicultural literature for elementary schools. In preparing to go back into the building after the break, I have a lot of Hispanics and African American males. A lot of my African American males do not know what they want to do. Having the multicultural literature in the classroom will help them see themselves. Even now, I do not even what to watch a movie unless there is someone who resembles me. So, I can only imagine what they feel like. The first thing that I want to do when I get back to school is get a multicultural literature library in my classroom.

Teacher 3:

Now that we have been open, I allow my students to choose text that they can relate to and I allow them to ask questions about what is going on in the news. I just make sure it is grade appropriate. I try to incorporate multicultural literature in all aspects of learning; the do now, homework, and classwork.

Teacher 4: "I have grown a lot, and my mind and eyes are opened to different cultures out there. So, I try to incorporate multicultural literature within the classroom."

Teacher 5: This teacher agreed with Teacher 4's comment. She did not have anything to add or contribute to the conversation concerning how she used multicultural literature in her classroom.

Question 2: Name Some Multicultural Literature That You Have Inside Your Classroom?

Teacher 1:

The Snowy Day, Peter's Chair, and Jed's Barbershop. It is kind of long for Pre-K but in our classrooms, we are required in our reading centers, to have different types of books depicting different races, nationalities, and so many fictions, and fantasy books. So, it is a large selection for the kids.

Teacher 2:

So, I do not recall having any sets of anything other than Black History Month books like *Rosa Parks* and *Martin Luther King Jr.* Even I am bored with those. I do recall a book, *Salt in His Shoes*. I have got to do better to see what I can order. There needs to be more. The district gives us books, but they are not popular titles, and they are not read often by the students.

Teacher 3:

I purchased the Keena Ford series books for my students and *Freddie Ramos*. We are provided with some multicultural titles from the district. However, I want my students to read about other cultures that are based not just on slavery.

Teacher 4: "We read *Big Mommas, Shortcut*. Mostly in kindergarten they are just

learning to read."

Teacher 5: "We talk a lot about likes and differences, so we read a lot of books about that."

Questions 3. How Is Reading Promoted for All Students in Your Classroom?

Teacher 1:

We are pre-reading until maybe February. So, we are basic. We are identifying names, labeling pictures. If they paint or draw, they may write a word to describe the pictures. The guided reading groups start in February with the students who are ready. So, we will assess first.

Teacher 2: "Giving them a reading log and making them responsible for reading. We set a purpose for reading by discussing the character or setting."

Teacher 3: "We make time to read every day. We have novel studies, and we read for 15 minutes each day at the end of the day."

Teacher 4: "We have guided reading daily. We are Spanish immersion, so reading is promoted daily."

Teacher 5: "We have shared and guided reading every day. With the COVID restrictions, I can only have a certain amount at the carpet and in the small group."

Question 4: What Reading Strategies Do You Use to Help Students Comprehend Text?

Teacher 1: "Picture walks and pictures. We talk about what is going on in the story. I ask questions like, 'what is going on in the story' or 'what do you think is going to happen next.'"

Teacher 2: "We set a purpose for reading. Being virtual makes it difficult. We read the text and discuss characters, setting, and author's purpose."

Teacher 3: "Phonics strategies, stretching the word, consonant blending; we focus our reading on the character and character strategies."

Teacher 4: "We use Jan Richardson and Lucy Calkins readers and writing workshop. We also incorporate Orton Gillingham-decoding skills."

Teacher 5: "We use the same material, Lucy Calkins and Orton Gillingham comprehension skills?"

Question 5: How Does Implementing Guided Reading Groups Help to Increase a Student's Reading Comprehension Skills?"

Teacher 1: "It helps with beginning reading comprehension skills for Pre-k. While pictures are important, you cannot point to things and make things happen. You are really reading the words."

Teacher 2: "I am able to help with vocabulary in small groups which helps increase reading comprehension."

Teacher 3: "It helps to focus on the individual needs of the students."

Teacher 4: "It helps to hear from an individual child and hear what they can do."

Teacher 5: Nothing added.

Question 6: How Does Adding Multicultural Literature Into Your Guided Reading Instruction Help to Increase a Student's Reading Comprehension Skills?

Teacher 1: "Students really want to understand or are curious about what happens in the lives of say Asians. They want to know about other cultures."

Teacher 2: "It helps with building background knowledge and helps with increasing Lexile levels. The more they know, the better for their reading comprehension."

Teacher 3: "It increases their interest in learning about different people. It also helps when they can see people who look like them."

Teacher 4: "They are able to read material that maybe they can relate to and that helps to build reading comprehension levels."

Teacher 5: "I think it is interest. If they are interested in a book, they will read it and it will help when done in small groups."

Question 7: What Are the Reading Levels of Your African American Males?

Teacher 1:

That is hard for me to answer. I am at a Title I program and children are based on need. They are labeled as being at risk of being behind for kindergarten. I have one African American male who can identify only 25 letters. I have two who do not identify any letters.

Teacher 2: "I have nine African American males in my class. I have four on grade level currently, one above grade level, and four who are below grade level."

Teacher 3: "I have 14 African American male students. Seven are on grade level, four are above grade level, and three are below grade level. Level E is the lowest and P is the highest that I have."

Teacher 4:

My classroom is equally divided this year. I have around 22 students and around six African American male students. They are up and down, some are struggling. You can tell if they came to the Pre-K program because that helps them, if not they struggle.

Teacher 5:

Most are low levels with reading. Mostly As and Bs some Cs. But that is normal

for this time of the year. I have two African American male students. One is

struggling. It may be hard to get to the next jump this year.

Question 8: How Does Multicultural Literature Impact Reading Scores With Formative Assessment?

Teacher 1:

I think it will increase reading scores. When students discover that there is a Santa

Claus in Germany, they get so excited learning about the cultures of others and

that will definitely help to increase reading scores on formative assessment.

Teacher 2:

Students are at a great disadvantage right now. I am used to giving assessments

that do not have a lot of multicultural literature included in there, but with that

included I do believe it would have a positive impact of reading assessments.

Teacher 3: "It helps them to learn background knowledge, which increases their

interest in reading and comprehension."

Teacher 4: "It helps with life experiences that helps them to be able to

comprehend the text in the upper grades as well."

Teacher 5: "Students need to be able to relate to what we are giving them,

otherwise they won't score well and oftentimes on those assessments, they cannot relate."

Question 9: Describe Your Culturally Responsive Teaching Approach?

Teacher 1: "I allow families to come and share through their students. We just

completed a study about families from Germany."

Teacher 2: "During the month of February, I will bring in African American

speakers to discuss their jobs and how they got there. I also do this with Hispanic

Heritage Month."

Teacher 3:

Now that we have gone to being more open to different cultures, I try to be open

but age appropriate and incorporate it to the text they are reading and every aspect

of the classroom, in the "Do Nows," homework, or classwork.

Teacher 4: "Through my teaching, I have grown a lot and my eyes and mind are

open to know that there are different cultures out there."

Teacher 5: No response.

There were five teachers who participated in the focus group discussion. One

teacher was a prekindergarten teacher; there were two kindergarten teachers, one second

grade teacher, and one from third grade. Transcripts from the focus groups were read and

the data filtered into themes categorized by research questions. The following themes

emerged from the focus group session that helped to give a clearer understanding of how

teachers perceived the use of multicultural literature in guided reading groups when

working with African American male students.

Themes

Multicultural Literature Inside the Classroom

When teachers were asked to discuss how they used multicultural literature inside

the classroom, most of the responses stated that they shared multicultural literature with

students as a read aloud or in small groups. Two of the five teacher participants explained

that they used multicultural literature in small, guided reading groups as well as whole

group. One of the teacher participants shared,

Being that I am in a predominately Black school, I am very intentional with the books that I choose of the characters of people they see as well as other cultures, and not just based on slavery. I want them to see themselves represented in the books we read in class.

The teachers did not elaborate much on this question. Some spent time thinking about the multicultural literature they had inside their classrooms. The teacher participants could not fluently articulate the multicultural literature they had inside their classrooms. When teachers were asked about the multicultural literature they have inside their classrooms, one of the participants shared, "I have to be honest. I am guilty of not having a multicultural literature library in my classroom, just some multicultural book titles." She went on to say that she really needed more multicultural books inside her classroom.

Some of the book titles inside their classrooms that teachers could quickly name were as follows:

- *Keen Ford Series.* This is a new book series by Melissa Thomson who is a Caucasian author writing about Black children.

- *Jed's Barbershop.* The teachers spoke about how this was an extremely popular title. You can find this book in most elementary classrooms and most elementary teachers are familiar with this book.

- *Peter's Chair.* Another popular title found in most elementary classrooms.

- *Black Panther*

- *Freddie Ramos*

- *Eza Jack Keats books*

- *Big Momma*

The teachers did add how they used certain multicultural books as a part of a unit of study or for special times, such as Black History Month or Hispanic American Month. Several of the titles listed are popular with the children, and the teachers may read the books more than once to a whole group. *Peter's Chair* was said to be used when the students were learning about the letter P and when they featured certain authors such as Ezra Jack Keats. The students also have an opportunity to choose these book titles for quiet reading throughout the day.

Strategies to Help Students Read and Comprehend

When teachers were asked to share reading strategies they used inside the classroom to help students learn to read and comprehend, they were all able to articulate examples. Teachers named the following strategies:

- For the younger students in kindergarten and prekindergarten: picture walks, labeling pictures, and sounding out words. The teachers explained how this is a basic criterion for reading readiness.

- Guided reading groups: All teachers agreed that by having students in guided reading groups, it could help increase their reading comprehension.

- Jan Richardson program

- Lucy Calkins

- Phonics: Teachers talked about how teaching phonics early on makes a difference in their reading and comprehension.

- Stretching Words

- Character Strategies

- Character focus

- Reading every day in class

- Whole group novel study and 15-minute reading at the end of the day

- Group discussions on what is happening in the story

- Setting a purpose for reading

- Break-out groups

- Asking students for understanding: Teachers talked about how this strategy helps with different levels of questioning and with interpreting the text.

- Questions to look for before reading a text.

Table 22 shows the reading levels teachers were asked to share concerning the African American male students in their classrooms. The data are based on levels at the time of the study. The following criteria were used: above grade level, on grade level, and below grade level. Teachers also shared reading levels as related to Fountas and Pinnell's (2001) A-Z; A being the lowest reading level and Z being the highest reading level.

Table 22

African American Male Student Reading Levels

Reading level	Number of African American males
Above grade level	6
On grade level	14
Below grade level	15

There were 35 African American male students between the five focus group teacher participants.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Approach

Teachers were asked to describe their culturally responsive teaching approach.

The responses were as follows:

Teacher 1: "I allow families to come and share through their students. We just completed a study about families from Germany."

Teacher 2: "During the month of February, I will bring in African American speakers to discuss their jobs and how they got there. I also do this with Hispanic Heritage Month."

Teacher 3:

Now that we have gone to being more open to different cultures, I try to be open but age appropriate and incorporate it to the text they are reading and every aspect of the classroom, in the "Do Nows," homework, or classwork.

Teacher 4: "Through my teaching, I have grown a lot and my eyes and mind are open to know that there are different cultures out there."

Teacher 5: No response.

The teacher participants also expounded on this question by saying that they have visitors come to share in the classroom during certain times of the year. One teacher did not have a response. From the responses and silence of some, it was obvious that most of the participants did not understand what culturally responsive teaching was all about.

Although there was a limited number of participants for this study, it does offer critical aspects and insight into teacher perceptions and awareness of guided reading, multicultural literature education, and culturally responsive teaching.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study involved three elementary schools from both a suburban and rural school district in North Carolina. Two of the schools selected for this study are Title I schools. The participating school district has a total school enrollment of 41,488 students, with 4,971 of those students being African American, 24,644 of them being White, and 7,827 being Hispanic. School A has a total of 248 students in kindergarten through third grade, School B has 324 students in kindergarten through third grade, and School C has a total of 457 students in kindergarten through third grade. There are 146 African American students in School A, 188 African American students in School B, and 46 African American students in School C. There were 12 teachers from all three schools who participated in the online line survey: 11 female and one male, five White teachers, and seven Black teachers. Five of the 12 teachers participated in the focus group. Three of the focus group participants were White, and two were Black. All participants in the focus group were females, and they were from Schools A and B.

Since August 2020, the parents of the students in all the elementary schools within this participating school district have had the option to send their students to school for in-person learning on Mondays through Thursdays. Teachers have full access to students, even during COVID. The entire school district has virtual learning on every Friday.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers as related to guided reading and multicultural literature while working with African American male students. The study was guided by three research questions.

1. How do teachers implement guided reading in their classrooms?

2. How do teachers implement the use of multicultural literature in their classrooms?

3. How do teachers perceive the impact of multicultural literature on the reading comprehension of African American Male students when used in guided reading?

The theoretical framework that was used for this study was based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive development with an emphasis on his ZPD and his concept theory of scaffolding. This theoretical framework was used to analyze the data. Subsequently, this chapter makes a connection between the findings of this study and the existing literature concerning guided reading and multicultural literature with the African American male students. This chapter also makes recommendations for future research and recommendations for school districts to employ regarding the use of multicultural literature in a guided reading setting. This chapter includes a summary of the study, followed by a discussion of the implications of the findings, recommendations, and the conclusion, linking the existing literature in the field of guided reading, culturally responsive teaching approaches, and multicultural literature education.

The low reading performance of African American male students in reading continues to be a national issue (Badian, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Spencer, 2014). African American male students often start school in kindergarten and first grade performing behind their White counterparts (Conley, 2010; Paige & Witty, 2010). By fourth grade, African American male students perform lower than any other subgroup nationally in reading (Husband, 2012).

Preparing a child for school as early as kindergarten is an indicator for future academic success (Fitzpatrick, 2012). When students develop the skills of making inferences, thinking critically about text, and conducting research, they are developing college ready knowledge and skills (Conley, 2010). This should be promoted in elementary schools (Conley, 2010).

Early reading interventions provide all students with learning that is needed to improve their reading performance (Polidano, 2013). Guided reading instruction is an important intervention for all students, especially African American male students (Hulan, 2010). Guided reading instruction allows teachers an opportunity to target specific individual student needs (Schulman, 2006).

Guided reading instruction helps to target reading deficiencies in all students. These deficiencies show up in early elementary grades (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Implementing guided reading consistently with fidelity has shown to increase fluency and reading comprehension (Denton & Al Otaiba, 2011). Guided reading instruction provides students with scaffolding strategies that allow them to master the skills taught in small group (Reutzel, 2014) .

Analysis of Findings

Findings of this study are in order of each research question. Each question is answered, and data collected from this study are analyzed and interpreted. Results are outlined in the context of the theoretical framework for this study. The results of this study identify a significant need to educate and train teachers more extensively on multicultural literature and culturally responsive teaching approaches in the guided reading groups. The research establishes the study's relevance to future research in the

use of multicultural literature, specifically with African American male students. Several themes were discovered during the in-depth focus group session and online survey.

Research Question 1: How Do Teachers Implement Guided Reading in Their Classrooms?

Students who fall behind in reading comprehension will be in jeopardy of not catching up with their peers (Iaquinta, 2006). Effective reading strategies, as teachers work in guided reading groups, help to improve reading comprehension (Clay, 2000; Lyons & Thompson, 2011). Research stated that guided reading is known to help improve reading achievement and increase reading comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Ten of the 12 participants believe that the purpose of guided reading instruction is to provide scaffolding during instruction. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) talked about how most schools used guided reading to help students improve their reading through teacher guidance and scaffolding (Temple et al., 2011). It is also a known strategy to help improve and increase reading comprehension skills (Clay, 2000; Lyons & Thompson, 2011). Only eight teachers who participated in the study strongly agreed that reading comprehension is an important component of guided reading instruction. Teachers who participated in the focus group discussion believed that students can be helped with vocabulary skills while working in guided reading groups and this will help to increase reading comprehension. Another focus group participant believed that implementing guided reading can help meet all students' individual needs.

Vygotsky (1978) explained how when teachers are working in the ZPD, the teacher must understand the child's level of development. The instruction and lessons

must be tailored to the child's learning needs; and scaffolding must be provided, along with additional strategies (Antonacci, 2000). Eight of the 12 teacher participants strongly agreed that the purpose of guided reading instruction is to help students out of their ZPD, while three agreed and one strongly disagreed.

Today, guided reading is patterned after Marie Clay's Reading Recovery program that started in 1970. The program was designed to help struggling readers. During pullout sessions like guided reading, students who were struggling in reading were tutored for 30 minutes a day (Clay, 2001). During those sessions, students would work on six specific tasks with the teacher: letter identification, concepts about print, a word test, writing vocabulary, hearing sounds in words, and running records (Clay, 2002). In today's guided reading groups, there are four steps to the guided reading program: prepare the students for the selection, silent reading, rereading, and follow-up activities (Ford & Optiz, 2011a). The text that is selected in guided reading is intentional (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Tyner, 2014).

From the online survey, teacher perceptions of the students spending at least 30 minutes in a guided reading group were not in agreement. Three of 12 teachers disagreed that you need 30 minutes in a guided reading group, three somewhat disagreed, two agreed, and four strongly agreed.

The participants were also asked to rate their perception on whether students should be grouped homogeneously based on reading levels for guided reading instruction. Four of the 12 teachers somewhat disagreed, and five agreed. When students are working in the guided reading groups, the results during the ZPD may be different depending on the child (Vygotsky, 1978). In a national survey conducted by Ford and Opitz (2008),

teachers were asked to discuss their grouping techniques used during guided reading. Most teachers used four small homogenous groups; 60% of the teachers group students homogenously based on levels. They meet for an average of 22 minutes 3.3 times a week.

When teachers were asked to give their perception on whether multicultural literature books should be used in guided reading lessons, seven of the 12 participants agreed that they should, four strongly agreed, and one somewhat agreed. The focus group participants were asked how does adding multicultural literature into the guided reading instruction help to increase a student's reading comprehension. The focus group participants believed that it helped to build background knowledge and help those who are curious understand who they are. They also stated that having material to read that they can relate to will help to increase their reading comprehension. They stated that if students are interested in what they are reading, it will help them understand it better. It is important for all teachers to understand how beneficial multicultural literature is for all students. Having multicultural books in primary classrooms is especially important to the reading comprehension of all students (Mongillo & Holland, 2016; Knoblaugh, 2016; Robertson, 2013). It is especially important for African American children to develop positive feelings of self-worth as they grow older (Tatum, 2010).

Reading comprehension is an important component of guided reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Studies have been done that prove that by including multicultural literature in the guided reading groups, this will help to increase comprehension skills and help students appreciate themselves as well as others (Robertson, 2013). Guided reading groups are a part of the regular learning within the classroom. All children deserve to see themselves in the books they are required to read

(Mongillo & Holland, 2016). When students do not see themselves in the books they are reading inside the classrooms, they do not feel a part of that classroom community (Milner, 2016). In this study, teachers from the focus group were asked how is reading promoted in their classrooms for all students. Some of the responses included some buzz words such as picture walks, pre-reading, character discussions, basal readers, reading logs, and guided and shared reading.

The type of reading instruction teachers give students in the early grades of kindergarten through third grade will determine their reading abilities (Halladay, 2012). Learning to read and comprehend is an important aspect of learning and is complex (Cain, 2016). Setting a solid foundation of reading for all students will enable them to read and comprehend effectively (Cain, 2016). Learning to read should start as early as preschool (Cain, 2016). If students who have reading difficulties receive explicit phonemic interventions, awareness of print, knowledge to decipher a letter and a word, phonics instruction, fluency instruction, and phonological instruction, their reading should improve (Talley, 2017). This is not always the case with African American male students (Talley, 2017).

In this study, the research focus group participants were asked to give the reading levels of their students, specifically their African American students. The responses were of 35 African American male students, six were above grade level, 14 were on grade level, and 15 were below grade level. The gap between African American males and their peers continues to be an ongoing issue for the educational system (Gordon, 2010). There must be a focus on African American male youth to keep them from being placed further at risk later in society (Swanson et al., 2010). African American students often begin

school in early grades, kindergarten and first, performing behind their White counterparts (Conley, 2010; Paige & Witty, 2010). There is an even wider gap for the African American male student (Fergus et al., 2014; Harper, 2012; Noguera, 2000). African American male students normally score at the lowest academic achievement level in schools for reading achievement (Ford, 2010).

Research Question 2: How Do Teachers Implement the Use of Multicultural Literature in Their Classrooms?

Banks (2010) defined multicultural as an educational movement or a process that will provide students with an equal opportunity to learn. According to Nieto (2000), multicultural education refers to a process that rejects racism as well as other types of discriminations. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (2019) defined multicultural literature as books by and about different groups of people from diverse backgrounds: African Americans, Africans, Latinos, Asian/Pacific, and Asian-Pacific Americans.

In this study, when the teacher participants from the focus group session were asked to define multicultural literature, buzz words such as cultures, different ethnicity, cultural differences, and diverse backgrounds of African American cultures were used. Most of the teachers did not elaborate on a definition, and some did not respond. Some of the teacher participants from the focus group responded with the following definitions:

- "I allow families to come and share through their children. We just completed a study about families from Germany."

- "During the month of February, I will bring in African American speakers to discuss their jobs and how they got there. I also do the same thing for Hispanic Heritage Month."

- "Through my teaching, I have grown a lot, and my eyes and mind are open to know that there are different cultures out there."

Teachers were asked to share how they use multicultural literature inside the classroom. Some of the responses were shared reading, whole group, or student choice of text. They were also asked to share some multicultural literature titles they have inside their classrooms. Most of the responses named by the participants were limited to only one or two book titles. Some of the books named were popular titles and some not so popular. If children are exposed to picture books at an early age, it can help increase cognitive development (Vox, 2011). It is important that African American children are exposed to positive multicultural literature in picture books at an early developmental stage (Vox, 2011). Exposing children to multicultural literature that is about friendship, superheroes, love, children around the world, and family and just fun books to read will help them to appreciate and make reading fun (Tatum & Muhammad, 2012).

Culturally responsive teaching is based on the relationship between the teacher and the students (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011). The cultural differences children bring to school can impact their reading skills and abilities (Haynes, 2012). Culturally responsive teaching includes every student's background in every aspect of learning within a teacher's classroom (Gay, 2002, 2009, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2000). Culturally responsive teaching will help to increase the academic achievement of all students, especially the African American male students (Pitre, 2014). A culturally responsive teacher uses scaffolding for students to work in the ZPD (Cole, 1996; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Santamaria et al., 2002; Sleeter, 2011). During the ZPD, the culturally responsive teacher assists the student in performing a

particular task with modeling, explicit directions, questioning, and scaffolding. The interventions given to the student during this time are in the forms of feedback and guidance. As the culturally responsive teacher continues to work with the student in the ZPD, the student will eventually emerge from one level of the ZPD and start to perform at a higher level without the assistance of the teacher. The student will then continue working with the teacher in the ZPD and a new concept and strategy at a higher level than before.

In this study, teachers from the focus group session were asked to share their culturally responsive teaching approach. The responses indicated that teachers were not familiar with what culturally responsive teaching was all about. The responses suggested that having families come inside the classroom to share or having African American speakers speak during Black History Month or celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month was culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally responsive teaching includes prior knowledge, life experiences, and learning styles (Gay, 2009; Sleeter, 2011). If there is a cultural difference between the teacher and the child, this will impact the learning of the child; therefore, it is important for teachers to understand this learning approach.

Research Question 3: How Do Teachers Perceive the Impact of Multicultural Literature on the Reading Comprehension of African American Male Students When Used in Guided Reading?

Multicultural literature is lacking during guided reading instruction. African American males rarely see themselves in text, which is causing them to be at risk of failing (Tomlinson, 2011). Utilizing multicultural literature in guided reading groups can

enhance reading comprehension for all students' reading comprehension, especially

African American male students (Freeney & Moravcik, 2005). When this is implemented,

it allows them to see themselves in the books that they read, enhancing their

understanding of the text more clearly (Temple, 2012).

Teacher participants in this study agreed that by adding reading comprehension to

guided reading instruction, it will help to increase student reading comprehension by

helping students build background knowledge, by increasing their interest in learning

about different people who look like them, and by providing reading material that looks

like them. The research participants also talked about how implementing guided reading

groups can help to increase vocabulary, increase reading comprehension, and help with

individual student needs. Some of the focus group participants responses included the

following:

- "It helps with beginning reading comprehension skills for Pre-K. While

  picture books are important, you cannot point to things and make things

  happen. You are really reading the words."

- "I am able to help with vocabulary in small groups which helps increase

  reading comprehension."

- "It helps to focus on the individual needs of the students."

- "It helps to hear from an individual child and hear what they can do."

Ten of the 12 teachers from this study agreed that the purpose of guided reading is

to provide students with the skills and strategies needed to be able to read and

comprehend. Ten of the 12 believed that providing scaffolding instruction will help

students with reading. Research shows that guided reading impacts literacy in all

students, especially African American males (Hulan, 2010). African American male students benefit academically when they can work in small groups with their teachers and receive help (Edwards, 2012). Guided reading overall allows all students an opportunity to develop into strong independent readers with the support and guidance of teachers (Baumann et al., 2000). Guided reading is one of the best instructional practices in literacy (Ford & Opitz, 2008).

Implications for Practice

There are many implications for change when it comes to reading instruction for the African American male students, culturally responsive teaching approaches as well as guided reading instruction. With consistent research-based implementations; the support of school districts, colleges, and universities; and the educators who impact student lives, the achievement gap in reading between African American male students and their counterparts can be closed.

Recruitment for North Carolina Prekindergarten Programs

Many children are not prepared when they enter school, which has an impact on future academic achievement. African American students begin school in early grades behind their White counterparts in kindergarten and first grade, and the gap continues through high school (Conley, 2010; Paige & Witty, 2010).

Giving all children an opportunity to enter a high-quality prekindergarten program can help to narrow the achievement gap (Dodge et al., 2016). Prekindergarten programs provide a solid foundation of learning and an opportunity to promote and improve early childhood educational outcomes (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Reynolds et al., 2001; Schweinhart, 2005).

A study found that when children enter prekindergarten programs, they can experience advances in language and literacy skills (Domitrovich et al., 2012). Another study done with a particular prekindergarten program in North Carolina tracked every prekindergarten student for a period of 13 years in 100 counties (Dodge et al., 2016). They found that students exhibit higher standardized reading scores in third through fifth grade (Dodge et al., 2016).

During prekindergarten, students should be exposed to and provided multicultural experiences. Teachers should share multicultural literature through reading aloud to the children several times a day. In addition, picture books and hands-on materials that depict multicultural persons and themes should be readily accessible.

Ensuring that all students, especially African American male students, attend a prekindergarten program is essential to closing the achievement gap. School districts should work with all levels of government for additional funding for the program. Currently, admission to the program is based on income and educational need. However, if the program was open to all children at age 4, more students would readily be prepared for kindergarten, and the achievement gap would become significantly smaller.

School Districts Providing More Multicultural Literature

From this study, it was evident that many schools lack an appropriate number of choices from which all students can benefit. Four of the 12 participating teachers had less than 10 multicultural books inside their classrooms, six had least than 15, one had at least 20, and one had at least 25 multicultural books for all their students to use. All school districts, just like the studied school district, need to provide a much larger selection of multicultural literature.

Recruitment of African American Male Teachers for Elementary Schools

When culturally responsive approaches are used in the classroom, African

American students perform better (Chouinard & Boyce, 2017). The teaching professional

workforce should look like the student population. However, due to a limited number of

minority teachers in the classroom, there continues to be a lack of understanding about

the children being taught (Ingersoll et al., 2017). America is becoming more ethnically

diverse, but our classrooms continue to be led by White female teachers (NCES, 2017).

Teachers are completing educational programs with minimal knowledge of how to teach

students from all cultures and races (Fasching-Varner et al., 2014).

Recruiting African American male teachers can bring insight and experience to

the classroom; things many students may have experienced (Sue & Sue, 2013).

The recruitment process for the African American male should first include

ensuring that they are professionally trained in the use of multicultural literature,

culturally responsive teaching approaches, and guided reading instruction. When

possible, this training should occur prior to them entering a classroom environment.

Additional training should include mentoring, cultural pedagogy, and leadership and skill

development workshops (Council for Educational Change, 2018).

Colleges and universities can partner to create more programs to recruit and retain

teachers who represent the school's population. One program that has been successful is a

program entitled Call Me Mister (2017). This program was started at Clemson University

to address the problem of underrepresented African American male teachers in the

elementary schools of South Carolina's lowest performing schools. This program has

since expanded to nine additional colleges and universities: Louisiana Tech, University of

Tennessee Martin, Longwood University, Kansas State, University of Illinois at Chicago, Georgia College, Edward Waters College, Eastern Kentucky, and Jackson State (Council for Educational Change, 2018).

Partner With Local Libraries

School districts should partner with local libraries to start the implementation of reading initiatives for multicultural literature. The promotion can focus on reading for all children, especially for the African American male child and those children from diverse backgrounds. The libraries should also partner with multicultural authors and spotlight them each month by inviting them into the library on the days when the students are highlighted. The authors can also have book signings and book giveaways. After the author is featured at the library, they can have author visits at some of the local schools, especially schools where there are achievement gaps.

The school districts and local libraries could set up mentoring programs for African American male students. The program would allow the students and the mentor to read together on Saturday mornings at a library site. After the reading takes places with the mentors, volunteer teachers could be on site to assist with learning through literacy learning centers. Once a month, students could meet a surprise reading buddy at the library and have an hour of reading and activities that involve comprehension.

The libraries could also provide summer reading programs. Summer months play a factor in reading deficiencies (Alexander et al., 2001). The summer program could be set up as a reading camp. Students would attend the camp for 3 hours each day of the week and engage in full reading experiences and activities. Lunch would be provided, and enrichment fieldtrips would be taken each week. Students could earn tickets to win

free books every time they attend and actively participate in their sessions.

Parents should be involved in reading initiatives. Parents need training and support in helping their children to love reading and learning. If parents are engaged in reading with their children and create a positive attitude towards reading, their children will enjoy reading too (Baker, 2014). Parents should be offered a variety of workshops that could be hosted by the library. These workshops would present strategies for parents to use at home that would help their child learn to read and appreciate reading. An incentive for parents to attend would be for the local library to give away free home libraries to families. The home libraries would consist of the most current and popular multicultural book titles.

Curriculum Created at the College and University Level

Colleges and universities should conduct more extensive research on guided reading with multicultural literature. They should conduct further research on the achievement gap in reading of African American male students and develop courses specifically designed to develop strategies for reading multicultural literature in the schools, specifically with the African American male student and other students from diverse backgrounds. Once research and data have been analyzed, the school districts and colleges or universities would need to develop a partnership to provide extension training for all educators: teachers, administration, and supporting staff in K-12 schools. The training would include research-based instructional strategies that would be used to increase academic achievement for all students and the instructional needs of teachers.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study are grounded in the theoretical context of Vygotsky's

(1978) cognitive development theory. School districts can benefit from these findings by reexamining how teachers are trained for a diverse classroom in today's schools, while considering the support and training teachers are given by school administration and the district. This study did not provide evidence that regular professional development opportunities were offered in either multicultural literature or guided reading. Further research in this and other schools/districts should investigate the impact of professional development using multicultural literature and guided reading on both teacher and student performance.

The replication of this study would allow future researchers the opportunity to compare findings and determine if the themes and conclusions drawn were exclusive to the district in which the study was conducted or if the findings could be somewhat comprehensive to the larger population. This would be implemented with the following factors in mind: (a) a larger sample size and in a larger context, (b) a larger school district or more participants from various schools within that district, and more participating schools.

Additional considerations to further research include the perceptions of all elementary teachers in prekindergarten through Grade 5. This study had five teachers who participated in the survey who had 10-20 years of experience, two teachers who had 6-10 years of experience, three teachers who had 1-3 years of experience, and two teachers who had 25-30 years of experience. For future research, the study could be broken down specifically to look at each group or novice and experienced teachers separately.

Another important finding in this study was the knowledge teachers had with

understanding and defining what culturally responsive teaching is. Considerations for further research would be to have school districts provide extensive training in culturally responsive teaching and conduct further research regarding how this affects the reading achievement of African American males. Some of the participants did not respond to the questions; and those who did, from their responses, lacked knowledge and understanding as to what culturally responsive teaching is all about. The future training could possibly change teacher perceptions on multicultural literature when implementing in a guided reading setting for African American students. After the required training, teachers should be given another survey asking them their perceptions on culturally responsive teaching.

Teachers were also given the opportunity to give their perceptions concerning multicultural literature and guided reading through an anonymous survey. A study of African American male student perceptions regarding multicultural literature through guided reading and/or reading instruction in general could be conducted. Further research could develop a more in-depth understanding as to how African American males learn and how they want to be taught in reading.

 Further research inside the classroom, gathering observational data of students and teachers, would allow more in-depth insight as to how teachers work with African American male students in small group reading; how teachers conduct small group instruction; and how multicultural literature is infused in the lesson. Classroom observations could also reveal culturally responsive teaching approaches.

Additional data can be collected from professional learning community minutes. These data could provide additional information regarding the effectiveness of guided

reading instruction when used with multicultural literature. This will also help drive possibilities for needed professional development for teachers and other school employees.

Finally, an examination of academic performance data from students who are assigned to teachers with training in guided reading approaches using multicultural literature should be conducted. These data should be studied longitudinally, not as a single snapshot.

Limitations and Delimitations

The findings of this case study are limited to the district in which it was conducted. It is also limited to three schools within the participating school district. The small sample size of 12 participants in an anonymous survey and five participants in a focus group from a rural school district in North Carolina gives restriction to the findings being pervasive for other districts and schools and gives only a glance of the possible perceptions of teachers in kindergarten through third grade in those schools, and it influences other research to explore these findings in a larger context.

Due to COVID restrictions during this study, the researcher had limited access to teachers within the schools. Teacher observations of guided reading groups could not be implemented due to COVID restrictions. Student interactions with the teacher were also limited due to COVID restrictions. Groups were much smaller and were distanced 6 feet apart. Teachers did not assist students as they normally would. Parents had the option to keep students home to learn virtually due to COVID restrictions which may have impacted teacher access to all students. Due to COVID restrictions, this study was limited to a Zoom focus group, online anonymous surveys, and teacher perceptions.

It is also important to recognize that participants in this study could have a limited perspective on multicultural literature when it is implemented with guided reading with the African American male students due to their limited experiences and training within the school district and trainings outside of the district. There is also limited access to multicultural literature for all students, especially if parents chose the virtual educational learning plan.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 world crisis personally impacted all our lives. It took many lives and caused mental and physical stress on all of us. The pandemic changed the way educators operated or functioned. School districts had to be creative in their teaching approaches for all students. As a teacher, having to take care of your own families during a pandemic, following CDC guidelines, and continuing to teach students is a challenge. The teachers who participated in this study did express the mental and physical exhaustion and frustrations of home and school life. They were especially frustrated knowing they could not and would not reach each child's academic needs.

My desire at the beginning of my research was to enter the classrooms of the participating teachers and perform observations of them and their students using multicultural literature during guided reading sessions. Unfortunately, that did not occur. Due to COVID restrictions and guidelines, all students had synchronous and asynchronous days, which made it exceedingly harder for teachers. Some of the teachers had a group of students who attended school for in-person learning, a group of students who attended online for virtual learning, and yet another group who did both online and in person learning.

I reached out to over 60 teachers to ask for participation in this study. I understand that due to these unprecedented circumstances, many teachers were unwilling or unable to give time or access; therefore, participation was low. However, I am so grateful for the teachers who did agree to participate.

The COVID-19 pandemic and circumstances surrounding its effects were inevitable. Despite the limitations and low teacher participation, this study has the potential to impact the growing achievement gap in reading between African American male students and their peers. It can provide an opportunity for meaningful professional development experiences in the areas of multicultural literature, culturally responsive teaching, effective phonics instruction, and effective guided reading approaches for all elementary teachers within the district and outside of this school district. Additionally, the data collected through this study can be used for comparative analysis in future research by colleges and universities. There needs to be ongoing research in multicultural literature, guided reading, and the culturally educational approaches used to teach the students within all schools.

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Appendix A

Gardner-Webb University IRB Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF
MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE, WHEN IT IS IMPLEMENTED DURING
GUIDED READING INSTRUCTION, ON READING COMPREHENSION FOR
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Principal Investigator: Cassandra Gregory

Department: Educational Leadership – Gardner-Webb University

Consent to Participate in Research

Information to Consider About this Research

I agree to participate in this research project, which is to investigate the processes taken to help the reading needs of African American male students in reading as perceived by those teachers serving as guided reading instructors. African American students began school in early grades, Kindergarten, and 1st grade, behind their white counterparts and the gap continues throughout High School (Convey, 2010; Paige & Witty, 2010). The purpose of this study is to examine instructional strategies and measures that educators can take to close the achievement gap, specifically in reading for African American male students.

The results of this study will be used to develop topics of discussion and exploration for school districts to consider regarding book selections, particularly multicultural book selections in the guided reading groups. The primary goal of the research is to develop processes and strategies during reading instruction that will close the achievement gap for African American Male students.

Twelve kindergarten through third grade teachers will be invited to participate in the qualitative case study within the school district. The first phase of the research will be a survey that will be given on Multicultural Literature in the classroom. After the guided reading survey, there will be group another survey given to the participants using Google Forms. This survey will be a 6-point Likert scale survey on Guided reading instruction.

Next, participants will be asked to take part in a 60-minute focus group discussion. The focus group discussion will be centered on the three research questions for this study:

- **RQ1- How do teachers implement guided reading in their classrooms?**
- **RQ2- How do teachers implement the use Multicultural Literature in their classroom?**
- **RQ3- How do teachers perceive the impact of Multicultural Literature on the reading comprehension of African American male students when used in guided reading?**

The focus group will be divided into two sections. The platform that will be used for the focus group will be Zoom. The focus group sessions will be audio recorded, written notes will be taken, and a transcription of the recordings will be created. All participants will receive a copy of the final transcription.

I understand that my personal identity will not be used when this study is published. My data will be anonymous which means that my name will not be collected or linked to the data. The information that I give in the study will be handled confidentially. My name will not be collected or linked to the data. I do understand that this study will be shared with administration, superintendents, surrounding school districts, and institutions of higher education. I understand that there are no anticipated risks in this study.

I understand that there are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. There is no payment for participants in this study. However, the study may help us to understand how to close the achievement gap in reading for African American male students.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty.

- If you would like to withdraw from the study, you can tell the researcher and leave the room or tell the facilitator of the focus group to stop the discussion. There is no penalty for withdrawing.
- If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact me at XXXXX.

If you have questions about the study, contact:
Researcher's name: Cassandra Sloan Gregory
Student Role: EdD Candidate
School/Department: Gardner-Webb University
Researcher telephone number: XXXXX
Researcher email address: XXXXX

Faculty Advisor name: Stephen Laws
Faculty Research Advisor: Stephen Laws
School/Department: Gardner-Webb University
Faculty Advisor telephone number: XXXXX
Faculty Advisor email address: slaws@gardner-webb.edu

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact:

Dr. Sydney Brown
IRB Institutional Administrator
Gardner-Webb University
Telephone: 704-406-3019
Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

<u>Voluntary consent by Participant:</u>
I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me.

_____ I agree to participate in the focus group.
_____ I do not agree to participate in the focus group.
_____ I agree to participate in the study.
_____ I do not agree to participate in the study.

_____ Date: _____

Participant printed name

_____ Date: _____

Participant signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

By proceeding with the activities described above, I acknowledge that I have read and understand the research procedures outlined in this consent form, and voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

Authorization

I hereby release, discharge and agree to save harmless Gardner-Webb University, its successors, assigns, officers, employees or agents, any person(s) or corporation(s) for whom it might be acting, and any form publishing and/or distributing any audio video produced as part of this research, in whole or in part, as a finished product, from and against any liability as a result of any distortion, blurring, alteration, visual or auditory illusion, or use in composite form, either intentionally or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the recording, processing, reproduction, publication or distribution of any audiotape, or discussion, even should the same subject me to ridicule, scandal, reproach, scorn or indignity. I hereby agree that the photographs and video footage may be used under the conditions stated herein without blurring my identifying characteristics.

_____ _____

Participant's Name (Print)　　　　　**Participant's signature**

Appendix B

Teacher Perspectives on the Use of Multicultural Literature in Their Classrooms

1. What is you gender? Female__   Male__   Other____
2. What is your ethnicity? Black ____   Caucasian ____   Asian ____ Native American _____ Hispanic _____ other (please specify) _____
3. Your education levels? Bachelor's _____Master's _____ Doctorate _____ Other _____
4. My school is an urban _____ suburban _____ rural ____ Other _____
5. Years of teaching experience: _____
6. How many of your students are: African American _____   Caucasian ____ Hispanic _____ Other _____
7. How many in your class: Males: _____   Female _____
8. How do you define multicultural literature?
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
9.   I use Multicultural Literature in my classroom: Never: ___ Sometimes ____ Most of the Time _____ Always _____
10. I believe my District mandates that all schools use Multicultural Literature in the classroom: Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Strongly Disagree _____ disagree _____
11. I believe my Principal supports teachers who use Multicultural Literature: Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Strongly Disagree _____ disagree _____
12. How do you select and locate Multicultural Literature books for students in the classroom:_____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
13. How many Multicultural Books do you have in the classroom? Less than 10 _____ 11- 15 _____ 16-20 _____21- 25 _____ 26-30 _____ 30-35 ____ other _

Below is a list of multicultural literature for elementary school students. Please checkmark those titles you may have in your classroom as a read aloud, library selection, or favorites. Indicate the use by using the following: (S for student, T for teacher and X for both).

Multicultural Literature for Elementary

Title/Author	Read Aloud	Selection	Favorite	Other
Mrs. Katz and Tush-Patricia Polacco				
Nappy Hair-Carolina Herron				
The Rainbow People- Laurence Yep				
A Single Shard- Linda Sue Park				
The Tree is Older Than You are: A Bilingual Gathering of Poems &Stories from Mexico- Naomi Shihab Nye				
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry-Mildred D. Talyor				
Molly's Pilgrim-Barbara Cohen				
The Giver-Lois Lowry				
A Chair for My Mother- Vera B. Williams				
Meet Danitra Brown -Nikki Grimes				
Mirandy and Brother Wind-Patricia C. McKissack				
Father's Rubber Shoes-Yumi Heo				
Tar Beach-Faith Ringgold				
Hair/Pelitos-Sandra Cisneros				

Martin Luther King Jr. Day- Margaret McNamara				
The House You Pass on the Way- J. Woodson				
Anastasia, Absolutely- Lois Lowry				
Fox Song- Joseph Bruchac				
Remember That- Leaslea Newman				
Just Juice- Karen Hesse				
The Heart of a Chief-Joseph Bruchac\				
A Boys Own Story- Edmund White				
Friends from the Other Side/Amigos Del OtroLado- Gloria Anzaldua				
Night-Elie Wiesel				
Mama Eat Ant, Yuck- Barbara Edmonds				

Permission was granted to use this survey from Geraldine Mongillo, PhD. & Karen Holland.

Appendix C

Likert Rating Scale for Guided Reading Questionnaire

Using the following 6-point Likert Scale for the following statements, please
rank:

1- Strongly disagree

2- Disagree

3- Somewhat disagree

4- Somewhat agree

5- Agree

6- Strongly agree

- **The purpose of guided reading is to provide students with the skills and strategies needed to be able to read and comprehend. RQ1**

- **The purpose of guided reading instruction is to provide scaffolded instruction.RQ2**

- **The purpose of guided reading instruction is to help students out of their Zone of Proximal Development level (what students can accomplish when receiving assistance from their teacher). RQ1 & RQ3**

- **Providing an effective and thorough guided reading lesson plan will allow for effective learning.RQ1**

- **It is important for students to spend at least 30minutes in a guided reading session.RQ1**

- **The type of student text chosen for guided reading lessons will help to improve academic success. RQ1**

- **Leveled readers should be used in a guided reading lesson for all students.RQ1**

- **Multicultural books should be used in Guided reading lessons. RQ1 &RQ2**

- **Assessing reading comprehension is an important component in guided reading instruction RQ3**

- **There should only be 4-5 students in a guided reading group. RQ1**

- **It is important to group students homogenously based on reading levels for guided reading instruction. RQ1**

Appendix D

Guided Reading and Multicultural Literature Focus Group Protocol

- Welcome Participants and thank each of them for their participation in the study.

- Describe the Purpose of the Discussion
  The purpose of this study is to explore the following research questions from the perspective of a guided reading teacher.
  - *RQ1- How do teachers implement guided reading in their classrooms?*
  - *RQ2- How do teachers implement the use Multicultural Literature in their classroom?*
  - *RQ3- How do teachers perceive the impact of Multicultural Literature on the reading comprehension of African American male students when used in guided reading?*

- Establish Guidelines for the Discussion
  - We have 60 minutes allotted to this discussion,
  - We are recording this focus group to have an accurate transcription.
  - As facilitator, I will guide the discussion. Everyone will be asked to speak and comment on each question.
  - Remember that participation is strictly voluntary. If at any time during the conversation that you feel uncomfortable, you may leave the group.

Discussion/Interview Examinations-

1. **How do you use Multicultural Literature in your classroom? RQ 2**

2. **Name some Multicultural Literature that you have inside your classroom? RQ2**

3. **How is reading promoted for all students in your classroom? RQ2 & RQ 3**

4. **What reading strategies do you use to help students comprehend text? RQ 1 & RQ3**

5. **How does implementing guided reading groups help to increase student's comprehension skills. RQ 1 & RQ 3.**

6. **How does adding Multicultural Literature into your guided reading instruction help to increase a student's reading comprehension skills? RQ1, RQ2 & RQ3**
7. **What are the reading levels of your African American male students? RQ3.**

8. **How does Multicultural literature impact reading scores with formative assessment? RQ 1 , 2 & 3.**

9. **Describe your culturally responsive teaching approach? RQ2 & RQ3**

➤ Thank the group for their participation in today's session
➤ Remind them of the confidentiality of the day's conversation and discussion
➤ Please remind the participants not to share any information from the day's session and to keep to the upmost ethical standards.