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KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THEIR ABILITY TO TEACH FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY SKILLS IN THE ERA OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

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ABSTRACT

KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THEIR ABILITY TO TEACH FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY SKILLS IN THE ERA OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

Elizabeth A. Beck

Literacy is an essential human right that serves as the basis for advancing one's education. Literacy education focuses on two key areas: foundational reading and reading comprehension skills. The five foundational literacy skills are phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension. Providing students with direct literacy instruction and opportunities to utilize learned skills in meaningful ways helps to establish a strong foundation necessary for lifelong success. One potential barrier to delivering strong literacy education may be the premature implementation of standardized assessments. Standardized assessments have been implemented in the classroom for hundreds of years; however, the idea of utilizing standardized assessments in the early childhood classroom is still widely debated. Standardized assessment scores are commonly used by schools to gauge teacher performance. Thus, it has been suggested that this influences the amount of time spent on "teaching to the test". Heavy emphasis on standardized test preparation consumes time that may be better spent on developmentally appropriate literacy instruction. The prospect of neglecting these instrumental skills as a result of the implementation of standardized assessments is concerning. A multi semi case study was performed on four current kindergarten teachers who are mandated to use FastBridge reading assessment in their classroom. This study examines two key research

topics: 1) How kindergarten teachers view their ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing students for the FastBridge Reading assessment and 2) how the kindergarten classroom environment influences a teacher's ability to deliver literacy instruction while preparing students to take the FastBridge Reading assessment. This study revealed that teaching experience and educational background may influence teacher confidence in delivering literacy instruction. Additionally, teachers with high expectations and good time management skills generally felt that curriculum and skills did not need to be pushed aside when preparing students for the FastBridge Reading assessment. Lastly, there may be a relationship between confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills and the teachers' pedagogy and classroom environment. It is envisioned that results from this study may inspire future research studies on how the delivery of foundational literacy skills is impacted by standardized assessments across additional grade levels.

Keywords: literacy, kindergarten, standardized assessment, teacher confidence.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my students, who I am blessed to learn from daily. For you, the trials and tribulations of balancing the full-time jobs of being a teacher, mom, and Ph.D. student are worth it. “There are no shortcuts to any place worth going.” ― *Beverly Sills.*

I would also like to dedicate my dissertation to my sweet daughter, Tatum Ann Beck. Tatum, you are my heart and soul. I hope you grow to learn that anything is possible with hard work and determination. “Keep your dreams alive. Understand to achieve anything requires faith and belief in yourself, vision, hard work, determination, and dedication. Remember all things are possible for those who believe”. ― *Gail Devers.*

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CHAPTER 1: Brand New Kindergarten

In 2009, a report entitled "Crisis in Kindergarten" warned that kindergarten in the United States had radically changed over the past two decades. The article noted that "developmentally appropriate learning practices centered on play, exploration, and social interactions had been replaced with highly prescriptive curricula, test preparation, and an explicit focus on academic skill building" (Bassok et al., 2016, p. 1). Achieving literacy success among young readers continues to be a challenge in the United States (The Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). To develop strong literacy skills, students need instruction in two related sets of skills: foundational reading skills and reading comprehension skills from an early age (The Institute of Education Sciences, 2016). This teaching practice is crucial to the development of young students and, when added to the five foundational literacy skills—phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension—students are given the opportunity to become independent readers and, ultimately, educators attempt to set students up for lifelong literacy success (Westberg et al., 2008, p. 118).

Statement of the Problem

FastBridge Assessment in the Kindergarten Classroom

In the 2018–2019 school year, it was mandated that one Southeastern school district begin to utilize an assessment for kindergarten and first grade students across the district to measure math and reading scores. The school district adopted the FastBridge earlyReading assessment in the 2018–2019 school year after selecting it from a number of other assessments. Prior to the FastBridge earlyReading assessment being used,

kindergarten students were assessed utilizing DRA text levels. The district implemented the FastBridge earlyReading assessment because it was a more cohesive and all-encompassing assessment. The scores prior to the FastBridge earlyReading assessment were not statistically different; however, the district decided to mandate the FastBridge earlyReading assessment to streamline the assessment experience for kindergarten teachers.

The FastBridge Assessment Impact in Kindergarten

The FastBridge earlyReading assessment was an effort made by the district to find a more developmentally appropriate method to implement standardized testing in early childhood education. The FastBridge earlyReading served as a growth measurement for the students. The data obtained from FastBridge earlyReading allowed for district to identify student strengths and weaknesses. The FastBridge earlyReading is one of the district's readiness assessments for kindergarten and first grade students. Additionally, the FastBridge earlyReading assessment meets the state mandated requirements for the primary grades' universal dyslexia screening. The FastBridge earlyReading assessment provides information to teachers on the following areas: foundational skills, such as concepts of print, onset sounds, letter names, letter sounds, rhyming etc. Standardized tests, such as the Fastbridge earlyReading assessment, and highly prescriptive curricula, are not well grounded in research and disregard long standing principles of child development and good teaching practices (Miller & Almon, 2009, p. 11). High-stakes testing has become widespread in the primary classroom, specifically in the kindergarten classroom, where these tests are often used for promotion, retention, and placement in both gifted and special education programs (p. 11). According to Miller and Almon

(2009), many argue that standardized tests take less time and, in turn, are a more efficient method of a performance assessment in comparison to observational and curriculum-embedded assessment. However, new studies determine that teachers are now spending on average 20 to 30 minutes each day preparing kindergarten children to take standardized tests (p. 11). As a result, kindergarteners are now faced with developmentally inappropriate expectations that were recently reserved for first grade (p. 11). At the same time, these students are being denied the benefits of play, which give students an outlet and an opportunity for socialization and creativity (p. 11). Subsequently, the heightened expectations mandated on kindergarteners in tandem with students being denied the benefits of play contribute to an increase in anger and aggression in young children, which increases reports of severe behavior problems being reported nationwide (p. 11). Ultimately, a healthy kindergarten learning environment would have an equal balance of a classroom rich in child-initiated play intertwined with a playful classroom with focused learning, rather than teacher-led instruction, including scripted teaching with little or no play (p. 12).

The Audience

This study will be used to inform kindergarten teachers who use FastBridge earlyReading or other mandated standardized assessments about other kindergarten teachers' views towards their ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing students to take a standardized assessment.

Significance of the Study

Impact for Students

As a result of the Common Core State Standards, No Child Left Behind Act, and other nationwide initiatives, the requirements of kindergarten students and teachers have increased exponentially in recent years. The difficulty of the requirements has trickled down throughout the education system and now has an active role in kindergarten classrooms all over the United States. “The current accountability context of public education has resulted in increased academic standards and assessment mandates within K–12 classrooms” (Pyle & Deluca, 2013, p. 3). The rigor and intensity of educational requirements in kindergarten classrooms are deemed, to some, developmentally inappropriate and may have a negative impact on young learners. According to Bassok et al. (2016), there were signs that “warned that kindergarten in the United States had radically changed over the past two decades and that 'developmentally appropriate learning practices’ centered on play, exploration, and social interactions had been replaced with highly prescriptive curricula, test preparation and explicit focus on academic skill building” (Bassok et al., 2016, p. 1). The days of young students learning from conversations and play have changed.

According to Pyle and Deluca (2013), “the majority of research in this area has centered on the tension between the constructed dichotomy of developmentally appropriate practices and the obligation to teach prescribed academically motivated standards” (p. 4). Parents, educators, researchers, and policymakers debate both the benefits and risks of focusing early childhood learning experiences on advanced academic content (Bassok et al., 2016, p. 1). According to Bassok et al., critics of academically focused kindergarten cautioned that focusing heavily on academic content is not developmentally appropriate, while, on the other hand, Bassok et al., suggested that

some will argue that exposing kindergarteners to academic content, in particular advanced content, can be beneficial for student learning and success (2016, p. 1). Additionally, Pyle and Deluca (2017) proposed that much research as of late has focused on the accountability movement that deals with integration of large-scale assessment mandates and on the measurement of learning that occurs in the upper grades (p. 457). Studies such as Pyle and Deluca's focus on how students in upper grades have been researched in depth over the last several years, but there is little research focusing on how younger students are impacted.

Because of this research deficit, districts are adopting a one size fits all approach and requiring all grades to focus on accountability. According to Miller and Almon (2009), this research gap for kindergarten students could prove to be problematic. If we are going to best serve kindergarten students and foster the full professional development of early childhood educators, we need to reject an ideological approach to teaching early childhood students and reevaluate kindergarten policies and practices (p. 13). Additional concerns show that a heavy focus on academic content in the early childhood classroom, specifically kindergarten, might overshadow other learning experiences that help students develop "social and regulation skills or help to foster physical and mental health, each of which is a predictor of children's longer-term outcomes" (p. 1).

A holistic approach to child development may augment the benefits of both academic and social learning. Additionally, some research "warns of the potential negative effectives of standards that narrow learning to particular academic areas and contain expectations that are developmentally inappropriate" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009; Pyle & Deluca, 2015, p. 457). In response to

those warnings, researchers have advocated for play-based classrooms. Play-based classrooms are typically viewed as a child centered and developmentally appropriate pedagogical approach (Pyle & Deluca, 2015, p. 457). When students are encouraged to play, it allows for the student to guide their individual learning and learn at a pace that aligns with their development (p. 457).

Unfortunately, many children in schools today are given less free time and fewer means to play and participate in child-selected activities during the school day because of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Ginsburg, 2007). Bassok et al. compared certain aspects of kindergarten classrooms, including classroom setup, pedagogical approach, child-selected activities, and didactic instructional activities over a 10-year period from 1998 to 2010 (2016, p. 4). The findings of their study indicated that teachers in 2010 were far less likely to incorporate various activity centers, including art, dramatic play, science, or sensory tables (p. 14). The trends from this study demonstrated a heightened increase in literacy and math instruction, which most likely monopolized both the teachers' and students' time and ultimately took away from instruction in other subjects (p. 14). The study also suggests that there was a surge of standardized tests used in early elementary classrooms over the 10-year span (p. 14). For example, in 2010, 30% of public school kindergarten teachers reported using standardized tests in their classroom at least once a month (p. 14). According to this statistic, the use of standardized testing is 2.6 times more often than the rate reported by first grade teachers in 1999 (p. 14).

Bassok et al. (2016) suggested that public school kindergarten classrooms in 2010 were strikingly similar in structure and focus to first grade classrooms of the late 1990s (p. 14). The overall expectations of kindergarten students have changed dramatically over

recent years, specifically after the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. These requirements have increased the implementation of standardized assessments, decreased play-based learning environments and heightened expectations of kindergarten students nationwide (Bassok et al., 2016, p. 2). As a result, pediatricians, researchers, and educators all believe that this could fundamentally change the way a child grows and develops both academically and socially (Ginsburg, 2007). B. Brown (2019) suggested that although there are negative impacts that standardized testing has on students and teachers, one of the most apparent negative effects is an increase in student anxiety (p. 4). A study by Segool et al. (2013) demonstrated how students' anxiety increases from classroom testing to standardized testing (B. Brown, 2019, p. 4). Some test anxiety can be normal, but when young students experience high anxiety due to the pressures of standardized testing, this is unhealthy for our young learners (B. Brown, 2019, p. 4; Wood et al., 2016).

Impact for Teachers

Studies demonstrate students are not the only ones impacted by standardized testing. According to Ryan et al. (2017), in the United States, standardized assessments "have been linked with a rise in reported teacher stress, student test anxiety, and school climate" (p. 2; Denscombe, 2000; Putwain, 2008; Putwain & Symes, 2011). Some states have adopted individual test-based accountability procedures that either punish or reward teachers based on their ability to raise student test scores (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 2). Although this system varies from state to state, in some instances teachers' bonus pay, tenure, and professional evaluation scores are all impacted by student test scores.

Morgan (2016) suggested that teachers feel pressured to improve test scores and since low-income students typically underperform on standardized tests, schools serving

poverty-stricken students are more inclined to "implement a style of teaching based on drilling and memorization that leads to little learning" (p. 67). Additionally, in many schools, students do not reap the benefits of a school's faculty because oftentimes teachers are fearful of sharing knowledge that could potentially raise test scores of students taught by rival teachers (p. 67). In turn, this elicits fear in teachers because it could negatively impact their ability to receive recognition or bonuses (p. 67). Mulvenon et al. (2005) argued that the interference of standardized assessments in the classroom strips teachers of their creativity, takes up a large amount of instructional time, and causes anxiety among teachers (Morgan, 2016, p. 67).

Burnout, absenteeism, stress, and attrition are all a result of teacher stress (Menken, 2006; Ryan et al., 2017; von der Embse et al., 2015; Yoon, 2002). Von der Embse et al. (2015) showed that the use of test-based accountability in performance evaluations, merit pay, and tenure decisions causes an increase in test-related stress in the classroom, an increase in stress related to the curriculum, and an increase in teacher stress in general and specifically to testing. Teacher attrition is a common challenge that faces the teaching profession in the United States (Ryan et al., 2017). Some studies have even suggested that as many as 40% to 50% of new teachers leave the field in their first 5 years of teaching (Darling & Hammond, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; Ryan et al., 2017). Ryan et al., (2017) conducted a study that ultimately identified test-based accountability policy as a predictor of teacher attrition. The findings of the study presented an important link between high-stakes testing, accountability policies, and teacher attrition rate. The study's findings also demonstrated that test-based accountability resulted in significant stress, attrition, and burnout. This study will evaluate four kindergarten teachers' views

toward standardized testing and their ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing students for the FastBridge standardized assessment.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore teachers' views about their ability to teach foundational literacy skills in the age of standardized testing. The research questions in this study investigate: 1) how kindergarten teachers view their ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment and 2) how the kindergarten classroom environment influences a teacher's ability to deliver literacy instruction while preparing their students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment.

Key Terminology

foundational literacy skills: the skills students need for literacy achievement and success including phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, phonics, spelling, and fluency (Horton, 2017).

phonemic awareness: a student's ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words. Also, it is the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds (Yopp, 1992).

self-efficacy: an individual's belief in their ability to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977).

standardized testing: any examination that is administered and scored in a predetermined, standard manner. There are typically two kinds of standardized tests: aptitude tests and achievement tests (Popham, 1999, p. 8).

teacher-made assessments: assessments created by teachers to show growth and understanding (Guskey, 2003).

teacher self-efficacy: "A teacher's 'judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning'" (Eberle, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 783).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens that is utilized throughout this study is Bandura's self-efficacy theory. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy relates to an individual's belief in their ability to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Bandura believed that views regarding one's ability are specific to oneself for instance, what the educator deems important, the educator's career goals, and outcome expectations (1977, 1982). According to self-efficacy theory, when individuals do not feel confident about a prospective activity or skill, that specific activity tends to be avoided; however, when a person believes the outcome is attainable, they are more likely to undertake and perform the task more confidently. Similarly, studies on self-efficacy have determined that, when confronted with difficult scenarios, people with a strong sense of self-efficacy exert a greater amount of effort to overcome those challenges as compared to those who doubt their own abilities (Bandura, 1981; Brown, 1978; Fitzgerald, 1991, p. 553).

Woolfolk (1998) noted that teachers who have high self-efficacy will work harder and persist longer when teaching more difficult students than teachers with low self-efficacy (Corkett et al., 2011). This is a result of the teachers' belief in their own teaching abilities and ultimately, their belief in their students' abilities as well (Corkett et al.,

2011; Woolfolk, 1998). Teachers with low self-efficacy are harder on students who make errors; tend to spend less time with students who struggle, and have a higher chance of referring a challenging student for special education services than teachers with high self-efficacy (Corkett et al., 2011; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Soodak & Podell, 1996). Corkett et al. (2011) noted that teachers with high self-efficacy have a positive influence on student achievement because "they are more likely to learn and implement new teaching approaches and strategies, use positive management strategies, provide assistance to low achieving students, increase student academic self-efficacy, set attainable goals for their students and persist when faced with student failure" (p. 72; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Reading and writing instruction are impacted by teacher self-efficacy because teachers with high self-efficacy take ownership of the responsibility for teaching all students, and teachers with low self-efficacy tend to place blame on students when problems arise (Corkett et al., 2011).

In this context, it is important to analyze how educators' views regarding their ability to teach foundational literacy skills in the age of standardized testing, specifically FastBridge earlyReading, is impacted. Factors such as teaching experience, perception of effective teaching, attitudes toward standardized assessment, and roles of the teacher and student all come into play when using self-efficacy theory as a driving force in this study.

Performance Accomplishments

Bandura identified four major sources of information that impact self-efficacy (Fitzgerald, 1991, p. 533). The four major sources are performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological feedback (p. 533). Performance accomplishments have been shown to be the most influential and powerful

source of efficacy expectations (p. 533). The performance accomplishment aspect of self-efficacy theory is centered around the idea that repeated failures when performing a certain behavior will reduce perceived self-efficacy, while success when performing a certain behavior will increase perceived self-efficacy (p. 533). Bandura (1977) suggested that positive and negative experiences will influence the ability of an individual to perform a specific task. If the person has successfully executed a task previously, they are more inclined to feel competent and perform well at a similarly associated task than someone who was unsuccessful. In short, people who continue to fail in a certain area will have negative self-efficacy, while people who thrive in a specific activity will have positive self-efficacy. When teachers feel that their students have been successful in an area such as writing, they may have positive self-efficacy and ultimately feel more determined to teach that specific skill, whereas if a teacher does not feel as competent in math and has negative self-efficacy in that area, they may not teach that subject area as well or as often.

Vicarious Experiences

The second source of self-efficacy is through vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura, people may develop high or low self-efficacy vicariously through other people's performances. A person may see another's performance and then compare their own ability with the individual's ability (Bandura, 1977). When people observe the success of others, it may enhance one's own expectations of mastery and ultimately they may feel more inclined to perform the activity (Fitzgerald, 1991, p. 533).

Verbal Persuasion

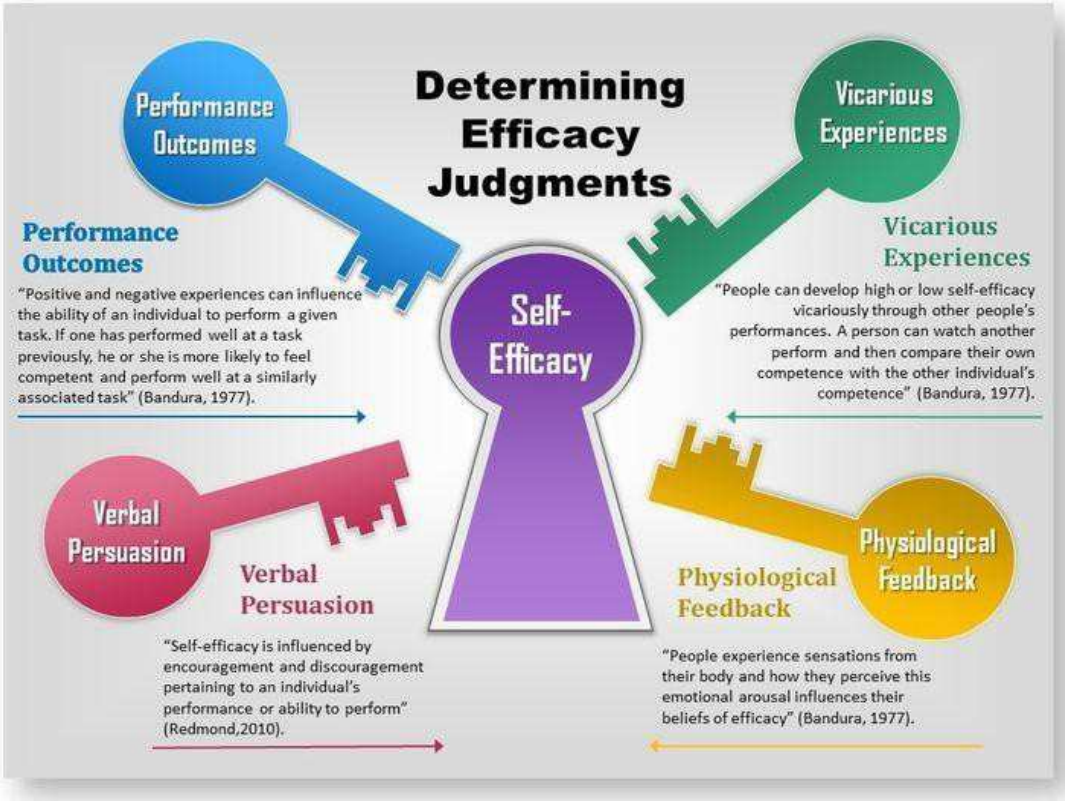
Verbal persuasion, as described by Redmond (2010), is when self-efficacy is influenced by encouragement and discouragement regarding an individual's performanceor ability to perform. This could also be viewed as positive and negative reinforcement. When educators hear they are performing well in an area, such as student's scores on a sight word assessment, they will have higher self-efficacy than if they were told they were unsuccessful in an area.

Physiological Feedback

According to Bandura (1977), people experience feelings and emotions and how they view this arousal impacts their beliefs of efficacy. People use physiological arousal or physical feedback to judge their abilities and experiencing anxiety, fatigue, or pain may be viewed as signs of physical inefficacy (Fitzgerald, 1991, p. 533). If teachers feel anxious about teaching a specific skill, such as long division, that may be perceived as a sign of inefficacy in that area.

Figure 1

Key Factors Influencing Efficacy Judgements



Note. Taken from The Pennsylvania State University

Additional Studies Using Self-efficacy

Teacher efficacy is defined as a "teacher's belief that she/he can influence desired student outcomes even when teaching the most difficult students" (Coladarci & Breton, 1997; Corkett et al., 2011; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Soodak & Podell, 1996; Wheatley, 2005). Some of the first measures of teacher self-efficacy took place during RAND studies in the 1970s and were founded on the work of Rotter (Armor, 1976; Corry & Stella, 2018, p. 158; Rotter, 1966; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Corry and Stella (2018) described RAND as a research organization that studies public policy and outcomes all over the

world (p. 158). For the RAND research, Rotter hypothesized a direct relationship between efficacious behavior and outcomes (1966, p. 158). The goal of this RAND research was to determine the input factors that resulted in student reading success (p. 158). One of the leading factors that emerged was teacher self-efficacy (p. 158). Ultimately, the better and more confident teachers felt about their ability to teach reading, the higher students' reading scores were.

Bray-Clark and Bates (2003) focused on the idea that self-efficacy can be an important predictor of teacher success during in-service training, a valuable factor to be considered during training, and a desirable result of in-service training (p. 14). The study suggested that the development of self-efficacy should become a central focus during in-service training plans and methods as well as a measured outcome of in-service training (p. 20). Bray-Clark and Bates' study found that when self-efficacy is involved in in-service training, the "whys and hows" of teacher development can begin to be understood. It also can be utilized to "foster positive efficacy beliefs, improve teacher competence, and enhance student outcomes" (p. 20).

Corkett et al. (2011) examined how sixth grade teachers reported self-efficacy for teaching, their perception of students' self-efficacy for reading and writing, and their students' reported self-efficacy for reading and writing related to students' abilities as measured by the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement-III. The lack of research between student self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy led Corkett et al. to conduct this study. The study focused on three constructs that helped to provide information about whether high teacher self-efficacy and high student self-efficacy impacts high student ability. Corkett et al. looked at several factors to determine whether high teacher self-

efficacy and high student self-efficacy coincides with high student ability. They listed several tests: "whether teacher perceptions of their students' self-efficacy and the students' self-efficacy accurately reflect students' actual reading and writing abilities; whether teachers' perceptions of students' self-efficacy are the same as the students' reported self-efficacy; how teacher self-efficacy for teaching correlates with their perceptions of their students' self-efficacy, the students' reported self-efficacy, and student reading and writing abilities" (Corkett et al., 2011, p. 74). Corkett et al.'s (2011) study suggested that teachers' perceptions of students' self-efficacy for reading and writing had a significant correlation to students' actual abilities; however, students' self-efficacy towards reading and writing did not have a correlation with their actual reading and writing ability (p. 95). Additionally, teachers' belief in students' reading and writing ability correlated with students' belief in their abilities, which demonstrated that there was no significant correlation between the two. Lastly, teachers' self-efficacy towards teaching reading and writing did not demonstrate a significant correlation with students' self-efficacy or the students' reading and writing abilities.

Eberle's (2011) quantitative study focused on whether a relationship exists between teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and their students' overall achievement on the North Carolina Reading and Math End-of-Grade tests (p. 13). Eberle concluded that many of the comparisons done throughout the study did not reveal a significant relationship between perceived teacher self-efficacy and North Carolina End-of-Grade reading and math test scores (2011, p. 91). Eberle did note that there was a relationship between perceived self-efficacy between genders, namely that female participants had higher perceived self-efficacy than male participants. Additionally, Eberle also concluded

that male teacher participants had higher North Carolina End-of-Grade reading test scores than e female teacher participants. Eberle also concluded that each of the participants, regardless of their perceived self-efficacy, had reading and math test results that were significantly higher than the stage average. Ultimately, Eberle indicated that by increasing teachers' perceived self-efficacy, there is potential to improve the overall work environment which, in turn, could lead to an increase in student achievement.

Critics of the Theory

Biglan (1987) argued that self-efficacy theory implies that efficacy expectations determine approach behavior and physiological arousal (p. 1). Biglan asserted that "such response-response relationships do not unequivocally establish that one response causes another" (p. 1). Biglan also argued that a behavior-analytic alternative to self-efficacy theory explains the relationships that appear throughout the self-efficacy theory more in terms of environmental factors. Ultimately, environmental factors could account for some of the relationships that occur during a traditional self-efficacy experience that could be manipulated to see more effective treatment procedures.

Lee (1989) described Bandura's self-efficacy's ability to explain human behavior as "largely illusory" (p. 115). Lee further argued that behavior arises from more complex interactions between unobservable variables which are ultimately difficult to define and assess. The biggest weakness that Lee addressed is the fact that unambiguous predictions cannot be made so it is impossible to test the model in a scientific manner, which, in turn, compromises the practicality of the theory according to Lee.

Application of Research Study

This study used Bandura's self-efficacy theory to address the following research topics: 1) How kindergarten teachers view their ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment and 2) how the kindergarten classroom environment influences a teacher's ability to deliver literacy instruction while preparing their students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. By utilizing self-efficacy theory, this study investigated teachers' views on their ability or self-efficacy to teach foundational literacy skills in the age of standardized testing, specifically the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. This theory helped me understand how teachers view their ability to teach foundational literacy skills to their students and the components that contribute to each teacher's self-efficacy.

Specifically, Bandura's self-efficacy theory discussed four components including performance outcomes, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological feedback. These components provided a clear understanding of how teachers may view their ability to teach foundational literacy skills, whether they have a high or low self-efficacy and the potential contributing factors behind their views.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the related literature and studies that have been conducted over the years on widely researched topics, that is, foundational literacy skills, standardized testing, play-based learning, and teacher views. The literature and studies that are addressed in this chapter delve into the ideology of foundational literacy skills, the history of standardized testing, play-based learning, and the views of educators and how these issues are addressed in the early childhood classroom. Because of the gap in literature on teachers' views on their ability to effectively implement foundational literacy skills in the classroom while preparing their students for standardized assessments, this review incorporates teachers' views on their ability to teach in general.

Organization of the Literature

This literature review attempts to provide an understanding of kindergarten teachers' views on their ability to teach foundational literacy skills in the age of standardized assessments, specifically the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. It begins with a description of foundational literacy skills and the significance of the incorporation of these skills in the early childhood classroom, specifically kindergarten. Next, the review provides an overview of the history of standardized testing. To shed light on how the kindergarten classroom has changed, a section of this literature review is dedicated to play-based learning. The review also explains the concept of teacher perception regarding their views on their ability to teach foundational literacy skills in the kindergarten classroom.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that was used to guide this study is self-concept. Self-concept, as defined by Wehrle and Fasbender, is "the totality of a complex, organized, and yet dynamic system of learned attitudes, beliefs, and evaluative judgments that people hold about themselves" (2018, p. 1). Self-concept can be shaped by a person's views of oneself, experiences, and contexts over time (p. 1). Self-concepts develop as a result of people's unique life experiences yet are also formed "by existent social expectation and power structures in the environment, mediating the link between social contexts and individual behavior" (p. 2; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Using self-concept as a conceptual framework allows for insight into how teachers view their ability to teach foundational literacy skills in the age of standardized assessment, specifically the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. Self-concept as a conceptual theory will also allow for teachers' individual circumstances to be considered, such as educational background, years teaching, feelings towards standardized assessments, and the role of teacher and student.

Foundational Literacy Skills

Literacy is an assortment of reading and writing tasks, skills, and strategies. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), defines literacy as "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts" (Montoya, 2018, Slide 2). Literacy, a foundational skill, enhances survival in the 21st century.

The act of learning to read is a "developmental process" (C.S. Brown, p. 35). Children follow a sequential path of learning foundational literacy skills and reading

behaviors as they begin to learn to read (C.S. Brown, p. 35). “During the earliest grades, students build the foundation for reading and establish learning trajectories that are remarkably stable throughout schooling” (Wanzek et al., 2014, p. 56). Bryan et al. (2013) suggested that it is alarming how schools fail to educate students in basic literacy skills given the resources that are made available to teachers and staff. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), “roughly one third of students in the United States read at or above the proficient level, one third of students read at the basic level, and one third read at the below basic level” (Allington, 2011, p. 40). In essence, this means that approximately two out of every three students in U.S. schools read well below the level that is needed to adequately complete assigned grade-level work (Allington, 2011, p. 40). Reading difficulties continue into adulthood as “approximately 23% of U.S adults meet only basic reading proficiency levels” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004; Ortlieb, 2013, p. 148). These are significant problems that face our nation that all begin in the kindergarten classroom.

The National Reading Panel (2000) identified five essential predictors for reading success. These skills include phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. These skills typically guide a child’s literacy achievement ability for the earlier part of a child’s schooling experience, such as the end of kindergarten or the beginning of first grade (National Early Literacy Panel & National Center for Family Literacy, 2008). Foundational literacy skills are gradually learned throughout the first years of life through observations, listening, and play. The Common Core Reading Standards for Foundational Skills for primary grades have also identified a

set of skills that children need to master before they are able to become successful, fluent readers who comprehend while reading (C.S. Brown, p. 36).

Generally, foundational literacy skills include: print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, and fluency. These skills are taught in the early years of the educational experience, specifically kindergarten. They are critical skills that teachers need to spend repetitive time on during these crucial years. Kindergarten teachers are responsible for teaching students the beginning stages of literacy during these fundamental instructional years in a developmental sequence to support critical reading development skills (C.S. Brown, p. 36).

From 2017 to 2020, The International Literacy Association (2020) found early literacy to be either the first or second hot topic for 4 years in a row. Its "What's Hot in Literacy" report found that "building early literacy skills through a balanced approach that combines both foundational and language comprehension instruction" to be the most critical topic, with 51% of respondents ranking this topic number one (International Literacy Association , 2020). It is evident that the topic of early literacy skills is important and needs to be addressed. It is necessary to explore when early literacy skills are being taught, how often, and if there are any roadblocks that prevent teachers from integrating foundational literacy skills into the classroom.

History of Standardized Testing

According to the National Education Association (NEA), standardized testing in some form or another began as early as 1838. The idea of students taking standardized tests in the United States is over 150 years old (Fletcher, 2009). Since the 1800s, standardized tests have been utilized to assess student learning and to hold schools

accountable for the scores, as well as provide educational opportunities to students (Fletcher, 2009). The last 70+ years of standardized testing has had a cumulative effect on the educational system. The history of standardized testing has followed many of the ideologies and concepts that were put forth at the beginning of the age of standardized testing from the 19th century. This has created a process that is maladaptive to our current century and education system. While standardized testing occurs at all levels in the educational process, one of the most widely recognizable standardized tests is the SAT. (Fletcher, 2009). The Scholastic Aptitude Test, better known as the SAT, was administered for the first time in 1926 (Fletcher, 2009). The SAT would "become the basis for rather general judgments about individuals' ability and achievement" (Fletcher, 2009, p. 126). The SAT is usually taken in the spring of a student's junior year of high school and sometimes taken again in the fall of their senior year of high school, although students are allowed to take the SAT as many times as they would like. These tests, while typically taken only a handful of times, are instrumental in increasing a high schooler's chances of getting into a university. The SATs, like all standardized tests, are not an all-encompassing measure of a student's strengths, abilities, and successes. SATs limit the information on a student's abilities based on only a few hours of testing, 1 or 2 days in a student's life. Like most standardized tests, SATs do not factor in if the student ate that morning, slept well the night before, has anxiety and apprehension while test taking, and so on.

The Launch of Sputnik

The history of standardized assessments has been influenced by significant historical events. One of the most well-known historical consequences that led to

educational reform was in 1957 when the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik. This event stunned many countries and was especially embarrassing and threatening to the United States. This immediately prompted the United States to reevaluate its educational system. The deficits of the schools were self-evident and the process whereby students were taught had to be altered. The following year, in 1958, *Life* magazine created a series of articles entitled "Crisis in Education" that criticized the education system and blamed the school systems in the United States for falling behind rival countries. Some of the claims *Life* magazine made included that "there is no general agreement on what the schools should teach" and "the standards of education are shockingly low" (Wilson, 1958). The launch of Sputnik sparked ample discussions regarding the inferiority of the United States education system and what needed to be accomplished to surpass other countries.

National Defense Education Act

The launch of Sputnik created an apparent and urgent need in education reform. President Dwight Eisenhower and his administration put forth the National Defense Education Act, or NDEA, which provided a substantial amount of federal funding for programs to enhance instruction in mathematics, sciences, and foreign languages (Owens, 2004). Overall, the success of Sputnik and the fear of falling behind launched an awakening of the American people to the racial inequality that was present throughout the public school system (Fletcher, 2009). The enrollment of students in public elementary and secondary schools expanded from 25 million in 1949 to 46 million in 1969 (Fletcher, 2009). During this time, the use of standardized assessments became the

gold standard as they appeared to represent the United States flourishing in the field of education (Fletcher, 2009).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The history of standardized testing continued into the 1960s when President Lyndon B. Johnson was in office. President Johnson's War on Poverty introduced the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). According to Fletcher (2009), the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act "opened the way for new and increased uses of norm-referenced tests to evaluate programs" (p. 131). The Elementary and Secondary Act is ultimately the predecessor of the No Child Left Behind Act. ESEA was initially passed "at a time of great optimism about the ability of government to improve the lives of the poor" (Gamson et al., 2015, p. 3). At this time, in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson stated that passing this bill would "bridge the gap between helplessness and hope for more than 5 million educationally deprived children" (Johnson, 1965). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was financially centered around the Title I component. The legislative goal was to balance the educational system and strongly support the disadvantaged and underperforming students (Gamson et al., 2015). The initial motives in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act were to ultimately bridge the gap; however, 3 years later, President Johnson shared additional initiatives that were also inclusive of ESEA (Gamson et al., 2015; Johnson, 1965). These initiatives included "dropout prevention, funding for children with disabilities, bilingual education programs, the addition of 3,600 new school libraries and 2,200 new education projects outside of the classroom, and regional laboratories for basic educational research" (Gamson et al., 2015, p. 3).

The No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act was supported by President George W. Bush in 2002. The No Child Left Behind Act reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as it included Title I provisions that catered to disadvantaged students. The No Child Left Behind Act changed the government's role in grades kindergarten through grade 12 by requiring U.S. public schools to base their success and effectiveness using students' accomplishment of academic standards and performance on standardized tests (Hyon, 2003). NCLB consists of four basic principles, including stronger accountability for guaranteeing results, increased flexibility and giving more control to the local officials, additional options for parents, and strong encouragement of teaching methods that have been proven to work (Hyun, 2003).

The idea of accountability is at the forefront of the No Child Left Behind Act. The precedence of accountability relies on several factors. First, states are responsible for their own state standards in math, reading, and science. Second, once standards are created, states must test student progress on those standards by aligning assessments to the created standards. Next, every state, school district, and school are expected to make sufficient yearly progress towards meeting the state standards. Moreover, school and district performances will be publicly reported in both district and state report cards and individual school results will be on shared district report cards. And finally, if the district or school continues to make insufficient yearly progress, they will be held accountable (Hyun, 2003).

The No Child Left Behind Act increased expectations for teachers nationwide. Teachers were now expected to teach to standards for reading, math, and science.

Mandated statewide standardized tests that were aligned with the state standards were expected to be given to students on all grade levels. The performance of teachers, principals, schools, districts, and states were going to be publicly shared through a report card. If continued failure or inability to make appropriate yearly progress, specific districts or schools would be held accountable for their inability to make progress.

Good Start, Grow Smart

In addition to President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, Good Start, Grow Smart was announced in 2003 (Hyun, 2003). Good Start, Grow Smart was proposed as a school readiness plan as an Early Childhood Initiative (Hyun, 2003). At the time, Sarah Greene, president and CEO of the National Head Start Association, expressed disapproval of the President's proposal and felt it was unnecessary to spend money on an assessment for 4-year-olds (Hyun, 2003). Green (2003) stated: "shouldn't we be trying to provide more low income children with a program that government studies say is effective in getting them ready to learn?" (p. 14A). Green (2003) continued to discredit the proposal by suggesting that a standardized one-size-fits-all assessment method completely disregards the diverse and varying circumstances families across the United States face, especially those who are low income. Green (2003) described the idea of standardized tests being mandated to measure 4-year-olds' school readiness is "likely to create the first institutional block to disadvantaged diverse children and families who deserve to have truly supportive learning conditions" (p. 122). Although Green's words and actions seem well founded in research, her opinions fell onto deaf ears, and the proposal of Good Start, Grow Smart ultimately became the new early childhood standard.

Play-based Learning

For many, kindergarten is a child's first time in school; their first time away from their parents and family; their first time with other children their age, and their first time holding a pencil and scissors. Now, the new kindergarten requirements also include the first time they encounter a prescribed curriculum; the first time they are exposed to technology, and now, their first standardized test. Recent studies suggest that "accountability pressures have trickled down into the early elementary grades and that kindergarten today is characterized by a heightened focus on academic skills and a reduction in opportunities for play" (Bassok et al., 2016, p. 1). There are conflicting arguments that suggest exposure to academic content in preschool and kindergarten is beneficial for student learning (Bassok et al., 2016; Claessens et al., 2014; Clements & Sarama, 2011; Engel et al., 2015). It was argued that using more academically oriented early elementary classrooms, students who did not attend preschool have the ability to get caught up to their peers (Bassok et al., 2016, Magnuson et al., 2007). The contrary argument suggested that too early of a focus on literacy instruction and academic content has negative consequences (Bassok et al., 2016; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Huffman & Speer, 2000; Marcon, 1999; Stipek et al., 1995). It was believed that too strong a focus on academics is stressful for children and in turn, could negatively impact their motivation, self-confidence, and attitudes toward school (Bassok et al., 2016, Stipek, 2006).

Additionally, the Common Core State Standards, which provide specific teaching standards to students of all grade levels, including kindergarten, have resulted in a significant amount of debate about developmentally appropriate instruction incorporated into kindergarten classrooms (Bassok et al., 2016; Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). Throughout these debates, researchers note that engaging literacy and math activities

need not be the opposite of play and other developmentally appropriate instructional strategies (Bassok et al., 2014, 2016; Clements & Sarama, 2014; Pondiscio, 2015). Developmental scientists suggest that there are ways to meaningfully engage young children in literacy and math instruction (Bassok et al., 2016, Katz, 2015; Snow & Pizzolongo, 2014). The way to meaningfully engage young children "depends on the pedagogical approach, the quality of teaching, and the connection of the instruction to young children's curiosity" (Bassok et al., 2016, Katz, 2015; Snow & Pizzolongo, 2014). In the past two decades, "preschool and kindergarten classrooms have rapidly become more academically oriented and less focused on exploration, social skill development, and play" (Bassok et al., 2016, p. 2). Bassok et al. (2016) conducted a study that compared the kindergarten experience in 1998 with the kindergarten experience in 2010 using five elements, including teacher beliefs about school readiness, curricular focus and time use, classroom materials, pedagogical approach, and assessment practices (2016). Bassok et al.'s (2016) findings suggested that there were large discrepancies in kindergarten over a 12-year period. The findings point to a more challenging literacy and math instruction; however, there was also a concerning reduction in time spent in art, music, science and child-selected activities, as well as an increase in standardized testing.

According to Ginsburg (2007), play is essential to healthy brain development (p. 183). Play fosters the development of problem-solving and social skills. Depriving students of play and interactive learning could detrimentally impact a child's development. Ginsburg (2007) argued that play has been proven to "help children adjust to the school setting and even to enhance children's learning readiness, learning behaviors, and problem-solving skills" (p. 183). The requirements and expectations for

kindergarten students have changed drastically. The new requirements have induced "stress and anxiety and may even contribute to depression" (p. 183). Likewise, children receive a wrong message from these new goals and pressures. It is possible that students learn that it is important to meet goals and expectations no matter the cost (p. 183). Universities and institutes throughout the country have reported that more students may be cheating to achieve a desired end result (Ginsburg, 2007, p. 186). These are significant long-term impacts from a high pressure and expedited education and childhood.

Teachers' Views

Educators' views on their ability to teach are impacted by a number of contributing factors, such as teacher experiences, teachers' personalities, and education-based or research-based principles (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017, p. 78). According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017), teachers' beliefs are significant when thinking about teachers' thought processes, teaching methods, and learning to teach (p. 78; Zheng, 2009). Although beliefs impact teachers' knowledge on planning their lessons, decisions they make, and on their classroom practices, teachers' beliefs also "identify their real behavior towards their learners" (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017, p. 78). When teachers determine their learners' abilities, they have the capability to choose and modify their behavior and teaching choices more appropriately (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017, p. 78). Teachers who have a good grasp on their ability to teach their students are better able to cater their teaching practices to their students and their individual needs. Harste and Burke (1977) and Kuzborska (2011) emphasized that teachers' beliefs impact their aims, procedures, roles, and their learners (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017, p. 78). The beliefs that

teachers have strongly influenced their instructional decisions and classroom practices(Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017, p. 78).

For teachers to best meet their students' needs, teachers need to have a sense of efficacy about their teaching ability. Marble et al. (2000) suggested that teachers must clearly understand how to adjust and refine their teaching practices to best meet their students' individual needs (p. 1). The Teaching and Learning International Survey, also known as TALIS, examined teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices while comparing teachers from a variety of schools and countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2009, p. 89). TALIS suggested that good instruction is not simply determined by the teacher's background, beliefs, and attitudes; it also factors in individual students' needs while meeting various student, classroom, and school environmental factors (OECD, 2009, p. 89). TALIS assessed teachers' views about their own efficacy using a construct and a related measurement that is widely used in educational research (OECD, 2009, p. 92; Schwarzer et al., 1999).

Synthesis of the Literature

When it comes to the topic of early literacy, most experts will readily agree that it is critical that students in the early childhood classroom, specifically kindergarten, receive adequate teaching and assessment of foundational literacy skills to be successful lifetime readers. Where this agreement ends, however, is on the question of standardized assessment and the role that standardized assessments and prescribed curricula have on the teaching of foundational literacy skills. Whereas some experts are convinced that prescribed curricula and standardized assessments better inform teachers of the gaps in their students' foundational literacy skills, others maintain the idea that teachers should

have the capability to freely teach foundational literacy skills in an unrestricted environment with little to no pressure from standardized assessments and the pending results of those assessments.

Early literacy is defined as what children know about reading and writing before they begin to conventionally read and write. These literacy skills begin at birth through talking, singing, reading, writing, playing, and exploring. These skills typically continue to develop and strengthen until around the age of seven, which is generally first or second grade. These skills are crucial for educators to teach and for students to learn. These skills include but are not limited to alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters or numbers, rapid automatic naming of objects or colors, writing and phonological memory, concepts about print, print knowledge, reading readiness, oral language, and visual processing (National Early Literacy Panel & National Center for Family Literacy, 2008). Kindergarten teachers are not allotted the significant amount of time it takes to introduce, teach, reteach, and assess student's knowledge of these skills. These are skills that need to be taught often and reinforced daily. It is also critical that these skills be taught and reinforced at home as well. This is not happening in most kindergarten classrooms today. Many kindergarten teachers feel bogged down and overwhelmed by standardized assessments. Standardized assessments play a large role in the evaluation of teachers through measuring student learning outcomes (SLOs) and are used to determine growth measurements of students. The standardized assessment preparation in kindergarten overshadows the teachings of foundational literacy skills. Much of the time that should be used to teach students things such as concepts about print and phonological awareness are now spent teaching to the test. Students who miss out on

the critical years of foundational literacy are more likely to struggle with reading throughout their schooling years and well into adulthood.

Several environmental factors influence teachers' self-efficacy on their ability to teach. These factors include teaching experiences, teachers' personalities, and education-based or research-based principles (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017, p. 78). Teachers' views, beliefs, and attitudes, all to be used interchangeably, impact how teachers decide what content to teach and how to teach the content. Teachers' self-efficacy will ultimately impact how often and to what degree foundational literacy skills are integrated into the students' daily and weekly instruction. Similarly, teachers' self-efficacy will determine how much time test preparation is incorporated as well. Teachers' self-efficacy may also impact if teachers are able to intertwine test preparation with foundational literacy skills.

The following chapter will provide an articulation of the selected methodology for this research project.

CHAPTER 3: Research Design

The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' views about their ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. The research procedure that was used during this study was a multi semi case study approach. Two research questions guided this qualitative study: 1) How do kindergarten teachers view their ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment? 2) How does the kindergarten classroom environment influence a teacher's ability to deliver literacy instruction while preparing their students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment?

Qualitative Research Approach

This study used a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research has become increasingly valued and must be conducted in "a rigorous and methodical manner to yield meaningful and useful results" (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Nowell et al., 2017, p. 1). The specific research procedure that was used during this study was a multi semi case study. This approach was selected as it allows for a more intimate and detailed data collection process. A multi semi case study allows a researcher to examine how different aspects of a person intertwine with one another to construct a well-rounded view of the person and their life (Cowger & Tritz, 2019; Riessman, 2007). A multi semi case study also allows for a researcher to explore both the personal and the social parts of learning, which results in a more holistic view of the learning that occurs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cowger & Tritz, 2019; Riessman, 2007).

Through the use of a multi semi case study design, participants have the ability to explain their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in their own words. Mapping and analytic memos were used throughout the data collection and analysis processes to structure the data collected from the interviews in a clear and cohesive manner. Analytic memos were used in this study to reflect on and record the coding process, patterns and themes, and ultimately theories that emerged (Rogers, 2018, p. 890).

Since only one subset of kindergarten teachers were interviewed in a single school district, generalizations about the views of kindergarten teachers towards the Fastbridge earlyReading assessment and their ability to teach foundational literacy skills in the age of standardized assessments cannot be made. Although this research cannot be applied to all kindergarten teachers, the study does provide a deeper understanding of four teachers' views and feelings towards their ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing their students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. This study allows other kindergarten teachers to examine how peer educators manage to teach foundational literacy skills in the age of standardized testing and ways in which they can attempt to create a more developmentally appropriate kindergarten classroom.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined qualitative research as "any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (p. 11). Qualitative research does not take a statistical approach to its findings and likely could incorporate multiple realities (Rahman, 2017, p. 102). It is important that researchers pay close attention to their own bias throughout the data collection and data analysis process so that multiple realities do not occur, and the findings are impartial to one's personal beliefs (Connolly, 2007). While there are some

fears that qualitative research could result in bias, qualitative research produces a detailed description of participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences that other research approaches are unable to do (Denzin, 1989; Rahman, 2017, p. 104). According to Rahman (2017), data interpretation and analysis may be more difficult to decipher t due to the amount of information; however, if a researcher can dig through the findings in an unbiased manner using strategic methodologies, this will reduce observation bias and generate a study that results in impartial yet detailed findings (p. 105). In order to eliminate bias, it was ensured that all data were analyzed, even if it did not appear to be useful or necessary to the study. All of the findings have been studied so that a holistic and well-rounded picture was created.

Interpretivist-Constructivist Paradigm

Due to the nature of this study, it is important to consider the interpretivism paradigm. Pham (2018) stated that, per the interpretivism paradigm, knowledge relating to human and social sciences cannot be used in the interpretation of physical science. This is based on how humans interpret the world around them and then act on those interpretations, while the natural world does not operate that way (p. 3; Hammersley, 2013, p. 26). Creswell (2007) argued that, through the interpretivism perspective, researchers obtain more detailed results of the studied phenomenon rather than generalized findings that attempt to understand an entire population (Pham, 2018, p. 3). Similarly, Hammersley (2013) suggested that, during an interpretivist researcher's study, multiple interpretations are developed. This further allows a researcher to see and experience the world through a variety of contexts and cultures and provides a more diversified study (Pham, 2018, p. 3). A multi semi case study, through the lens of an

interpretivism paradigm, allows for a more thorough approach to the findings. In comparison to other research approaches, a multi semi case study permits a researcher to delve into the many layers of an individual's feelings, thoughts, and experiences. It encourages a thorough and cohesive study to be conducted that not only examines one's unique views but the corresponding factors that may influence their views.

Methodology

This study utilized a multi semi case study to answer the two key questions. First, how do kindergarten teachers view their ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment? Second, how does the kindergarten classroom environment influence a teacher's ability to deliver literacy instruction while preparing their students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment?

Case studies can be defined as "an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalize over several units" (Gustafsson, 2017, p. 2). It is a research method that analyzes different parts of a person's life in order to paint a more detailed picture of them. Creswell describes the case study method as exploring "a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information… and reports a case description and case themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97; Gustafsson, 2017, p. 2).

Qualitative research approaches, including case studies, spark skepticism from critics. It is believed that qualitative research allows for bias in research that is otherwise absent in quantitative research. Multiple case studies allow a researcher to evaluate the

nuances between the cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Gustafsson, 2017, p. 3; Stake, 1995). Similarly, during multiple case studies, a researcher can analyze the data within each individual case study and across the multiple case studies (Gustafsson, 2017, p. 3; Yin, 2003). The findings obtained from a multiple case study are "strong and reliable" (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Gustafsson, 2017, p. 3). Through the use of multiple case studies, a researcher can create a more convincing and concrete argument when the findings are apparent throughout all of the case studies in comparison to one finding from a single case study (Gustafsson, 2017, p. 3).

Research Site

The study site chosen was one Southeastern school district. The school district, which was organized in 1951, consolidated several smaller school districts in the surrounding counties. The school district serves 17,409 students. 49% of the students are female and 51% of the students are male. Student demographics for this district are as follows: 57.7% White, 27.8% African American, 5.4% multiracial, 5.4% Hispanic, 3.1% Asian, .4% Pacific Islander, and .2% Native American. 39.7% of students receive free or reduced lunch. The median household income is $66,313, and the median home value is $125,000. The school district encompasses an area of approximately 196 square miles. The school district has three attendance areas that include three separate towns located northwest of the state's capital. The school district operates a total of 12 elementary schools, two intermediate schools, three middle schools, four high schools, one Center for Advanced Technical Studies, and one alternative school. The school district's mission focuses on the ability to provide challenging curricula with high expectations for learning that develop productive citizens who can solve problems and contribute to a global

society. The school district's vision is to empower all students to meet or exceed expectations for academic, social, and emotional growth and success. The district also strives to provide opportunities for students to develop creative and critical problem-solving skills to meet dynamic global changes.

To protect the privacy of the participants, schools, and the school district, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. Four participants from three different elementary schools were used for this study. The first school included in this study is where two of the kindergarten teachers, Dana and Sarah taught. The school, Hartsville Elementary School, is a Title I school that serves 634 students in preschool through fifth grade. According to niche.com, 48% of students are proficient in math and 44% of students are proficient in reading. The mission of Hartsville Elementary School is to provide a strong foundation for success that ensures social, emotional, and academic growth through a nurturing and engaging environment. The second school used for this study is Collins Elementary School. Amber teaches kindergarten at Collins Elementary School. Collins Elementary School consists of 842 students ranging from pre-kindergarten to fourth grade. According to niche.com, 59% of students are proficient in math and 58% of students are proficient in reading. The mission of Collins Elementary School is to ensure all students are engaged in learning at high levels in a safe and supportive environment. The third elementary school used in this study is Smithville Elementary School, a media magnet school. This is where Emily teaches. Smithville Elementary School serves 557 students in grades pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. According to niche.com, 42% of students are proficient in math and 35% are proficient in reading. The mission of Smithville Elementary School allows learning to be fostered in

an interactive and digital environment and prepares students for success in a digital society.

Participants

Four kindergarten teachers were selected from one Southeastern school district in the United States to participate in the interview process. The participants were selected based on their levels of experience. It was important that there were teachers with varying years of experience so that a variety of perspectives were well represented in this study. Categorizing the teachers into years of teaching experience ensures that each teacher is familiar to potential readers, and teachers nationwide will have the ability to connect with a participant in this study based on their years of teaching experience. Recruitment occurred in the following ways. First, a letter was sent to teachers who matched the criteria for the study. The letter consisted of information regarding the study and my contact information should the participants have any questions or concerns prior to, during, or after the study. Once participants were selected, more information about the study was provided, as well as an informed consent document for the participants to sign stating they are willing to participate.

Procedures

Data collection began after receiving approval from the St. John's University's IRB and my thesis advisory committees. Data were collected using a questionnaire regarding the participants' backgrounds, teaching experiences, etc. Next, artifacts were collected from the participants such as lesson plans, pictures of the classroom setup, and reflections on the artifacts obtained. Lastly, interviews were conducted with each participant regarding the findings from the questionnaire and artifacts. All participants

were anonymous and have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity. The data was collected virtually due to COVID-19.

Data Collection

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative researchers "typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual information rather than rely on a single data source" (p. 278). The data collected through this study included questionnaires, artifacts, and an interview. The questionnaires were distributed to each of the participants to obtain information on their teaching experience, educational background, etc. Next, participants were asked for artifacts, such as lesson plans on foundational literacy skills, classroom photographs, and journal reflections. Lastly, interviews were conducted with each participant. Table 1 summarizes the data collected in this study.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Data Collected

Participant	Questionnaire	Interviews	Artifacts Received	Types of Artifacts Received
Amber	1	1	29	Photographs, resume, unit of study, reflections
Dana	1	1	7	Photographs, lesson plan, reflection
Emily	1	1	4	Photographs
Sarah	1	1	3	Photographs, lesson plan

All participants were anonymous and were coded using pseudonyms. In turn, it was also confirmed that the participant had thoroughly read over the Participant Consent Document that they were asked to read, sign, and submit before the start of the study.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2013), organizing and preparing the data is the first step when thinking about data analysis (p. 278). Creswell referred to this preparation as transcribing interviews, typing up field notes, cataloguing visual material, and sorting and arranging the data into different categories depending on the initial source of the data. The data collected for this study included questionnaires, artifacts, documents, and interviews. All sources of data are considered open-ended forms of data, where the participants have the flexibility to share their ideas without the constraints of scales or instruments (Creswell, 2013, p. 278).

Creswell (2013) also said that the next step for analyzing data is to look at all of the data. This step allowed for reflection on the data obtained from the participants. I interpreted the data received. Next, I reviewed the data, analyzed it, and organized the data into codes and themes that are apparent throughout all of the data sources (Creswell, 2013, p. 278).

Coding the data is the next practical step in qualitative data analysis. Coding, according to Creswell (2013), is "the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks and writing a word representing a category in the margins" (p. 278; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The first part of coding involves generating a description and themes from the transcription and data gathered. For this study, the researcher utilized a thorough coding process. First, the researcher read over the transcripts obtained from the interviews with the participants. Next, the researcher used different colored highlighters to color code specific words that appeared frequently throughout the interviews. Then, the researcher created a table for each key word that frequently appeared. This table highlighted the key

word and listed the associated participants and quotes shared that incorporated the key word. Lastly, the researcher looked at the different tables that highlighted the key concepts and developed themes based on all of the data collected. Creswell has described qualitative data as a detailed analysis of information about the people, places, and events in a setting (p. 278). The type of coding process utilized in this study was a thematic analysis. According to Nowell et al. (2017), thematic analysis "provides a highly flexible approach" that can be utilized in a range of studies that provide "a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" (p. 2; Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). Thematic analysis is also a useful method when examining different perspectives of research participants, shedding light on nuances, and generating unexpected findings (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2; Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). Thematic analysis has also proven beneficial when summarizing key features of a large data set, for instance, a series of lengthy interviews, in that "it forces a researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organized final report" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2; King 2004). Thematic analysis was used to develop themes found across the different sources of data obtained during this study.

Potential Research Bias

It is important to be aware of potential research biases that could get in the way when conducting a qualitative study. Potential biases were identified, allowing me to remain impartial during the data collection and data analyzing portions of this study. Analytic memos or reflective commentary were also incorporated into this study. Reflexivity or analytic memos comment on two important points: past experiences and how these experiences shape interpretations (Creswell, 2013, p. 278). Analytic memos

serve as data, yet mostly consist of "future directions, unanswered questions, frustrations with the analysis, insightful connections" (Rogers, 2018, p. 890; Saldaña, 2016, p. 45). Throughout this study, analytic memos were used to include observations about the process of data collection; thoughts regarding the data collection process, and concerns about reactions of participants to the research process (Creswell, 2013, p. 278). Analytic memos are a valuable tool for researchers to record the research process and the findings that emerge (Rogers, 2018, p. 890). Through the use of analytic memos, the credibility of a study increases (p. 890).

Trustworthiness

When conducting a qualitative study, it is imperative to consider the necessary steps that need to be taken to ensure overall credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2017, p. 120). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is not compatible with reliability or generalizability (Creswell, 2013, p. 278). Credibility in qualitative research is comparable to internal validity in quantitative research (Rogers, 2018, p. 890; Shenton, 2004). According to Creswell (2013), qualitative validity suggests that a researcher has confirmed the accuracy of the findings by conducting certain procedures, whereas qualitative reliability ensures that the researcher's approach remains consistent across different researchers and through different research projects (p. 278; Gibbs, 2007). To consider a research project credible, it is imperative to use multiple validity procedures (Creswell, 2013, p. 278). The validity procedures utilized in this study were triangulation of the data and member checking (p. 278). The way in which this study incorporated triangulation of the data was through the use of transcription and coding. Information obtained from the participants

was used to examine the evidence and used to build themes that became apparent throughout the interviews (p. 278). Themes emerged after the researcher coded the transcriptions. Additionally, after artifacts were received from the participants, such as lesson plans and photographs, the researcher developed themes derived from the data.

In order to factor in transferability of a study, it is important to think about reproducibility. If this study were to be replicated, four kindergarten teachers of varying years of teaching experience that all teach in the same district and use a common standardized assessment would need to be recruited. One way to ensure transferability is to provide a detailed description of the pertinent information required to replicate the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017, p. 120). Creswell (2013) suggested that, when qualitative researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting or share different perspectives on a theme, the results of the study become much more prominent and realistic (p. 278). An audit trail that transparently describes the research study can be utilized to ensure dependability and confirmability are present in the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017, p. 120). Lastly, reflexivity can be established in a qualitative study through the use of a diary or reflective notes (Korstjens & Moser, 2017, p. 120). Reflective commentary was utilized throughout this study through the use of analytic memos (Rogers, 2018, p. 890). This step ensures a valid research study and is arguably one of the most important factors when considering potential biases. A researcher is responsible for examining their own conceptual lens, assumptions, preconceptions, and values, and how these aspects could potentially impact research decisions in all phases of a research study (Korstjens & Moser, 2017, p. 120).

CHAPTER 4: Report of Research Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to the following research questions: 1) How do kindergarten teachers view their ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment? 2) How does the kindergarten classroom environment influence a teacher's ability to deliver literacy instruction while preparing their students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment?

By utilizing a multi semi case study approach, the views of kindergarten teachers on their ability to teach foundational reading skills were explored, as well as how each teacher's classroom environment influenced their ability to deliver literacy instruction while preparing their students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment.

This section presents profiles of each participant, providing important information about their views on their ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. This information is included in Table 1, which delineates the elementary school where the teacher works, the amount of years the teacher has taught kindergarten, and the highest level of education of each teacher. All teachers use FastBridge earlyReading as their main reading assessment tool.

Table 2

Background Teacher Data

Name	School	Years teaching kindergarten	Highest level of education
Sarah	Hartsville Elementary	16	Master's degree
Dana	Hartsville Elementary	4	Master's degree
Emily	Smithville Elementary	3	Bachelor's degree
Amber	Collins Elementary	13	Master's degree +30

Names have been changed to maintain participants' anonymity.

Sarah

Sarah is a kindergarten teacher who has been teaching for 36 years, with the last 16 years spent teaching kindergarten. Sarah earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education. Sarah also minored in learning disabilities (mentally impaired and emotionally disturbed). Sarah also earned a master's degree in learning disabilities. In Sarah's class, foundational reading skills, such as phonics, comprehension, etc. were taught daily for 60 minutes. Due to Sarah's experiences as a teacher, she felt very comfortable and confident in her ability to teach reading skills. Sarah stated:

> I feel amazingly comfortable with teaching reading skills. I haven't always felt
>
> comfortable; my comfort level comes from all of my experience. We had several reading programs during my special education days.

When asked about her ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment, she shared that the concepts and skills she teaches do not change when the test is coming up. She stated that "the testing

and progressing monitoring tells me what skills need to be taught or retaught. We do not teach to the test; we use the test to let us know what needs to be taught."

Sarah shared that while it can be difficult to fit in all subjects each day, she did not skip any content areas. Sarah, who felt "amazingly comfortable" teaching foundational literacy skills while preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment, had a designated intervention time each day where she spent 30 minutes teaching those skills to her students. She also incorporated a reading workshop model into her classroom that allowed for both guided and independent review of foundational reading skills for students. This provided her with accountability to ensure that she was incorporating foundational literacy skills into her daily instruction. Sarah said:

> From 8:30-9:00 every day we have intervention time….We [also] have a whole group lesson that lasts about 20 minutes a day. We currently use the program Imagine It. It is remarkably similar to Open Court. We introduce the letters and then the sounds. We also work (on) rhyming, on-set and rhyme, compound words and sight words. Two sight words are introduced weekly. We also have 30 minutes of workshops. I have a word study activity, then I have a one station setup with a phonics activity, computer activity which reviews a phonics skill or reading comprehension. Then the students come to me for guided reading. I give the Dominie… another reading assessment to figure out their instructional reading level.

Sarah incorporated literacy instruction several times throughout the day that specifically focused on foundational literacy skills. This targeted instruction included a variety of foundational literacy skills such as letter names, letter sounds, rhyming, sight words,

phonics, etc. By having several different times of targeted literacy instruction throughout the day, including intervention time and whole group and small reading groups, it appeared that Sarah felt confident in her ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing her students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. By sharing her daily schedule, Sarah explicitly displayed her exceptional time management skills. Sarah's daily schedule encompassed a variety of subjects that provided her students with ample learning opportunities without skipping any pertinent curricula. Sarah shared that she adhered to her daily schedule in order to ensure that all essential subjects were covered.

Sarah said that a strength of hers was behavior management techniques. She attributed her strong behavior management skills to her education in learning how to teach emotionally disturbed students. Sarah's time spent teaching special education, specifically mentally impaired and learning disabled children, helped to shape her behavior management techniques.

Sarah has high expectations for her students: "I believe if you do not have expectations, they [students] will not reach them." Sarah saw all students as individuals and set personalized goals for students based on their current abilities. This information allowed Sarah to meet students where they were and set realistic, yet high, expectations for every child. Sarah believed that all of her students were very capable and as a result, she was able to access all subjects each day and did not feel it was necessary to skip any curricula.

Sarah's classroom was a well-organized and a literacy rich environment. Sarah's largest literacy feature in her classroom was a large word wall that spanned an entire wall. Sarah's word wall was organized in a clear and coherent manner and was easy for

her students to access. Sarah stated that much of her foundational skills and literacy instruction was done in small groups. As such, a majority of her students' resources are stored away and readily accessible for them during small group instruction. Some literacy items that were incorporated into Sarah's classroom were a large word wall, small group reading materials, literacy stations, and small-group guided reading table.

Sarah's word wall also appeared to be set up in an efficient and accessible manner. The word wall was well organized and low to the ground making it easy for the students to access and utilize it independently. As depicted in Figure 2, Sarah's word wall incorporated student names, while also denoting consonants in blue and vowels in red.

Figure 2

Word Wall That Includes Student Names in Sarah's Classroom

Additionally, Sarah's classroom included a reading workshop rotation including literacy center rotations, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Reading Workshop From Sarah's Classroom

Dana

Dana has been teaching kindergarten for 4 years. Dana earned a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in teaching early childhood and elementary education. Dana spent 60 minutes a day on foundational literacy skills as a school-wide mandate. As a result, she felt very confident teaching foundational literacy skills. However, Dana felt certain skills get pushed aside because of the need to prepare students for standardized assessments. Dana found it very difficult to teach foundational skills while preparing students to take standardized tests. She stated that "the lessons are more limited because of trying to get students assessed as well as keeping the others up to speed who aren't being assessed." She spent time giving students activity sheets to practice their skills while her time was spent assessing students. Therefore, essential subjects, like foundational reading skills or math, were pushed to the side. Likewise, Dana, who has a

master's degree in teaching early childhood and elementary education but a bachelor's degree in English found it "very hard" to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing students to take standardized tests. Dana shared: "I feel as if the lessons are more limited because of trying to get students assessed as well as keeping the others up to speed who aren't being assessed. It may consist more of activity sheets to practice their skills or a quick mini lesson."

Dana stated that it is "very hard" to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing students to take standardized tests in the class. She noted that some topics are pushed aside:

> Yes, they [subjects] definitely do. In kindergarten there is a lot of standardized testing and expectations that go with it. In reality, though, there is only so much time in a school day. I think foundational reading skills, math, science, or social studies may get pushed aside. The subject all depends on how the teacher is trying to juggle the day.

As a result of standardized testing, Dana admitted that certain subjects get neglected.

Dana shared the impacts that standardized testing has on her ability to teach all subjects to her students. She said:

> As a teacher, I have to find times throughout the day to pull my students to assess them and to meet the deadline. Sometimes certain subject areas may be compromised such as foundational reading. I am not able to fully teach it like I had planned due to stringent assessment deadlines with a large class size, as I have to assess students one-on-one.

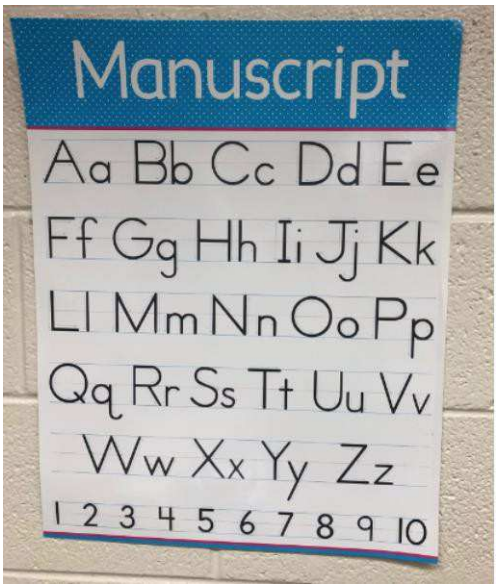
Dana discussed the impacts that standardized assessments have on her teaching abilities. Dana found it difficult to teach all subjects that are required. Dana also said that some subject areas, including foundational literacy skills, might have been compromised because of standardized assessment preparation.

When asked about classroom management, Dana shared that one of her weaknesses as a classroom teacher is time management. Dana also found it difficult to fit in all of the subject areas each day and shared that "sometimes certain subject areas may be compromised, such as foundational reading." Additionally, she noted that she was "not able to fully teach [it] like I had planned due to stringent assessment deadlines with a large class size, as I have to assess students one-on-one." Dana's realization helped to solidify the idea that teachers' classroom management, including time management, could influence teachers' abilities to teach all subject areas each day.

Dana's classroom was not very student friendly. Her literacy activities were not tailored to her individual students; were in areas that made it difficult for students to see and access and were scarce and difficult to find. Many of Dana's literacy tools in her classroom were purchased posters or disorganized materials.

Figure 4

Manuscript Poster From Dana's Classroom



Dana, who found teaching foundational literacy skills difficult while preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment, had a generic alphabet poster posted in her classroom, as shown in Figure 4. This poster was hanging high up in the classroom making it difficult for students to see and ultimately use as part of their reading and writing process. Students had limited connection to this poster as they were not explicitly taught how to access it.

Additionally, Dana noted that, when it came to assessment time, students were typically provided a worksheet or an unrelated activity due to the time constraints associated with assessing students one on one. Dana did not implement a reading workshop model in her classroom and did not use literacy centers. Dana felt that her foundational literacy skill lessons were "limited" as a result of assessing students and keeping students who are not being assessed up to speed. As a result, Dana provided students with activity sheets and/or mini lessons rather than literacy centers.

Dana's word wall was not very accessible for her kindergarten students. As seen in Figure 5, Dana's Open Court phonics program's letter sound cards were hung high on the wall. Below each sound card, and above others, were high frequency words. Dana's word wall was very busy and disorganized. Some words were posted above the letter cards, making it even more difficult for the students to see. Overall, Dana's word wall was very difficult for the students to access and use as an essential tool during their reading and writing time.

Figure 5

Alphabet Cards Doubled as a Word Wall in Dana's Classroom

Amber

Amber has been teaching for 17 years; 13 of those years have been spent teaching kindergarten. Amber obtained a bachelor's degree in earlychildhood and elementary education. Amber then went on to receive a master's degree in divergent learning. She also earned a master's +30 in early childhood literacy. Amber hasbeen also considered highly qualified in her teaching certificate, has a reading endorsement, and is nationally board certified and Google certified. Amber was also a teacher of the year finalist in 2015 and 2017 and won a teacher of the year award in 2018. Amber said that foundational literacy skills were incorporated in her classroom throughout the day. When asked about her confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills in her classroom, Amber stated:

> I put in a lot of continuing education hours as well as continually read professionally. I have a lot of understanding into how readers build theory and understanding, as well as the process of writing. I am very comfortable with students who come with little to no understanding of reading and writing and low concepts of print and letter/sound knowledge.

Most of this confidence stems from her strong background in education as well as her years spent teaching kindergarten and continuing education.

Amber said that she does not allow any curriculums to get pushed aside:

> No curriculum or assessment is perfect or is a one size fits all. I continue to meet student needs in whole group and in small group. As long as my students continue to grow, I will continue to use what I know to be best practice.

Amber noted that foundational literacy skills were embedded into everything she does; she incorporated foundational literacy skills in "morning message, intentional word study, shared reading, literacy stations, small groups, writing workshop, intentional centers, as well as integrated appropriate times during social studies and math." Amber's day was "built through balanced literacy with an emphasis on gradual release of responsibility." Amber is skilled at time management. Amber's confidence regarding her ability to teach her students foundational literacy skills was apparent during our conversation. Amber felt so confident about her students that she was able to provide tailored and individualized instruction in both whole group and small group instruction.

When asked about classroom management, Amber mentioned that she considered her students to be her curriculum. She made lesson plans designed to meet the interests of

her students and that, alone, to her, was classroom management. The students were busy being engaged in their talk and work; they did not misbehave as a result.

Amber allowed movement in her classroom which helped her manage her classroom and students' behavior. Amber also invested time and energy into building relationships with each one of her students. She noted that this, too, helps with her classroom management:

> We work hard to eliminate the theory that there is a right and a wrong in their thinking. We have a lot of talk sharing our thinking and confirming or changing it. Everything we do focuses around our talk and it's very rich, especially when reading. It's not a quiet act in my classroom. Students are sharing their thoughts, agreeing with others, and even disagreeing respectfully at times. Learners are often clarifying or asking questions. Student talk drives on day 1 form my instruction for Day 2. Building relationships and community helps us socially and academically which is why we always start with a morning meeting.

Amber's views surrounding her success with classroom management influenced her views regarding her ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing her students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment.

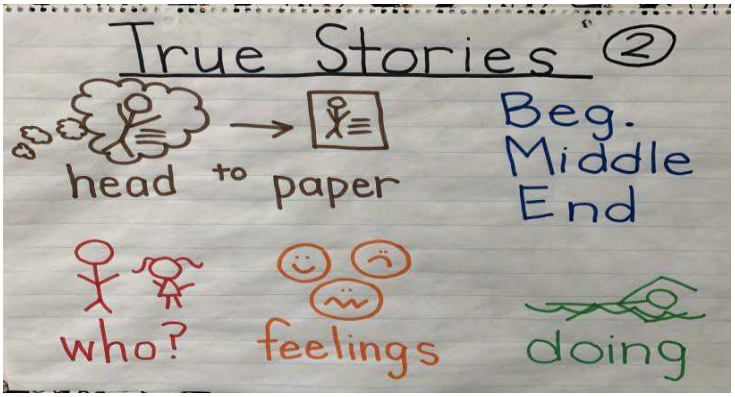
Amber believed that high expectations of students were a "gradual release of responsibility." Amber gave her kindergarten students autonomy over their learning and provided students with ample intentional literacy opportunities throughout their school day. Her day moved fluidly through all subjects each day. Since Amber held her students to such high expectations, she provided them with ample opportunities

throughout the day to reach curricular goals without allowing for skills to be pushed aside.

Amber's classroom was filled with an ample amount of intentional and developmentally appropriate literacy opportunities. Amber shared that she "worked hard to be an expert in reading so parents and other educators will find my work trustworthy." She also emphasized that she had a thorough understanding of how readers build both theory and understanding and how all of these beliefs contributed to her ability to create a literacy-rich environment for her students based on her students' individual needs. Amber said that her students were at the center of her curriculum. This ideology was apparent throughout her classroom, as she had a surplus of literacy activities that were student-created and easily accessible for students to use. Some items that contributed to Amber's literacy rich environment were her classroom library, student choice book display, class-created anchor charts, morning messages, interactive word wall, spelling cards, small group materials, vowel chart, and literacy stations.

Figure 6

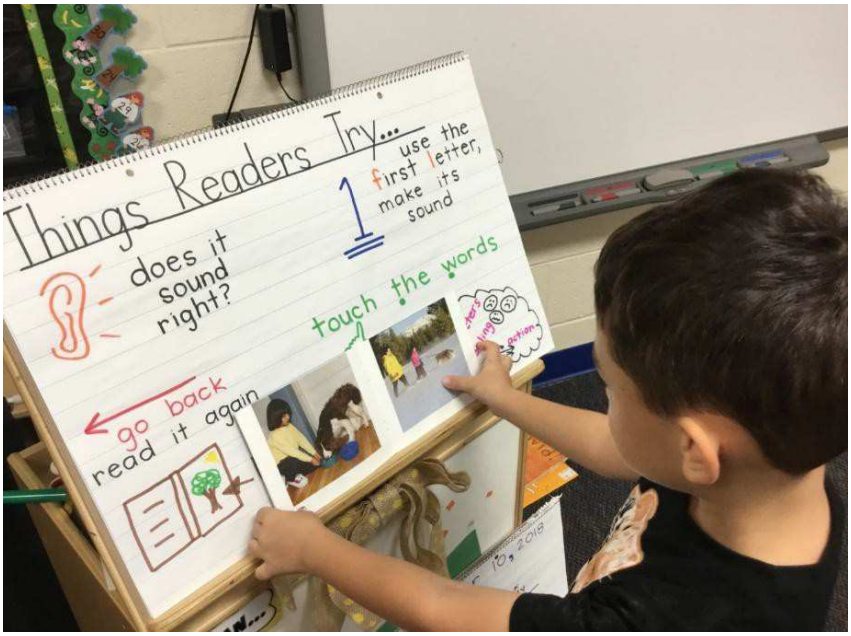
Class-created Anchor Chart From Amber's Classroom



Amber's classroom consisted of class-created anchor charts demonstrating both reading and writing strategies that students could access at any time during the day, as seen in Figures 6 and 7. She shared that the student friendly anchor charts "help bring understanding to different types of writing" and to provide students with autonomy over their learning.

Figure 7

Student Accessing Class-created Anchor Chart During Independent Reading



Amber shared that the class name chart "supports rich word study with meaningful words to students. The students make lots of connections to the name chart throughout the year." The class name charts were very organized, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Class Name Chart From Amber's Classroom

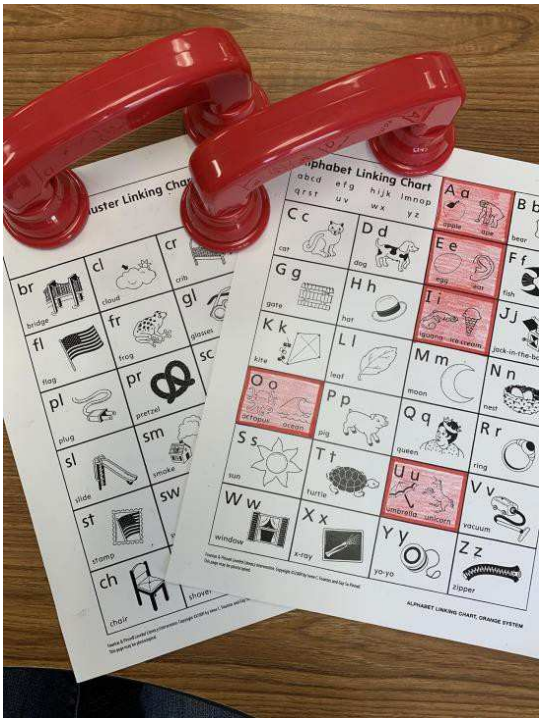
The alphabet linking charts used in Amber's kindergarten classroom were accessible to students. They were kept in reading folders that were convenient to use during reading and writing time. Whisper phones were paired with alphabet charts for a literacy exercise. The exercise encouraged students to say each letter sound or blend to themselves in the whisper phone. It appeared to be a beneficial way to keep the students engaged while the teacher performed a running record on a student. When asked about the linking charts, Amber shared that the Fountas and Pinnell linking charts "support reading and writing growth in small groups." Amber also noted that the students were specifically taught how to use these alphabet charts during guided reading. The Fountas and Pinnell alphabet linking chart was previously implemented during both reading and writing workshops. The students appeared connected with the chart since they were explicitly taught how to use the charts. Similarly, the charts intertwined their reading and

writing process. The students appeared comfortable with the alphabet charts and seemed to have a thorough understanding of the purpose of them.

Amber often uses whisper phones, as seen in Figure 9, as an exercise for students to practice their letter sounds during guided reading. She said that whisper phones "keep readers from listening to others and problem solving for themselves."

Figure 9

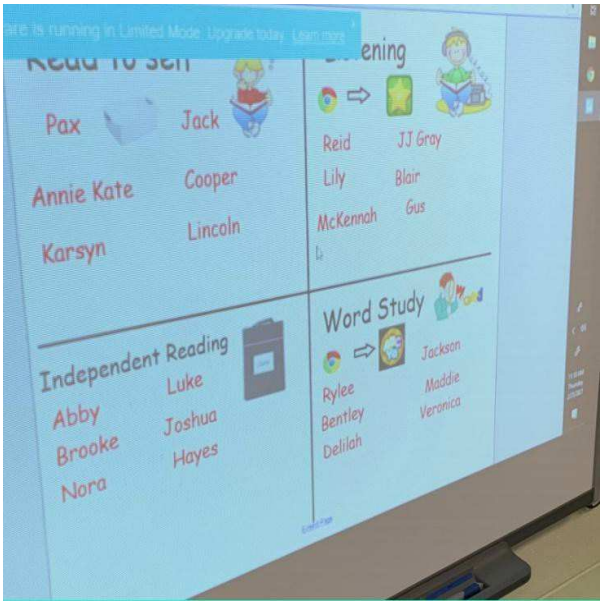
Whisper Phones and Linking Charts From Amber's Classroom



Additionally, Amber utilized highly organized literacy center rotations to effectively keep students on track, as seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Literacy Center Rotations From Amber's Classroom



Amber described an interactive word wall, as seen in Figure 11. Amber said that the interactive word wall "supports new words we discover in shared reading to be used in our writing." Amber's word wall was low to the ground, making it easy and accessible for students. Student names as well as high frequency words were located on the word wall. The high frequency words were printed in a large black font on a red background making it even easier and more accessible for students to read during independent reading and writing time. Each letter posted on the word wall consisted of an image that may have been beneficial for students who do not yet know their letters but may be familiar with listening for beginning sounds of words.

Figure 11

Interactive Word Wall From Amber's Classroom

Emily

Emily has a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of South Carolina and has been teaching kindergarten for 3 years. Emily spends 15-25 minutes a day teaching whole group foundational literacy skills; phonics instruction is included for 5 minutes. Emily felt "moderately comfortable" teaching foundational literacy skills as a result of teaching kindergarten for several years. Emily did not feel that curricula or skills get pushed to the side to prepare for standardized assessments. Emily had plenty of time throughout her day to get to all of the essential subjects, especially foundational literacy skills. Emily felt that she was adequately able to teach foundational

reading skills while also preparing students for the standardized assessments. Emily noted that the FastBridge earlyReading assessment tests students on the same foundational literacy skills that she already taught in her classroom. Therefore, she was sufficiently able to teach foundational literacy skills in her classroom while simultaneously preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment.

Emily shared that she felt "moderately comfortable" towards her ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing students for FastBridge earlyReading. Whereas many teachers' sense of confidence stemmed from years of experience teaching kindergarten, advanced degrees, and a wide range of training, Emily's training in foundational literacy skills has been solely through school based professional development from the school's reading coach, as well as a district based professional development session on word study for kindergarten. Emily's lack of training and educational background may have influenced her confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills.

Emily said that learning best took place in her classroom "when students are engaged and excited about the content that they are learning." Emily noted that her students were most engaged when she made specific connections to what they were learning. This allowed students to see the importance of what they were learning and also intertwined their personal lives to the content areas.

Emily described herself as a loving, calm educator with high expectations for her students. She shared that one of her strengths as a kindergarten teacher was her classroom management skills and holding her students to high expectations. Emily noted: "I try to set expectations at the beginning of the year and hold students accountable for them

[expectations]. I am calm but I do have high expectations for their behavior." Emily believed that holding her students to high expectations from early in the school year helped to set up a successful foundation for the remainder of the year. Similarly, Emily said holding students to high goals allowed them to accomplish more daily and throughout the length of the school year. Emily's classroom was not very literacy rich or student friendly. While Emily did have evidence of literacy activities in her classroom, the activities were not abundant and easily accessible for students. Some literacy items that were incorporated into Emily's classroom were alphabet linking charts, anchor charts, and a word wall. Emily, who appeared less confident in her abilities to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment, also had anchor charts posted around her classroom, as seen in Figure 12. Emily's anchor charts were difficult for students to access, were created by the teacher without student input, and appeared to just serve as a space-filler rather than as a literacy tool.

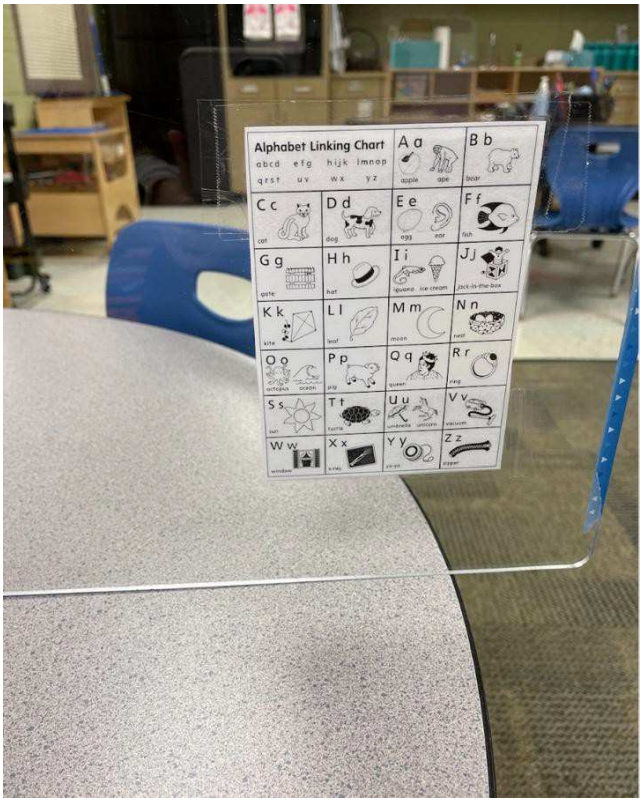
Figure 12

Teacher-made Anchor Chart in Emily's Classroom

Emily used the Fountas and Pinnell alphabet linking charts which were posted on plexiglass in front of students' desks, as shown in Figure 13. These charts were accessible for the students since they were posted in close proximity to their workspace; however, when they were away from their desks the students would often either need to return to their desk to review the chart or would attempt to use other forms of letter charts and posters posted around the room. It appeared that having the linking charts within reach at all times allowed the students to have a thorough understanding of the letter sounds chart and appeared easier for the students to utilize during reading and writing time.

Figure 13

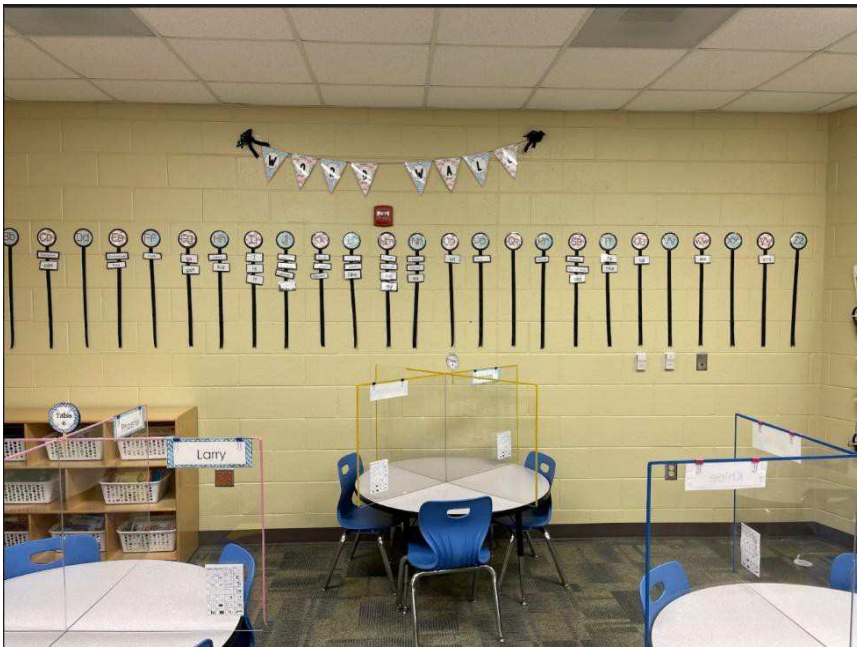
Alphabet Linking Chart From Emily's Classroom



As seen in Figure 14, Emily had an entire wall in her classroom dedicated to her word wall. This made it an organized and accessible tool for her students during reading and writing time. The only caveat that was noticeable in regards to Emily's word wall was that the words were quite small, which could make it increasingly difficult for the students to read.

Figure 14

Word Wall From Emily's Classroom



CHAPTER 5: Discussion of Research Findings

The purpose of this multi semi case study was to explore teachers' views on their ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. The following research questions were used to guide this study: 1) How do kindergarten teachers view their ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment? 2) How does the kindergarten classroom environment influence a teacher's ability to deliver literacy instruction while preparing their students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment?

The findings from this study may help to further inform practice for kindergarten teachers while preparing their students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment as well as other reading standardized assessments. This study examined four kindergarten teachers with different experience levels and educational backgrounds. As such, this study may provide insight on how these variables impact teacher confidence and ability to deliver foundational literacy instruction in the age of standardized testing.

Revisiting the Study: Problem of Practice

Teacher and student requirements are rapidly evolving with limited long-term evidence to support said changes. Furthermore, there is a research disparity on standardized assessments in early childhood classrooms, specifically kindergarten. Similarly, there is a lack of research examining how teachers view their ability to deliver foundational skills while simultaneously preparing students for standardized tests. This is because requiring kindergarteners to partake in standardized assessments is a new development, as is expecting kindergarten teachers to prepare students for these

assessments. This study utilized teacher reports to examine how teachers with diverse backgrounds perceive their ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment.

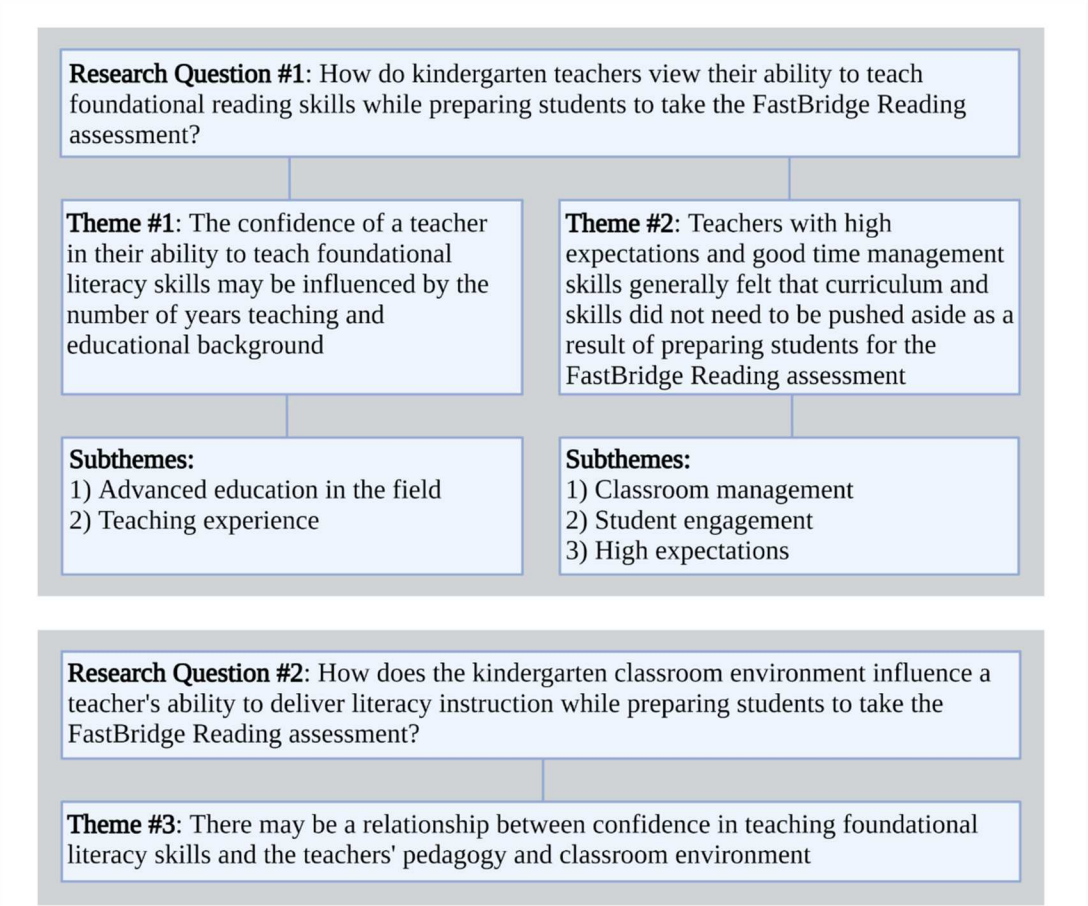
Findings

The following section shares the findings from participant interviews and artifacts obtained. The outline below supports the findings and themes that culminated from the coding process developed following participant interviews. I analyzed the transcripts derived from the interviews conducted and artifacts acquired during this study to create the coding process. The information obtained from the interviews and artifacts were then structured into themes and patterns for analysis in order to address the research questions.

Three prominent themes surfaced during the coding process. The themes that became apparent during the coding process were: (a) the confidence of a teacher in their ability to teach foundational literacy skills may be influenced by the number of years teaching and educational background, (b) teachers with high expectations and good time management skills generally felt that curricula and skills did not need to be pushed aside as a result of preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment, and (c) there may be a relationship between a teacher's confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills and teachers' pedagogy and classroom environment**.** These themes, along with their subthemes, are illustrated in Figure 15.

Figure 15

Summary of Research Questions and Emerging Themes



Theme 1

The first theme is that the confidence of a teacher in their ability to teach foundational literacy skills may be influenced by the number of years teaching and educational background**.** This theme was centered on two subthemes, those of advanced education and teaching experience. These subthemes were case-based and helped to create a holistic picture of the educator. Subthemes derived from this theme allow kindergarten teachers to be more relatable to other teachers and for kindergarten teachers to connect to the educators utilized in this study based on their background.

The intention of this study was to examine teachers with a range of teaching experience. For example, Emily taught kindergarten for 3 years; Dana taught for 4 years; Amber taught for 13 years, and Sarah taught for 16 years. Over the course of the interviews, it appeared that experience and education level directly influenced a teacher's confidence and ability to deliver foundational literacy instruction while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment.

Advanced Education in the Field

Teachers' confidence in their ability to teach foundational literacy skills appeared to be influenced by their degrees of education within the field. Teachers who appeared confident teaching foundational literacy skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment had more advanced degrees in the field of education. Amber and Sarah shared their confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills to their kindergarten students. Their confidence stemmed from their advanced degrees in education. According to Dickenson et al. (2020), a higher percentage of South Carolina teachers (63%) had a post baccalaureate degree (i.e., master's, education specialist, or doctorate degree) in comparison with all teachers in the nation (58%). It is important to mention that while Dana has a master's degree in teaching early childhood and elementary education, her bachelor's degree is in the field of English. Teachers' confidence and preparedness may be influenced by having both a bachelor's and master's in a teaching discipline. Amber and Sarah's confidence stems from their educational background. In short, educational background may influence how teachers perceive their capacity to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing their students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment.

Teaching Experience

According to the National Education Association, in the 2015-2016 school year, public school teachers had, on average, 14 years of teaching experience. Two of the teachers interviewed for this study were classified as having above average experience, while two of the teachers interviewed were considered below average. The two teachers with above average teaching experience are Amber and Sarah, whereas Dana and Emily were below the average. Amber and Sarah shared that teaching foundational literacy skills came easier to them now than it did at the beginning of their career. Kini and Podolsky (2016) found that, although teachers improve more rapidly during their first few years of their careers, they continue to improve throughout their careers. Of the 30 studies that Kini and Podolsky conducted, 28 found that teaching experience is "positively and significantly associated with teacher effectiveness" (2016). Confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills while preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment may be influenced by the number of years they have spent teaching.

Summary

This theme demonstrated a relationship between participant background and confidence in their ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. More specifically, teacher confidence positively correlated with years teaching kindergarten and advanced educational background. It appeared teaching experience and educational background influence a teacher's confidence in delivering foundational literacy instruction.

Theme 2

The second theme is that teachers with high expectations and good time management skills generally felt that curricula and skills did not need to be pushed aside as a result of preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. Three out of the four kindergarten teachers interviewed shared that they did not find it necessary to push curriculum or skills aside when preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. Time management skills and high expectations for students seem to influence the teacher's ability to teach all content areas without needing to push skills or curricula aside. It appeared strong time management skills and high student expectations had an impact on a teacher's ability to cover all content areas without needing to push aside essential curricula in their daily schedule.

Classroom Management

Classroom management appeared to influence a teacher's ability to cover all subjects on a daily basis. The participants shared their strengths and weaknesses regarding their teaching abilities. This trait, recognized by two of the four participants, connected the teacher's personality to their pedagogy. Strong classroom management skills appeared to influence a teacher's ability to cover all subjects and skills each day without needing to skip over material or push curricula to the side.

Student Engagement

In discussing classroom management abilities, a subtheme concerning student engagement emerged. The teachers with strong classroom and time management also

expressed strength in student engagement. Time management skills and high expectations for students seemed to influence the teacher's ability to cover all content areas without needing to push skills or curriculums aside. Teachers with strong classroom management attributed this quality to their ability to engage their students in their learning.

High Expectations

Participants felt that high student expectations are instrumental in achieving curricular goals. There appeared to be a link between teachers with high expectations for their kindergarten students and high achievement of daily curricular goals.

Summary

Three out of the four teachers interviewed did not feel that it was necessary to push curriculums and skills aside in order to prepare students to take the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. Most teachers explained that foundational literacy skills were embedded into their everyday instruction and, while at times it was difficult for them to get to all of the necessary content each day, they were able to do so effectively. Teacher expectations appeared to influence the likelihood that all subjects were taught daily. Additionally, classroom and behavior management seemed to influence a teacher's ability to accomplish curricular goals without neglecting subject areas.

Theme 3

In Theme 3, there may be a relationship between confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills and teachers' pedagogy and classroom environment**.** A literacy-rich environment "is a setting that stimulates students to participate in language and literacy activities in their daily lives thereby giving them the beginning understandings of the utility and function of oral and written language," according to the

National Reading Panel (2000). A literacy-rich classroom environment appears to influence the ability of teachers to deliver effective foundational literacy instruction while preparing their students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment.

Amber and Sarah did an excellent job in promoting a well-organized, literacy-rich environment for students. In contrast, the classrooms of Emily and Dana did not emphasize literacy to the same extent. Amber created a literacy-rich environment via a classroom library, student choice book display, class created anchor charts, morning messages, interactive word wall, spelling cards, small group materials, vowel chart, and literacy stations. Some literacy items incorporated into Sarah's classroom were a large word wall, small group reading materials, literacy stations, and small group guided reading table. In contrast, Emily's classroom only included alphabet linking charts, anchor charts, and a word wall. Dana had the least student friendly classroom. Dana's literacy activities were not tailored to her individual students; were in areas that made it difficult for students to see and access, and were scarce and difficult to find. Many of Dana's literacy tools in her classroom were purchased materials.

Summary

This theme revealed that the more literacy-rich classroom environment the kindergarten teacher had, the more likely they were to exude the most confidence regarding teaching literacy skills in the age of standardized testing. The teachers who had the most student-centered, organized, and easiest access to literacy resources were more likely to display confidence in their ability to teach foundational skills. Anchor charts, class name charts, alphabet linking charts, vowel charts, and word walls were some of the

most noticeable ways that teachers varied between the accessibility of their literacy resources for their kindergarten students.

Findings in Relation to the Literature

The confidence of a teacher in their ability to teach foundational literacy skills may be influenced by the number of years teaching and educational background. Consistent with Bandura (1997), teachers who take on new challenges and who are successful at doing so typically develop high levels of self-efficacy in comparison to teachers who do not feel comfortable when approaching an unfamiliar skill. According to Bandura, teachers who have demonstrated success in overcoming challenges during their careers tend to have high levels of self-efficacy. Bandura believed that mastery experiences or performance indicators are the "most influential source of efficacy information because they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed" (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016, p. 2). Teachers' confidence in their ability to teach foundational literacy skills appeared to be a direct result of the number of years teaching and education they had earned. This became apparent during the participant interviews. While speaking with the participants, it was clear teachers felt that overcoming challenges improved their self-efficacy. According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017), as teachers' experiences grow, their knowledge develops into a personalized belief system that influences their "understanding, judgement, and behavior" (p. 79; Kagan, 1992). Beliefs serve as the background to teacher decisions and pedagogy and are created steadily throughout their careers (p. 79, Richards & Lockhart, 1994). By encountering obstacles, teachers learn from difficult experiences. These experiences help

to shape them as an educator by influencing their teaching style and the choices they make in their classrooms.

Teachers with high expectations and good time management skills generally felt that curricula and skills did not need to be pushed aside as a result of preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. Bandura (1997) believed that self-efficacy impacts behavior. Teacher self-efficacy can impact "instruction, classroom management, and student engagement" (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016, p. 1). Similarly, Harste and Burke (1977) and Kuzborska (2011) emphasized that teachers' beliefs impact their aims, procedures, roles, and their learners (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017, p. 78). During the teacher interviews, it appeared that self-efficacy impacted expectations for students, classroom management, and student engagement. Three out of the four kindergarten teachers shared that they did not need to push curricula goals aside. These same three teachers attributed their ability to teach foundational literacy skills daily to their high expectations for students and strong classroom management, including time management and student engagement.

There may be a relationship between confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills and the teachers' pedagogy and classroom environment. Participants who appeared confident in their teaching abilities appeared better able to cater their teaching practices to their students' individual needs. This became evident after data analysis of the participant interviews, specifically Amber. Amber's confidence in her skills as a teacher primarily stemmed from her ability to get to know her students. Amber stated that the students are her curriculum and she structured her teaching around her students. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) believed teachers' views strongly influence their instructional

decisions and classroom practices (p. 78). The idea that teachers' beliefs impact their instructional decisions and classroom practices was recognizable in the artifacts from each teachers' classrooms. Based on observations of participants' classrooms, it appeared that teachers' pedagogy and classroom environment were influenced by their confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills. When teachers are able to determine their learners' abilities, they have the capability to choose and modify their behavior and teaching choices more appropriately (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017, p. 78).

Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1997) served as the theoretical framework for this study. Bandura's self-efficacy theory is founded in four sources that impact self-efficacy, including enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological feedback.

Enactive Mastery Experiences

Bandura believed that "enactive mastery experiences are the most influential source of efficacy information" (1997, p. 80). Teachers with more experience have greater self-efficacy given that they are more likely to have accomplished more over their careers in relation to those with less teaching experience. Bandura's enactive mastery experience surfaced during participant interviews. It became clear that the teachers with longer teaching careers faced numerous challenges in their careers; however, those obstacles led them to feel successful and confident as a teacher. Sarah shared her experiences with teaching writing: "my weakness is teaching writing. This is an extremely hard concept for kindergarteners. I am at a Title I school where my students have a lot of needs. I feel over the years I have improved in this area. I think back to my

first years and cringe." Sarah's vulnerability highlights Bandura's enactive mastery experience.

After 36 years of teaching, Sarah has improved by succeeding after failures and setbacks. Sarah continued to share how her career has impacted her self-efficacy as it relates to teaching foundational literacy skills. Sarah reflected: "I feel amazingly comfortable with teaching reading skills. I haven't always felt comfortable. My comfort level comes from all of my experience." Sarah attributed her success to years of teaching experience. Bandura (1997) believed "by sticking it out through tough times, they [people] emerge from adversity stronger and more able" (p. 80). While Sarah's experiences were not always easy, they helped shape her self-efficacy regarding her teaching abilities.

Vicarious Experiences

According to Bandura (1997), vicarious experiences are another source of self-efficacy. Vicarious experiences refer to experiences had by observing others (Mohamadi & Asadzadeh, 2011, p. 427). After observing the success or failure of another individual, people begin to use the information gleaned from that experience to attribute feelings about their own abilities (p. 427). Vicarious experience was relevant to this study.

While vicarious experience can be between any two people, it was most apparent between the participants and their students. When students were successful in an area, teachers felt accomplished in covering that subject. In contrast, when students struggled in an area, the participants investigated how they could improve teaching that particular subject. For instance, Amber shared her feelings about preparing students for standardized tests: "I teach kids to be literate, and they should be able to be successful on

any test if they are successful. I do not teach to any test. I use the data to better understand the processes that support readers and writers. It helps me find gaps in my understanding that I can fill in with continuing education or professional reading."

Amber harnessed student successes and failures as an introspective exercise to gauge her performance. When students struggle in a specific area, Amber utilizes continuing education courses and professional reading to eliminate gaps in her understanding of the topic.

Amber described how assessments influence her self-efficacy: "every assessment reveals and conceals. Each assessment has some sort of reflection on teaching in the classroom, and intentional shifts in teacher language can help the data better represent the success of my students." Amber's self-efficacy as a teacher was determined by the success of her students.

Verbal Persuasion

Bandura (1997) claimed that verbal persuasion is when self-efficacy is influenced by a statement from a credible source (p. 10). Throughout the participant interviews, teachers were given feedback continuously for their answers and their hard work. Positively rewarding teachers on their responses appeared to improve their participation in the interviews. These positive affirmations also seemed to influence the teachers' self-efficacy about their responses. Similarly, Bandura's verbal persuasion was observed during this study through relationships teachers have with their students. The participants' self-efficacy appeared to be impacted by the relationships they had with their students. The teachers in this study seemed to be driven by positive relationships with students and their families. An example of this was evident during Amber's

interview: “I am very invested in building relationships with my students and planning to their interest. I have a high energy, constantly reflective personality. I worked hard to be an expert in reading so parents and other educators will find my work trustworthy.” Amber felt a high sense of self-efficacy towards her teaching ability as a result of her strong relationship with her students and their families. Positive relationships appeared to motivate Amber to continue to improve her self-efficacy alongside her teaching abilities.

Physiological Feedback

Bandura claimed that physiological feedback was an additional source of measuring self-efficacy. Physiological feedback focuses on the information received about “arousal during situations in which the capability in the domain in question is demonstrated” (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016, p. 2). When people encounter stressful situations, they are likely to perceive the situation as flawed, which will negatively influence their self-efficacy beliefs (p. 2). Dana reflected on her self-efficacy in her ability to teach foundational literacy skills as a result of outside contributing factors. Dana experienced stress from the time constraints associated with standardized testing, which negatively impacted her confidence as a teacher. Dana shared insecurities in her time management as she was unable to reach daily curricular goals:

> I think standardized assessments do impact my teaching because of the expectations of when they need to be completed. As a teacher, I have to find times throughout the day to pull my students to assess them and to meet the deadline. Sometimes certain subject areas may be compromised such as foundational reading. I am not able to fully teach it like I had planned due to stringent

assessment deadlines with a large class size, as I have to assess students one-on-one.

Dana's vulnerability in her ability to teach crystallized Bandura's physiological feedback as a source of self-efficacy. Dana's view about her teaching ability was influenced by the strain of standardized assessments. Dana pushed curriculum aside as a result of time constraints placed on her and as a result appeared to question her teaching ability.

Reflections on the Methodological Approach

This multi semi case study utilized a variety of data collection procedures, providing insight into the daily lives of four kindergarten teachers and their views on their ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing their students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. Through the use of a multi semi case study, descriptors that influenced how kindergarten teachers perceive their ability to teach foundational literacy skills were investigated. This methodology allowed me to delve into the participant's unique stories and experiences. The teachers' vast experiences and views came to light during this qualitative research study. Case studies allowed me to develop an "in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, on one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2017, p. 40). This study design allowed me to look for meaning, similarities, and differences in the four participant's views and experiences.

By using a multi semi case study, I was able to synthesize four kindergarten teachers' unique backgrounds, experiences, and views. Employing diverse methods for data analysis allowed me to explore the lives, feelings, and classrooms of the participants. By utilizing questionnaires, interviews, and acquiring artifacts from the classroom, I explored how the teachers' experiences helped shape their views towards their ability to

teach foundational literacy skills while preparing their students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment.

Limitations

Several limitations exist within this qualitative study. Some of these limitations were out of my control or were beyond the scope of this study. The limitations demonstrate that further research on kindergarten teachers' views in their ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing their students for standardized assessments is required.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided significant limitations to this study. The pandemic considerably changed how classrooms were set up, including masks, plexiglass throughout classrooms, and social distancing. It also brought instructional changes, such as students not being able to work in small groups, an exorbitant amount of independent work, lack of collaboration and play, as well as an absence of sharing books and materials. Many of the teachers shared the differences in their teaching and grouping of students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers shared that, in a normal year, things would look differently; however, as a result of mandates from their school leaders, certain aspects of their classrooms needed to be altered. Additionally, as a result of COVID-19, it was difficult for the researcher to find a school and district that would allow for research to be conducted.

This study exclusively focused on kindergarten teachers, limiting the application to one specific grade level. This study utilized kindergarten teachers; however, a more thorough study could have incorporated teachers from multiple grade levels. While foundational literacy skills are heavily taught in kindergarten, they are also instrumental

in first and second grade instruction as well. It is envisioned that this study will lead to future exploration on how the delivery of foundational literacy skills is impacted by standardized assessments across additional grade levels.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice derived from this study may be far reaching and diverse. Some of the implications for practice from this study include special emphasis on the importance of teacher experience and teachers' levels of education, teacher training and preparation, teachers' expectations of students and time management skills, and teachers' abilities to create a literacy rich learning environment.

The four participants in this study shared their experiences with teaching foundational literacy skills in the age of standardized assessments, specifically the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. Through this qualitative study, it appeared that teaching experience had the largest impact on the ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. There is no doubt that more teaching experience leads to improved confidence teaching foundational literacy skills while preparing students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. However, this argument could be proven further with the use of a quantitative study that could measure the effect of the number of years teaching kindergarten on FastBridge earlyReading assessment scores.

Additionally, this study further solidifies the importance of setting high expectations for all students. The teachers who shared their confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills to their kindergarten students also mentioned their ability to hold their kindergarten students to high expectations from the start of the school year.

Setting goals for students and holding students to a high standard allowed the teachers to feel more confident instructing the students, while simultaneously impacting the students' ability to learn the material.

Similarly, strong time management skills correlated with confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills while simultaneously preparing their students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. Good time management skills appeared to be a direct result of teaching experience according to the teachers included in this study. Teaching experience and good time management skills improved the likelihood a teacher was able to access all parts of their curriculum each day, including foundational literacy skills instruction.

Teachers who created a literacy rich learning environment in their kindergarten classrooms exuded confidence teaching foundational literacy skills. The literacy rich learning environments contained student centered anchor charts and easily accessible literacy tools, such as classroom libraries, word walls, and letter-sound charts, as well as providing an organized and systematic learning atmosphere. The teachers who held their students to high expectations along with having good time management skills were the teachers who felt their delivery of foundational literacy instruction was efficient. These teachers also provided their students with a literacy-rich classroom in what appeared to be a natural and authentic manner.

Lastly, a limitation that was mentioned previously emphasized the difficulty of finding a school and district to allow for research to be conducted. Moving forward, as a result of COVID-19, it may continue to be difficult for researchers to work in schools as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Many schools and districts will not allow for outside

personnel to work in the schools. This could prove to be difficult for years to come. It is important for researchers to begin to use other means of data collection as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the future, it may be necessary for researchers to collect all methods of data virtually.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are clear opportunities for additional research in this area. There is little literature focusing on teacher confidence. Additional studies could focus on teachers' views on their ability to administer a variety of literacy skills such as sight words, reading comprehension, and phonemic awareness while preparing their students for standardized assessments. Similarly, future studies could define teachers' views on their ability to teach a variety of content areas such as writing, math, social studies, and science. Since this study was limited in participant sample size, a subsequent study could incorporate additional participants with varying years of teaching experience. Similarly, this study took place in one Southeastern United States school district that included three different elementary schools. Future studies could include additional schools within the district or could include a variety of different cities and school districts across the region or country. Also, a more robust representation from one school could help to investigate the role that a school may play in answering the research questions.

A variety of grade levels could be examined in future research studies. Since kindergarten is the first year of formal schooling, some believe that students have entered their kindergarten year naïve to foundational literacy skills; however, it may be enlightening to see how teachers in varying grade levels perceive their ability to teach foundational literacy skills to their students.

While qualitative studies, specifically case studies, allow for a deep and thorough lens into participants' experiences, feelings, and stories, conducting a mixed methods study that simultaneously allows for both quantitative and qualitative research to take place could further elucidate how confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills impacts student success. After triangulating both the qualitative and quantitative data found in an additional study, the use of a mixed methods study could result in more valid and accurate information with less bias and influence from the researcher (Creswell, 2017, p. 40). In addition, different frameworks and methodologies could be used to expand upon the thinking and perspectives regarding teachers' views towards their ability to teach and how that impacts student success.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that the education system has changed and, as a result, kindergarten students are now held to a much higher standard than years ago. This qualitative study was successful at shedding light on the views of four kindergarten teachers about their ability to teach foundational literacy skills while preparing their students for the FastBridge earlyReading assessment. Information generated by this study may be referenced by kindergarten teachers across the globe, providing insight into contributing factors that impact confidence in delivering foundational literacy instruction while preparing their students for standardized tests. Teachers were able to reflect on aspects of their classrooms and teaching abilities that impact their confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills. Information from this study may be utilized by teachers to examine how they can improve self-confidence when teaching foundational literacy skills while preparing their students for standardized assessments.

This study may be beneficial to inexperienced kindergarten teachers by providing them with the opportunity to reflect on the key variables that most significantly impact confidence in teaching foundational literacy skills. By sifting through the multi semi case studies that have been conducted, teachers across the globe can inherit ideas from the participants in this study that could help improve their own ability to teach foundational literacy skills in the age of standardized testing.

APPENDIX A

Participant Consent Form

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about teacher's views about their ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take standardized assessments. This study will be conducted by Elizabeth Beck, Education Department, St. John's University as part of her doctoral dissertation. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following: take part in an interview and send artifacts such as lesson plans and pictures of your classroom. Participation in this study will involve approximately one hour of your time. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained through the use of a coding system and keeping consent forms separate from data to make sure that your name, school, and district will not become known or linked with any provided information. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For interviews, questionnaires, or surveys, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer. If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact, Elizabeth Beck, at 631-965-6368, elizabethbeck16@gmail.com.

Agreement to Participate

_____ _____

Subject's Signature Date

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. (Educational background, teaching experiences, any other additional information you'd like to share, etc.)
2. Where did you go to college?
3. What is your highest level of education? (Bachelors, Masters, etc.)
4. How would you describe yourself as an educator?
5. How long have you been teaching?
6. How long have you been teaching kindergarten?
7. What made you want to become a kindergarten teacher?
8. What do you feel are some of your strengths as a kindergarten teacher? (Content areas, behavior management techniques, etc.)
9. What do you feel are some of your weaknesses as a kindergarten teacher? (Content areas, etc.)
10. When thinking about teaching kindergarten, what do you believe are the foundational reading skills necessary to teach in kindergarten?
11. How much time spent per day/week do you spend on teaching foundational reading skills? (Letter recognition, sight words, phonics instruction, etc.)
12. Do you have a specific time of your day allotted for teaching foundational reading skills? (Letter recognition, sight words, phonics instruction, etc.). If so, could you explain how you teach those skills?
13. How comfortable do you feel teaching foundational reading skills? Why do you feel this way?
14. How much time per day/week do your students spend playing in your classroom?
15. If applicable, what do the students play? What does that look like in your classroom?
16. How do you facilitate collaboration and communication in your classroom?
17. How do you believe learning best takes place in your classroom?
18. What types of assessments are used in your kindergarten classroom? (teacher-made assessments, observations, etc.)
19. What standardized assessments are used in your classroom?
20. What are your experiences with the standardized assessments used in your classroom?
21. How many years have you given the standardized assessments used in your classroom?
22. How do you feel about the standardized assessments used in your classroom? Do you feel that these assessments accurately represent your students? Do you feel that these assessments accurately represent your teaching abilities?
23. What type of information do the standardized assessments used in your classroom provide for you?
24. What do you typically do with the information obtained from the standardized assessments used in your classroom?

25. Do you feel that standardized assessments used in your classroom impacts your teaching, specifically your ability to teach foundational reading skills? If so, how?
26. Do any curriculums or skills get pushed to the side because of test preparation for the standardized assessments used in your classroom? If so, which ones?
27. How do you view your ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing students to take the standardized assessments used in your classroom? Why do you feel this way?
28. What would help improve your ability to teach foundational reading skills while preparing your students to take the standardized assessments used in your classroom?
29. If applicable, before the standardized assessments used in your classroom, how did you teach the skills that you now teach for the standardized assessments used in your classroom?
30. If applicable, before the standardized assessments were used in your classroom, how did you assess the skills that now the standardized assessments assess?

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