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**DECODABLE DELIBERATIONS IN EARLY READING INSTRUCTION:
A MIXED-METHODS STUDY OF FIRST-GRADE TEACHERS'
PERCEPTIONS, SELECTION, AND USE OF DECODABLE TEXTS**

Patricia Gallery

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SELECTION, AND USE OF DECODABLE TEXTS

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by

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ABSTRACT

DECODABLE DELIBERATIONS IN EARLY READING INSTRUCTION: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY OF FIRST-GRADE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS, SELECTION, AND USE OF DECODABLE TEXTS

Patricia Gallery

The fundamental significance of literacy achievement cannot be overstated. However, the 2022 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) divulges alarming findings, with a mere 33 percent of the nation's fourth graders performing at or above proficiency in reading (NAEP, 2022). Exploring the nexus of research-informed pedagogy and practice is imperative to disrupt this deleterious trajectory. This mixed-method study will examine how first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction with a critical lens on teachers' perceptions of decodable text to fully understand the complex intersection of intentionality and attitude when choosing texts for early reading instruction. This study will deploy a parallel convergent design to merge the results from quantifiable data, such as Likert-based survey results, and qualitative data, such as open-ended question responses, to understand better teachers' perceptions and subsequent text selection. The findings from this study present implications for teachers, students, administrators, and policymakers and broaden the landscape to pave the way for future research that foregrounds the voices and perspectives of the teachers within a research-informed paradigm.

DEDICATION

“...and a child shall lead them.”-Isaiah 11:6

This dissertation is dedicated to my students, whose resilience and courage amid overwhelming reading challenges kindled an insatiable thirst for knowledge acquisition that buoyed my doctoral journey. I am especially grateful for Daniel, whose triumphant journey through reading challenges left an indelible mark on my soul and laid bare the consequence of our craft. I am forever thankful for Mia's insight, authenticity, and perseverance, which vitalized my commitment to know and do better. I further want to thank Isabela, Lorelai, Riley, Siena, and Nicholas, whose diligence deepened my resolve.

I further dedicate this dissertation to my family, whose steady support and love weathered me through endless storms. To my husband, Joseph, whose unwavering loyalty and love nourished and sustained me. To my heartprints, our daughters, Lexi and Julia, whose celestial golden souls illuminated my path forward. To my heroic dad, who bolstered my resolve to carry on. To my brother, Eddie, whose own arduous journey stymied my resolve. To my Pixie-girl who never left my side through sleepless nights and diligent days. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my mom, who consistently reminded me whose daughter I am and dreamed a dream for me that compelled my resolute determination to actualize my aspirations.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

Learning to read is transformative and foundational for knowledge acquisition, participatory democracy, economic success, and cultural engagement (Castles et al., 2018). The ability to read is a critical precursor for academic success, and skilled reading predicates the foundation for learning across content areas and disciplines (Bogan, 2012). Despite the essential nature of reading proficiency, recent 2022 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) results present shattering statistics, with only 33 percent of the nation's fourth graders performing at or above proficiency in reading (NAEP, 2022). The importance of effective early reading instruction is inestimable. Studies indicate that students who are struggling readers in the primary grades continue to struggle in advanced grades (Foorman et al., 1998).

The Matthew Effect referencing a rich-get-richer-while poor-get-poorer analogy is a term Stanovich (1986) used to describe the widening global gaps attributed to continued struggles with reading that can begin as early as first grade. Stanovich (1986) details a downward spiraling process whereby students with early reading struggles, often attributed to weak decoding skills, engage in far less reading practice, inducing diminished motivation to read, resulting in impoverished vocabulary development, exacerbating achievement gaps between struggling and proficient readers. These devastating snowball effects contribute to abysmal outcomes beyond the school setting (Stanovich, 1986). According to McNamara et al. (2011), findings suggest that not only do struggling readers continue to lag behind their peers as they progress through the grades, data point analyses indicate that the variance between struggling and strong

readers increases in intensity. Given these unpropitious projections, Stanovich (1986) compels us to consider how we can turn to instruction to disrupt the devastating deleterious trend sparked by early reading failure and circumvent the crippling effects of generalized and global deficits across academic areas. The dire state of reading achievement in the United States demands increased inquiry into how teachers support students' reading development at the earliest stages of instruction. Our students deserve a more promising path forward, and research findings suggest that knowledgeable teachers are instrumental in producing better reading outcomes for students (Podhajski et al., 2009).

Efforts to strengthen reading instruction are obliged to turn to research and evidence. A copious volume of research has pursued questions regarding beginning reading instruction (e.g., Dehaene, 2010; Moats, 2020; Morrow et al., 2010; Stanovich, 1986), and findings reflect a convergence of fields, including neuroscience (Eden & Moats, 2002), linguistics, and psychology (Spear-Swerling, 2007). Dehaene (2010) explicates that unlike learning to speak, learning to read is not inherently wired in the human brain. Thus, early reading instruction necessitates explicit, intentional instruction to show students how letter strings conventionally relate to speech (Dehaene, 2010; Foorman et al., 1998). Furthermore, convergent findings reveal that in-depth development of the alphabetic principle, or understanding how graphemes in writing represent phonemes in speech, is fundamental to successfully acquiring reading skills in an alphabetic code (Adams, 2013; Castles et al., 2018; Dehaene, 2010).

Tasked with identifying the most effective evidence-based methods for teaching children how to read, The National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) identified systematic

phonics instruction as a critical component of reading instruction. Although phonics alone is insufficient for skilled reading development, it is essential (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). To fully comprehend written text, readers must weave together and efficiently integrate multiple skills (Grimm et al., 2018). There is broad consensus that effortless and automatic word recognition is one of the most salient characteristics of skilled readers (Share, 2008), and all children need varying degrees of support in developing this necessary understanding (Castles et al., 2018). According to Dehaene (2010), beginning readers must decode words or link the letter(s) in words to the corresponding speech sounds to become skilled readers. Although decoding in and of itself is not sufficient for reading, it is a prerequisite for skilled reading fluency, which, in turn, allows cognitive attention to turn toward the comprehension of text (Adams, 2013; Grimm et al., 2018). As Adams (2013) noted, the automaticity of word recognition affords the reader adequate cognitive resources to support a more extensive understanding of text. Dehaene (2010) posits the indispensable nature of decoding automaticity in positioning readers to concentrate on textual understanding. Furthermore, in a recent study of 444 middle school students, Roembke et al. (2021) found automaticity to be uniquely predictive of reading skills.

Allington (2013) asserts that primary grade teachers' essential task is to develop students' decoding proficiencies effectively. At the same time, Ball and Cohen (1996) posit that instructional materials are the nexus of what teachers and students do, presenting a uniquely impactful connection to teaching. Nevertheless, it is not only the teacher who implores deeper study but also the methods. The materials that students use as tools for practicing reading represent a critical component of all reading instruction

and, in the early grades, can provide a crucial building block for future growth (Bogan, 2012). In a study examining the influences of various word features on the developing word recognition skills of 93 first graders, Juel and Roper/Schneider (1985) found that the type of text used early in first grade seemed to determine which strategies and cues the students learned to use and continued to use in subsequent word recognition. Ball and Cohen (1996) declare that teachers select, focus, and perpetuate the use of instructional materials to design effective instruction.

In considering which type of texts to use to support early reading instruction, it is essential to note that most texts designed for early readers include controlled language intended to scaffold students' reading acquisition in various ways (Mesmer, 1999). Although various specifically scaffolded texts are available to support readers, many teachers express uncertainty about using specific text types for beginning readers, and questions regarding text selection spark polarizing debates (Brown, 2000). Despite convergent findings identifying explicit phonics instruction as essential (NRP, 2000), opinions on decodable text vary markedly (Jenkins et al., 2003). Additionally, teachers must select appropriate texts as scaffolding tools to support decoding skill development while presenting students with opportunities to think, discuss, write, and experience grade-level texts (Hastings, 2016), often without clear guidance (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2021; Bogan, 2012).

As Beverly et al. (2009) posit, the two salient influences on first-grade reading development are the methods of instruction and the types of texts used for word recognition practice. Teachers' understanding of instructional material, their beliefs about what matters most, and their perceptions of the role of students and teachers deeply

define their practice (Ball & Cohen, 1996). However, reading reform initiatives often employ curriculum materials to influence classroom instruction with scant attention to the teacher (Ball & Cohen, 1996) or notable concern for student's changing Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD), i.e., the distance between a student's actual and potential (Vygotsky, 1978) reading development. In exploring the efficacy of instructional tools and techniques, it is critical to consider the nature of the complex interactions between the teacher, student, methodology, and materials. The devastating implications of reading failure implore a comprehensive examination of how teachers perceive, select, and use instructional texts best suited to facilitate the effective development of solid foundational skills necessary for skilled reading acquisition within the narrow window of opportunity in the primary grades.

Statement of the Problem

Learning to read is a fundamental component of classroom instruction and an essential determinant of social, emotional, economic, and physical health (Moats, 2020). Illiteracy's direct and indirect costs are staggering. A lack of basic literacy hinders humans from obtaining critical information for basic hygiene and mental, physical, and economic health (Castles et al., 2018). Despite the monumental impact of literacy across an individual's lifespan, many students fail to acquire proficiency in reading. Recent scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) paint a devastating picture of reading achievement, with only 33 percent of fourth graders, 31 percent of eighth graders, and 37 percent of twelfth graders in the nation performing at or above proficiency in reading (NAEP, 2022). When disaggregating the data by specific student groups, the statistics portray a devastating profile for vulnerable groups, with only 16

percent of Black students, 18 percent of American Indian/Alaska Natives, 20 percent of Hispanic students, and 19 percent of students eligible for National School Lunch Programs performing at or above grade level (NAEP, 2022).

These startling statistics underscore the need for more punctilious pedagogy and practice in reading instruction. Students who experience difficulty with reading acquisition in the early grades are likely to continue to struggle throughout their educational journey (Foorman et al., 1998; Podhajski et al., 2009) and are four times less likely to graduate from high school (Wexler, 2019), and are at much greater risk for future difficulties with employment, social adjustment, and personal autonomy (Moats, 2010). In considering the devastating implications of the 2022 NAEP results, it is incumbent upon educators to address and rejuvenate reading instruction at the earliest stages to prevent catastrophic failure, especially for high-risk populations.

Connected texts are a critical component of all reading programs. The National Reading Panel (2000) report establishes phonics as one of the five crucial components cited as compulsory at the core of any effective reading program. Based on the NRP findings, it is plausible to argue that students need opportunities to engage with texts that foster the development of phonics skills (Cheatham & Allor, 2012). However, in practice, most of the texts students interact with do not match up with the letter-sound correspondences they are learning (Blevins, 2006, as cited in Chu & Chen, 2014), and teachers frequently use leveled text as a text for all purposes, including decoding, indicating a mismatch between text type and purpose (Mesmer, 2006). Teachers often prompt students to use meaning or context clues to figure out word identities when using text that does not contain previously taught letter-sound correspondences. According to

Duke (2020), using context-based prompts to help students identify words is a wasted opportunity to reinforce the letter-sound correspondences that are a necessity for the full development of the alphabetic principle and whole-unit word storage in memory (Chall, 1996, as cited in Cheatham & Allor, 2012). Beginning readers who learn this way may face increasing hardships as selective cueing fails to develop generative strategies for identifying novel words. According to Gough et al. (1992), finding unique cues to distinguish new terms will become progressively challenging for students who rely on selective cueing.

Decodable text is an alternate form of text progression employing a phonics emphasis to build on students' emerging understanding of letter-sound relationships (Brown, 2000). Ehri (2005) posits that attention to the graphemic properties, the identity and order of the letters, and the way they map onto the spoken words is essential to forming advanced orthographic representations of words. While Share (2008) advances that since it is this attention to graphemic detail that enables self-teaching, it seems logical that texts used to teach early readers should provide opportunities to attend to these graphemic properties, enabling students to develop a self-teaching mechanism that they can deploy to decode new, unfamiliar words.

However, the research on the efficacy of decodable text use is unclear regarding the justification for emphasizing decodable text use for beginning reading instruction (Price-Mohr & Price, 2019). Controversies over the efficacy of decodable text use are ubiquitous (Jenkins et al., 2004), and decodable text has emerged as a critical reading topic that has received insufficient attention in the research landscape (Jenkins et al., 2004), while Wolf (2020) identifies a failure to identify appropriate textual scaffolds for

ELLs. Furthermore, existing programs may be unreliable in providing efficacious texts aligned with students' needs or grounded in sound theoretical perspectives (Hiebert et al., 2005). In a study examining beginning reading programs, researchers found that the compulsory components reflected more of a response to policy mandates and consumer wishes rather than sound theories about what students need to learn to become proficient readers (Hiebert et al., 2005).

Literacy is fundamental, and ensuring that all students learn to read necessitates a careful review of early reading texts from the vantage point of the processes and content consistent with early reading success (Hiebert et al., 2005), not failure. Since the preponderance of materials created for emerging readers scaffolds students' acquisition of reading by design (Mesmer, 1999), teachers must demonstrate intentionality in selecting instructional texts that will best meet the unique needs of the early readers. However, questions regarding specific text types, interactions among texts, and instructional applications across developmental stages of early reading acquisition remain unanswered (Cheatham et al., 2012). Additionally, there are existing gaps in the research addressing how early reading text influences reading development and performance (Cheatham et al., 2014). The staggering national statistics establish an urgency to identify best practices to effectively facilitate skilled reading development during the narrow window of opportunity the primary grades present. Alarmingly, despite the significant role of the teacher in selecting and using instructional materials to support reading development, the research landscape lacks qualitative study amplifying teachers' views on decodable text use.

This study proposes to help fill gaps in the literature by using a mixed-method design to examine how first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction with a critical lens on teachers' perceptions of decodable text to fully understand the complex intersection of intentionality and attitude when choosing texts for early reading instruction. Concerns over text construction foreground the importance of teachers' judicious selection of texts for reading instruction. Reading acquisition is critical and necessitates careful reflection of teachers on the interactions between reader, text, and task as an integral part of instructional planning for word learning (Johnston, 1998). By merging qualitative and quantitative data analyses, this study seeks a more comprehensive and complex understanding of how texts are perceived, chosen, and used to support first-grade readers.

Purpose of the Present Study

This convergent mixed methods study aims to take a sedulous look at how decodable texts are selected and used by first-grade teachers in relation to teachers' perceptions of this specific manipulated text type. The study will interpret quantitative and qualitative data to render a complete and comprehensive understanding of intentionality by studying how first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction. Expanding on the contentious debate surrounding decodable texts and addressing gaps in the research, this study will seek to capture and merge the personal views of the teachers with survey data to render a complete understanding of textual scaffolding by comparing and synthesizing both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Drawing on significant gaps in the research, the present study

seeks to excogitate the topic through a deep study of the complex confluence of factors that predict how teachers perceive, select, and use early reading texts.

Guiding Theoretical Framework Overview

Teacher text selection is grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which posits that learning is socially mediated through interactions with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers and peers. In his seminal work, Vygotsky established the zone of proximal development (ZPD), the distance between actual and potential development scaffolded through teacher mediation. By matching text types to students' development, teachers can dynamically work within students' zone of proximal reading growth, the space between what they already know about reading and the next phase of development (Brown, 2000).

The seminal work of Gough and Tunmer (1986) posits the simple view of reading (SVR), asserting that skilled reading comprehension is the product of decoding and linguistic comprehension. The SVR clearly distinguishes that decoding is not sufficient for skilled reading development but is necessary (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Ehri's (1995) phase theory of sight word development presents an instructive framework to inform instructional decision-making. Ehri (2005) distinguishes four phases of word learning development: pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic, and consolidated alphabetic. Each phase characterizes the progression of sight word development in beginning readers as they progress from the earliest phases toward proficiency. Knowledge of the characteristics of each stage can assist teachers in gaining precision as they initiate scaffolds to facilitate students' word-learning development that capitalizes on students' burgeoning knowledge and avoids instruction that requires knowledge yet to be

acquired (Ehri & McCormick, 1998). Text reading is critical to helping students gain syntactic and semantic information about a word's role in a sentence so that it can bond to its spelling and pronunciation in memory (Ehri, 2022). Information about phases of word reading development can assist teachers in determining how best to scaffold students as they progress in word reading acquisition (Ehri & McCormick, 1998).

This study proposes a framework informed by Ehri's (2005) phases of word learning pedagogical framework as applied to Vygotsky's (1978) theory of scaffolding to comprehensively study teacher intentionality in selecting and using texts for beginning reading instruction. Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) notion that optimal learning occurs in spaces and places that thoughtfully consider and apply awareness of students' ZPD, this study will explore teachers' practices and perceptions regarding text integration convergent with quantitative data derived from survey responses. This study will deeply explore teachers' potential for sagaciously selecting conducive textual scaffolds for reading instruction aligned to the reader's ZPD and instructional goals. This study explores how teacher attitudes predict text selection and use by merging survey data, which queries how teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction, with qualitative interviews intended to explore teachers' perceptions of decodable text. Through a convergent mixed-methods design, this study will excavate the intersection of teacher perceptions, the reader, and instructional text selection with a critical lens on amplifying teacher voices.

Significance of the Study

Literacy's importance in terms of opportunity and enrichment is beyond cogitation. The consequences of illiteracy or marginal literacy are vast and have

significant implications across a reader's lifespan (Moats, 2020). Despite the critical importance of literacy acquisition, recent national statistics on reading acquisition are concerning. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2022), recent results show a steep decline in reading scale scores compared to 2019. Furthermore, statistics showing reverse progress give pause for concern; 2022 12th-grade published scores indicate a decrease compared to the 1992 scores. Additionally, the 2022 NAEP results find 39 percent of fourth-grade students to be "below basic" on the reading assessment. (NAEP, 2022).

Both instructional methods and the type of texts used for word recognition practice are crucial influences on early reading ability (Beverly et al., 2009). It is imperative to focus on the intersection between instructional materials, student needs, and teaching methodologies (Mesmer, 1999). This study will contribute to the literature by delving deeply into the complex intersections of teacher perceptions, selection, and integration of textual scaffolds in early reading instruction grounded in sound theoretical perspectives.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers can use findings from this study to strengthen intentionality when choosing textual scaffolds to support early readers. To counter ubiquitous overreliance on fixed progressions and limited readability formulas (Brabham & Villaume, 2002), teachers can leverage intentional and knowledgeable use of textual scaffolds aligned to student needs and gain increased sensitivity to the dynamic relationship between perception, knowledge, and intention when selecting instructional scaffolds to support first-grade readers.

Implications for Students

Students will benefit from this study as it will broaden the landscape of instructional text selection to acknowledge the broad range of text types that scaffold students' reading development within their changing ZPD. The finding from this study can switch the focus from alignment with one text type to intentional selection based on appropriate goals for particular students at specific points in their development (Brown, 2000).

Implications for Policymakers

Policymakers will benefit from this study, providing a more comprehensive and complex understanding of textual scaffolding and illustrating the critical need for increased teacher knowledge and engagement in text adoption endeavors. Rightmyer et al. (2006) caution that the adoption of materials does not guarantee that instruction will match actual student needs but posit that we must rely on knowledgeable teachers to create reading environments and match reading materials to the developmental needs of the students.

Implications for Future Research

Future research will benefit from this study as it identifies and responds to current gaps in the literary landscape. It illuminates the teacher's critical and complex role in the sagacious selection of texts as instructional scaffolding tools to support students within their ever-changing ZPD. Future research could replicate the current study across populations.

Research Questions

1. How do first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction?
2. What are first-grade teachers' perceptions of decodable text?

Definition of Terms

Decoding. A word reading strategy where the reader transforms graphemes into phonemes and blends them to form a recognizable word (Ehri, 2022).

Decodable Text. Text that is either phonetically controlled at the word level or related to phonics instruction (Mesmer, 2000). At the word level, decodability refers to texts identifying a portion of regular phonetic patterns (Hiebert et al., 2005; Vadasy et al., 2005). At the instructional level, phonetically-controlled texts align with phonics instruction, frequently referred to as lesson-to-text match (LTTM) (Mesmer, 2005). LTTM represents a link between the text's letter/sound relationships and the previously taught phonics lessons (Jenkins et al., 2003; Mesmer, 2005).

Graphemes. One or more letters representing a single phoneme (Ehri, 2022).

Leveled Text. In this endeavor, the term "leveled text" refers to text designed to support readers in using multiple cueing sources of information, such as context and pictures, to recognize words (Clay, 1985; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Peterson, 2001 as cited in Mesmer, 2009). Leveling criteria include picture-text match (word identification support to aesthetic role), text structure (highly to less repetitive), language and literary elements (oral to written), content, theme, and ideas (most to least familiar) (Hiebert et al., 2005).

Phonemes. The smallest units in the pronunciation of words (Ehri, 2022).

Summary

This chapter discussed the issues concerning text selection for beginning readers and the teacher's critical role in integrating specific types of texts during reading instruction. Deepening knowledge of how specific text types align with distinct phases of learning and sagaciously choosing appropriate text types aligned to instructional goals enables efficient, effective scaffolding of beginning reading. Additionally, exploring teachers' perceptions could present opportunities for reform regarding text integration that reflects theoretical and pedagogical practices aligned with research and evidence. In the chapter that follows, a review of the literature will establish the theoretical footing for the study while construing the distinguishing features of beginning reading texts, the integration of textual scaffolds in first-grade instruction, and the complex intersections of teachers' perceptions, selection, and use of text across variegated factors and populations.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review comprehensively examines the selection and use of instructional texts for first-grade reading instruction. Careful consideration of the literature landscape will seek a deeper understanding of the complex intersections of student needs, teacher attitudes, instructional practices, and instructional text selection in early reading instruction.

Theoretical Framework

Early reading development has been investigated through multiple theoretical lenses culled from an amalgamation of social and cognitive perspectives. Social learning perspectives emphasize the pivotal role of social interaction in developing knowledge and learning (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Lev Vygotsky (1978) was one of the earliest and most influential social learning theorists. He originated the widely known theory of social constructivism, which maintains that children learn through social interaction (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Vygotsky established the zone of proximal development (ZPD), or distance between potential and actual development, as the optimal space for learning as determined through interactions with more capable others (Handsfield, 2016). Scaffolding, or the assistance that more competent others provide during learning acquisition, is one key idea in Vygotsky's social constructivism model (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Although often attributed to language or verbal prompts, scaffolding can easily apply to the teacher's integration of specific types of texts to support students' progress in their ZPD (Brown, 2000).

In this study, reading is recognized as a social and cultural practice (Aukerman & Schuldt, 2021), and the text is a carefully planned, specifically focused mediation tool

through which teachers can support students' advancing cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Tracey and Morrow (2012) posited that a fundamental idea in Vygotsky's social constructivism advances the influence of sign systems, such as the written language, on student development. As Vygotsky (1978) posited, internalizing these culturally created signs affords development. Teachers, as more knowledgeable others, are tasked with procuring the optimal level of task difficulty to facilitate learning within the learner's ZPD (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Judicious selection of appropriate texts enables students to internalize culturally mediated signs with moderation by the teacher or more knowledgeable others. Furthermore, as Tracey and Morrow (2012) advanced, scaffolding, another key idea in Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism, refers to the carefully chosen scaffolds teachers provide that result in student development.

Gough and Tunmer (1986) present a perdurable formula coined the simple view of reading (SVR), which asserts that reading comprehension is the product of word recognition and language comprehension. Reading comprehension will be compromised if either domain is lacking (Gough et al., 1992). Since it is the product of combining decoding with linguistic comprehension that produces skilled readers, the model emphasizes the necessity for the full development of both decoding and language comprehension. Although decoding alone is insufficient for reading, SVR posits it is essential (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Readers must automatically and accurately recognize printed words to support comprehension (Adams, 2013; Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Readers learn to read printed words automatically by bonding various word identities, such as pronunciation, spelling, and meaning, together to form a single amalgamated unit

in memory (Ehri, 2020). Thus, proficient readers fully process all letters in words, are attentive to the underlying structures (Cheatham & Allor, 2012; Duke, 2020; Moats, 2020), and must apply their knowledge of letter-sound relationships to bond spellings to pronunciations (Ehri, 2020).

Ehri (2005) presents a phase theory developmental model of word recognition, which identifies critical advances that occur as students learn to recognize words automatically. The phases are labeled to reflect the alphabetic knowledge employed to bond the sight words in memory. The pre-alphabetic phase primarily relies on visual or context clues, not letter-sound relationships, to recognize words, such as recognizing familiar signs or symbols. Readers move on to the partial alphabetic phase when they know some letter names or sounds they can use to read and write but cannot decode unfamiliar words as they often struggle with vowel sounds and decoding. Readers can move forward into the full alphabetic phase when they can apply knowledge of letter-sound relationships to successfully analyze and decode words while gaining a deeper understanding of the complete spelling of words. In the consolidated alphabetic phase, students can learn sight words by forming complete grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) and applying them to increasingly complex words (Ehri, 2005, 2020; Moats, 2020). As readers move through the phases, they use diverse strategies to figure out word identities. Decoding or mapping speech sounds to their corresponding letter(s) is considered the primary method for learning word recognition, thus stamping it as a necessary and critical strategy to decode words (Adams, 1990, as cited in Cheatham & Allor, 2012).

Ehri 's (2005) word learning phases provide an insightful pedagogical framework to inform teacher decisions when choosing texts as scaffolds to support first graders' beginning reading acquisition. Working within students' ZPD necessitates teachers intentionally choosing appropriate texts to scaffold student learning aligned to their developmental needs. A social constructivist theory provides a guiding lens to closely study how teachers, as more knowledgeable others, choose and use specific instructional texts to scaffold student reading development.

This literature review aims to understand the previous research on decodable text. This review explores text used to support early reading instruction. This chapter will also dive deep into understanding the role of the teacher in selecting and using appropriate textual scaffolds for beginning reading instruction.

Connection to the Framework

Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory undergirds this literature review. According to Vygotsky (1978), children learn social interactions orchestrated by more knowledgeable others. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) establishes the ZPD, or space between students' actual and potential development, as the most propitious for learning. Teachers, as the more knowledgeable others, integrate carefully selected texts as scaffolds (Tracey & Morrow, 2010) to facilitate students' reading growth. Ehri's (2005) phase theory of word recognition development offers a pedagogical framework to inform teachers of the sentience of students' ZPD.

In consonance with Ehri's (2005) word learning phases, this study begins with a review of the literature on the unique constructs of beginning reading instruction. Honing in on how first-grade teachers select and use decodable text is accordant with Ehri's

(2005) phase theory, as the partial-alphabetic phase typifies novice first-grade readers (Ehri & McCormick, 1998). First-grade reading instruction characteristically focuses on supporting readers as they transition from partial to full alphabetic word reading. As Brown (2000) advanced, text can be integrated as a veritable scaffold to support students' reading development. Thus, the literature review will delve into beginning reader text types, strategy integration, and interactions with the teacher and reader. It will also examine teacher attitudes regarding decodable text and how teachers consider high-risk populations' unique needs when selecting text for reading instruction. Furthermore, the review strives to engender voices from the field with a critical lens on how beginning reading instruction is scaffolded through textual mediation by more knowledgeable teachers through intentional selection and use of text as informed by Ehri's (2005) phases of word learning theory.

Beginning Reading Instruction

To effectively study how teachers choose instructional texts to support students' reading development, it is imperative to understand the unique needs of beginning readers. In 2000, the NRP released a report based on decades of reading research identifying five key concepts compulsory to effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (NRP, 2000). We can also turn to neuroscience to find answers to what beginning readers need to develop into skilled readers. According to Stanislas Dehaene (2010), all desired aspects of literacy depend on the student's ability to translate graphemes into phonemes, and this process requires explicit instruction to facilitate the readers' construction of rapid, effortless, automatic neuronal pathways. There is consensus from the field that word recognition,

albeit insufficient for skilled reading comprehension, is essential (Adams, 2013; Share, 2008; Vadasy et al., 2005). Difficulties with word recognition are the key issue for struggling readers (Vadasy et al., 2005).

According to Allington (2013), the research field demonstrates that almost every child has the potential to reach grade-level proficiency by the end of first grade. Given the critical role of decoding instruction in the earliest grades, it is imperative to delve deeper into the available research on word recognition regarding early reading instruction. Allington (2013) notes that the NRP (2000) report recommends that every kindergarten and first-grade reading lesson dedicate a small portion of instruction to effective decoding instruction, further identifying decoding instruction as compulsory to early reading development. Research shows that learning to read changes and refines the brain circuitry (Dehaene, 2010; Gentry & Ouellette, 2019), and results indicate that decodable text is a critical consideration for early instruction as it increases the likelihood that students will apply a decoding strategy (Cheatham & Allor, 2012), thus reiterating the importance of attention to the details of reading instruction.

The cornerstone of efficacious instruction for first-grade readers is determining where students are developmentally. Johnston (1998) advances that teachers need to know where students are in constructing a complex system for word storage and retrieval, further clarifying that teachers can gather information from spelling samples, reading errors, and word reading to determine where they are on a developmental continuum. To fully support the specific needs of the beginning reader, in-depth knowledge of how word recognition develops and supports reading comprehension is essential.

Importance of Skilled Word Recognition

According to Adams (2013), readers only have the available cognitive energy and resources to devote to meaning-making when word recognition has become rapid, effortless, and automatic. From a holistic perspective, word recognition is a small but vital component of skilled reading acquisition. According to Gough & Tunmer (1986), decoding in and of itself is not sufficient for reading, but it is necessary. Readers cannot develop higher reading comprehension processes efficiently without solidifying the lower skills and vice versa (Adams, 2013). Furthermore, translating the printed word into language is not only a critical precursor for reading but has also been identified as a common cause of reading failure (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). A prerequisite to reading success is the unnatural, challenging need for students to learn how to analyze words in print and map them to their meaning, which represents a tremendous challenge (Castles et al., 2018). Models of skilled reading advance that reading involves the translation of a word's spelling to its pronunciation and meaning but equally necessitates eventual fluent reading of words with a direct connection from the printed word to meaning without alphabet decoding. Still, this recognition cannot falsely conclude that students can bypass decoding (Castles et al., 2018).

Translating graphemes to phonemes facilitates fast, efficient word recognition and spelling (Ehri, 2005, 2022; Ehri et al., 2005). This phonological recoding process enables efficient orthographic knowledge growth, which is needed to decode novel words (Share, 1995). Share's (1995) self-teaching hypothesis posits that decoding facilitates word-specific connections, which readers use to decipher unfamiliar words. Longitudinal studies show that early reading struggles characterized by difficulty learning and

applying grapheme-phoneme connections typically evolve into broader reading comprehension issues (Podhajski et al., 2009).

Castles et al. (2018) posit the necessity of phonics for reading development and describe how alphabetic decoding and phonological processes are deployed by skilled adult readers, illustrated by their ability to generalize phonic knowledge to unfamiliar words. Both methods of instruction and texts used for practicing word recognition skills influence first graders reading development (Beverly et al., 2009). Developing the alphabetic principle and its application to word reading and spelling is complex. Effectively supporting students' efficient word recognition development aligned to their ZPD requires an in-depth understanding of the developmental phases of word reading.

Phases of Word Reading Development

Ehri (2005) identifies broad categories of developmental phases that students navigate from pre-alphabetic to consolidated alphabetic. Each phase reflects the level of alphabetic knowledge that influences the connections formed as students learn to read words by sight. Students can decode unfamiliar words as they enter the full alphabetic word learning phase. They can connect word pronunciations to spelling so that even if the decoding attempt leads to an incomplete pronunciation, the students can use their oral vocabulary to determine the correct word while simultaneously creating links between the written and spoken word (Castles et al., 2018).

According to Dehaene (2010), the quintessential prerequisite to skilled reading acquisition is the development of the alphabetic principle or knowledge of how printed letter(s) represent spoken language. While Castles et al. (2018) assert that most children will require support in acquiring this principle, Ehri (1995) classified the development of

the alphabetic principle across four phases labeled to reflect the type of alphabetic knowledge dominantly used to decode words: pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic, and consolidated alphabetic. According to Cummings et al. (2011), Ehri's phases offer important implications for instruction and can support teachers as they plan instructional strategies to support reading development. According to Ehri (1995), children become full alphabetic phase readers when they can form a complete connection between spelling and pronunciation to fully bond in memory. Readers can subsequently advance to the consolidated phase of word learning when they have amassed increasingly more sight words in memory, and their understanding of the letter-sound connections in these words becomes consolidated into larger units (Ehri, 1995).

It is essential to consider methods and materials used in instruction to determine how best to support student's advancement through the phases of word recognition development. According to Juel and Roper/Schneider (1985), the types of words in the texts presented to beginning readers for reading practice may be more influential in determining the strategies students deploy to recognize words than the instructional methods used. Given the critical importance of skilled word recognition development, careful consideration must prevail in determining which type of text is most conducive to supporting students' word recognition growth in the earliest stages of reading development.

First Graders and ZPD

According to Ehri's phase theory (1995), students in the full alphabetic phase learn sight words by forming complete letter-sound connections. This allows the words and pronunciation to become fully amalgamated and secured in memory as a bonded unit.

As students gain increased familiarity with these grapheme-phoneme connections, they become consolidated into expanded chunks, which are valuable for reading longer multisyllabic words; during this consolidated phase, students are burgeoning their sight word lexicon (Ehri, 2005). In first grade, decoding skills account for 80 percent of the variance in reading comprehension (Moats, 2020).

Furthermore, Ehri and McCormick (1998) posit that the full alphabetic phase typically comprises first graders and beyond. During this critical phase of sight word development, students must practice using graphophonic cues to read words in a connected text (Ehri & McCormick, 1998). According to Cheatham and Allor (2012), decodable texts are explicitly designed for readers in the full alphabetic phase of word learning to facilitate the likelihood of students applying phonological skills to effectively process all letters within words.

In first grade, the texts students interact with are influential in determining the cues or strategies students deploy and develop and will continue to use in future word identification endeavors (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985). First-grade teachers' selection of texts for practice presents critical implications for strategy development, necessitating a more profound query into the relationship between texts and strategy use.

Cueing Strategies

Balanced literacy approaches teach students to employ contextual guessing, picture clues, and patterned, repetitive language to recognize words, which are strategies that only poor readers rely on (Moats, 2007). In the early stages of reading development, students may rely on context to recognize words. However, this may prevent them from

developing the context-free word recognition skills necessary to read texts successfully, where many words share characteristics (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985).

As advanced by Adams (2013), skilled readers process almost every letter of every word, and skillful readers do not use context to select the meanings of words in advance; instead, research shows that as words are perceived, all possible meanings materialize. Juel and Roper/Schneider (1985) posit that the most salient and reliable cue for word recognition is the complete string of letters that spell the word. Although beginning readers can rely on context to guess word identities, this strategy is inefficient and will not help readers internalize the spellings of words. Adams (2013) declared that context processing works synergistically with decoding when efficient and automatic word recognition has developed. According to Ehri and McCormick (1998), if readers rely on prediction as the dominant strategy for word identification without attention to the graphophonic connections, their word-reading skills will be insufficiently developed.

In a study of struggling readers in New Zealand, Ryder and colleagues (2007) found significant, lasting positive effects for a phonemically-based decoding intervention with practice reading aligned decodable texts. In the discussion, Ryder and colleagues (2007) caution that students with weak literacy-related skills denied explicit code-based instruction will ultimately rely on ineffective word-identifying strategies such as picture clues, context, and partial word cues.

The texts teachers select and use are impactful in determining which strategies students deploy to identify words when reading, as the words determine the access points. Using decodable texts encourages students to attend to the letters in a word, sound them out, and match them to a word they know, and this is a far more reliable strategy than

relying on picture and context clues (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985). In selecting instructional texts to support beginning reading development, it is critical to understand how texts align with instructional goals.

Text Types

Selection and use of high-quality instructional materials aligned to research-derived pedagogy are critical for setting beginning readers on a pathway to success. Primary first-grade reading instruction texts are typically decodable or leveled (Hiebert et al., 2005). Increasing numbers of teachers are asking questions about the type of text most beneficial for beginning readers (Brown, 2000) since the text is a tool both students and teachers use to fine-tune and further develop reading processes (Bogan, 2012). The selection and integration of text to support reading instruction necessitates considering both the benefits and costs of textual scaffolds (Mesmer, 2009).

Along with methods of instruction, texts used for word recognition practice influence first-grade reading ability (Beverly et al., 2009). Decodable texts provide the student with opportunities to practice explicitly taught phonics skills and afford successful early reading experiences (Castles et al., 2018) and viability as an instructional strategy for students who struggle with the alphabetic principle (Jenkins et al., 2003). Regardless of specific design, controlled texts represent a temporary scaffold (Mesmer, 2010) constructed to assist beginning readers as they traverse various stages of development. Although predominantly viewed as verbal support, teacher scaffolding can deploy controlled text as influential instructional support to bolster students' reading development (Brown, 1999). How teachers use textual scaffolds is a topic that necessitates deeper inquiry.

Leveled Text

Leveled texts are used widely in early literacy instructional settings when choosing texts to support early readers. Leveled texts initially leveled for reading recovery are widely used to teach reading across the primary grades in regular and special education classrooms (Cunningham et al., 2005). These predictable texts support a whole language view of reading where students use context and their language skills to understand text (Bogan, 2012). Leveled texts typically include close picture-text associations, familiar language, and predictable structures (Cunningham et al., 2005). Critics of leveled text share concerns regarding students' reliance on predictable language and over-attention to picture clues, cautioning that these students may miss opportunities to gain the necessary understanding of the underlying system of words (Brabham & Villaume, 2002).

Additionally, these texts often represent a progression of increasing complexity from simple to more advanced. Increased awareness and availability of leveled readers, often employed as the basis for informal reading assessments, have rendered these texts widely used and amassed in broadening collections as tools for instruction (Brabham & Villaume, 2002). State budgets ubiquitously funded leveled text purchases in states such as Texas and California for decades, and even when pedagogical goals changed from the text level to the word or word-part level, these texts had already established a stronghold in classrooms across the nation (Mesmer et al., 2012).

Leveled text integration concerns predominantly question strategies students deploy to figure out word identities. Since leveled texts often require students to use visual or context clues, questions arise over word recognition strategy development. Over-reliance on contextual cues to decode words may inhibit the growth of attention to

graphic information and ignorance of the most valuable and obvious cue for context-free recognition of words, the actual string of letters in the targeted word (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985).

Learning to read is an unnatural process and an acquired skill; thus, immersing students in a print-rich environment with extensive exposure to print will not be sufficient for learning how to read and spell (Moats, 2020). Duke (2020) advises that beginning readers should not be prompted to use context to identify words as their primary strategy, as using context clues to decipher words has proven unreliable. Since students are prone to habitually using information outside the printed word, they do not need further instruction to facilitate these habits. Instead, instruction should focus on attention to the letters as identification of words through context inhibits students from forming bonded letter-sound connections, which is necessary for efficient and permanent word storage in memory. The seeming lack of opportunity to transfer skills (Vadasy et al., 2005) from instruction to practice in applying decoding strategies focused on learned letter-sound correspondences is of particular concern. Given the relative mismatch between leveled text and decoding practice, it is imperative to explore alternate text options that support early readers' learning and application of the alphabetic principle as they progress through the stages of reading development (Ehri, 2005).

Decodable Text

Decodability is a critical characteristic when choosing texts for beginning readers, as such texts increase the likelihood that students will use a decoding strategy (Cheatham & Allor, 2012; Mesmer, 2005). Decodable text is one textual scaffold representing the manipulation of reading material to assist readers with word identification. Additionally,

decodable text may be used as a temporary scaffold to support students' development of letter-sound connections and the application of learned phonics knowledge to novel words (Mesmer, 1999). The integration of text and instruction is critical, yet the definition of decodability itself makes it difficult to disentangle the text from the teaching (Mesmer, 1999). In a review of the literature on decodable texts, Mesmer (2001) suggests that decodable text practice may be most beneficial for students in the partial-alphabetic phase of reading and that full-alphabetic reading may actualize further through the integration of decodable text designed to encourage readers to apply letter-sound knowledge in connected text.

Mesmer (2005) contends that decodability is a textual scaffold that allows students to apply letter-sound knowledge successfully to identify words in a text. Jenkins and colleagues (2003) posit that teachers can deploy decodable texts to facilitate alphabetic principal development, anchor GPCs in memory, and enhance motivation as students confidently practice with text that foregrounds the use of a decoding strategy. Intentional scaffolding is a critical consideration, especially for those students who are frustrated by the challenges of early reading and poised to turn away from applying letter-sound relationships, sensing it as futile. Vadasy and colleagues (2005) suggest that decodable text practice may help students amalgamate word reading skills. Despite these findings, many questions regarding decodable text integration remain unanswered (Allington, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2003).

While some studies have endorsed varying levels of decodable text integration (Adams, 2013; Brown, 1999; Jenkins et al., 2003; Mesmer, 1999), other studies have also found decodable texts to show no positive effects on reading development or have

determined decodable text to be less motivational for readers (Price-Mohr & Price, 2019). Notably, Brabham and Villaume (2002), while acknowledging the efficacy of decodable text progressions as a tool for practicing learned phonics knowledge, also lamented the cons of the constrained vocabulary often pervasive in decodable texts. They expressed concerns about the dismal effects of limiting readers' opportunities to engage in the rigorous word-solving and meaning-making experiences that skilled readers enjoy. Although the research literature has yet to afford consensus regarding decodable text use, it has established decodability as a critical characteristic of early reading text that is effective for supporting beginning readers' understanding of the alphabetic code, which is a precursor for word recognition proficiency (Cheatham et al., 2014; Ehri, 2005) while also unearthing additional topics for future study.

In a study comparing decodable text reading practice after phonics instruction to instructional models using authentic literature, Beverly and colleagues (2009) found that although average readers showed more significant improvement following authentic literature reading practice, struggling readers demonstrated increased comprehension when given phonics instruction plus decodable text practice. These findings suggest that decodable text may be most effective at the earlier stages of reading development, whereas advanced readers may benefit from more challenging texts (Beverly et al., 2009).

Jenkins and colleagues (2004) studied at-risk first graders who received tutoring in more or less decodable texts. Although findings found that supplemental phonics instruction with practice in connected text may sufficiently help struggling readers develop grade-level proficiency in developing word-specific representations in memory

and strengthening decoding of novel words, decodable text showed no significant influence on post-test measures.

Cheatham and Allor (2012) posit that critical characteristics of decodability need to be addressed in future studies to clarify important questions about ways to measure decodability, degrees of decodability matched to learners' needs, relationships between independent reading and decodable text, and the impact of other text characteristics. Furthermore, the NRP (2000) reported insufficient research on decodable text efficiency. The benefits and contributions to reading development from reading practice in decodable texts continue to stir contentious debate (Jenkins et al., 2004), further emphasizing the need for additional research to address how readers interact with decodable text, whether or not decodable texts elicit positive effects, and the increased attention towards LTTM as a critical factor in text deployment (Mesmer, 2001).

Mesmer (1999) offers the following insights regarding decodable texts: text and instruction should be linked, decodable text use is stage-specific, decodability represents one of many scaffolds for emergent readers, and decodable text use should be temporary and aimed at quickly transitioning students into authentic texts. Additionally, Mesmer (1999) cautions that decodable text is not a replacement for literature but a tool to help students gain quicker access to a wide array of engaging literature. Similarly, Jenkins and colleagues (2003) posit that decodable text may present an opportunity to demonstrate that phonics has utility to those early readers requiring additional practice with applying phonics knowledge and to support struggling readers to anchor word-specific grapheme-phoneme connections in memory.

Comparing Text Types

Juel and Roper-Schneider (1985) examined the role of text features in developing word recognition skills. A sample of 93 children placed in either a phonic series with decodable text or a basal text that focused more on high-frequency words was compared. An analysis of the data suggested that text selection, used early in first grade, partially determined the types of strategies students developed and continued to use to identify words. The authors discussed the futility of emphasizing a phonics method of instruction when texts presented to students failed to present word structures with regular letter-sound correspondences where students could practice decoding words (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985).

Mesmer (2010) manipulated text as an independent variable to investigate its relationship to accuracy and fluency. Seventy-four participants read one qualitatively leveled text and one decodable text at prescribed data collection points. Findings indicated that reading rate was enhanced within predictable texts but did not render statistically significant results regarding accuracy.

In a quantitative study designed to investigate the effects of highly decodable text and coordinated phonics instruction on first graders' word recognition development, Mesmer's (2005) findings indicate that treatment participants reading highly decodable text: applied phonics knowledge to a greater degree demonstrated more accuracy, and relied less on examiners for support as compared to control participants.

However, in comparing first graders randomly assigned to tutoring groups with decodability manipulated as the independent variable, Jenkins and colleagues (2004) found no significant differences in post-test scores between the more or less decodable

groups. This study did not define decodability as LTTM. Instead, decodability was determined based on alignment with the phonics scope and sequence used in the schools. Similarly, in a study of beginning readers, low phonically decodable books were associated with more significant comprehension effects (Price-Mohr & Price, 2020). It is important to note that this study also lacked an LTTM.

Johnston (1998) advances that immersion in meaningful reading experiences should be an intentional focus of all reading programs but cautions that students need to be able to read the words to both effortlessly enjoy and construct meaning from text. In comparing more or less decodable texts, it is essential to evaluate the quality of the text, as decodability is not the only criterion to consider (Cheatham & Allor, 2012). In comparing text types, it is critical to consider the relationship between the developmental phase of the reader, the instruction, and the teacher, as the integration of teaching and decodable text renders this type of scaffold viable (Mesmer, 1999). Similarly, research is needed to determine the relationship between scaffolded text and student engagement, motivation, and learning (Hiebert et al., 2005), as text designs that focus on such constructs as decodability may ignore other critical variables, such as engagement or predictability (Hoffman et al., 2002).

Matching Texts to Instruction

In viewing text selection as a scaffolding tool, decision-making moves from over-reliance on commercially established levels to decisions considering the type of text best matched to students' actual development (Brown, 2020) and mapped to instructional goals. (Allington, 2013; Cunningham et al., 2005). As posited by Ryder and colleagues (2008), children who possess high levels of reading capital, including reading-related

skills, knowledge, and experience, may benefit from broader reading emphasizing trade books, while students possessing lower levels of essential reading skills require explicit, systematic instruction in orthographic patterns and word identification strategies.

Furthermore, Ryder and colleagues (2008) advance the devastating outcomes for students entering school with lower-level reading skills forced to use ineffective word reading strategies, such as relying on picture, partial-letter, and context cues, often paired with leveled readers, to identify words.

The decodable text presents a conducive scaffold for early reading instruction as it affords a greater chance for students to practice applying decoding strategies, leading to increased accuracy (Cheatham & Allor, 2012). A critical consideration of decodable text use is the intentional matching of text and instruction by the more knowledgeable teacher (Vadasy et al., 2005), aligned with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of ZPD and scaffolding. The more knowledgeable other can optimally utilize decodable text to lesson matching to design a space for learning that recognizes a student's developmental place based on what has previously been taught and guides the student to advance to reach for their potential for increased learning.

Text and the Reader

Brabham and Villaume (2002) noted that teacher exchanges divulged concerns about students experiencing frustration when applying phonics knowledge to phonetically irregular words encountered in predictable texts. Furthermore, Johnston (1998) alluded to the problematic nature of predictable text, noting that the supportive construction of the text may discourage careful attention to processing the print. Cheatham and colleagues (2014) posit that decodable texts contribute to the development of word reading and

decoding skills of readers who are developing phonics skills. If the goal is for students to generalize information taught in phonics instruction to reading connected text, they must practice reading texts comprising phonics regularity mapped to phonics instruction (Mesmer, 2005).

Readers who rely on prediction as a primary strategy for word identification may not build the necessary word-reading skills to process graphophonic connections (Ehri & McCormick, 1998). Decodable texts increase opportunities for students to apply phonics to word identification, facilitating greater decoding accuracy and less reliance on support from more knowledgeable others (Mesmer, 2005).

While lauding the teachers' use of leveling criteria to select texts matched to the student's needs, Brabham and Villaume (2002) discussed teachers' concerns regarding students' over-reliance on predictable language in leveled texts as an obstacle to students' attention to actual words and how they work. Similarly, problems arise over extended use of decodable readers beyond the early stages of phonics development, where language constraints may begin to outweigh affordances (Castles et al., 2018).

Decodable texts are especially efficacious for students with limited decoding skills and a critical scaffold for dyslexic students whose primary issue is decoding (Spear-Swerling, 2019). Spear-Swerling (2019) advances that when there is a mismatch between a student's decoding levels and words in a text, the reader will experience frustration, fluency will decline, and comprehension will be compromised. In a quasi-experimental study of 56 low-performing first graders, findings demonstrate that 10-15 minutes of reading practice in decodable text, compared to an intensive word study, resulted in significantly higher post-test reading fluency rates in grade-level texts

(Vadasy et al., 2005). These findings suggest that it may be increasingly efficacious for students to strengthen fluency when applying decoding skills in actual text rather than at the isolated word level (Vadasy et al., 2005).

In considering implications for practice and potential future research regarding the efficacy of the independent reading practice of multiple-criteria texts, it is vital to examine the timing and scope of integrating these textual scaffolds. Cheatham and colleagues (2014) suggest that there may be a development period where students need more heavily scaffolded text to develop and apply decoding skills in connected text. However, this needs to wane as students master decoding skills.

In choosing textual scaffolds, it is also essential to consider non-quantifiable categories such as students' motivation to read and ardor for reading (Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005). Jenkins and colleagues (2003) state that practicing reading in decodable texts may foster motivation and grow confidence, especially for struggling readers, since students can successfully use decoding strategies to determine the words' meaning. The usefulness of decodable text, as with all instructional materials, depends on the implementation method. Mesmer (1999) reminds us of the complexity of the decision-making process in choosing instructional supports and the need for sagacious use, at appropriate periods, by sage instructors.

High-Risk Populations and Early Reading

Early and appropriate intervention is critical to remediating reading difficulties, and screening procedures should focus on phonological awareness and decoding measures (Grimm et al., 2018). Struggling readers often demonstrate deficient development of language processes, and it is incumbent upon reading, writing, and

spelling teachers to gain an in-depth understanding of speech-to-print relationships (Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2005). Instruction in word recognition is essential, especially for students with learning disabilities associated with reading and other at-risk factors such as poverty (Podhajski et al., 2009).

Allington (2013) posits that in numerous learning situations, struggling readers are presented with overly complex texts for reading and instead should experience increased opportunities to engage in rewarding reading transactions fueled by success. Similarly, in a study of thirty-two first graders, Beverly and colleagues (2009) found that below-average readers demonstrated increased comprehension compared to average readers given phonics plus decodable text treatment. These findings indicate that positive results of explicit phonics instruction and reading practice in decodable text are specifically efficacious for beginning readers. In contrast, more advanced readers appear more likely to benefit from authentic literature reading (Beverly et al., 2009). These findings elucidate the merits of purposefully sagacious text selection matched to students at their specific phase of learning (Beverly et al., 2009).

English Language Learners (ELLs) may face significant challenges in learning to read in environments where the language of teaching and learning is English, and the role of the teacher in mediating learning is critical (Venketsamy & Sibanda, 2021). A study of Taiwanese children learning English indicated that incorporating meaningful decodable text offered a superior linking channel for word reading (Chu & Chen, 2014). The findings of this study offer teachers a viable way to support English language learners by scaffolding reading practice in a way that recognizes students' ZPD. In a comparative descriptive study of 80 first-grade students, Wolf (2022) examined the relationship

between the type of text used and early literacy outcomes of Hispanic English Language Learners' decoding abilities. Results of t-test comparisons showed that ELLs using scaffolded text aligned to specific spelling patterns outperformed ELLs using non-scaffolded text and accurately decoded words on par with English-only students, offering evidence that scaffolded text use helps ELLs to learn to read in English (Wolf, 2022).

Ehri and McCormick (1998) noted that readers with learning disabilities demonstrate over-reliance on context clues for reading words in the text over the application of graphophonic cues, which results in insufficient sight word development. These same students subsequently require interventions that foreground alphabetic knowledge and the application of grapheme-phoneme connections to decode words. In a study of twenty-four 5-6-year-old struggling readers, phonemic awareness and phonemically based decoding skill instruction with practice in decodable text showed significant results for students on measures of phonemic awareness, pseudoword decoding, context-free word recognition, and reading comprehension (Ryder et al., 2008). In a two-year follow-up, Ryder and colleagues (2008) found that the students in the intervention group outperformed the control group, indicating that the positive effects of the intervention were not only maintained but also generalized to word recognition ability in connected text. These findings suggest that struggling readers benefit from instruction focused on phonemically-based decoding strategies with opportunities to practice in aligned text.

In exploring the use of decodable text as a scaffold for students learning English as a new language, decodable text reading practice can be efficacious in securing the phonological route and facilitating retention of phonics skills even for students with non-

alphabetic first language (L1) backgrounds (Chu & Chen, 2014). In a study of 64 low socioeconomic, language-minority first-graders, results suggested that students demonstrated more significant gains when they read text designed to provide practice in the phonics instruction they received at their independent level (Ehri et al., 2007).

In effectively supporting early readers in at-risk populations, a teacher's advanced knowledge of promoting growth at each phase of word reading development is vital to deploying specific scaffolded instruction conducive to promoting readers' development (Ehri & McCormick, 1998). Since both leveled and decodable texts customarily support the reading instruction of at-risk students, teachers must judiciously select texts that can help resolve reading difficulties (Murray et al., 2014).

Text and the Teacher

Texts are tools that teachers use to both improve and perfect reading (Bogan, 2012) and can represent a viable teaching tool for scaffolding reading development (Brown, 2000). Nevertheless, studies show that teachers may lack critical knowledge about beginning reading instruction and how different text types function as appropriate scaffolds (Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2005; Podhajski et al., 2009; Pogorzelski et al., 2021) to meet identified needs. Leveling criteria can create text progressions, yet teachers must balance the leveling system with a knowledgeable and thoughtful application (Brabham & Villaume, 2002). Brabham and Villaume (2002) discuss concerns regarding teachers' misappropriated attention to leveled text over specific learning targets and caution that misaligned integration of decodable text devoid of connection to sequenced phonics instruction may render such texts as essentially non-decodable. Additionally, assessments that determine students' reading scores with holistic scores, such as numbers

and letters, may conceal specific weaknesses, such as decoding and linguistic comprehension difficulties (Hastings, 2016).

Acknowledging students' changing ZPDs and adjusting text types to match students' needs provides a conduit to facilitate students' growth from what they already know toward what they aim to accomplish (Brown, 2000). This acknowledgment by a more knowledgeable other aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) description of the optimal space for instruction between students' actual development and their learning potential. Cheatham and colleagues (2014) state that teachers should provide opportunities for struggling readers to read a decodable text independently. They further suggest that if students spend a mere twenty minutes per day reading highly decodable text, this practice can effectively support their development of the alphabetic principle.

Teachers can purposefully wield decodable texts to scaffold students' interactions with specific grapheme-phoneme correspondences in actual text (Castles et al., 2018). Since phonics instruction is an essential component of early reading instruction, it is plausible that students need texts that allow them to practice these skills (Cheatham & Allor, 2012). A critical initial consideration is the effective diagnosis of students regarding where they are in their reading development (Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005) before integrating differentiated scaffolds.

Mesmer (2005) asserts that the key to the effective use of textual scaffolds rests upon the teacher's knowledge of the developmental needs of the reader aligned with appropriate instructional goals. Podhajski and colleagues. (2009) examined the effects of professional development in scientifically-based reading instruction on teacher knowledge and student reading outcomes and found that teacher knowledge increased.

Students showed increased growth in reading skills compared to the control group. Implications from this study posit that increased teacher knowledge can be incredibly impactful in helping to diminish existing achievement gaps, especially for vulnerable populations (Podhajski et al., 2009).

As evidenced in the literature, the role of the teacher in developing decoding skills is constitutive (Allington, 2002; Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2005), and to effectively scaffold student learning, teacher knowledge is a significant factor for consideration. Juel and Minden-Cupp (2000) advance that reading growth is linked not to the methods but to the teachers who thoughtfully deploy such methods. However, knowledge often lacks calibration with purpose; in a survey of West Australian teachers, Pogorzelski and colleagues (2021) found that teachers did not understand the intentions of different text types for beginning reading instruction. These findings suggest that teachers may need support understanding the purpose of different text types for early reading instruction.

In a study of teachers' attitudes to and knowledge of reading development, Fielding-Barnsley and Purdie (2005) noted that although teachers revealed positive attitudes towards metalinguistics, they demonstrated poor understanding of critical metalinguistics such as how to distinguish graphemes and phonemes within a word, correctly identify voiced and unvoiced sounds, and recognize diphthongs. In a study of kindergarten through third-grade teachers, $n=722$, Cunningham and colleagues (2004) found that less than 1% of teachers correctly identified the number of phonemes in all 11 words presented as stimuli, and only 28% of the sample correctly answered all phonics questions.

Rightmyer and colleagues (2006) found that variables beyond models of instruction, such as instructional focus, time reading connected text, and interpretation of literacy activities, influenced teachers' reading theories. Juel and Minden-Cupp (2000) advanced the critical importance of teachers being knowledgeable about matching methods to students while heralding that consideration of what methods require consideration from a richer perspective.

Teachers must scrutinize textual scaffolds to scaffold early reading instruction effectively based on the processes and content most conducive to efficacious reading acquisition (Hiebert et al., 2005). Teachers represent a dominant force in the marketplace for educational materials and should be empowered to yield their influence to demand high-quality texts that provide access without forfeiting quality (Hoffman et al., 2002). In assessing the efficacy of instructional materials, it is imperative to foreground the user. Mesmer (1999) reminds us that the efficacy of any instructional material waives deference to the user, considering how efficiently knowledgeable professionals use the materials appropriately. As discussed in the NRP (2000) report, the choice of instructional methods for the teaching of reading has historically been influenced by multiple factors, including teachers' own experiences, politics, economics, and "wisdom of the day" (NRP, 2000, p. 2-1). To gather a complete, complex view of how decodable text is selected and used in first-grade classrooms, it is imperative to study the criteria and factors that influence text selection contextualized within teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes towards this specific text type.

Teacher Attitudes and Text Types

Teachers' attitudes towards specific text types significantly impact text selection and integration in classroom instruction. Exploring how teachers perceive decodable and leveled text is critical to better understanding the connections to teaching. Teachers may use decodable texts without fully understanding how phonics learning progressions align with instruction, which is necessary to facilitate reading practice based on systematic advancements (Brabham & Villaume, 2002).

Similarly, in a synthesis of comments from teachers on an electronic mailing list (listserv), Brabham and Villaume (2002) noted that over-reliance on leveled texts might divert teachers' attention from focusing on students' actual development of specific needs such as word recognition and comprehension strategies. In a survey of Western Australian teachers' use of texts in supporting beginning readers, Pogorzelski and colleagues (2021) found that teachers held several beliefs and opinions about how specific text types should support early reading instruction. However, the researchers could not conclusively determine whether those beliefs influence teachers' selection and use of texts. Interestingly, Pogorzelski and colleagues (2021) noted one exception, finding a high correlation between teachers who strongly agree that decodable text types align more closely with synthetic phonics instructional approaches and increased the likelihood of using exclusive decodable text use.

It is imperative that teachers closely consider leveling criteria to determine what underlying strategies students are and need to be using to read the text with a critical eye on leveling practices and assumptions (Hastings, 2016). Ultimately, the teacher, not the teaching model, will address the reader's specific needs and create the environment to

engage the reader (Rightmyer et al., 2006). Nurturing a love for teaching and learning is fundamental (Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005).

Voices from the Field

The science of reading (SOR) or vast convergent findings from diverse disciplines provide abundant clear insights regarding reading instruction (Petscher et al., 2020).

Despite the acrimonious debates surrounding instructional texts pervasive across the English-speaking world (Castles et al., 2018), multiple voices from the field are taking measures to align with findings from the SOR, with promising results. Mississippi recently enacted legislation and changed its trajectory from ranking 49th in the nation for reading in 2013 (NAEP 2013) to 25th in the nation for reading in 2022 (NAEP, 2022).

According to Folsom (2017), an examination of changes in teacher knowledge following the 2014 K-3 early literacy professional development initiative found that educator knowledge increased from the 48th percentile to the 59th percentile, and increases were found in the average rating of quality instruction of student engagement, and average rate of teaching competencies.

In their book *Know Better, Do Better: Teaching the Foundations so Every Child Can Read*, Liben and Liben (2019) share their transition from balanced literacy practices to research and evidence-based instruction. This change in practice catapulted students' achievement at the New York City Family Academy from the lowest-performing school to the highest-performing of any non-gifted school in Harlem. In a final note to the reader, Liben and Liben (2019) argue that improving literacy outcomes for all students is possible but requires “time, heart, and work from the teacher” (p. 160). Facing a paucity of research extolling clear guidance on which types of text are most conducive to

effective scaffolding of early reading development, these voices from the field provide a roadmap for the journey forward.

Cultivating Change

Convergent findings reveal that letter and word recognition difficulties commonly cause reading struggles (Perfetti, 1985; Stanovich, 1986; Vellutino, 1991; Vernon, 1971, as cited in Adams, 2013). Indeed, it is incumbent upon educators to determine whether selected decodable texts provide opportunities for engagement. As Hiebert et al. (2005) noted, research is needed to determine how the level of engagement of decodable texts affects student motivation and learning. Published literature on decodable texts elicits the need for a broader conceptualization to ascertain which text type will work best, for which reader, and at which stage of reading development (Mesmer, 1999).

In a study of second-grade students, Cheatham and colleagues (2014) found that students still developing early reading skills showed improvement when using multiple-criteria text. The multiple-criteria texts addressed high-frequency words, decodability, and meaningfulness. At the same time, students who had already mastered basic decoding skills showed no statistical significance compared to the authentic literature reading control group. These findings suggest that highly controlled texts may only be fortuitous as a temporary scaffold for students still developing basic phonics skills and not beneficial for all students, emphasizing the importance of the judicious selection of text by the teacher.

In viewing text selection as a scaffolding tool, decision-making moves from over-reliance on commercially established levels to decisions considering the type of text best matched to students' development (Brown, 2020). The case for the sagacious use of

decodable text as a scaffold for reading development begins with substantial knowledge regarding the individual needs of the reader, relevant to stage acquisition in the reading process, accompanied by scrupulous text selection.

To avoid over-reliance on one type of text, educators must acknowledge and nurture how early readers' interactions with text change as they move from print awareness to learning to decode, on to the fluency indicative of independently capable readers. The goal should always be the thoughtful and knowledgeable selection of text that supports and extends students' progress; in this way, text selection becomes a critical instructional scaffolding tool (Brown, 2000) that considers a student's ZPD. The text selection process should incur a multidimensional process recognizing that texts impact how students perceive reading and view themselves as readers (Hastings, 2016).

The ubiquitous debate regarding appropriate texts for early reading instruction is steeped in polarizing arguments advancing one type of text over another (Hastings, 2016). This study seeks to delve deeply into the nexus of textual deliberations, the intersections of text criteria, instruction, students' developmental phase, and teacher perceptions, which have received far less attention (Cheatham & Allor, 2012) across the research landscape. Cheatham and Allor (2012) posited that when considering decodability in text selection decision-making endeavors, it is essential to distinguish decodability as a criterion rather than a text type. Scaffolding reading instruction is critical and requires the intentional selection of appropriate texts mapped to students' potential and derived from research-informed pedagogy. This study explores teachers' perceptions of text types and examines how texts are selected and used in first-grade reading instruction.

The next chapter will outline the methods used to conduct this study, including the rationale for employing a convergent mixed methods design, the guiding research questions, the sampling method, and the data collection and analysis plan. Additionally, the chapter will discuss ethical considerations, internal validity and reliability, external validity and limitations, and positionality.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The research used a convergent mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) to understand first-grade teachers' perceptions of decodable texts and how these beliefs predict their selection and use of decodable text. This study will employ quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and integrate both data analyses to seek a deeper understanding of the complex interaction between teacher perceptions, the text, the methodology, and the reader. Within this design, the researcher collects, analyzes separately, merges, and then conjointly interprets quantitative data (Likert-type and multiple-choice surveys) and qualitative data (interviews) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Fundamental to mixed methods research is the belief that combining quantitative and qualitative data will provide a complete understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study will seek to integrate findings from two sources of data collection to develop a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions as they relate to the selection and use of decodable texts for first-grade reading instruction (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The researcher will collect each independent strand of qualitative and quantitative data in a single phase and merge results to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon than that which could be provided by either strand alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

The quantitative survey sought to explore the first research question: (1) How do first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction? The qualitative interviews will seek to explore the second research question: (2) What are first-grade teachers' perceptions of decodable text? A mixed methods approach will give a complete understanding of the text selection problem. First, it will explore how teachers select and use instructional texts to support beginning reading instruction. Second, it will explore

teachers' perceptions of decodable text, which may predict the selection criteria and the frequency of text use. Third, it will integrate findings from each strand to lay bare the key characteristics that converge or diverge regarding how teachers' perceptions of decodable text intersect with criteria used for selection and frequency of integration into classroom instruction.

A mixed-method research design is conducive to the present study as it aims to explore intentionality within the complex intersections of teachers, students, and texts during early reading instruction. A sine qua non of this topic centers on the socially mediated nature of teaching and learning. This study will seek a comprehensive understanding of how texts are selected and used to scaffold reading instruction by querying text criteria and use and teachers' perceptions of decodable texts. This study aims to merge the results from quantifiable data, such as Likert-based survey results, and qualitative data, such as open-ended question responses, to understand better teachers' perceptions and subsequent text selection (Creswell, 2018, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By combining quantitative and qualitative results, this study will gain new knowledge beyond just the survey results and dig deeper into the behaviors and attitudes of the teachers involved.

Research Questions

Two research questions will guide this study.

1. How do first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction?
2. What are first-grade teachers' perceptions of decodable text?

Research Site

The research site was a Northeast elementary school with diverse demographics.

Participants

Purposeful and convenience sampling techniques will be employed to recruit participants. For the quantitative portion of this mixed-methods design, the researcher will use a purposeful, non-probability sample of first-grade teachers teaching in suburban elementary schools in the Northeast. This location was selected based on the absence of legislation mandating the implementation of research-based instruction in the primary grades. The study will use snowball sampling to recruit additional participants and increase the sample size (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018). The study will recruit teachers to participate in the research and complete the survey based on their status as first-grade teachers. The study will recruit participants from elementary schools where the researcher has access to potential first-grade teachers. To gain access to potential participants, the researcher will contact school building principals via email to seek permission to survey their teachers. Once school principals consent to surveying teachers in their buildings, the researcher will recruit teachers via email.

To minimize biases, most school districts contacted will be those with whom the researcher has no personal or professional connection. However, the researcher fully discloses their employment in one of the participating school districts.

Procedures

In this section, the researcher will outline the procedures for collecting and gathering relevant data from first-grade teachers to answer the research questions.

Quantitative Data Collection-Surveys

The survey instrument for this study represents a modification of an existing survey instrument constructed by H.A. E. Mesmer to study how teachers across the nation choose and use beginning reading materials (Mesmer, 2006). Although the present study draws inspiration from Mesmer's (2006) approach, it focuses on a discrete sample of participants, limiting criteria to first-grade teachers who teach in suburban Northeastern districts. Quantitative data from Likert-scaled and multiple-choice constructed questions reflects items developed, piloted, and then finalized (Baumann et al., 2000; Commeyras & Degroff, 1998; de Vaus, 2002; Dillman, 2002; Fresch, 2001; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999 as cited in Mesmer, 2006).

The researcher will email the initial survey to building administrators of the school districts that have granted permission to collect data from their first-grade teachers. Follow-up reminders containing the survey link will be sent every other week over four weeks to maximize participation. The deployment of snowball sampling will augment participation.

Qualitative Data Collection-Interviews

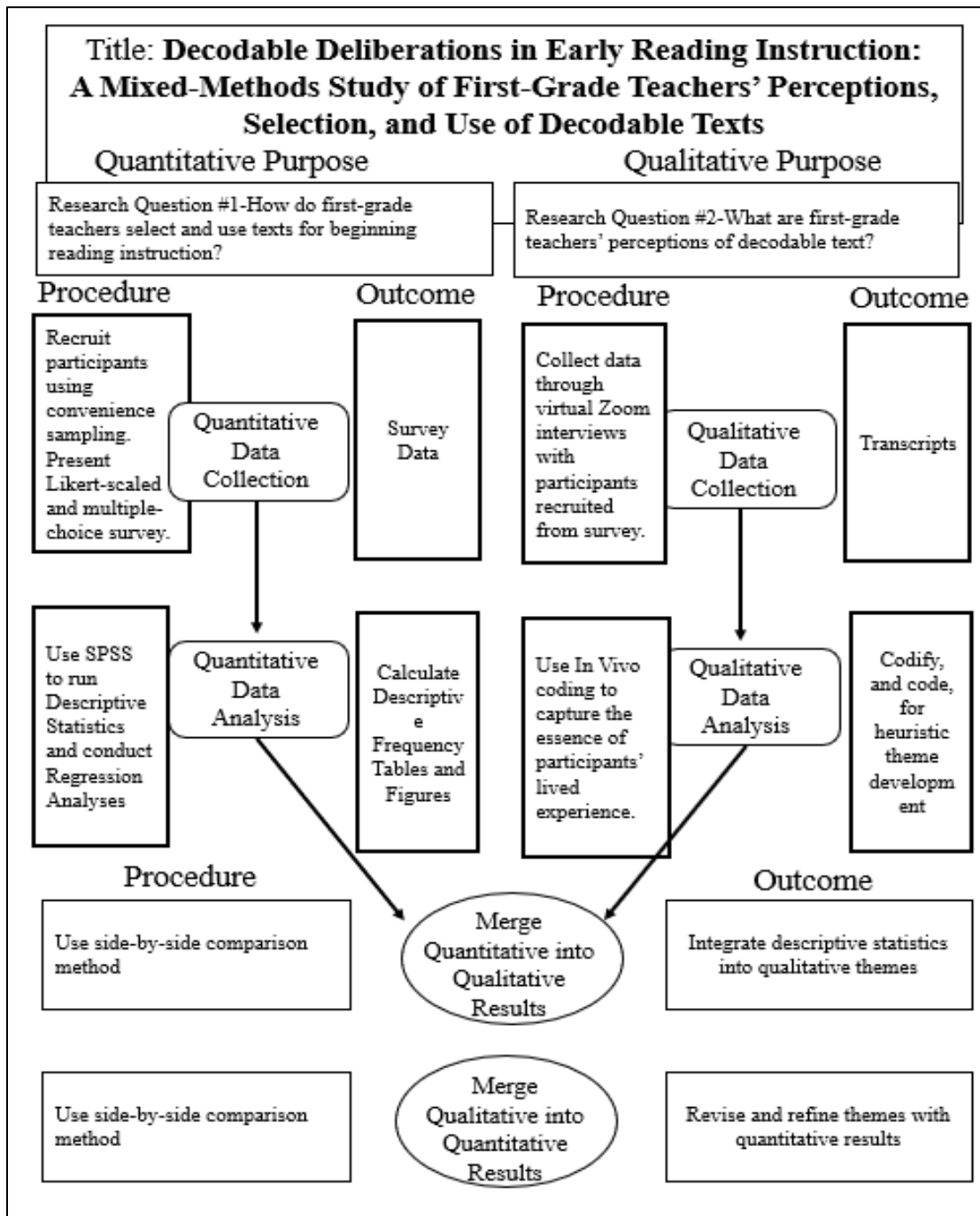
The researcher will collect qualitative data through interviews conducted via virtual meeting formats. Interviews will include the same sample of first-grade teachers who participated in the quantitative phase of the study. Convenience sampling methods will continue to recruit participants for this qualitative strand of the study. A question at the bottom of the survey will ask respondents if they would be willing to participate in a post-survey interview session via the St John's secure platform Webex.

An interview protocol will help to structure the data collection and organize the information to maintain consistency. The header of the protocol will provide space to record statements about the purpose of the study, a reminder to review the consent form, a statement about the study's purpose, reminders to check recording equipment and information about the participants' first-grade teaching experiences, and the date and time of the interview.

The protocol also included five brief questions. The first question was an icebreaker to set the participants at ease and motivate them to talk. The remainder of the questions addressed teachers' perceptions of decodable text. The researcher used the empty spaces under each question to take brief notes during the interview.

Figure 1

Convergent Parallel Research Design



Data Collection

This convergent mixed methods design deployed a single-phase approach to collect quantitative and qualitative data concurrently during the same data collection phase. Qualitative and Quantitative strands will be collected independently, and data analyses will be merged, compared, and synthesized to render a more complex and complete understanding of how teachers' perceptions of decodable text interact with the criteria used for selection and the frequency of use (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This study will collect quantitative data through a survey of first-grade teachers and qualitative data through interviews.

After receiving approval from district administrators, the researcher will email the survey to first-grade teachers in the participating district with a dedicated link to access the survey included in the body of the email. An eight-week data collection window will be strictly adhered to and will offset maturation issues.

Data Analysis Quantitative Strand

The initial analysis will calculate descriptive statistics for all the study's quantitative variables using SPSS. This analysis will include the means, standard deviations, and range of scores for these variables. The researcher will identify missing data, develop plans to report missing data and strategize how such data will be ameliorated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher will create frequency tables to organize the data.

Data Analysis Qualitative Strand

The researcher will deploy a cyclical process of coding and recoding the data to analyze the open-ended questions responses or qualitative data. During the first coding

cycle, the researcher will assign essence-capturing codes to sections of the datum. During the subsequent cycle of coding, the researcher will assign a combination of Descriptive Codes and In Vivo Codes to capture the essence of the data with an emphasis placed on foregrounding the actual words of the participants through the extraction of verbatim quotes (Saldaña, 2013).

Following the coded cycles, the researcher will deploy an iterative data analysis process to describe, classify, and interpret the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With the research questions anchoring the heuristic coding process, links to the central idea of first-grade teacher perceptions of decodable and leveled texts will guide the codifying and categorizing of data (Saldaña, 2013).

Merging the Data Analyses



The researcher will merge the data analyses using a side-by-side comparison method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The researcher will relate quantitative and qualitative findings by theme and present findings side-by-side in the discussion section of the final publication. The researcher will solicit participant feedback through all phases of data analysis. Using the iterative process outlined by Saldaña (2013), the researcher will continue to codify the data from the specific to the more general. To grasp the essential meaning of the perspectives of first-grade teachers based on their lived experiences, as described in Creswell and Poth (2018), an emphasis on understanding the themes generated by the coded datum will center on how teachers perceive decodable and leveled text. Ultimately, through a process that embraces reflexivity and centers the participants' voices, the researcher will collate an authentic structure of the teacher's lived

experiences, identified and acknowledged through a detailed description that includes In Vivo quotes to capture the essence of the experience.

In this convergent parallel research design, the data will be mixed in the study's interpretation phase to notice convergence or divergence across the qualitative and quantitative findings.

Table 1

Data Collection and Data Analysis

	RQ1: How do first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction?	RQ2: What are first-grade teachers' perceptions of decodable text?
Data Collection	Likert-scaled and multiple-choice survey questions	Interviews
Data Analysis	SPSS will be used to calculate descriptive statistics, and cross-tabulations of selected data points will analyze relationships between data points.	A cyclical, heuristic process of assigning descriptive and In Vivo codes will be used to develop themes.
 Merge Results		
 Interpret Results to Compare		

Ethical Considerations/ Research Bias

Objectivity is a critical aspect of practical research, and it is incumbent upon researchers to address potential biases. To consider teachers' authentic perceptions of decodable and leveled text, a necessary first step will be to suspend personal judgments regarding this subject. To clear the path for an unaffected exploration of teachers' perceptions through their own lived experience, the researcher will strive to bracket off individual perceptions and instead center the researcher's lens on the participants' perceptions as recounted through their individual and collective voices (Daly, 2005). Furthermore, the researcher will mediate potential bias by selecting additional participants in the sampling process who are not in the researcher's organization (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Ethical Considerations and Positionality

It is incumbent upon the researcher to fully disclose their role and its influence on the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). As a literacy coach practitioner working in elementary education in a suburban Northeast school district, it will be critical to diversify sampling procedures to balance participants from within and beyond the researcher's backyard (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As discussed by Creswell and Creswell (2017), to mediate any imbalances of power that can compromise the relationship between the researcher or inquirer and the participants, it is crucial for researchers studying participants in their organizations to take responsibility for showing the participants how the data will not be compromised, nor will the study place the participants at risk (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In the present study, to further ameliorate any existing power imbalances, the researcher will invite the participants to

collaborate in the research's data analysis and interpretive phases (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Furthermore, the researcher will take explicit steps to secure permission from the institutional review board (IRB) to conduct this study to protect the rights of all human participants. In alignment with IRB protocols, the researcher will seek the approval of the gatekeepers to gain access to participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Additionally, the researcher will procure informed consent from all participants. As a subjective inquirer, it is incumbent upon the researcher to acknowledge and bracket off personal views to the utmost extent during data collection, analysis, and interpretive phases. The researcher is committed to amplifying the voice of the participants and will use the participants' own words during all phases of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and publishing.

Internal Validity and Reliability

A considerable threat to internal validity may lie in the sample selection. This study will adhere to a strict timeline for data collection to offset maturation issues. All first-grade teacher respondents will complete the survey at a relative point in time. Snowball sampling will be employed to increase the sample size to offset mortality.

The modified survey instrument reflects established construct validity field testing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Since the study deploys a modified instrument, data analysis will further establish validity and reliability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

External Validity and Limitations

The researcher will use purposeful, convenience sampling based on first-grade teaching status and the district administration's willingness to permit teacher recruitment to recruit participants. Therefore, the researcher acknowledges the possibility of

population biases. The study will employ triangulation and member checking to establish validity for qualitative databases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Summary

This research will employ a convergent mixed methods design. This design is conducive to the goals of the study as there is a wide berth of evidence connecting the reading instructional methods and texts used to students' reading achievement (Beverly et al., 2009; Cheatham et al., 2014), yet scant research amplifies the voices of the teachers who are instrumental in selecting instructional materials.

The convergent mixed methods design will use a single data collection phase, with quantitative and qualitative data mined concurrently. Qualitative data will be accrued through open-ended questions to understand better how first-grade teachers select, use, and perceive texts for reading instruction.

The researcher will analyze quantitative data using statistical analysis. The researcher will use coding to analyze qualitative data. The researcher will interpret data from the quantitative and qualitative survey items at the data analysis stage to determine if any themes converge regarding the selection and use of texts for reading practice and teachers' perceptions of leveled and decodable text. The implications of these findings can inform teacher preparation and professional development opportunities and foreground judicious text selection and use based on fundamental characteristics such as decodability (Cheatham & Allor, 2012) and instructional supportiveness (Cunningham et al., 2005).

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

This chapter presents findings from the study organized by the research question. The chapter begins with a brief review of the purpose of the study, research questions guiding the study, and an overview of the methodology. Then, participant demographics and summaries of the qualitative and quantitative analyses associated with each research question are summarized. Finally, quantitative and qualitative results are merged and conveyed.

Purpose of the Study

This convergent mixed-methods research study aimed to understand first-grade teachers' perceptions of decodable texts and how these beliefs predict their selection and use. Furthermore, the study aimed to seek a deeper understanding of the complex interaction between teacher perceptions, the text, the methodology, and the reader. The study utilized a convergent mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Questions

The following two research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: How do first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction?

RQ 2: What are first-grade teacher's perceptions of decodable text?

Descriptive statistics addressed research question 1. A combination of descriptive statistics and qualitative analyses addressed research question 2. A description of the data collection process and analyses, which consist of frequencies and percentages for the categorical variables, and coding and rich description of the qualitative data, appear in subsequent sections.

Overview of Methods

A convergent mixed-method research design delved deeply into intentionality within the complex intersections of teachers, students, methodology, and texts during early reading instruction. This study used teacher surveys and semi-structured interviews to analyze how first-grade teachers select, use, and perceive decodable texts.

As noted by Creswell and Poth (2018), pragmatism encompasses practical applications in the real world. The present study analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data separately, merged the two databases to combine the results, and rendered a deeper understanding of the research problems. The integration married the quantitative and qualitative data, thus rendering a complete understanding of how first-grade teachers select and use texts for reading instruction and the perceptions of teachers interacting with these texts. Merging the quantitative and qualitative data results proffered a more comprehensive picture of this phenomenon.

The researcher collected quantitative survey data following IRB approval and once participants signed electronic consent forms. Superintendents in Northeastern school districts were contacted via email (see Appendix A) to secure consent (see Appendix B) to communicate with their teachers, and once securing consent, recruitment emails were sent to first-grade teachers in the Northeast (see Appendix C). Participants gained access to the Google Form survey (see Appendix E) via email links. The researcher used snowball sampling techniques to reach and recruit additional potential subjects. The survey was closed when the sample size reached 37 participants.

Survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics calculated within the IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29) platform. The researcher calculated frequency tables and

statistics for each survey response. The researcher created tables and figures to communicate the results. Analysis of the survey data also identified potential participants to participate in the qualitative portion of this study.

The qualitative component of this study utilized a semi-structured interview for data collection. Lichtman (2013) notes that this format establishes comfort for the interviewer since a clear set of guidelines is prepared in advance while welcoming a responsive variation of questions. Before the interview, a detailed interview protocol (Appendix D) was developed, including five focused questions and space for notetaking. As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018), this interview protocol enables the recording of reflective notes and descriptive information. The researcher engendered manual coding techniques to code interview transcripts during and after data collection. The data was encoded using First and Second-Cycle coding initial, descriptive, and In Vivo codes. After codifying the corpus, categories were assigned to data families based on shared characteristics (Saldaña, 2013).

Data Collection Process

Data collection began following IRB approval, and once the participants signed all consent forms electronically. Quantitative data were collected using a researcher-designed survey instrument loosely based on a survey instrument constructed by H.A. E. Mesmer to study how teachers across the nation choose and use beginning reading materials (Mesmer, 2006). The researcher emailed the survey to first-grade teachers in Northeastern school districts. The survey consisted of a demographics section, which included questions about the number of students, years of teaching experience, and type of school. The survey instrument consisted of 27 questions, with the first requesting

consent for the study and the final asking teachers if they would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview.

The survey administered in this study asked first-grade teachers to share information regarding how they select and use texts for beginning reading instruction to explore research question 1. The first section explored how teachers select texts for reading instruction within the school climate. The following section queried the types of materials used to teach reading, how they were purchased, and the frequency of use by text type. Subsequent sections posed Likert-based questions to explore the utility of specific text types for teaching reading and multiple-choice questions to understand better teacher beliefs, practices, and use of texts for reading instruction. Participant's responses to the final question identified potential participants for the qualitative interview portion of the study. Table 2 provides a summary of demographic information for the participants in this study.

Quantitative data was cleaned and coded for IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29) database entry. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable to illustrate participant contributions and establish a conduit for deducing meaning. SPSS output was organized into tables to render the data more accessible for interpretation by illuminating patterns and trends.

Qualitative data was transcribed and heuristically coded to reveal emerging themes. As a fellow teacher and literacy leader in a Northeastern district, I had to reflect on the researcher's subjective nature and recognize that personal and situational influences would undoubtedly influence the research work and its findings (Lichtman, 2013). In practicing reflexivity, the researcher had to sort through personal subjectivities

and recognize the influence exerted on practical aspects of the study, including the selection of questions and more opaque influences such as nonverbal reactions and affirmations.

Lichtman (2013) reminds us of the critical role of the researcher as a conduit for the flow of information. Thus, as an emergent qualitative researcher, the researcher struggled to balance the role of the researcher as a sculptor of sorts, as opposed to an objective container. The researcher candidly acknowledges that, as a fellow educator, personal experiences shaped the research. However, by welcoming the process through the active self-reflection suggested by Lichtman (2013), a conscious effort was made to focus on the participants' words while embracing the awareness that each participant's contributions were shaping the researcher. Vivo coding captured the participants' genuine words, thus centering their voices.

Participants

Participants were recruited based on their status as first-grade teachers. The researcher identified potential sites for participant recruitment with assistance from the online State School Superintendent Directory. The researcher sent recruitment emails to first-grade teachers in Northeastern school districts where district superintendents secured prior consent. The sample was limited to first-grade teachers, who would select reading instruction texts for students in the full alphabetic phase and beyond (Ehri & McCormick, 1998). During this critical phase of sight word development, students should use connected text to practice using graphophonic cues to read words (Ehri & McCormick, 1998). Participant recruitment was limited to the Northeast based on the lack of mandated legislation addressing the science of reading alignment in this region.

The researcher utilized snowball sampling to offset low response rates and strengthen recruitment. The total number of survey respondents was 37. Table 2 presents a summary of participant demographic information. As shown in Table 2, most participants are experienced teachers who have been teaching for more than 19 years. The specific number of participants and their years of experience are as follows: less than three years ($n=4$, 10.8); 4 to 8 years ($n=4$, 10.8); 9-13 years ($n=2$, 5.4); 14-18 years ($n=3$, 8.1); and 19 or more years ($n=24$, 64.9). Participants reported the number of students they teach as follows: less than 15 students ($n=4$, 10.8), 16-20 students ($n=23$, 62.2), and 21-25 students ($n=10$, 27.0). Thirty-two participants described their school community as suburban in a medium-sized town (86.5%), and five described their school as suburban outside of a major city (13.5%).

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Teachers

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Number of students		
Less than 15	4	10.8
16-20	23	62.2
21-25	10	27.0
Years teaching		
Less than 3	4	10.8
4 to 8	4	10.8
9-13	2	5.4
14-18	3	8.1
19 or more	24	64.9
Type of school		
Suburban in a medium-sized town	32	86.5
Suburban, outside of a major city	5	13.5

Note. $N=37$

Quantitative Data Analysis

RQ 1: How do first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction?

Quantitative data were collected using a researcher-designed survey. Once the data collection period ended, the researcher downloaded survey data into a Google sheet. Survey data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29). The researcher carefully reviewed responses before entering data into SPSS, with RQ 1 foregrounding the initial analysis. A careful review of the research objectives was a necessary precursor to statistical analysis. The data was scrutinized and recoded into different variables, and categories of ranges of responses were created and added to the SPSS database to prepare and check the survey files. The researcher subsequently calculated frequency distributions for each question.

Freedom of Choice

In seeking to explore how teachers select, use, and perceive texts for first-grade reading instruction, it was critical to ascertain the autonomy participants experienced when choosing texts for the classroom, including independent reading collections. As displayed in Table 3, most participants (64.9%) reported having extensive classroom libraries with *201 or more* books. Over one-third of teachers surveyed (37.8%) said they purchased 51-100 books with their own money. This data suggests that many sample teachers could gather and purchase books of their own volition.

The first research question queries how first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction, so it was essential to determine how much freedom of choice teachers experienced in choosing and using texts. Teachers reported on degrees of choice incurred within their school climate to address this question. As shown in Table 4,

most teachers reported that although they were required to use specific books, they could also supplement (73%). Next, teachers reported being required to teach to objectives. However, they were free to choose materials (24.3%), with only one teacher reporting being required to use specific books and not being able to *supplement* (2.7%).

Table 3

Book Selection and Availability

	Percentage
Who decides on book selection?	
Required to use specific books, but can supplement	73.0 (27)
Required to use specific books, cannot supplement	2.7 (1)
Required to teach objectives but free to choose materials	24.3 (9)
Number of books in the library for free, independent reading	
Less than 50	2.7 (1)
51-100	2.7 (1)
101-200	29.7 (11)
201 or more	64.9 (24)
Number of books in the library paid for with own money.	
Less than 50	32.4 (12)
51-100	37.8 (14)
101-200	10.8 (4)
201 or more	18.9 (7)

Frequency

It was essential to ascertain the frequency of use for specific text types to address how first-grade teachers use texts. Survey responses from the *Types of Material Used* section were analyzed to understand the frequency of use better. Teachers disclosed how often they use decodable books, leveled books, and authentic children’s literature. As shown in Table 4, participants reported using leveled books most frequently, with 45.9% of respondents asserting they used leveled books *3-4 times* per week and 37.8% claiming they used leveled books *more than five* times per week. Participants reported using

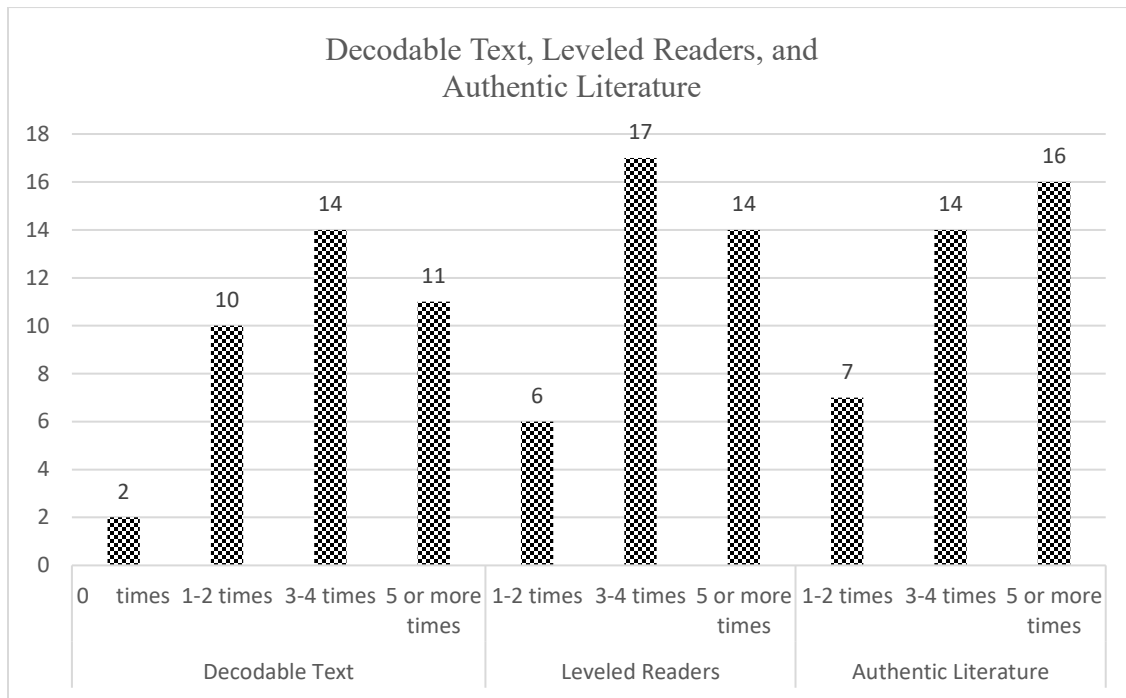
Decodable books less frequently, with 37.9% of participants reporting using decodable texts 3- 4 times per week and 29.7% of the respondents reporting using decodable books *more than five* times per week. Authentic literature was also widely used, with 43.2% reporting using authentic texts five times weekly. As shown in Figure 2, participants reported using all three text types widely, and only two respondents (5.4%) reported using decodable text 0 times per week. Respondents reported using decodable text less often per week than leveled readers and authentic literature (Figure 2).

Table 4
Use of Materials

	Percentage
In a typical week, how often do you use decodable books?	
0 times	5.4 (2)
1-2 times	27.0 (10)
3-4 times	37.8 (14)
More than five times	29.7 (11)
In a typical week, how often do you use leveled books?	
0 times	0.0 (0)
1-2 times	16.2 (6)
3-4 times	45.9 (17)
More than five times	37.8 (14)
In a typical week, how often do you use authentic children’s literature?	
0 times	0.0 (0)
1-2 times	18.9 (7)
3-4 times	37.8 (14)
More than five times	43.2 (16)

Figure 2

Text Use



Text Selection Criteria

A critical query in understanding how teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction is an exploration of the criteria used to inform choices. The survey asked participants to rate the criteria for text selection as *essential*, *very useful*, or *not useful at all*. As shown in Table 5, teachers found words that students can easily decode as the preeminent issue when selecting texts (73%), followed by letter/sound match with phonics lessons (67.6%). Illustrations support word recognition, and Guided Reading Level (GRL) also received high rankings, with 48.6% rating picture match as *essential* and 45.9% rating GRL as *essential*. The quality of the literature was also rated highly, with 51.4% of respondents rating it as an *essential* criterion. Illustrations supporting word

recognition were also highly rated, with 48.6% of respondents rating it as *essential* and 43.2% rating it as *useful*.

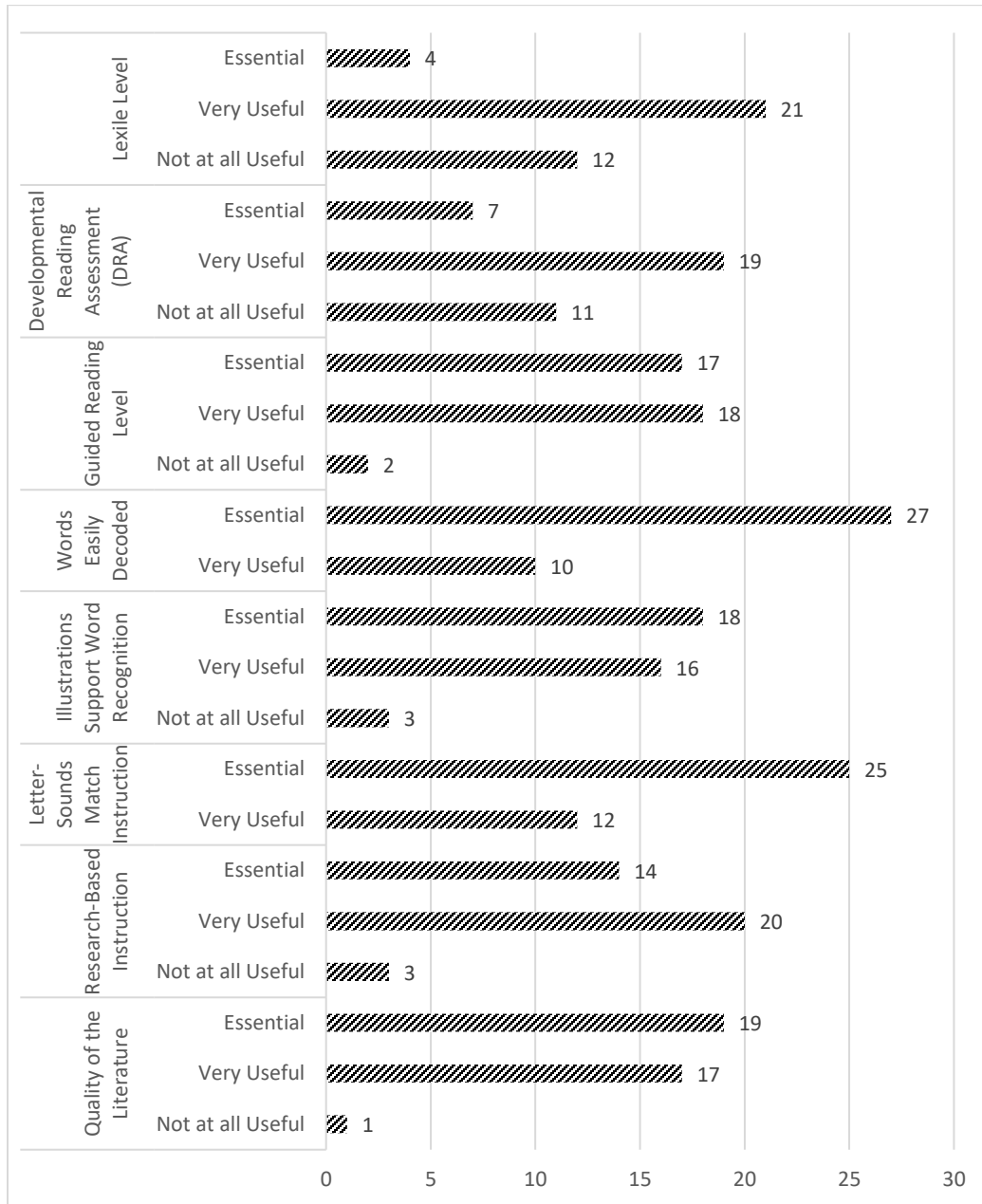
Table 5

Ratings of Criteria for Text Selection

Criteria	Percent (<i>n</i>)		
	Essential	Very Useful	Not at all useful
Quality of literature	51.4 (19)	45.9 (17)	2.7 (1)
Research-based instruction	37.8 (14)	54.1 (19)	8.1 (3)
Letter/sounds match phonics lesson	67.6 (25)	32.4 (12)	0.0 (0)
Illustrations support word recognition	48.6 (18)	43.2 (16)	8.1 (8)
Words can be decoded easily by students	73.0 (27)	27.0 (10)	0.0 (0)
Guided reading level	45.9 (17)	48.6 (18)	5.4 (2)
Developmental reading assessment	18.9 (7)	51.4 (19)	29.7 (11)
Lexile Level	10.8 (5)	56.8 (21)	32.4 (12)

Figure 3

Ratings of Criteria for Text Selection



Assessing Text Appropriateness

Gaining a complete grasp of text selection decision-making requires exploring how teachers assess text appropriateness. As shown in Table 6, teacher judgments

primarily focused on listening to students read, making on-the-spot judgments (91.9%), and thinking about how phonics instruction coordinated with readings (86.5%). Using running records to calculate the percentage of words read correctly was reported to be used less often by teachers in determining appropriate text selection (56.8%).

Table 6

Judgements

Judgment	Percent Using
Listen to students read	91.9 (34)
Running records to calculate % correct	56.8 (21)
Think about how phonics instruction coordinates with readings.	86.5 (32)

Teaching Methods

The survey questioned respondents to explore the methods of instruction first-grade teachers use to teach reading. As shown in Table 7, all respondents reported using phonics and phonemic awareness instruction (100 %). Most teachers also reported using Guided Reading (91.9%) to teach first graders how to read. Similarly, Reader’s Workshop emerged as widely used by 75.7% of respondents. Additionally, 67.6% of teachers reported using Balanced Literacy as an approach widely used to teach reading. Few teachers reported using Reading Recovery (2.7%). Only 27% of respondents reported using a direct, systematic approach.

Table 7*Approaches*

Approach	Percent Using
Guided reading	91.9 (34)
Balanced literacy	67.6 (25)
Readers' workshop	75.7 (28)
Three cueing system	21.6 (8)
Reading Recovery	2.7 (1)
Phonics and phonemic awareness instruction	100.0 (37)
Multisensory approach	56.8 (21)
Direct, systematic approach	27.0 (10)
Other	8.1(3)

Text-based Philosophies

Survey questions asked respondents to consider various perspectives, philosophies, or beliefs about reading to further gauge potential influences on text selection and check all that applied to their ideology. As shown in Table 8, most respondents asserted that phonics should be taught directly to beginning readers so that they can become fluent, skillful readers (94.6%). Additionally, 83% of teachers also identified themselves as having an eclectic attitude, meaning they draw from multiple perspectives and sets of materials when teaching reading. 75.7% of teachers identified themselves as having a balanced approach to teaching reading, and the same percentage of teachers believed that students should be immersed in literature and literary experiences to become skilled readers. Additionally, 70.3% of teachers reported that students must learn to read words using multiple cues (picture, context, and visual). Few teachers would describe themselves as whole language teachers (13.5%). These teachers believed in literature-based approaches where authentic text would be used exclusively

(8.1%) or viewed basal programs as valuable tools for teaching students how to read (8.1%). These findings illuminate the wide berth of conflicting philosophies influencing text selection decisions. Although most respondents indicated that phonics should be taught directly, three-quarters of the sample also indicated that students need multiple cues to read words. These inconsistencies demarcate the need for increased attention to teacher knowledge building related to early reading instruction and support early findings highlighting the need to improve teachers' knowledge of instructional strategies aligned to particular text types (Porgorzelski et al., 2021).

Table 8

Perspectives, Philosophies, and Beliefs Toward Reading

Philosophy	Percent Indicating
Traditionalist	8.1 (3)
Eclectic	83.8 (31)
Whole language teacher	13.5 (5)
Balanced approach	75.7 (28)
Decoding most important	73.0 (27)
Phonics needs to be taught directly.	94.6 (35)
Use of authentic literature	8.1 (3)
Published basal programs	8.1 (3)
Immersion in literature	75.7 (28)
Multiple cues	70.3 (26)

Phonics

Survey respondents selected a statement that best describes their opinion about teaching phonics. As shown in Table 9, 86.5% of respondents stated that synthetic phonics (systematic instruction that teaches students letter-sound correspondences first and then taught how to decode words) best described their opinion about teaching phonics. Only 5.4% of teachers reported analytic phonics, characterized by word sorts

and word study, where students are taught some sight words first and then phonics generalizations from these words aligned with their opinions about phonics teaching.

Table 9

Phonics

Opinion about teaching phonics	Percentage
Synthetic practice	86.5 (32)
Analytic phonics	5.4 (2)
Instruction in phonics by way of word families or phonograms	8.1 (3)

How Teachers Use Texts

Respondents indicated how helpful decodable books, leveled books, or authentic children’s literature were for specific instructional goals or specific populations of students to delve deeper into how teachers use texts in the first-grade classroom. As shown in Table 10, teachers viewed decodable text as the most essential material for all categories except for comprehension skills, where authentic literature was preferred (75.7%), and concepts of print, where authentic children’s literature (67.6%) was also preferred. In selecting the type of text that was most useful for teaching students how to read independently, results indicate that most teachers found all three text types to be either essential or very useful, with only 5.4% stating decodable books as *somewhat useful*; 18.9% reporting leveled books as *somewhat useful*; and 8.1 % reporting authentic children’s literature as *somewhat useful*. No respondents reported any text as *not at all useful* to teach students how to read independently. Most teachers attributed decodable text as useful for teaching struggling readers (86.5%) and English language learners (73%). The table below depicts a more detailed description of the results by category.

Table 10*Ratings of Criteria for Text Selection*

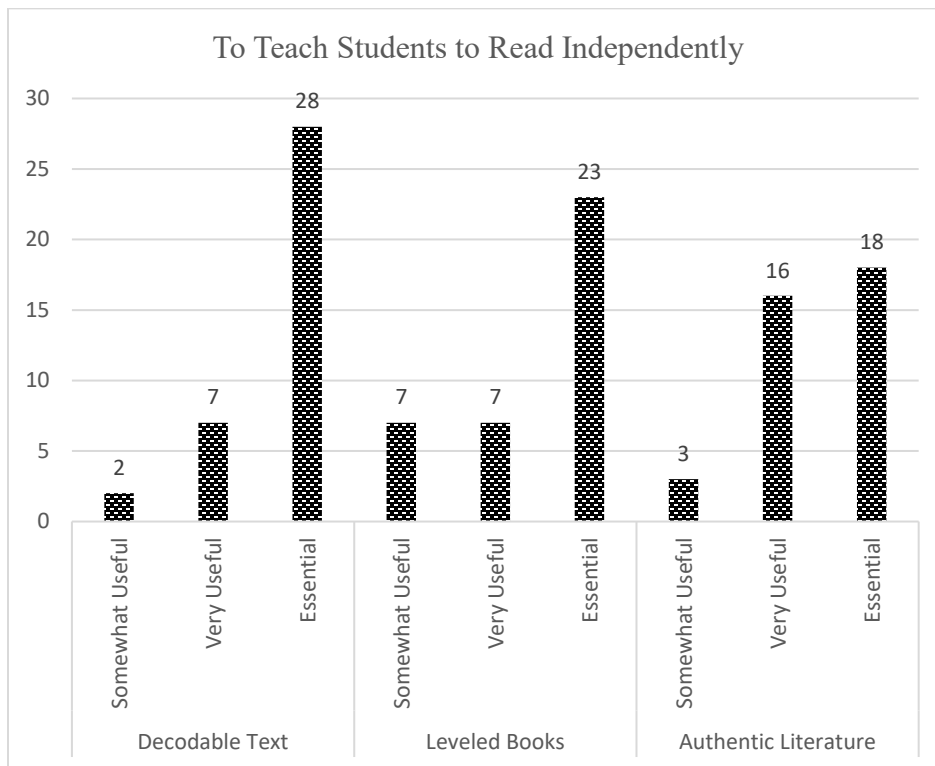
Activity	Percent			
	Essential	Very Useful	Somewh at Useful	Not at all useful
Reading independently				
Decodable books	75.7 (28)	18.9 (7)	5.4 (2)	0.0 (0)
Leveled books	62.2 (23)	18.9 (7)	18.9 (7)	0.0 (0)
Authentic children's literature	48.6 (18)	43.2 (16)	8.1 (3)	0.0 (0)
Concepts of print				
Decodable books	64.9 (24)	27.0 (10)	8.1 (3)	0.0 (0)
Leveled books	48.6 (18)	43.2 (16)	8.1 (3)	0.0 (0)
Authentic children's literature	67.6 (25)	24.3 (9)	8.1 (3)	0.0 (0)
How to decode words				
Decodable books	91.9 (34)	5.4 (2)	2.7 (1)	0.0 (0)
Leveled books	40.5 (15)	27.0 (10)	29.7 (11)	2.7 (1)
Authentic children's literature	13.5 (5)	37.8 (14)	45.9 (17)	2.7 (1)
Basic high-frequency words				
Decodable books	67.6 (25)	21.6 (8)	10.8 (4)	0.0 (0)
Leveled books	48.6 (18)	40.5 (15)	10.8 (4)	0.0 (0)
Authentic children's literature	24.3 (9)	40.5 (15)	35.1 (13)	0.0 (0)
Comprehension skills				
Decodable books	21.6 (8)	18.9 (7)	56.8 (21)	2.7 (1)
Leveled books	45.9 (17)	45.9 (17)	8.1 (3)	0.0 (0)
Authentic children's literature	75.7 (28)	24.3 (9)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Struggling readers				
Decodable books	86.5 (32)	13.5 (5)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)
Leveled books	51.4 (19)	24.3 (9)	21.6 (8)	2.7 (1)
Authentic children's literature	29.7 (11)	32.4 (12)	32.4 (12)	5.4 (2)
English language learners				
Decodable books	73.0 (27)	21.6 (8)	5.4 (2)	0.0 (0)
Leveled books	45.9 (17)	32.4 (12)	21.6 (8)	0.0 (0)
Authentic children's literature	32.4 (12)	43.2 (16)	24.3 (9)	0.0 (0)

Teaching Students to Read Independently

When asked to rate the usefulness of specific text types to teach students how to read independently, most teachers ($n=28$) rated decodable text as essential, while slightly fewer teachers ($n=23$) rated leveled readers as essential. When rating the usefulness of authentic literature, 18 teachers deemed such text essential, and 16 teachers deemed it *very useful*. Overall, results demonstrate that teachers consider all three text types essential resources to teach students how to read independently (See Figure 4).

Figure 4

How to Read Independently



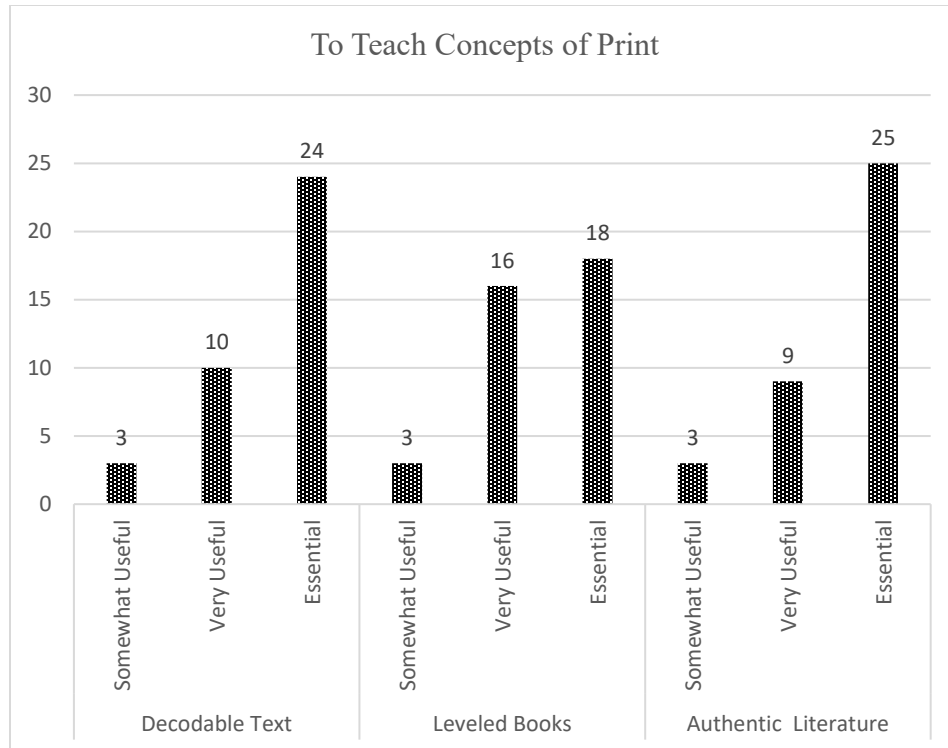
Teaching Students Concepts of Print

When choosing which texts are most appropriate for teaching concepts of print, most teachers rated authentic children’s literature ($n=25$) and decodable text ($n=24$) as

essential. However, leveled text also appeared widely used, with 18 teachers rating it as *essential* and 16 as *very useful*. For each of the three text types, only three teachers rated the text type as *somewhat useful* (See Figure 5).

Figure 5

Concepts of Print

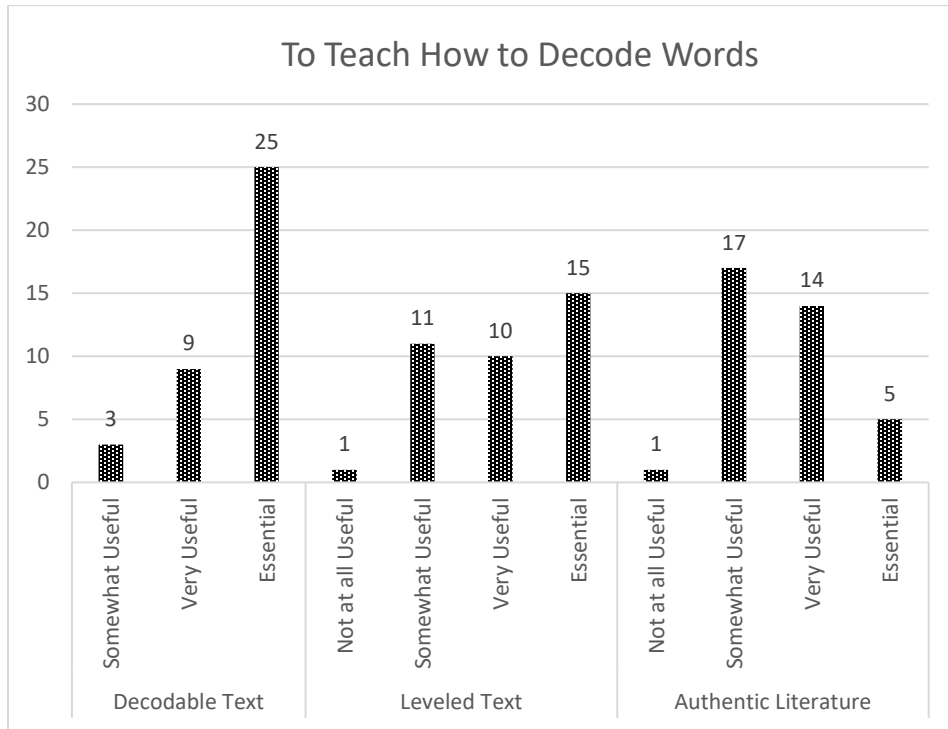


Teaching Students How to Decode Words

As illustrated in Figure 6, when choosing which texts are most appropriate for teaching students how to decode words, most teachers rated decodable text as *essential* ($n=25$) or *very useful* ($n=9$). Still, many teachers rated leveled text as *essential* ($n=15$) or *very useful* ($n=10$). Seventeen teachers considered authentic children’s literature *somewhat useful*, while 14 deemed this text *very useful* for teaching decoding.

Figure 6

How to Decode Words

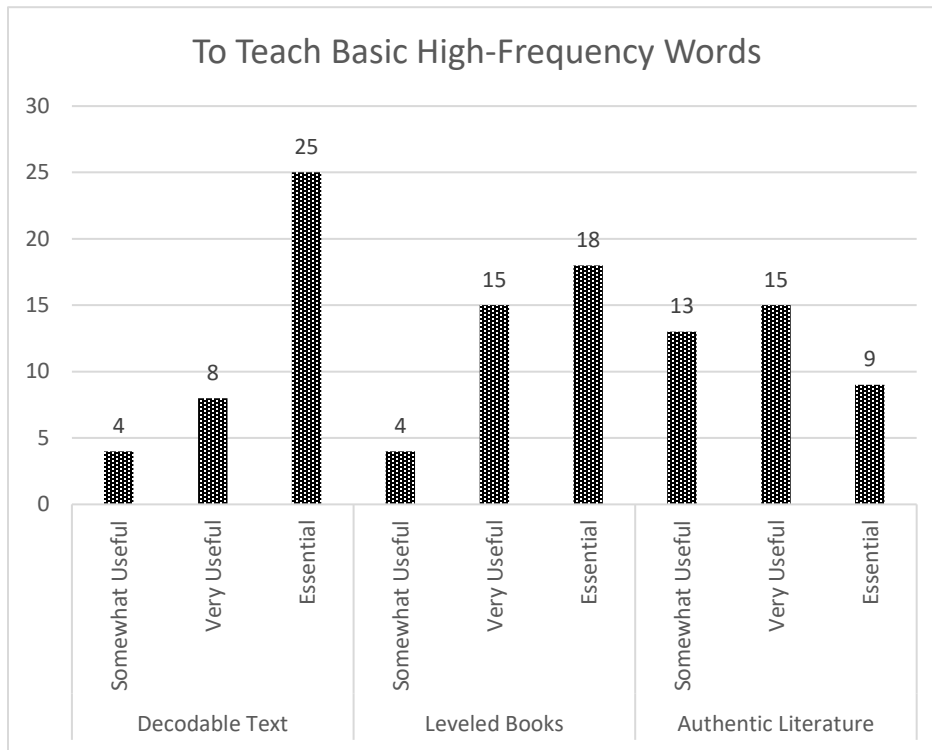


Teaching Students Basic High-Frequency Words

Most teachers rated decodable text *essential* ($n=25$) to teach students basic high-frequency words. However, many teachers also indicated that leveled readers were used to teach basic high-frequency words, with 18 teachers rating such texts *essential* and 15 teachers as *somewhat useful* (See Figure 7).

Figure 7

Basic High-Frequency Words

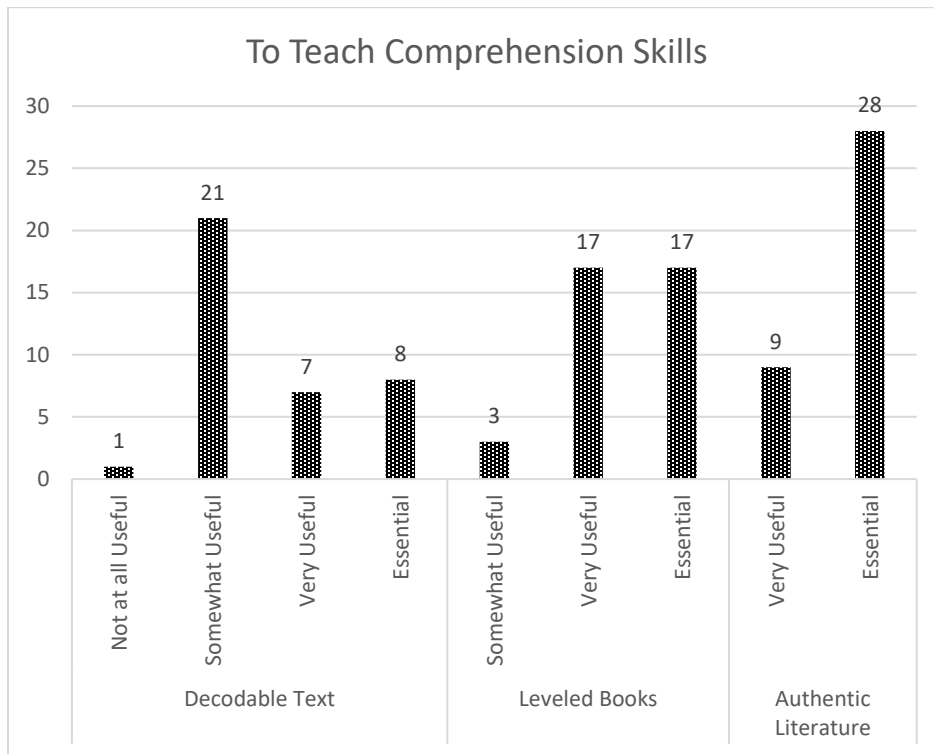


Teaching Students Comprehension Skills

As shown in Figure 8, most teachers selected authentic text as *essential* ($n=28$) to teaching comprehension skills. Leveled text also seemed to be used by teachers to teach comprehension skills, with 17 teachers rating this text as *essential* and 17 as *somewhat essential*. Decodable text, in contrast, was not aligned with teaching comprehension skills, with most teachers rating this text as *somewhat useful* ($n=21$) and one teacher even rating it as *not at all useful*.

Figure 8

Comprehension Skills

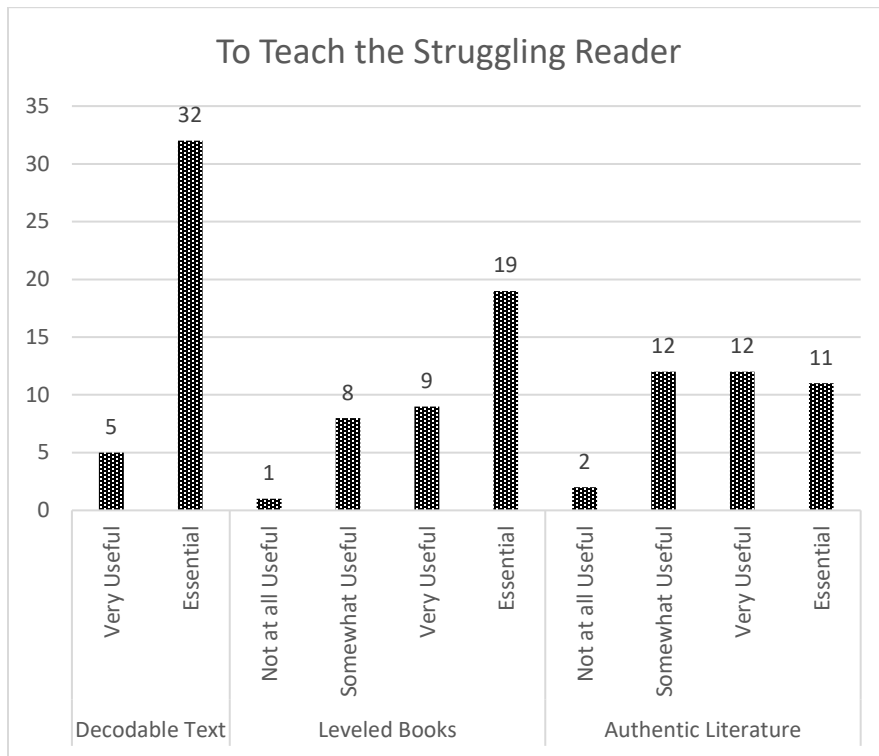


Teaching Struggling Readers

When asked which text type would be most useful for teaching the struggling reader, teachers showed the most consensus, choosing decodable text as *essential* ($n=32$) or *very useful* ($n=5$). Leveled text was selected by fewer teachers as *essential* ($n= 19$) or *very useful* ($n= 9$). According to respondents, authentic literature was least likely to be selected to teach struggling readers (See Figure 9).

Figure 9

Struggling Readers

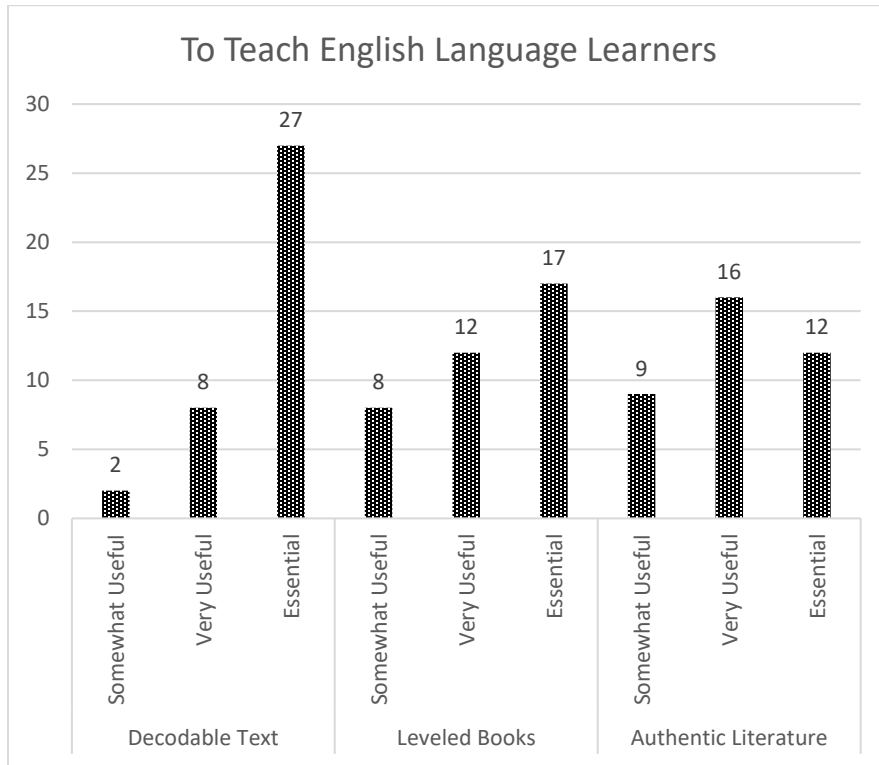


Teaching English Language Learners

As shown in Figure 10, when asked which text type would be most useful for teaching English Language Learners, teachers showed major concurrence in demarcating decodable text as *essential* ($n=27$). Teachers indicated that leveled text and authentic children's literature were used far less but proportionately, with leveled readers rated as follows: *essential* ($n=17$), *very useful* ($n=12$); *somewhat useful* ($n=8$), and authentic text literature as follows: *essential* ($n=12$); *very useful* ($n=16$); *somewhat useful* ($n=9$).

Figure 10

English Language Learners



Qualitative Data Analysis

RQ 2: What are first-grade teacher’s perceptions of decodable text?

The qualitative data sources included three one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited based on survey responses indicating interest in participating in the interview process. Offers of Remuneration boosted participation in the semi-structured interview portion of this study. Once the researcher obtained informed consent from potential interviewees, each participant communicated with the researcher via texts and emails, and a mutually agreed-upon date, time, and setting were selected. The researcher and participants agreed upon Virtual Webex platform meeting dates and interview times. The participants and researcher agreed to conduct

synchronous, pre-planned (Lichtman, 2013) online interviews using the Webex platform. Each participant agreed to a recording of the Webex session, and as a backup, a Sony recorder recorded the interview.

The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews using Webex's automatic transcription feature. Transcripts of participant responses were downloaded into Microsoft Word and revised to use pseudonyms in place of names to protect participant identities. Each transcript was carefully reviewed and compared with the video recording line by line to check for accuracy and validity. The researcher carefully edited automated transcriptions to correct errors and ensure accuracy and validity. Before coding the interview data, the researcher listened to the recording several times and conducted multiple transcript readings to experience data immersion. During these multiple readings, the researcher took the opportunity to circle, highlight, and underline data and store intriguing quotes for later use. (Saldaña, 2013).

The researcher used manual coding to analyze the corpus. To prepare the data for analysis, the researcher copied the transcripts to the left side of a Microsoft Word table, leaving a wide right margin for analysis. The researcher separated the text into paragraph-length units and utilized line breaks to create stanzas (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher then used preliminary jottings to code the data during the organization stage, and significant quotes were identified and highlighted.

The researcher utilized a First Cycle coding process described in Saldaña (2013) To code the data, assigning attributes to each section of the language-based transcription. In Second Cycle coding, the researcher initiated the process of reconfiguring the codes by attempting to capture the datum's essence (Saldaña, 2013). Subsequently, the researcher

used in-vivo coding to capture the essence of the participants' experience using direct quotes. After alphabetizing the codes and quotes, the researcher began the heuristic process of analysis and interpretation, which focused on labeling and linking the data (Saldaña, 2008). During data codification, the researcher used the following collating categories: uses, pros/cons, student experience, and leveled text. The researcher utilized a heuristic process to codify the data further, and encapsulating themes were reviewed and refined. The findings are presented under four themes were identified during analyses, namely, (1) Who and what matters in text selection, (2) The good, the bad, and the neutral nature of texts, (3) How students respond to decodable texts, and (4) “Regular” Texts (See Table 11).

Table 11*Themes*

Themes	Open Codes	Categories	Example Quotes
Who and what matters	Beginning readers Struggling readers Practice sounds Word patterns Variety Opportunity Phonics ENL Interventions Synthesize Perspectives New	Uses	“Decodable texts, I believe, are wonderful tools for students who are just learning how to read, or for students who may struggle reading such as students who maybe receive interventions or ENL students.”
The good, the bad, the neutral	Can apply phonics. Language rich Vocabulary Backgrounds 3 Cueing Word patterns Content Simple Value Quality Exciting Comprehension	Pros/Cons	“So, they [decodable text] don’t rely on the kids having to do as many cue systems, as they know that sound, and they’re familiar with it, and it’s a little bit easier for them to read.” “...it’s kind of just words on a page.”
The student response	Successful Confidence Proud Know Feel Perceiving	Student’s experience	“...and then it was like, I really can read this book, and so, like, the smile was on her face, and she felt so happy and proud of herself.”
“Regular” Texts	Regular Other Leveled Guided reading	Leveled text	“...when a kid picks up a book that’s not a decodable, just a regular reader, the stories sometimes tend to be a bit more interesting.”

Theme 1: Who and What Matters

The focus group interview participants shared their thoughts regarding how decodable texts work with their first-grade reading instruction. All the participants identified specific types of students that would most benefit from using decodable texts, with most participants emphasizing specific types of students best suited to this type. There was a consensus among participants that decodable text is beneficial for the “struggling” or “beginning readers.”

“Decodable texts, I believe, are wonderful tools for students who are just learning how to read, or for students who may struggle reading such as students who maybe receive interventions or ENL students,” said Participant 1. Both participants 2 and 3 zeroed in on the “beginner reader” as benefitting most from working in decodable text. Participant 2 stated, “I find it is really beneficial for learners who are really just learning how to decode.” Participant 3 added that decodable texts often isolate specific sounds and help “beginning readers because they practice in the beginning with a certain sound... they know that sound, they’re familiar with it, and it’s a little bit easier for them to read.”

One of the central issues in early reading instruction revolves around the role of phonics in reading acquisition. Convergent research fields recognize phonics as compulsory to skilled reading development while concurrently acknowledging its limitations (NRP, 2000). It is plausible to metaphorize phonics as a necessary key to unlock a complex series of processes while simultaneously clarifying that it is not a master key. Although reasonably necessary as an enabler of automatic word recognition for meaning-making, it is also insufficient (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). By design,

decodable texts allow students to practice applying the phonics concepts taught to larger chunks beyond the isolated word. The current study's findings reveal that decodable text may seem more like a remediation tool than a practice opportunity. Participant 1 delineates decodable text as presenting an application opportunity, "Decodable text is a text in which about 90%, if not more, of the words, are decodable and in which student can apply letter-sound knowledge" yet qualifies how decodable text fits within classroom practice, "it is developmentally appropriate to meet the needs of those [learners who are just learning to read] students." To acknowledge this student population's unique word phase development, a secondary question might consider the affordances and constraints of increased decodable text integration in first-grade classrooms. Ehri's (1995) full alphabetic phase characterizes most typically developing readers (Ehri & McCormick, 1998), prompting careful consideration of the benefits of expanding opportunities for practice in decodable text aligned to phonics instruction to include typically developing readers. These findings unearth the need for increased attention to defining the specific scaffolding opportunities presented in specific text types and an expanded inquiry regarding text integration in actual classroom practice.

After clearly indicating who decodable texts might benefit most, all participants articulated the purposes of decodable text. Participant 1 stated that decodable texts are books with "words that the children can sound out or tap out on their own." Participant 3 repeated the word "practice" several times when explaining how decodable texts "help" beginning readers because after practicing target sounds in isolation, "when they go to read the decodable text...they know it." Participant 3 also emphasized that students reading decodable text don't "use as many cue systems, as they know that sound and

they're familiar with it." Participant 1 explained that decodable texts are books students can "sound out or tap out on their own."

Participant 2 was clear to illustrate that decodable texts were used in her first-grade classroom to "supplement" instruction and help students "take the knowledge they are learning in phonics instruction and apply it when they are reading a text." Meanwhile, Participant 1 clearly distinguished that decodable texts were the texts used: "If I'm not doing guided reading." Participant 3 clarified that decodable books were not the only texts used for reading instruction, "You know, in my classroom, my first-grade classroom, I tend to use both types of books." Participant 3 further elaborated by asserting that "kids need variety."

The issue of text variety embodies complex issues within early reading instruction, and the literature asserts that text integration is critical to teaching (Ball & Cohen, 1996). Participants disclosed the eclectic approach to text integration during early reading instruction, "I think they need variety, um, because all readers learn in different ways and all books offer different skills" (Participant 3). These findings illuminate challenges at the application level. Effective integration of multiple text types aligned to specified student needs underwrites the need for practical skill identification tools to identify needs and inform text selection matches. These findings are notable and illuminate the challenges inherent in matching texts to first-grade readers. In balancing the literacy diet of first-grade readers, advocating for the intentional selection of texts that match identified goals for individual and collective readers seems plausible. Goals for early literacy instruction should reflect the convergent findings from the research landscape. The literature firmly establishes fluent, efficient, automatic word recognition

as compulsory for skilled reading acquisition (e.g., Dehaene, 2010; Moats, 2020; NRP, 2000; Share, 2008). Furthermore, Share (2008) posits the importance of phonological recoding while advancing the problematic role of context in reducing the reader's attention to orthographic detail necessary for developing self-teaching mechanisms to read novel words. Suppose the goal is for first graders to develop efficient self-teaching mechanisms, which is best achieved through decoding practice. In that case, using contextually dependent leveled readers and phonically controlled decodable text might present dissonance for the readers and demand further consideration.

Most of the participants elaborated on the affordances of decodable text in fostering opportunities for connection and practice. Participant 1 recounted how she purposefully “connects the decodable texts to what they’re learning in Foundations®.” Participant 1 chronicled how she had students who publicized their reading struggles by sharing, “I can’t read yet.” The participant responded, “So, with those readers, I plan on breaking out the decodables.”

One Participant explained that decodable texts were “kind of new to me” and shared that she “just started using them last year.” (Participant 1). The other participants did not indicate whether decodable texts were new for them or not, and this might be an essential consideration for further inquiry building on previous findings positing that teachers may use controlled texts such as decodable texts or leveled readers without a solid understanding of the application to sequence of instruction or instructional goals (Brabham & Villaume, 2002).

Theme 2: The Good, the Bad, and the Neutral

Participants considered the pros and cons of decodable text, which expanded the conversation to include comparisons of other text types. Participant 1 stated that a pro of decodable texts was that struggling readers “can actually read a book.” Participant 2 clarified that decodable texts were “beneficial” for students who are learning how to apply phonics skills. Participant 3 shared that the familiarity with sounds and word patterns makes the text more “predictable” for them, and this is a pro of using this text type. In a summary statement on the pros of decodable text, Participant 2 extolled, “So, decodable texts are great because it’s not predictable and students are really able to apply their knowledge when using them.”

All three participants referenced the three-cueing strategies when communicating the pros and cons of decodable text. Participant 2 explained that decodable texts are “great” because students are “able to apply their knowledge when they’re reading” and further clarified that other texts “have a very predictable pattern and students can often guess the language or guess the sentence structure because it’s very predictable and often it’s repeated.” Similarly, Participant 1 supported her claim that one of the pros of decodable text is that students...” don’t have to use picture cues to help them figure out the words.” Participant 3 further echoed these statements by expounding that decodable text “don’t rely on the kids having to use as many cue systems as they know that, they know that sound and they’re familiar with it.” Each participant indicated that students not relying on three-cueing strategies to read was a pro of decodable text.

Cueing systems represent a salient challenge in early reading instruction. Convergent findings across the literature discuss the constraints of multiple cueing as a

detractor from the attention to orthographic details that represents a critical step in developing word-specific letter-to-sound meaningful mappings that can be applied to novel words (Dehaene, 2010; Share, 1995). Findings from this study unearth the complexity of the research-to-practice application. Context is vital in determining word meanings and language comprehension while representing a flawed word identification approach. Stanovich (1986) asserts efficient decoding, not context use, as the critical mechanism enabling cognitive capacity to be allocated to comprehension, further advancing the idea that only the unskilled reader relies on contextual information. Findings from the current study unveil the ubiquity and ambiguity associated with cueing systems relative to text selection and reading instruction, decrying a need for further exploration.

All three participants seemed to agree that a lack of story development represented the cons of decodable text. Participant 1 conveyed that decodable text “don’t always have a lot of content.” Participant 2 elaborated further, “So the content, it could be that there isn’t as big of a comprehension piece to it, and that students may not increase their vocabulary or really learn much of the backgrounds with those texts.” Participant 3 contextualized the cons of decodable text framed within a comparison to other books,

You know, when a kid picks up a book, that’s not a decodable just a regular reader. The stories sometimes tend to be a little bit more interesting where these are kind of, not, not as, you know, they’re not going to get the kids interested as much because, um, again, there’s a lot of rhyming, so it limits to what the story can...how the story can evolve.

One con associated with decodable text referred to student interest. Participant 3 verbalized, “some negatives,” explaining, “sometimes they’re not as interesting.” She attributed this to the language patterns, stating the decodable texts, “kind of rhyme.” Additionally, Participant 1 attributed the “forced language” of the decodable text to the rhyming nature of the text. As shown in Table 12, some negative connotations regarding decodable text shared by participants included words or phrases such as: “simple,” “not necessarily a story,” “just words on a page” (Participant 1), “not as language rich,” “isn’t a big comprehension piece to it,” “not increasing their vocabulary,” “not really learn much of backgrounds” (Participant 2); “not as interesting,” “story’s forced,” “not be as exciting,” “silly” (Participant 3).

Authentic literature represents a separate text type category compared to the scaffolded design of decodable and leveled text. Since the construction of authentic literature disentangles itself from either phonetic control or contextualization mappings, it is necessary to demarcate the unique affordances and constraints of this text type related to the first-grade reader. To offset the deleterious consequences of the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 1986), it is critical to integrate authentic literature across skill levels in early reading instruction, yet simultaneously requires interrogation of effective integration methods. Hastings (2003) asserts that denying struggling readers access to engaging texts reduces motivation, engagement, and comprehension skill development. The present study's findings authenticate the need for further exploration of equitable obligations to provide students with sufficient opportunities to develop decoding skills while engaging students with complex text regardless of decoding abilities (Hastings, 2003). Further inquiry aimed at unearthing efficient practices to ensure that all students engage with

authentic texts regardless of their decoding abilities can turn to technological adaptations (Hastings, 2003) such as speech-to-print translation applications and audiobooks.

Analyzing the transcripts made it challenging to cull descriptions of decodable text categorized as neither optimistic nor pessimistic but more neutral language.

Respondents demonstrated what could be characterized as more neutral language when recounting how or when they use decodable text. For example, Participant 1 stated, “I use mine, so if I’m not doing a guided reading group, I’m using the decodables.” This respondent further elaborated that these texts were “for my struggling readers.”

Participant 3 also conveyed a more neutral description when reiterating that decodable text becomes more “predictable” due to repeated “practice,” Participant 2 used more neutral tones to explain how “learners really learn how to take the knowledge they’re learning in phonics instruction and apply it when they’re reading a text.” Overall, the respondents seemed to have strong opinions about the value of this text type, or lack thereof, illuminating essential considerations for future inquiry and attention. Table 12 depicts a summary of respondents’ references to decodable text.

Table 12*Decodable Text In Vivo Codes*

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
“For my more struggling readers.”	“Beneficial for learners...just learning how to read and how to decode.”	“Isolated to a certain sound...or digraph”
“New to me”		“Helps beginning reader because they practice...a certain sound...and when they go to read...words are...more predictable.”
“Simple Books”	“Supplement my instruction.”	“Don’t rely on...as many cue systems.”
“Words...children can sound out or tap out on their own.”	“Help learners ...take the knowledge...in phonics...and apply it”	“Easier”
“Don’t have to use picture clues.”	“90 %, if not more, of the words are decodable?”	“Short readers”
“Kids who are struggling readers feel successful.”	“Students can actually apply letter-sound knowledge.”	Words...rhyme”
“Can actually read...”	“Developmentally appropriate”	“Same sound patterns”
“Don’t always have a lot of content.”	“Match the phonics instruction that’s being taught.”	“Don’t have to rely on...sounding out because they ...flows a little bit easier.”
“Simple”	“Wonderful tools for students...just learning how to read, or...struggling readers...receive interventions...or ENL”	“Predictable... sounds...patterns”
“Not necessarily a story.”	“Beneficial For students learning how to apply letter-sound knowledge.”	“don’t have to rely...on the pictures.”
“Just words on a page”	“Not as language- rich as...authentic text, or...mentor text”	“Not as interesting.”
“Getting better”	“Isn’t a big comprehension piece to it?”	“Story’s..forced.”
“Becoming more of a story.”	“Not increasing their vocabulary.”	“Not be as exciting.”
“It gets them more confident...with tapping...sounding out.”	“Not...really learn much of...backgrounds.”	“Silly”
“Saw value in them.”	“Not predictable”	“Trying to Isolate a word pattern.”
“Beneficial for ...struggling readers”	“Able to apply their knowledge.”	“For kids who are beginning readers...because they’re looking for a certain sound or word pattern...can be more predictable.”
	“So important for first graders.”	“Easier to read”
		“Lot more to do with sound or a letter pattern.”
		“Able to synthesize and use it (letter-sound) in...reading practice.”
		“Able to figure out words...faster.”
		“Feel more successful”

Theme 3: Student Responses

Throughout the heuristic coding process, a strong theme that emerged from the data, as shared through the participants' own words, was a vivid description of how the first-grade student experienced decodable text. In describing students' experiences with decodable text, respondents shared sentiments such as: “It’s a little bit easier for them to read” (Participant 3); “struggling readers feel successful” (Participant 1); “can actually apply letter-sound knowledge when reading the text.” (Participant 2).

Respondents also discussed how decodable texts could help to build student’s reading confidence, “...I find that it really helps learners who are...maybe they struggle, or they don’t have the confidence to read a regular book...” (Participant 2). Similarly, Participant 1 stated, “The kids who are struggling readers feel successful because they can actually read a book.” Participant 3 posited, “...I think it makes them feel more successful when they read sometimes because they’re able to figure out those words a little bit faster because they see the pattern in there.”

Using a detailed description, one respondent recounted an interaction with a first-grader who shared with her teacher that she could not read a particular book yet. The respondent described the student’s reaction when allowed to work in a decodable text,

Moreover, she, like, just started looking at the first page, and she’s like, “Oh I, I know this word...Oh I know this word,” and then it was like,” Oh, I really can read this book” and so...like... she just like ...the smile was on her face, and she felt so happy and just proud of herself (Participant 1).

After reflecting on what she had shared, Participant 1 added, “So, anything you can do to make a child feel good about their reading skills or lack thereof is...you know...such a...are the way to go...then that’s what I’m going to use.” Later, the respondent also asserted that her students don’t know the difference between decodable text and not, explaining that teachers do not typically share this information with kids but surmised, “They’re perceiving it as a book I can read.”

These findings underscore perception's importance and impact on text selection, use, and efficacy. Participants’ descriptions of decodable text relegated this text type as “not as interesting” (Participant 3) or “not necessarily a story” (Participant 1). Contrarily, when recounting students’ responses to decodable text, perceptions shifted to a more positive description: “...the smile was on her face, and she felt so happy and proud of herself.” Understanding these dichotomous descriptions of decodable text proffers an opportunity for continued study of this phenomenon.

Theme 4: “Regular” Texts

Exploring teachers’ perceptions of decodable text led to comparisons to other texts, and what evolved as an essential theme was how participants labeled other texts using language such as “regular.” A scrutiny of the data found that the label “regular” was attributed to both authentic literature (Participant 2) and leveled readers (Participant 3), leading to a deeper analysis of how interviewees described non-decodable texts in the transcripts.

Some respondents described other texts as having “a very predictable pattern, and students can often guess the language or guess the sentence structure because it’s

predictable and often repeated.” (Participant 2). While others shared the merits of such texts,

I do use leveled readers for them because I find they can then build on their experiences. They can really learn how to connect the text to real-world experiences. They can build their backgrounds, their cultural backgrounds. And they can really learn more in the vocabulary and really read a literature-rich text and not just, you know...they’re not just reading the decodable piece; they’re also making connections ...they’re learning more about the world around them.

A consistency noted through all of the participants’ transcripts was the use of multiple text types for first-grade reading instruction, as illustrated by the following quotes: “I think they need variety” (Participant 3); “...if I’m not doing a guided reading group” (Participant 1); “I do feel that decodable texts are so, so important for first-graders, however sometimes I do also tie in the level of literacy and leveled books.” (Participant 2).

Finally, respondents also referenced the challenges of selecting specific text types and securing high-quality texts. Participant 2 describes the predicament of text selection,

So, I do think that it can be difficult because they have very different perspectives, but I do feel like it is important to tie in both to meet the needs of all types of learners because, realistically, so many students learn differently that it’s nice to tie in little pieces of everything.

One respondent also references less experience using decodable text, “Um, I just started using them last year, so it’s still kind of new to me” (Participant 1). The participant later discloses,

“I mean, I definitely saw value in them from last year. I’m going to continue to work with them this year, and just how it goes, I think it’s beneficial for kids. You know, who are struggling readers that they feel successful reading a book because I started my new year this year and I have kids who are telling me, I can’t read yet...

These findings support previous research asserting the wide use of leveled text and over attention to text levels at the expense of thoughtful application. Brabham and Villaume (2002) posit that overreliance on text levels often precipitates insufficient attention to instruction that nurtures active construction of meaning and self-regulation bolstered by careful monitoring of both word recognition and comprehension development.

Integrated Findings

Quantitative findings disclosed ubiquitous use of leveled text by first-grade teachers, with more than three-quarters of survey respondents indicating using leveled readers 3-5 times per week. Contrarily, respondents reported using decodable text less frequently, with two respondents even indicating they did not use decodable texts at all. The quantitative findings on the frequency of use according to text type converge with the qualitative findings, with interviewees describing authentic literature and leveled readers as “regular” texts while using language such as “other” or “supplemental” connected to the decodable text. These findings are consistent with other studies discussing the widespread use of leveled text across classrooms, fueled by increased attention to ascertaining students’ reading levels (Brabham & Villaume, 2002) to inform instruction and monitor growth.

Quantitative and qualitative data findings regarding text selection reveal significant convergence and divergence. Survey responses indicated that most teachers identified words students can easily decode as the preeminent criteria for text selection. However, qualitative findings foregrounded “struggling,” “beginning,” or “ENL students” as the notable characteristic for text-to-student matching. Furthermore, 48.6% of respondents rated illustrations support word recognition as *essential*, and 43.2% *related such criterion as applicable, further illuminating inconsistencies in the criterion* used to undergird text selection and use. Previous research indicates that teachers’ understanding and beliefs about the material, what is essential, and ideas about students influence their practice (Ball & Cohen, 1996), divulging important considerations for further study.

A merging of findings regarding text selection decision-making reveals that teachers use on-the-spot judgments to inform text selection. Quantitative findings reveal that 91.9% of survey respondents focused primarily on listening to students read and make on-the-spot judgments. Similarly, qualitative findings indicated that teachers used “guided reading,” which predicates using oral reading assessments to identify a guided reading level to inform instruction, as a “regular” practice. Previous findings address the issue of text selection decision-making and posit the challenges of identifying at-risk readers, foregrounding the insufficiencies of teacher judgment and the need for increased attention discerning the utility of alternative screening measures (Grimm et al., 2018).

Overall, integrated findings merging quantitative and qualitative strands reveal dissonance between methods, philosophies, and practices related to phonics instruction and text selection. While quantitative findings indicated that all respondents reported

using phonics and phonemic awareness instruction, qualitative findings reveal that all students were not presented with decodable texts aligned with phonics instruction. However, these scaffolded texts were reserved for “struggling” readers, while readers who were not identified as struggling read “regular” texts encompassing both leveled and authentic text. Further exploration of these divergent findings could further query how specific text types relate to student growth in both word recognition skills and linguistic comprehension to diminish ambiguity regarding how instruction relates to practice opportunities in connected text building on previous research positing the texts presented to students to read as an essential component of reading instruction (Cheatham & Allor, 2012).

Summary

As conveyed in these findings, teachers shared strong, concurrent opinions regarding who benefits most from decodable text: beginning readers, struggling readers, readers receiving intervention, and ELL students. Similarly, most teachers indicated that decodable text optimally provided opportunities for students to practice learned phonics skills. In voicing the pros and cons of decodable text, teachers posited the utility of decodable text as a lesson-to-text-match opportunity while describing the lack of story content and seemingly forced language as a con. Teachers’ recounts of student responses when interacting with decodable text intimated that students appeared to feel confident and proud of their success during decodable text reading experiences. Teachers also shared the challenges inherent in choosing specific text types to support beginning readers, and most teachers reported using multiple text types to meet diverse student needs.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

This chapter summarizes the quantitative and qualitative results, followed by a discussion of both. Quantitative results include explanations of descriptive statistics. The themes identified during First and Second cycles of coding, codification, and analysis outline the discussion of qualitative findings. Convergent analyses reveal how qualitative findings illuminate and explain quantitative data and deepen understanding of the inquiry. Lastly, this section presents significant implications for future research.

Overview of Study

Learning to read is transformative and vital. It is the consummate goal of the education system. Reading is a prerequisite for successful scholarly, cultural, financial, and social engagements (Castles et al., 2018); hence, teaching students how to read is the *raison d'être* of primary-grade teachers. Despite the crucial importance of reading proficiency, recent NAEP (2022) data divulge alarming statistics, with 37% of the nation's fourth graders performing below proficiency in reading. Texts as a tool to improve and refine reading (Bogan, 2012) represent a critical component of reading instruction. In practice, however, text selection does not always align with the research landscape. Decodable text is a scaffold designed to correspond with learned grapheme-phoneme correspondences (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Brown, 1999; Cheatham & Allor, 2012; Mesmer, 2005, 2006; Mesmer, 2001). Despite its utility for practicing phonics and the critical importance of teacher selection, scant qualitative attention attends to the complex intersections between the teacher, text, methodology, and student.

This convergent mixed-methods research study aims to collect quantitative and qualitative data to understand better first-grade teachers' perceptions of decodable texts

and how these beliefs predict their selection and use of decodable text. Furthermore, the study seeks a deeper understanding of the complex interaction between teacher perceptions, the text, the methodology, and the reader. The following research questions: (1) How do first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction? (2) What are first-grade teachers' perceptions of decodable text? Guide the study.

Descriptive statistics analyzing demographic data reveal that the participants are primarily experienced teachers working in Northeastern suburban school districts with average classroom sizes of approximately 16-20 students. Teachers indicate they can select and use texts for early reading instruction to meet learning objectives and supplement existing curricula. Most teachers report having extensive library collections, including self-purchased and district-provided titles.

When asked how frequently they used decodable text, leveled readers, and authentic literature per week, respondents revealed that decodable, leveled, and authentic texts were all used frequently, with leveled texts reported as most frequently used, followed by authentic literature, and then decodable text.

Respondents' criteria ratings for text selection indicate that most teachers deem words easily decoded by students essential for selecting texts. Letter-sounds matching phonics lessons were the next most essential feature reported. Guided Reading Levels and illustrations- support- word recognition were also criteria noted by teachers as *essential* or *very useful* to inform text selection. Results indicate that the quality of the literature is also an essential consideration for text selection. Respondents reported that listening to students read and making on-the-spot judgments are the preeminent means of assessing text appropriateness.

Participants demonstrate strong consensus, identifying phonics instruction as the most effective method for teaching reading. Guided Reading and Readers Workshop are also widely identified as essential approaches to teaching students how to read. Teachers mostly self-identified with a teaching philosophy positing that phonics needs to be taught directly to beginning readers to facilitate fluent, skilled reading. Findings reveal that slightly fewer teachers ascribed to eclectic philosophies that embody diverse perspectives, balanced approaches, and immersion in literature-based beliefs. Synthetic phonics approaches were preferred over analytic approaches by most respondents.

Decodable text emerged as the text type reported to be essential to effectively support multiple categories of instruction, including independent reading, word decoding, basic high-frequency words, struggling readers, and English Language Learners. However, respondents deemed authentic children's literature essential for comprehension instruction and concepts of print. Participants identified Leveled readers to teach most concepts of print. Most teachers strongly agreed that decodable text was essential for teaching the struggling reader. Most teachers also selected decodable text as more essential than other text types to teach English Language Learners how to read.

The qualitative results unearthed four prevalent categories associated with decodable text perceptions: uses, pros/cons, student experiences, and leveled text. These categories later transformed into four prevalent themes: (1) who and what matters in text selection, (2) the good, the bad, and the neutral nature of texts, (3) how students experience texts, and (4) "regular" texts.

Within the who and what theme, qualitative findings revealed that decodable text was associated with meeting the needs of struggling readers, beginning readers,

intervention students, and English Language Learners. Respondents described decodable text as the most efficacious in allowing students to successfully apply phonics to read the text, building self-confidence for struggling readers, and providing an opportunity to practice and synthesize the phonics lesson taught in class.

Participants voiced the pros and cons associated with decodable text. The decodable text was deemed a supplemental resource and limited by its word pattern, short length, limited content, and sparse vocabulary opportunities. This exact text was heralded for its lesson-to-text match structure and for presenting opportunities for students to apply learned letter-sound correspondences instead of using context or picture clues to identify words in print.

Recounts of student interactions with decodable text divulged that students demonstrated increased confidence and feelings of success, pride, and satisfaction. Teachers remarked that decodable text provided opportunities for students to read books.

Participants described alternate texts, such as leveled and authentic texts, as rich and language-rich content that is connective, relatable, and engaging, thus providing increased opportunity for deep comprehension; participants also discussed cultural inclusivity and relatable topics.

Merging quantitative results into qualitative findings enabled the transformative work of integrating descriptive statistics into qualitative themes to provide a more complete understanding of the inquiry (Privitera & Ahlgrim-DeLzell, 2018). The findings of this study revealed that interview participants concurred with survey data analyses that decodable texts are essential tools for teaching students how to decode words. In alignment with survey results, participants also described their reading instruction as

heralding the critical importance of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction while embracing an eclectic philosophy.

This study's most striking concurrence was identifying decodable text as most appropriate to meet the needs of struggling, beginning readers, “Learners who are just learning how to read and how to decode.” Harmonizing with quantitative findings, authentic literature, and leveled books were posited by participants as providing opportunities to interact with “rich- language,” vocabulary,” “content, and “connections.”, thus correlating with the wide use of these texts to support comprehension skills noted in the quantitative data.

Qualitative and quantitative findings diverged regarding how teachers choose texts. While descriptive statistics identified letter-sound matches’ phonics instruction and easily decoded words as the *essential* criteria for text selection, detailed descriptions from interview participants indicated decodable texts best-suited students who were “struggling,” “learning how to read,” “receive greater interventions,” “ENL students,” and “beginning readers.” Similarly, although participants recounted as a positive that students were able to use letter-sound correspondences rather than use “other cues” such as “guessing based on pictures,” quantitative survey data revealed that many teachers deem illustrations providing support for word recognition as an *essential* or *very useful* criterion for selecting texts for first-grade reading instruction.,

In harmony with the eclectic perspective noted in the quantitative data, interviewees shared that they use multiple text types for reading instruction but also disclosed the challenging nature of such decision-making. Despite the quantitative results identifying decodable text as most well-suited to meet instructional goals, participants felt

that the decodable texts lacked content. Findings from this study also revealed that decodable text may be a “new” text type for some teachers, and due to increased demand, the quality seems to be “getting better.”

Integrated Findings

The results of this study indicate that first-grade teachers select and use a variety of texts to teach students how to read. The discussion focuses on teachers’ perceptions of decodable text and the intersections of perception, selection, and use connected to the teacher, text, methodology, and student within the literature landscape. Headings define and demarcate discussions within each research question. The final section of the study describes how the findings of this study interweave with the theoretical background.

Research Question 1

RQ 1: How do first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction?

A significant finding of this study is that first-grade teachers select texts for beginning reading instruction primarily based on perceptions of students’ reading ability. Qualitative findings revealed that most teachers agree that decodable texts best fit the needs of students’ specific categories: struggling readers, beginning readers, readers receiving intervention, and English Language Learner (ELL) students. Quantitative survey results converged with these findings, with decodable text viewed by teachers as the essential material for teaching struggling readers and ELL students.

Quantitative survey results indicated that criteria such as *words can be sounded out* and letter sounds presented match phonics lessons were deemed essential to selecting instructional texts by first-grade teachers. However, qualitative findings diverged from these results, with teachers ubiquitously selecting texts for readers based on their

perception of student ability. Teachers overtly disclosed that decodable readers match students who struggle. In contrast, “regular” or “other” texts, such as leveled readers and authentic children’s literature, were utilized to teach comprehension skills to students who “often have mastered decoding.”

The findings of this study reveal dissonance in philosophies guiding text selection for beginning reading. As noted by Hiebert et al. (2005), leveled texts have been written based on Guided Reading and Reading Recovery-based leveling systems, which include features such as picture-text match, highly to less repetitive sentence structure, oral-to-written language registers, and highly to less familiar content. In the present study, 100% of teachers reported using a phonics and phonemic awareness instructional method to teach reading; concomitantly, 91.9% of the same teachers also reported using Guided Reading as an approach to teaching reading. These discordant philosophies obfuscate the text selection process for teachers and present conflicting blueprints for first-grade students eager to learn how to read.

As Moats (2020) posited, we have strong evidence to guide our practice. However, there is a deviation from what is recommended in classroom practices, fueled by a lack of alignment in teacher preparation programs, ubiquitously used misaligned commercial curricula, and research-devoid professional development opportunities. As echoed in the present study’s qualitative findings, “different perspectives” make it “difficult” to choose appropriate texts sagaciously to effectively align the teaching, text, methodology, and student needs.

Although quantitative results indicate that decodable texts are deemed essential to multiple facets of reading instruction, quantitative results dichotomously reveal that

overall, teachers selected and used leveled text more often than any other text type when teaching first graders how to read. Similarly, despite quantitative results indicating most teachers rated easily decoded words as the paramount text selection-guiding criteria, in practice, leveled texts were used more extensively by the first-grade teachers in this study. Text selection matters, primarily since the type of text students use early in first grade will strongly determine the strategies students choose and use (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985) and will play a significant role in determining their reading reflex or primary reading strategy.

Research Question 2

RQ 2: What are first-grade teacher's perceptions of decodable text?

Quantitative results indicated that first-grade teachers found decodable text to be efficacious for teaching students how to decode words, learn high-frequency words, and read independently. Results also pinpoint decodable text as widely used, albeit not as widely used as leveled text. Close analysis of qualitative findings further illuminated how first-grade teachers perceive decodable text. The present study divulged how teachers concurrently deemed decodable text appropriate and effective for phonics application and practice, specifically for the struggling or beginning reader. However, findings from this study also unearthed teachers' opinions of decodable texts using the following descriptors: language deficient, lacking strong content, used forced, limited vocabulary, and not as exciting as other books. Teachers' negative perceptions of the quality of decodable text are essential considerations that warrant further exploration.

The present study also revealed that teachers found the text selection process challenging. Although quantitative and qualitative findings converged to show that all

teachers believed that phonics needs to be taught directly to beginning readers, teachers also believed in eclectic approaches, including Guided Reading and Reader's Workshop. Qualitative findings also revealed that teachers believe that students need a variety of texts to meet diverse needs.

Nourishing students with a harmonious, sagaciously- mixed literacy diet is the coveted objective, the optimal intention, of reading instruction. Text selection decisions are complex and warrant impelling the nexus of the text, the developmental stage, and the reader (Mesmer, 1999). We aspire to teach all students how to learn to read. Researchers purport that given the appropriate instruction, most students can learn to read instruction (e.g., Dehaene, 2010; Moats, 2020; Morrow et al., 2009; Stanovich, 1986) effectively. The path to the actualization of this vital goal needs to be guided by a sound body of credible evidence. The findings of this study lay bare the challenges inherent in decision-making when conflicting philosophies abound. The stakes are too high for a nation, leaving too many students behind (NAEP, 2022).

The findings of the present study revealed that there is uncertainty shrouding the text selection process. Teachers need and deserve clear guidance on effectively matching texts to instructional goals and student needs. The literature indicates that clear guidance stems from theoretical solid models such as Ehri's (2005) Phases of Word Learning Theory and guided by Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and scaffolding theories. Decodable texts represent an efficacious scaffold, which can buoy students' skillful reading development. As posited by Brown (2000), skillful matching of text to student needs capacitates work within first graders, changing "zones of proximal reading development" (p. 293).

Additionally, the research landscape presents a vast accumulation of reading science, representing a convergence of fields, including linguistics, cognitive science, neuroscience, education research, and psychology (e.g., Dehaene, 2010; Moats, 2020; Morrow et al., 2009; Stanovich, 1986). However, the outcomes of the present study's deep inquiry illuminate the opaque ambiguity cultivated by a marked research-practice divide. The amplification of teacher voices from the field demonstrates the need for professional development and teacher knowledge-building that bridges research to practice.

Teachers face insurmountable challenges each day. Bogan (2012) posited that reading instruction texts represent influential tools, and selecting appropriate instructional tools is daunting. To translate research into effective practice for classroom teachers requires concrete, comprehensive, and practical guidance. We know what students need, but teachers are unclear on how to implement and integrate efficacious tools to actualize desired outcomes.

Implications for Teachers

Findings from this study engender notable implications for teachers. First and foremost, the findings of this study illuminate the importance of foregrounding teacher beliefs and perceptions through consistent integration of teachers' expertise and experience as a vital part of the learning process. In selecting texts for beginning reading instruction, it is imperative that teachers feel empowered to match texts to both instructional goals and student needs competently. Teacher practice emerges from teachers' knowledge of the material, philosophical beliefs, identification of student needs, and self-perceptions (Ball & Cohen, 1996). Teachers need ample, ongoing opportunities

to access and engage with research and evidence about how students best learn to read in determining instructional goals and selecting appropriate resources. As posited by Moats (2020), teaching reading is complex, yet it is the most researched aspect of cognition. Bolstered by solid theoretical models such as Ehri's (2005) Word Phase Theory and Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and fortified with sound, comprehensive research from convergent fields of study, teachers can willfully harness the power of sound pedagogy to inform efficacious decision-making.

Students who struggle in first grade are likely to continue to flounder and may never catch up with devastating lifelong repercussions ahead (Cummings et al., 2011; Ehri et al., 2007; Stanovich, 1986). As practitioners on the front lines of a literacy crisis, teachers have the power to transform lives. To that end, informed pedagogy and sound practice should guide instructional decision-making, including selecting and using textual scaffolds. It is incumbent upon teachers to demand high-quality professional development, consistent knowledge development opportunities, and access to high-quality instructional tools. Additionally, teachers can utilize appropriate assessment tools to determine actual vs. perceived student needs to guide instructional decisions.

Implications for Educational Leaders

K-3 teachers' professional development should be focused, consistent, ongoing, and practical. The knowledge base of K-3 teachers faced with the complex task of nurturing reading development must reflect the vast body of research demonstrating the critical role that processes such as the alphabetic principle and phonemic awareness play in learning to read (Cunningham et al., 2004).

Additionally, efforts should seek to align assessment tools with research-informed goals for readers at certain phases of development along a continuum so that the right tool for the student represents an informed decision, not merely a feeling. Teachers need practical tools that identify students' print-processing abilities to select appropriate texts that strengthen word recognition and further facilitate word learning fortified by consistent attention to print (Johnston, 1998).

Implications for School District Leaders

The present study revealed that quality matters when choosing instructional materials to teach students how to read. Students require and deserve texts that reflect current research and evidence about what works best in reading instruction. District leaders should ensure that the texts provided to teachers and students represent high-quality material aligned with reading science. When approving the purchase of decodable texts, additional criteria such as high-frequency word counts and meaningfulness present essential considerations for text integration Cheatham et al. (2014). Preliminary findings from a study of multiple-criteria text by Cheatham et al. (2014) support texts combining decodability with additional considerations, such as language coherence, to facilitate the development of the alphabetic principle. The selection of decodable texts need not limit teachers to using books with forced, silly, repetitive language; instead, decodability can be considered alongside additional criteria such as language coherence and cultural inclusivity when choosing texts to support early reading instruction. Similarly, leveled readers should be vetted to confirm that the quality and construct align with research and evidence. Reading practice materials should be of the highest quality and address

multiple criteria, including background knowledge development, vocabulary, phonics alignment, and inclusivity.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should seek to amplify student voices regarding instructional materials. The present study revealed a divide between how teachers perceive decodable text and how teachers describe student responses to decodable text. Instructional materials present a critical and influential tool to support reading instruction (Bogan, 2012). The texts for beginning reading instruction are incredibly impactful as they establish the reading reflex, or the go-to strategy students are most likely to employ in later word reading endeavors. Future studies should explore textual scaffolds from quantitative and qualitative approaches while centering student and teacher voices to interrogate further the interactions between perception, selection, use, and outcomes.

An important topic for future research is to explore the efficacy of multiple-criteria texts that consider both readability formulas mapped to phonics instruction and additional criteria such as content development, vocabulary, and language development. Findings from the current study illuminate the pros and cons of scaffolded text, both leveled and decodable, related to student engagement, motivation, and reading development. Previous studies posit the need to examine texts not limited to a single criterion or scaffold type, such as decodability, but consider multiple criteria (Cheatham et al., 2013; Hiebert, 2005; Mesmer, 2010). Important consideration should be aimed at determining the engagement level of decodable texts about student learning and motivation (Hiebert et al., 2005)

Additionally, authentic literature represents a distinguishable category from scaffolded text, both leveled and decodable. Future studies could closely examine how authentic literature and scaffolded text address specific aspects of early reading development while also considering how scaffolded text and authentic literature can be synergistically integrated into classroom instruction to meet the unique needs of the early reader optimally. As advanced by Hiebert and colleagues (2005), early reading texts used to support beginning readers necessitate closer scrutiny from the “vantage point of the processes and content of successful beginning reading acquisition” (p. 30).

Future research should explore questions that examine the balance of text types most conducive to classroom instruction. The present study's findings reveal that teachers experience challenges matching text types to students. Texts with high levels of decodability seem to be most beneficial for readers still developing basic phonics skills (Murray et al., 2014) and increase the likelihood that students will deploy a decoding strategy (Juel & Roper Schneider, 1985)

These findings herald the need for increased research attention to explore curriculum development and curricular guidance for teachers. Teachers’ understanding and beliefs of material strongly influence their practices, and individual teachers shape the curriculum profoundly (Ball & Cohen, 1996).

Limitations

The scope of this study was limited to the study of Northeastern first-grade teachers. Narrow in scope, this study only included a small sample size of a very narrow snippet of teachers. Hence, the conclusions from this study may not necessarily be generalizable to all first-grade teachers selecting and using texts for early reading

instruction. Similarly, the perceptions of teachers in a Northeastern community may also not be generalizable to all first-grade teachers across communities.

The timing of this study also posed immense challenges. Commencing in early June of 2023 and closing in September 2023 did not represent the most conducive timeframe to work with first-grade teachers, considering the vast number of distractions evident during the school year's opening and closing. A concerning limitation of this study was the difficulties associated with recruiting participants for a research study at such a problematic time of year.

Concluding Thoughts

The direct and increasingly devastating indirect costs of illiteracy, such as the inability to access information regarding health, safety, and hygiene (Castles et al., 2018), are ghastly and soul-crushing. The type of text used in early reading instruction represents an essential cornerstone (Bogan, 2012) of efficacious early reading instruction. The research-to-practice divide is irrefutable (Allington, 2013; Castles et al., 2018; Moats, 2007; Moats, 2020) and confirmed by the findings of this study.

The time is now to recalibrate the *balance* (Castles et al., 2018) in our students' literacy diet. We know what is necessary to steer charted waters with an enriching literature landscape, navigating an enlightened course. Effective practices will not be utilized without congruency in teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices informed by research (Cunningham et al., 2009).

Our students need direct, systematic, explicit phonemic awareness and phonics instruction to develop the deep working knowledge of sound-spelling correspondences, spelling patterns, and words that Adams (2013) elucidates is not the endgame but the

enabler of the process of skilled reading acquisitions. The texts provided to early readers should provide opportunities to practice and strengthen these critical foundational skills. Ultimately, the knowledge of the teacher selecting the text and applying the sound methodology is well-positioned to transform student trajectories.

As a cautionary tale, a poignant takeaway from the experiences gained from immersion in the present study heeds us to recognize this moment in reading education as a Sputnik moment. We were ill-prepared, and crisis ensued, lest history repeat itself; our field must commit to ongoing professional development and demonstrate an openness to consistent revision (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Our students' futures depend upon it.

APPENDIX A PERMISSION EMAIL FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

Permission Email for Superintendents

Wednesday, March 16, 2023

Dr., Superintendent of School District

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Dr.

I am writing to request permission to collect data from your first-grade teachers. I am currently enrolled in the literacy program at St. John's University, and I am in the process of writing my dissertation. My study is entitled Decodable Deliberations in Early Reading Instruction: A Mixed Method Study of First-Grade Teachers' Perceptions, Selection, and Use of Decodable Text.

Literacy's importance in terms of opportunity and enrichment is beyond cogitation. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the existing body of research regarding how teachers select and use instructional texts to support early reading development. Reading serves as the nexus of knowledge, opportunity, empathy, and access, and students, teachers, administrators, and policymakers will be positively impacted by the findings of this inquiry.

By participating in the study, first-grade teachers will be asked to complete an online survey regarding how they select and use texts to support beginning readers. The participants will also be given the opportunity to participate in a semi-structured interview. Participation in this study is entirely optional. Confidentiality will be maintained as no identifying information will be published. Research records from the survey will be securely stored.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. If you agree to provide consent for this study, please send an email acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this survey. An exemplar permission email is linked below for your reference.

I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns. You may contact me at my email: patricia.gallery20@my.stjohns.edu or call me at 631 834-4623, or you could contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Ekaterina Midgette, via email midgette@stjohns.edu or by telephone at @718-990-1953.

Sincerely

Mrs. Patricia Gallery Doctoral Student

APPENDIX B INFORMED CONSENT FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

Date:

To Mrs. Patricia Gallery and St. John’s University,

As a Superintendent of _____ School District, I am writing to give permission for Mrs. Patricia Gallery to conduct her research study within our school district. I understand this study will investigate how first-grade teachers perceive, select, and use decodable text to support reading instruction. This study will include an online survey for first-grade classroom teachers, as well as an option to participate in a semi-structured interview if needed. I also understand that the survey results will only be used for a dissertation study as part of the St. John’s University doctoral program in Literacy.

Signature _____

Title: _____

APPENDIX C SURVEY OF FIRST-GRADE TEACHERS

Conducted by doctoral student Patricia Gallery from St. John's University

The purpose of this research study is to explore how first-grade teachers select and use texts for beginning reading instruction with a critical lens on teachers' perceptions of decodable text. Your completion and subsequent return of this online survey will be considered evidence of your informed consent to participate in this study. All responses to this online survey are completely anonymous and cannot be traced to you in any way. If you do not wish to answer a question, you may choose not to select an indicator and/or leave the text box blank. There are no risks associated with participation in this study, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. This study has been approved by the St. John's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) #

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Patricia Gallery, principal researcher, at patricia.gallery20@mystjohns.edu or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Ekaterina Midgette, via email: midgette@stjohns.edu or by telephone at 718-990-1953. Any questions that you may have about your rights as a research subject will be answered by:

Name:

Contact Information:

Please click on the link below to access the survey.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Patricia Gallery

St. John's University Doctoral Student

APPENDIX D INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews

Target research question #2- What are first-grade teachers' perceptions of decodable text?

How does decodable text work with your first-grade reading instruction?

How would you describe decodable text to a colleague?

What are the pros and cons of using decodable text?

How does decodable text compare to other texts used for reading instruction?

In what ways do decodable texts support first graders reading development?

APPENDIX E LINK TO GOOGLE FORM SURVEY

Quantitative Survey Instrument: First-Grade Teacher Survey

<https://forms.gle/Ga8Lk5kSDy566RkFA>

**APPENDIX F PARTICIPANT PERMISSION FORM: SEMI-STRUCTURED
INTERVIEW**



Dear Participant:

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about how teachers perceive, select, and use decodable text. The study will be conducted by Patricia Gallery, a doctoral student in the Literacy Program at St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation work. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Ekaterina Midgette, Associate Professor of Literacy and Director of the Ph.D. in Literacy Program at St. John's University.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in one virtual interview concerning your experience as a first-grade teacher. Your interview will be videotaped and audio recorded. You may review these recordings and request that all or any portion of the tapes be destroyed after the study is complete. No known risks are associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life.

Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator understand how instructional texts are perceived, selected, and used to support reading instruction.

Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by removing your name, and any identifiers will be replaced with a pseudonym. Consent forms will be stored in a separate location from the interview documentation and will be stored in a locked file. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. You have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer. Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect you in any way.

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 Patricia Gallery at 631-834-4623, Patricia.gallery20@stjohns.edu, St. John's University 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439 or the faculty supervisor, Dr. Ekaterina Midgette via email: midgette@stjohns.edu or by telephone @718-990-1953.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

Agreement to Participate

Yes, I give the investigator permission to use my name when quoting material from our interview in her dissertation.

No, I would prefer that my name not be used.

Agreement to Participate

Subject's Signature

Date

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