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Secondary Content Area Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Teaching Explicit Reading Strategies on Reading Comprehension and Student Academic Performance

Abstract

Many students are entering high school unable to read proficiently. Other students are graduating from high school with reading skills below proficiency and are unprepared to meet the literacy demands of college or the workplace. The negative outcomes for these students graduating from high school and entering society as young adults with reduced literacy skills include an increased dropout rate, affiliation with the criminal justice system, unemployment, and reduced income earning power. Federal and state education reforms and standards continue to be implemented in an effort to improve the literacy crisis and academic performance of students. Secondary content area teachers are well positioned to assist these students with strategies to improve their reading skills, comprehension, and academic performance. This qualitative phenomenological research study examined the lived experiences of secondary content area history teachers as reflected in their perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of evidence-based reading strategies, and teachers' interpretation of the impact of their instructional strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance. This study was conducted in two diverse school districts in New York State, in a suburb north of New York City. Data collection consisted of demographic surveys, a focus group, and in-depth interviews. Findings of this study revealed secondary content area history teachers lack the support, training and knowledge of reading acquisition and need to be trained in the explicit teaching of evidence-based reading strategies. These findings are significant for higher education because it may help focus the process of teacher education and the need for teacher preparation programs to consider literacy, reading acquisition and implementation of evidence-based reading strategies as components of college coursework.

Document Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department

Executive Leadership

First Supervisor

Dr. Frances Wills

Second Supervisor

Dr. Debra Lamb

Subject Categories

Education

Secondary Content Area Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Teaching Explicit
Reading Strategies on Reading Comprehension and Student Academic Performance

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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Committee Member

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Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College

December 2020

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Dedication

First, I give all honor and glory to God, for giving me the strength and wisdom to complete this dissertation journey. I dedicate this dissertation to all of those who provided me with love, encouragement, support, guidance, and prayers.

I would like to thank my beloved husband, Anthony Weaver and our children: Christopher, Lauren, Ariana, Kenan, Shatera, and Xavier. Thank you for your patience and the sacrifices you made for me. Thank you for believing in me, encouraging me, and pushing me to complete this dissertation on time. Words cannot express how much I love you today, tomorrow, forever, and always.

I would like to thank my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Frances G. Wills, for being you, and so graciously guiding me, pushing me, and challenging me throughout this journey. Thank you for your patience and support, for listening and calming me when I was beyond overwhelmed. I will forever be grateful!

I would like to thank my Committee Member, Dr. Debra Lamb, and Dr. William J. Wallis, my advisor, for all of your support.

A special thank you to my daughters Lauren and Ariana Weaver, for your patience and guidance in assisting me in mastering the technology and Power Point presentations, and to my Soror and friend, Diane Munroe Morris, my “through it all” cohort partner.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Nettie Webb, my mentor, advisor, and steadfast friend. Thank you for the encouragement, prayers, guidance, conversations, tea and honey. To God be the glory for the things He has done!

Biographical Sketch

Sandra Dance Weaver is currently the Coordinator and Supervisor of Speech and Language Services at the Clear View School, located in Ossining, New York. Mrs. Dance Weaver attended the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo from 1979-1983, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Disorders and Sciences in 1983. Mrs. Dance Weaver continued her education at SUNY Buffalo, where she attended the graduate program from 1983-1985 and graduated with a Master's degree in Speech and Language Pathology. As a New York State licensed speech and language pathologist, Mrs. Dance Weaver has been working with students from preschool through high school with varied language disabilities, speech disorders, and reduced reading comprehension skills. She began her doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in the spring of 2018. Mrs. Dance-Weaver pursued her research of content area teachers' perceptions of the impact of teaching explicit reading strategies on reading comprehension and student academic performance under the direction of Dr. Frances G. Wills and Dr. Debra Lamb.

Abstract

Many students are entering high school unable to read proficiently. Other students are graduating from high school with reading skills below proficiency and are unprepared to meet the literacy demands of college or the workplace. The negative outcomes for these students graduating from high school and entering society as young adults with reduced literacy skills include an increased dropout rate, affiliation with the criminal justice system, unemployment, and reduced income earning power. Federal and state education reforms and standards continue to be implemented in an effort to improve the literacy crisis and academic performance of students. Secondary content area teachers are well positioned to assist these students with strategies to improve their reading skills, comprehension, and academic performance.

This qualitative phenomenological research study examined the lived experiences of secondary content area history teachers as reflected in their perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of evidence-based reading strategies, and teachers' interpretation of the impact of their instructional strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance. This study was conducted in two diverse school districts in New York State, in a suburb north of New York City. Data collection consisted of demographic surveys, a focus group, and in-depth interviews. Findings of this study revealed secondary content area history teachers lack the support, training and knowledge of reading acquisition and need to be trained in the explicit teaching of evidence-based reading strategies. These findings are significant for higher education because it may help

focus the process of teacher education and the need for teacher preparation programs to consider literacy, reading acquisition and implementation of evidence-based reading strategies as components of college coursework.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The ability to read and analyze information is essential in this technologically advanced 21st century. Along with technology comes access to massive amounts of information. The aptitude to read, comprehend, and effectively analyze information and data is critical in developing and constructing informed decisions (Goldman, 2012). Every important social issue is affected by literacy: employment, economics, healthcare, politics, and education (ProLiteracy, 2018).

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) (2010), individuals with reduced reading skills are two to four times more likely to be unemployed than those with increased literacy skills. Employment for reduced readers often consists of low wage jobs, as advanced literacy skills are required for more technological and professional employment. Over 230 billion dollars is spent every year in health care costs, due to Americans' inability to critically read documents and comprehend medical instructions and procedures, in order to make informed decisions (Cohen & Syme, 2013). Adults with inadequate literacy skills are socially isolated and have diminished involvement in politics and the community (Perreault, 2013; ProLiteracy, 2018).

Reduced literacy skills not only limit and restrict an individual's life but also affects the lives of their offspring and future generations. Children of parents with deficient literacy skills reside in literacy reduced environments and have a 72% chance of becoming poor readers, and inevitably poor students (NBER, 2010).

The ability to read proficiently provides access to a world of knowledge and opportunities in a globalized labor market (Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012). However, many students are attending high schools and graduating with reading skills below proficiency, as documented by the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) (2017). Research studies have shown that students who leave high school with reading skills below proficiency are more likely to become adults with reduced literacy skills (Aiken & Barbarin, 2008; Kieffer, 2010; Vlach & Burcie, 2010).

The term proficient is designated as an achievement level that demonstrates knowledge of fundamental skills as determined by the ability to analyze and generalize subject matter (NCES, 2017). In fact, national studies indicate that only 37% of 12th grade students nationally are reading at or above proficiency (NCES, 2017). The statistics for African American and Hispanic students are more alarming, as only 17% of 12th grade students are proficient readers. If students are to be successful in school and viable members of society, they must be able to read proficiently (Goldman, 2012; Pezolla, 2017).

The process of learning to read in the United States is generally understood to be developmental and is the focus of instruction in kindergarten through third grade. Thus, in kindergarten through third grade, students learn to read. However, once students reach fourth grade, instruction in reading skills usually diminishes or concludes, and students are expected to read to learn (Musen, 2010). Some students can effectively make this transition and continue to develop their reading skills and content knowledge simultaneously. Other students have difficulty and require more support as they attempt to read to learn (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). When students are experiencing

difficulty reading, they struggle to meet academic demands and fall further behind with each subsequent grade (Ness, 2009; Swanson & Wanzek, 2014; Torgesen, Houston, & Rissman, 2007).

To achieve academic success, it is vital that students are able to read at or above grade level. With increased rigorous content and academic demands, high school students are expected to read, comprehend, analyze, conceptualize, and integrate a variety of information genres through diverse media contexts and in various disciplines (Swanson & Wanzek, 2014). In addition, the teaching methods, complexity, and quantity of content further impede the reading growth for these students (Swanson & Wanzek, 2014; Torgesen et al., 2007). If content area teachers do not provide reading strategies and literacy support to assist struggling readers, these students are left on their own and continue to lag behind from one class to the next, as their academic performance is significantly impaired (Ness, 2007; Snow & Moje, 2010).

The United States has a long history of exploring methods and reforms to improve literacy, academic rigor, and educational outcomes (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was implemented as a national educational reform effort to set high standards and improve educational outcomes. Following this reform, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was implemented. These national reforms included implementation of increased literacy in core content classes. In spite of these reforms, minimal gains in reading achievement have been made. Graduation rates have improved, math skills have made gains, but the reading scores nationally continue to remain flat, without growth for the last 20 years (NCES, 2017).

Research studies have revealed the effectiveness of providing reading strategies in middle and high schools (Ness, 2009; Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn, & Stuebing, 2015; Swanson & Wanzek, 2014). Students who are struggling readers in high school can improve their reading skills and knowledge of content if the reading strategies of comprehension and vocabulary are effectively implemented by content area teachers (Cantrell, Almasi, Rintamaa, & Carter, 2015; Lovett, Lacerenza, De Palma, & Frijters, 2012; Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2010).

Yet, notwithstanding the volume of evidence-based research regarding the positive outcomes of implementing reading strategies, many content area teachers continue to refrain from direct teaching of reading strategies. Moreover, content area teachers provide a range of explanations for their absence; ranging from lack of knowledge, implementation of instruction, pedagogical practices, confidence, and time constraints (Meyer, 2013; Pezolla, 2017). Furthermore, researchers Gersten et al. (2008) argue that the lack of basic literacy knowledge by content area teachers further impedes the reading difficulties of struggling readers. In addition, it is important to consider the factor of self-efficacy, since teachers' beliefs shape their instructional behavior and pedagogy (Dar, 2018).

Research studies have suggested a number of factors that affect struggling readers. Gallagher (2010) argues that poverty, competition with technology, decline in reading practice, lack of parent education, poor literacy environments, and second language issues impact reading proficiency. Lenters (2006) further submits that socioeconomic status, living environments (urban/suburban), student's motivation, avoidance behavior, reluctance, disengagement, and technology are also mitigating

factors. Other researchers are of the belief that when students enter high school absent of a solid foundation in core reading skills, they never catch up (Hock et al., 2009). Still other researchers disclosed that teachers and the academic environment play a significant factor in influencing the outcomes for these struggling readers. Furthermore, the demands currently placed on core content teachers offer limited time to address the literacy needs of these students and further contribute to the problem (Gallagher, 2010; Meyer, 2013; Ness, 2007).

Although a number of factors in studies have emerged as contributing to the plight of struggling secondary readers, this study focused specifically on the perceptions and beliefs of content area history teachers about the implementation of reading comprehension strategies in their classrooms. This study examined secondary content area history teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the explicit teaching of reading strategies, and the impact on reading comprehension and student academic performance. In addition, this study explored patterns and trends related to the obstacles and supports of implementing reading strategies in the content area.

Problem Statement

In order for students to achieve academic success and become viable members of society in pursuit of higher education and their dreams, students should be able to read proficiently (Pezolla, 2017; Swanson & Wanzek, 2013). However, statistically, our national high schools are failing to produce a significant number of proficient readers. According to the NCES (2017), 63% of the nation's 12th grade students are unable to read proficiently. The outcomes for these students graduating from high school and entering society as young adults with reduced literacy skills include teen pregnancy,

increased dropout rate, affiliation with the criminal justice system, unemployment, reduced income earning power, and a lack of basic reading skills needed for job training, military exams, and college entrance (Goldman, 2012; ProLiteracy, 2018; Snyder, De Brey, & Dillow, 2018). Furthermore, students are graduating from high schools and entering colleges unprepared to encounter the rigorous academic coursework (American College Testing [ACT], 2015). As a result, colleges nationwide have increased the number of remedial classes for first year college students (ACT, 2015).

For the past 2 decades, national educational reforms have been implemented in efforts to address this literacy crisis and improve educational achievement by setting high standards in schools. These national reforms included implementation of increased literacy in the core content classes (Center on Education Policy, 2011; Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). Despite the evidence-based research of reading strategies for struggling readers (Ness, 2007; Swanson & Wanzek, 2013), and the implementation of national education reforms (Center on Education Policy, 2011; ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001), the problem still exists. Many high school students are unable to read at a proficient level.

Furthermore, the use of technology and social media forums with productions of brief summaries and videos, appear to have weakened and further reduced student interest and access to complex ideas requiring thoughtful and critical reading skills (Urquhart & Frazee, 2012). Yet, in order to succeed and participate effectively in a society that demands understanding of history and government, reading proficiency is required.

Notwithstanding, as an out-of-the-classroom professional service provider, this researcher has experienced firsthand, an increase in the number of students who have been referred to special education to receive speech and language therapy to address literacy and reduced reading skills. The expense of remedial services, the need to label students in order for them to receive the services, and possible misdiagnosis need to be considered, especially when some of these reading deficits could be addressed in the classroom if teachers were provided with the resources and exposure to explicit teaching practices of teaching reading strategies in the content area.

Theoretical Rationale

Social constructivism is the guiding theoretical framework for this study and includes Bruner's (1960) social constructivist theory of scaffolding and Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory. These theories are relevant to the research topic as they address the manner in which students learn.

Bruner's (1960) theory of scaffolding purports that learning is an active process in which learners create new ideas and concepts based on their current knowledge when given scaffolding (assistance) from an adult or knowledgeable peer (Lutz & Huitt, 2004). Bruner refers to scaffolding as helpful and purposed interactions utilized to support less knowledgeable individuals with accomplishing specific objectives (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Content area teachers assume this role when the students are taught reading comprehension strategies and are provided with assistance, modeling, and feedback until the strategies can be independently performed and utilized by the student.

Bruner (1960) suggested that much of his theory of scaffolding emerged from the work of Lev Vygotsky, a developmental psychologist (1896-1934). Vygotsky claimed

that social interaction was the structure for all learning and development (Lutz & Huitt, 2004). Vygotsky, whose earlier works were later published in 1978, is best known for the constructivist theory, zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the distance between a child's level of development and the level of development a child of potential can obtain when guided by an adult or peer (Lin, 2015). Vygotsky's theory made a significant impact on education and learning and emphasized the importance of providing support and assistance to all learners (Ardana, 2017).

Students in high school are expected to read, comprehend, and analyze complex text. When students encounter difficulty with new content and are not given assistance in "scaffolding" by the teacher or "knowledgeable other" then the student cannot learn the content beyond what the student already knows. Growth and achievement do not occur and a student falls further behind. However, students can achieve beyond what they could accomplish alone, when given assistance (Lin, 2015). Thus, the roles that secondary content area teachers play are critical in improving the reading skills of struggling readers.

Statement of Purpose

As a nation we are failing to produce a significant number of students who are proficient readers. This study sought to explore the perceptions and beliefs of secondary content area history teachers, who potentially play a critical role in finding a solution to this national literacy crisis. The lack of literacy skills sets the stage for future challenges in the lives of literacy reduced students and future generations of children, if content area teachers do not assist in developing students who are proficient readers, problem solvers, and analytical thinkers (Goldman, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to add to the body of literacy knowledge and practices of secondary content area history teachers on the topic of improving reading outcomes for secondary students, by utilizing evidence-based reading strategies. This study examined secondary content area history teachers' perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, and implementation of evidence-based reading strategies and the impact of utilizing these strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance.

Secondary history coursework requires students to be able to critically think and analyze data, determine fact from fiction, and delve into various historical perspectives with diverse media formats and documents. By exploring secondary content area history teachers lived experiences, this study sought to understand the ways secondary content area history teachers see their role and responsibilities in teaching high school students to read, comprehend, and master complex expository texts to achieve academic success. Through this research study, the researcher sought to develop recommendations to shape a more effective approach to student learning of content at the secondary level.

This study was conducted in two suburban high schools, in the northeastern part of New York State, in a diverse suburb north of New York City. The participants were secondary content area history teachers. Data collection consisted of a demographic survey, a focus group, and in-depth interviews.

Research Questions

This qualitative study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do secondary content area history teachers describe what they know about literacy learning and evidence-based reading strategies?

2. How do secondary content area history teachers describe their use of evidence-based reading strategies?
3. What perceptions do secondary content area history teachers have about the impact of teaching reading strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance?
 - 3a. How do secondary content area history teachers describe beliefs about the challenges, obstacles, and strengths they experience in their pedagogical practices as they address varied student reading skills?
 - 3b. How do secondary content area history teachers view their role in assisting students with reading in the content area and how do they believe they can enhance opportunities for successful student outcomes?
4. How do secondary content area history teachers' beliefs about reading strategies in the content area classroom influence pedagogical practices including challenges, obstacles, and strengths?

Significance of the Study

The use of technology and social media has changed the way students engage in reading, resulting in reduced reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, and has promoted skimming and scanning of text (Urquhart & Frazee, 2012). This study is important because the lack of literacy in a significant number of high school students, not only sets the stage for present and future challenges in the students' lives and future generations, but also impacts the nation (Goldman, 2012). Teachers need to develop students who are proficient readers and analytical thinkers. However, teachers must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, desire, and the resources to do so.

As citizens, it is imperative to have the ability to critically read and analyze information to determine facts from fiction, to make informed decisions. Critical readers are able to problem solve and engage in civic duties and responsibilities, and possibly assist in addressing some of the many problems this nation is currently facing, including global warming, health care, homelessness, poverty, terrorism, computer data security, education achievement gap, racism, and the opioid epidemic. Proficient readers and analytical thinkers are needed for the future stability and advancement of this country (Goldman, 2012).

As national and state reforms continue to address this literacy crisis, including the most recent reform (National Research Council, 2015), teachers must integrate reading strategies into content areas if high school students are to be prepared to meet the demands of the 21st century with inquiry and critical analytical skills (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wendt, 2013). Therefore, this study is significant because it may help to focus the process of education on finding solutions that might influence literacy skills, student achievement, the delivery of instruction, and inform pedagogical practices, school leaders, administrators, educational curriculum, and policy makers.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms and definitions are critical to assist the reader in understanding the proposed research and its context.

Content Area – Knowledge or skill in an academic subject area such as history, science, mathematics, or English.

Efficacy – The power or capacity to produce effects.

Evidence-Based Reading Strategies – Skills or procedures that have been researched and shown to improve reading skills.

Explicit – An idea developed in detail.

MKO – Most knowledgeable other (Lin, 2015).

Pedagogy – The art, occupation, practice, or method of teaching

Perceptions – The process of becoming aware or conscious of a thing.

Proficient – An achievement level which demonstrates mastery of fundamental skills, determined by the ability to analyze, and generalize subject matter. (NCES, 2017).

Reading Intervention – Programs or procedures designed to improve reading.

Scaffolding – Helpful, structured interactions purposed to assist less knowledgeable individuals with achieving specific objectives (Luitz & Huitt, 2004).

Secondary Schools – High schools (Grades 9-12).

Struggling Reader – A student reading 2 or more years below their grade level.

ZPD– Zone of proximal development (Luis & Huitt, 2004).

Chapter Summary

Across the nation a significant number of high school students are attending public schools, transitioning through the secondary school grade levels, yet are unprepared to face the literacy demands of the 21st century, and lack the necessary reading skills for college or the workforce. Reduced literacy skills not only set the stage for present and future challenges in the students' lives, but also impact the nation (Goldman, 2012). For the past 2 decades national educational reforms have been implemented in an effort to address this literacy crisis (Center on Education Policy, 2011; ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001). Research studies have shown that students who are

struggling readers in high school can improve their reading skills and knowledge of content, if the strategies of reading comprehension and vocabulary are effectively implemented by content area teachers (Cantrell et al., 2015; Lovett et al., 2012; Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2010). Despite the evidence-based body of research regarding reading strategies, the implementation of national education reforms (Center on Education Policy, 2011; ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001), and content area teachers' beliefs and implementation of reading strategies (Lovett et al., 2012; Meyer, 2013), the problem still exists.

This study examined secondary content area history teachers' perceptions of the impact of implementing reading strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance. By inquiring of the teachers to understand their perceptions, knowledge, and decision-making processes as they teach in their area of expertise, this study illuminates the way teachers experience the problem of reading deficiency at the secondary level. In addition, this study informs content area history teachers' descriptions of their lived experiences, including barriers, and/or supports in the process of implementing reading strategies in the content area. Chapter 2 examines and summarizes evidence and conclusions discussed in current research reviewed in selected peer-reviewed journal articles and other literature to better understand this literacy problem. Chapter 3 details the methodology of the study and provides a description of the data analyses. Chapter 4 provides the findings and results of the data analyses. Chapter 5 discusses the findings related to the research literature as well as the research implications, limitations, and directions for future research studies.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

In order for students to achieve academic success, it is vital that they are able to read at or above grade level. Unfortunately, many students are reading significantly below grade level benchmarks, and yet are expected to read and comprehend complex texts (Swanson & Wanzek, 2013). The teaching methods in content classes do not allow for students to ever catch up, or bridge the gap, as content area textbooks become increasingly more difficult to read (Torgesen et al., 2007).

Furthermore, the frequent use of computers and social media applications have led to changes in the reading skills of students. No longer are students engaged in *deep reading* which requires utilizing analytical and critical thinking skills when comprehending text. Students are using quick methods of skimming and scanning when engaged in texts, further reducing comprehension skills (Urquhart & Frazee, 2012).

Recent data revealed that only 37% of 12th graders nationally were reading at or above a proficient level (NCES, 2017). The federal government has made numerous attempts to address this literacy crisis by implementing various educational reforms. Despite these reforms, minimal gains in reading achievement have been made (NCES, 2017). The projected outcomes for these students graduating from high school and entering society as young adults with reduced literacy skills are discouraging, not only for the individuals, but for the nation (Goldman, 2012). In order for the United States to

continue to compete as a dominant world power on the global stage, the issue of reduced literacy in schools must be addressed.

A number of studies have revealed the effectiveness of providing literacy strategies in the content areas in middle and high school (Ness, 2007; Swanson & Wanzek, 2013; Vlach & Burcie, 2010). Yet with the substantive body of evidence-based research regarding the effectiveness and success of implementing these strategies, many students continue to struggle with reading.

In an effort to better understand the challenges struggling readers face in high school, and the reading strategies, interventions, and abilities of content area teachers to assist them, literature on relevant learning and cognitive theory and scholarly journal articles on the topics were reviewed and analyzed. Since content area teachers play a critical role in student learning, this review also includes studies that examine their beliefs and perceptions regarding student learning. In this review, content area teachers are defined as teachers who have knowledge and expertise in a specific subject matter, such as history, science, mathematics, and English. Secondary refers to high school Grades 9-12.

Topic Analysis

Theory of learning. Bruner's (1960) theory of scaffolding, suggests that learning is an active cognitive process, in which children are constantly learning and processing information from their experiences (Searle et al., 2017). Learning through this lens is viewed as an individual matter, in which no two learners are identical. This theory rooted in constructivism asserts that individuals create their own knowledge by actively engaging, creating, and interpreting new knowledge with previous knowledge (Lin,

2015). When children confront something they do not know, they first rely on their prior knowledge to make a connection to the new experience. If they cannot make a connection, learning tends to cease. However, when children are given support and assistance (scaffolding) to help make the connection from a knowledgeable adult or peer, the learning from this new encounter is made (Lutz & Huitt, 2004). Bruner defined scaffolding as helpful, structured interactions that are designed to assist less knowledgeable individuals with achieving specific objectives (Lutz & Huitt, 2004).

Bruner (1960) suggested much of his theory of scaffolding emerged from the work of Vygotsky, who believed learning occurred best in a social context. Vygotsky claimed social interaction was the framework for all learning and development (Lutz & Huitt, 2004). A fundamental aspect of his theoretical model was Vygotsky's belief that a child develops psychologically and constructs meaning from social interactions with others.

Vygotsky (1978) is best known for the constructivist theory of learning that relies upon the construction of meaning as a child interacts with adults and children. This theory is characterized by Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, which is the distance between a child's level of development and level of development a child can potentially achieve when guided by an adult or peer (Lin, 2015). According to Vygotsky's theory, a child can work independently in their level of development. However, when the learner confronts new concepts the more knowledgeable other (MKO) can provide support or guidance to assist the learner, with understanding and learning new concepts. The MKO can be an adult, teacher, or a peer, who provides support to assist learning in an activity beyond what the individual learner could have

completed on their own. According to Vygotsky, once the learner is comfortable with the new knowledge, the MKO reduces or eliminates the support, and the learner's ZPD increases (Lewis, 2018). Vygotsky's theory made a significant impact on education and learning and emphasized the importance of providing support and assistance to all learners, regardless of their intellectual capacities and disabilities (Ardana, 2017).

Bruner's (1960) theory of scaffolding is also a constructivist learning theory with strong emphasis on creating knowledge in a social environment and providing support to any learner who needs it. Bruner extended the idea of Vygotsky's ZPD and referred to the guidance that the MKO provided to the learner as scaffolding. This concept of scaffolding can be used in a variety of educational settings at all grade levels, intellectual levels, and ages (Lutz & Huitt, 2004). In an educational setting, scaffolding can be extremely useful for teachers to implement in the classroom, to assist students with learning complex topics, and abstracting information (Lutz & Huitt, 2004). The use of scaffolding is in direct alignment with the use of reading strategies to facilitate knowledge growth with the guidance of an MKO or the content area teacher.

Federal policy and law related to reading instruction. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was signed into law. ESEA provided federal funding to primary and secondary schools with the purpose of providing high standards and accountability. Federal funds were allocated specifically for educational programs, professional development, instructional material, and parental engagement (Jeffrey, 1978). ESEA consist of subdivisions, referred to as titles. Title I was authorized to provide federal funding to students of low-income families. The aim of Title I was to provide equity in education and reduce the achievement gap in reading, writing, and

mathematics (Jeffrey, 1978). ESEA was a component of the war on poverty predicated upon the ideology of attacking poverty by educating the poor (McLaughlin, 1975).

Numerous revisions to ESEA have been made over the years, including the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015).

In 2001, the NCLB Act was passed with bipartisan support. The goal of this act was to promote accountability and achievement in all students. NCLB included yearly standardized tests with punitive measures if schools failed to meet the achievement bar set (Zascavage, 2010). NCLB expanded the government's role in education and required states to institute increased academic standards, annual accountability testing, higher qualifications for teachers, and school choice.

In 2009, President Barack Obama's administration revised NCLB, without Congressional approval and reshaped ESEA, with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This act aimed to develop innovative incentive strategies, to improve student outcome, close achievement gaps, increase graduation rates, and ensure that students graduating were prepared for college and career (Moldt, 2016).

In 2015, ESSA was implemented. The intention of ESSA was to ensure equal education for all students, including students who were disabled, homeless, migrants, and/or economically disadvantaged. The federal government allowed more oversight of the accountability measures by the state and district, through annual testing of students in Grades 3-8 and once in high school. The primary goal of ESSA (2015) was to provide high academic standards for all students that would prepare them for success in college or the workforce. In addition, ESSA was to provide support and resources to students and schools who needed it, ensure equitable access to an excellent education, and excellent

teachers, and to improve the achievement gap. Although students are graduating from high school, many are unprepared for college and the workforce (Pezolla, 2017). A recent study revealed that approximately 47% of high school graduates do not complete college or career ready coursework (ESSA, 2015).

The federal government has made numerous attempts to improve academic outcomes and address this literacy crisis by implementing various educational reforms that included more resources, accountability measures and standards, as well as professional development to increase preparedness for teachers and thusly improve teacher effectiveness . Despite these reforms, minimal gains in reading achievement have been made (NCES, 2017). Most recently, the Next Generation Learning Standards were adopted in New York State in 2017. These standards include a strong emphasis on literacy and teacher development in an effort to promote literacy in the content area, improve comprehension of complex text and critical thinking skills of the students. The goal of Next Generation Learning Standards is to develop students to become lifelong learners, critical thinkers and active participants in civil, community, and professional ventures (New York State Education Department [NYSED, 2017). Implementation of Next Generation Learning Standards is expected beginning in 2021.

Research describing characteristics of highly effective teachers. Dar (2018) conducted a study to examine the characteristics of highly effective teachers. Findings revealed that highly effective teachers give priority to their students' needs and interests. Highly effective teachers attend to individual students' learning needs and advocate to ensure that students were receiving the resources they needed. Effective teachers encouraged their students, believed in their students, attempted to motivate students and

engage them in learning. Effective teachers developed confidence in their students and favored questions of query and discussions in their classrooms. Highly effective teachers had a high level of professional commitment to learning. These teachers participated in seminars, workshops, and other professional development activities to promote professional growth in preparation for student learning and advancement (Dar, 2018). Highly effective teachers believed in their students and their ability to improve student learning (self-efficacy).

Self-efficacy and teacher effectiveness. According to Bandura (1997) self-efficacy resides in the “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute a course of action required to produce a given attainment” (p. 3). Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) further revealed that “individual efficacy beliefs are excellent predictors of individual behaviors” (p. 480). It is important to consider the factor of self-efficacy since a teacher’s beliefs shape their instructional behavior and pedagogy (Dar, 2018). Research studies have indicated a strong correlation between teacher efficacy and teacher behaviors that foster student achievement (Allinder, 1994; Meijer & Foster, 1998; Woolfork & Hoy, 1990). Snyder and Fisk (2016) reported that the greater the teacher’s self-efficacy, the more the teacher’s students progressed in reading achievement. Therefore, one can certainly reason that belief in one’s ability, both teachers and students, has an impact on student performance in reading and academic success (Corkett, Hatt, & Benevides, 2011).

Furthermore, teachers who had higher expectations of their students and assumed personal responsibility for student learning, were successful in improving student learning (Brophy & Evertson, 1977). If these teachers encountered obstacles or

difficulties, they handled them by researching and applying appropriate teaching methods. Teachers with high self-efficacy do not view challenges as indicators that students cannot learn, but rather as their responsibility to ensure that students do learn. Further, teachers with high self-efficacy believe that it is the teacher who possesses the skills and ability to develop student learning. This further supports the concept that teachers' expectations and role definitions affect student academic performance and success (Dembo & Gibson, 1985).

Content area teachers' knowledge and preparation. Meyer (2013) examined whether middle and high school teachers possessed the necessary foundational knowledge of adolescent literacy to provide literacy instruction in the core content classes. Meyer further sought to discover whether teachers of one content area, English language arts (ELA), possessed greater literacy knowledge than the others. Data were collected utilizing a research survey questionnaire which was distributed to a study group of 161 teacher participants. Results indicated that content area teachers have limited knowledge of adolescent literacy. Furthermore, ELA teachers did not possess any greater knowledge about literacy than the other content area teachers. The author suggested the need for content area teachers to improve their literacy knowledge and instructional skills. In addition, Meyer (2013) suggested the need to examine preservice curriculum and instruction.

Wexler, Mitchell, Clancy, and Silverman (2017) conducted an exploratory study to investigate the types and frequency of text and implementation of literacy practices teachers used in their lessons to support instruction. The participants were 10 high school biology teachers, with 198 students in ninth through 12th grade, who were at risk

for reading difficulties based on standardized assessments. The setting was six suburban high schools in a Mid-Atlantic state. Data were collected via semi-structured teacher interviews and classroom observations. In 40 classroom observations of science instruction, a total of 3,167 minutes of literacy practices were observed and coded.

Findings of the Wexler et al. (2017) study revealed that teachers rarely used multi-paragraph expository text as part of their classroom instruction (2.2%).

Worksheets, electronic texts (websites and online modules), and lab activities were primarily used. Teachers were not observed integrating any comprehension strategies. However, implementation of the literacy strategies of background knowledge and simplistic vocabulary instruction were observed.

Findings indicated teachers reported an awareness of the importance, expectation, and need to incorporate expository text and strategies into their instruction to assist students. However, observations revealed many of the teachers' beliefs did not align with the practices observed. Furthermore, teachers provided reasons for the lack of implementing strategies, including lack of guidance to implement strategies, time constraints, and fear of misbehavior in allowing students to work in small groups (Wexler et al., 2017).

Ness (2009) conducted a study to identify the frequency of reading comprehension instruction in middle and high school science and social studies classrooms. Participants included eight teachers from two rural public schools. The mixed method study collected and analyzed data in two phases. Ness observed 2,400 minutes of direct classroom observations and conducted teacher interviews. Findings revealed that teachers provided reading comprehension instruction for 82 minutes (3%)

of the 2,400 minutes of reading instruction observed. In addition, the teachers' lack of literacy knowledge and implementation skills was evident in both interviews and observations. Teachers also acknowledged a lack of qualifications and responsibility for providing specific comprehension instruction. One limitation of this study was that the sample was small. This Ness (2009) study, like Meyer (2013), emphasized the need for content area teachers to improve their literacy knowledge and instructional skills, and to understand the value of incorporating reading strategies in the content class. Ness (2009) further suggested teachers must be prepared to assist struggling readers in the core content classrooms.

Alger (2009) conducted a descriptive case study regarding first year teachers' selection and use of reading strategies learned in their preservice program, and to examine the amount of in-class time these teachers allotted for reading opportunities. The participants included two biology teachers and two English teachers in their first year of teaching. Data collection included a tracking system, teachers' self-reports, lesson plans, interviews, questionnaires, and class observations. Content area knowledge was acquired via textbooks, trade books, handouts, images, and text on PowerPoint and the Internet.

Findings revealed the reading strategies teachers learned in college preparatory course work did transfer to secondary classrooms (Alger, 2009). The participants seemed to learn to employ various strategies in the content classes, and offered students some opportunities for reading, but merely for the purpose of learning content. The number of pages students read in and out of the classroom was insufficient, especially for high school college preparatory classes. English classes afforded the students more

reading opportunities. Most of the reading in biology came from PowerPoint slides. The researcher indicated that the strategy used by first year teachers was not primarily motivated by the need to improve students' reading comprehension, but was merely more beneficial for organizing content, or as means to reduce the amount of reading required by the student. Previous research indicated that teachers are not being taught the use of strategies in their preservice course work and as a result they are unable to employ these strategies in content area classes (Meyer, 2013; Ness, 2009).

Copeland, Keefe, Calhoun, Tanner, and Park (2011) performed a qualitative exploratory study to examine how faculty in higher institution programs prepared teachers to provide literacy instruction for students requiring extensive support in the classroom. Participants were nine faculty educators, representing nine different schools, in seven states. All participants worked in higher education programs and taught teaching methods courses in reading instruction to preservice teachers. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Findings of the Copeland et al. (2011) study revealed that faculty participants reported challenges in preparing teacher candidates to provide literacy instruction in the content area, especially for children with extensive literacy needs. One identified challenge was providing effective literacy instruction that aligned with the constant changes of state and federal mandates and local districts and school policies. All of the faculty participants reported the need for students to have some basic understanding of the reading process. Reportedly, the lack of prior reading knowledge hindered the students' progress in obtaining specific skills needed to effectively implement literacy instruction. Faculty participants further reported the limited ability of students to collect

and analyze data, and to use data to guide instruction. In addition, faculty participants reported the need to make changes in the curriculum and field placements to include evidence-based literacy practices and reading strategies. The researchers suggested future research should examine the structure and content of programs for teacher preparation in more depth (Copeland et al., 2011).

Christy (2011) conducted a study to evaluate teachers' and preservice teachers' abilities to use screening tools to evaluate a student's reading performance, instead of teachers' formulating conclusions regarding students' reading abilities based on their perceptions and attitudes. Participants were 22 master of arts teaching candidates, with varied content majors, enrolled in a content area reading course at a state university in Georgia. Participants were provided with a survey to examine teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding students' reading performances and their knowledge of reading assessment tools. Participants completed the survey before and after the intervention. Eighteen children who were enrolled in an accelerated learning program were provided with individual reading assessments (read aloud) by the reading instructor, who completed the assessments as the participants observed. Survey data were collected and analyzed.

Findings revealed that preservice teachers had misconceptions about the students' reading abilities based on their own beliefs. The researcher reported that when many of the participants heard the students read aloud without error, they were surprised to find out that these same students were also unable to correctly answer questions about what they read. Participants also had difficulty interpreting the results of the reading test. Christy (2011) suggested that assessment and intervention are the keys to

improving student performance, and teachers should rely on these skills and not their own beliefs and perceptions when assessing a child's reading abilities. Christy (2011) further noted that if teachers are to provide effective and quality instruction, they must become knowledgeable of reading skills and assessments in order to plan instruction that best supports individual learning.

Content area teachers have a limited knowledge of reading strategies and reading assessment skills to assist struggling readers in the content area classrooms (Christy, 2011; Copeland et al., 2011; Meyer, 2013; Ness, 2009; Wexler et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the need for content area teachers to improve their knowledge and use of reading strategies is paramount if teachers are to be successful in assisting their students who are struggling readers (Meyer, 2013; Ness, 2009). Teachers reported a lack of qualifications and responsibility to teach reading in the content area (Meyer, 2013; Ness, 2009). Algar (2009) demonstrated that even when teachers learn reading strategies in preservice coursework, they apply some of them, but only in an effort to improve the student's knowledge of content, not for assisting with reading.

Moreover, Wexler et al. (2017) further contended that content area teachers stated they valued the use of strategies in the content area, but their beliefs were not demonstrated by their practices. If struggling readers are to succeed in improving their reading skills, content area teachers must also be equipped to help them. While all of the studies examined content area teachers' knowledge of reading strategies, Algar's (2009) study differed, as this researcher examined first year teachers who recently were taught reading strategies in their coursework, and compared their recent knowledge to application. Algar suggests that with the learned knowledge of reading strategies,

content area teachers are more apt to use them to assist their students. However, Copeland et al. (2011) indicated while it is necessary to include more literacy in the preservice coursework of teachers, faculty educators are still presented with a number of challenges in this effort, including course content, reading knowledge, and teacher placement.

Teachers attitudes and beliefs. McCoss-Yergian and Krepps (2010) conducted a study about the beliefs content area teachers held about literacy. The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether or not those beliefs interfered with content area teachers' abilities to implement reading strategies in the classroom. Participants included 39 middle and high school teachers who elected to participate in the study. A mixed methodology was conducted to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Data were collected and analyzed via survey and interviews. Findings revealed a large number of teachers held unfavorable attitudes toward implementing reading strategies in the content area. Furthermore, teachers' lesson plans and attempts at strategy implementation were impacted by those beliefs.

Cantrell, Burns, and Callaway (2008) investigated content area teachers' beliefs about literacy during a yearlong professional development study. Participants included 78 teachers from six schools in a southeastern state, who taught core classes for Grades 6 and 9. Teachers participated in ongoing literacy training to develop instructional strategies to teach content area literacy. Interviews were conducted to examine factors that contribute or inhibit successful implementation of literacy strategies. Results of this study varied, although most of the teachers believed that literacy should be incorporated into their respective disciplines, but they did not believe that reading was their

responsibility. In addition, teachers reported that participating in professional development, collaboration, coaching, and training helped to ease implementation of strategies.

Lesley (2011) examined preservice teachers discourse models surrounding reading. According to this research, discourse models are generally unconscious theories individuals hold about the world and how they shape their actions. The researcher wanted to find out if content area teachers held negative discourse models about their own reading experiences; would it affect their ability to teach reading in the content area, or make them more resistant to the task? This qualitative research study was conducted utilizing data gathered to address the questions consisting of literacy narratives. Subjects were 114 undergraduate students who answered questions based on their literacy experiences. Preservice teachers wrote about feelings in regard to their literacy attitudes, aptitudes, and identities. Findings revealed that when teachers had negative narratives regarding their early literacy experiences, these narratives tended to follow them and affected their future literacy scripts. When students deemed literature to be boring or difficult, these negative associations and restrictions affected how they perceived literacy. If content area teachers hold negative mental models, they may continue to struggle against the path of resisting teaching reading strategies in the content area if their negative models are not changed.

Harmon et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study to investigate a high school reading program and the perceptions of teachers and students regarding its usefulness. The study occurred in two sites, one in Texas and the other in North Carolina. The participants were five high school reading teachers and two to three of their students, who

ranged in age from 14 to 16. Data were collected via interviews of each of the participants. Interviews were transcribed for analysis using a constant comparison approach.

Findings revealed a discrepancy between teachers' and students' understanding about reading and the inconsistencies in instruction. One interview question addressed whether the reading instruction students received supported them in their content area classes. The teachers responded with uncertainty as to whether students benefited from their instruction when in the content classes. Given these comments, the authors suggested that direct support for reading in the content area classrooms was not a primary objective in the reading classes. The challenges of reading in the content area were not addressed; instead the reading teachers focused more on the development of the basic components of reading at the word level and practice of reading with a diversity of text. The students reported that the reading classes increased their reading comprehension and the amount of time they practiced reading, and enabled them to become more confident in their reading capabilities (Harmon et al., 2016).

The Harmon et al. (2016) study supports the idea that small group instruction for struggling readers is beneficial as teachers can engage in differential reading strategies and skills specific to the individual's student's needs. However, this study also highlights the perceptions of reading teachers and their roles or responsibilities to prepare students with strategies and skills to be successful in the content area. The students did perceive the reading teachers as helpful, but not in developing skills to prepare them for success in the content areas (Harmon et al., 2016).

Glassett (2009) conducted a mixed-method study to ascertain if one form of professional development was more effective than another in fostering change in content area teachers use of comprehension strategy instruction, and if the professional development (PD) impacted student learning. Participants included 66 teachers and their ninth grade students. Two groups of high school teachers participated in 1 year of professional development in the teaching of comprehension strategies. One group received weekly workshops on different research-based comprehension strategies. The other group participated in a professional learning community (PLC), which focused on comprehension strategy instruction and was supported with ongoing small group reflection. Data collection included survey questions, observations, interviews, lesson plans, student assessments, and reading inventory (Glassett, 2009).

Findings revealed that teachers in the PLC group reported and were observed teaching more comprehension strategies than the traditional group. The teachers from the traditional PD model struggled to change their teaching practice and to incorporate reading strategies in their content area classes. Many of the content teachers in the traditional PD group saw implementing strategies as one more task to accomplish and did not make the connection to student learning or teaching practice. This further supports the idea that teachers' belief systems affect their teaching practices, and ultimately student achievement. Content teachers in the PLC group reported that the reflection sessions helped them to cogitate and analyze their instruction regularly. Furthermore, findings revealed that students of teachers in both groups increased their awareness of reading strategies. Glassett (2009) further revealed that the traditional approach to professional development merely targets an awareness or declarative knowledge of

strategies, whereas the PLC model provided the teachers with a wider understanding of strategy application.

Sargent, Ferrell, Smith, and Scroggins (2018) performed a study to examine secondary content teachers and their ability to impact students' reading development. Participants were content area teachers who were not trained in literacy. One hundred and fifty-three participants from multiple school districts in a rural setting, participated in the study from a diverse group of content areas. All content area teachers were administered the Reading Teaching Outcome Expectancy Assessment (RTOE). Specific questions dealing with reading teaching outcome expectancy were analyzed. Descriptive statistics were examined to investigate trends in the data.

Findings revealed of the 153 teachers surveyed, 17% had a low reading teaching expectancy outcome score; 67% obtained a score in the average range; and 16% had a high or optimal range. These findings suggest that only 16% of the teachers had a strong belief in their ability to influence student's reading development in the content area. Researchers revealed limitations of the study, which included use of surveys, based on self-report, as the participants may have concealed information they did not want others to know or provided responses they thought were expected (Sargent et al., 2018). Researchers suggested future research in this area to explore other approaches to increase content area teachers' beliefs that they can impact students' literacy progress.

According to the findings of these studies content area teachers hold some negative beliefs about implementing literacy in content area classes. The negative attitudes and feelings teachers reported may be a result of lack of knowledge and barriers which affected their ability to effectively implement them (Cantrell et al., 2008; McCoss-

Yergian & Krepps, 2010). Sargent et al. (2018) also noted this as findings indicated not only a lack of content area teachers' knowledge but their beliefs that they could make an impact on students reading development. Cantrell et al. (2008) and Glassett (2009) suggested that when teachers are taught how to implement the strategies and are given time to learn and practice implementation with professional support, they are more willing to engage in implementation. The authors suggested that teachers need time and must be taught how to implement reading strategies in the core content classes. When teachers are taught how to effectively utilize the strategies, they may be more willing to do so.

Still other researchers suggest that it is not that simple for all teachers to embrace teaching reading strategies in the content area (Harmon et al., 2016; Lesley, 2011). Teachers may have negative mental discourse models from their own negative associations and continue to resist learning and implementing reading strategies. Teacher's beliefs arise from their own past experiences and these negative experiences must be addressed before any meaningful content area literacy instruction can take place (Lesley, 2011).

Reading interventions. To address the needs of struggling adolescent readers, schools have engaged in utilizing diverse approaches and programs ranging from commercial programs that promote significant gains in student performance, to programs developed by teachers. Some research studies have compared the outcomes of these programs (Lang et al., 2009; Paul & Clarke, 2016). Yet many questions remain surrounding the most effective interventions for secondary students (Harmon et al., 2016).

Lang et al. (2009) conducted a yearlong randomized control study to explore whether intensive reading interventions for struggling high school students were effective, and to determine if the students receiving interventions made gains in reading and on the state assessment test. The participants included 1,197 ninth graders identified as struggling readers, in seven high schools in a Florida school district. Three hundred and eighty-five students were identified as Level 1, students reading below a 4th grade reading level. Eight hundred and twelve students were identified as Level 2, students reading between a fourth and sixth grade level. Students were randomly assigned to one of four intense treatment interventions: READ 180, REACH system 2000, Reading Intervention through Strategy Enhancement (RISE), and School Offered Accelerated Reading (SOAR), which served as the control group. Intervention groups were led by teachers in 90-minute blocks. Data were calculated and computer analyzed.

Findings revealed that on average all four interventions were equally effective for gains in reading and on the assessment tests for both the high risk and moderate risk students (Lang et al., 2009). Furthermore, the high-risk group (Level 1) in the control group (SOAR) resulted in larger gains (1.70.42) than gain scores for other intervention groups. Students in the high-risk group in all four interventions also demonstrated growth that exceeded the annual expected gains on the state assessment. Results for students in the moderate risk groups (Level 2) revealed that students in the READ 180 classes and RISE interventions made significantly greater gains compared to the students in the control group (SOAR).

Findings from the Lang et al. (2009) study indicated for Level 1 (high risk students) reading below fourth grade level, there was no statistically reliable differences

in outcomes across the four interventions. However, the control group that focused more on direct teaching skills produced the largest overall growth in performance. Researchers suggested that the extra year of experience teachers had with the curriculum led to higher quality implementation. The reading program READ was associated with the smallest reading gains for the high-risk students and the largest gains for moderate-risk students. This was thought to be attributed to the skills focused on in the READ program. Results of this study suggested that most students who enter high school substantially below grade level will require more than 1 year of intervention, but gains can be made for the struggling reader. The findings also indicated that high risk students and moderate risk students have different needs. This study further supports that struggling readers can make gains in reading when teachers use reading strategies and interventions in the classroom, as notable gains were evident in the control group.

Paul and Clarke (2016) conducted a systematic randomized control study to review and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions designed to improve the reading skills of secondary students. A database search to locate studies was utilized and resulted in 10,844 studies. Eight studies conducted between 1999 and 2014 met the criteria. Four of the studies targeted multiple component reading skills, three of the studies employed computer aided instruction and one study focused on reading comprehension. All of the interventions were delivered in whole class groups. Findings revealed the computer aided instruction was not an effective method. Evidence also revealed a low effect size in reading comprehension outcomes for secondary students aged 11-18 years. Interventions focusing specifically on reading comprehensions skills produced gains, but the effect sizes were small (Paul & Clarke, 2016).

The evidence from this study suggests that computer assisted instruction (CAI) should not be relied on to produce gains in reading abilities in high school students. In addition, interventions that specifically target reading comprehension yielded larger effect size than previous studies (0.71) in relation to intervention gains. Paul and Clarke (2016) indicated that this result was unusual as the effect size was higher than one would expect, based on previous research findings. Furthermore, gains were maintained after 6 weeks of intervention. The authors concluded that more studies were needed to address reading interventions for secondary students, with consideration to factors such as specialist training, the cost of intensive support, and 1:1 tutoring.

Cantrell et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the effects of the intervention Learning Strategies Curriculum (LSC) on reading achievement and motivation. A multiple-cohort randomized treatment control group design was utilized over 4 years. Participants included 605 sixth graders and 593 ninth graders, who scored 2 years below grade levels on reading assessments. Students received a minimum of 50-90 minutes daily, of supplemental instruction in an intervention class taught by a teacher with LSC training. A total of 21 schools and 38 teachers participated over 4 years. Test scores and data were analyzed with ANOVA. Results indicated a significant impact on reading growth for ninth grade students with this intervention, but not for sixth grade students. Reading motivation for both sixth and ninth grade students was significantly impacted. A follow up study revealed the positive benefits of a 2nd year of intervention for sixth grade students who were still struggling readers after the year-long intervention (Cantrell et al., 2015).

Implications of this study are that supplemental reading program LSC can improve reading achievement for ninth grade students who enter high school and are struggling with reading. However, the research design and methodology of the follow up studies had several limitations. The number of students in the analysis and follow up studies were too small to make any definitive conclusions about the second year of intervention. The study was further disrupted when students did not participate in the intervention the following year. The intervention appeared to be extremely helpful for minority students who were not in special education. More studies are needed to investigate the impact of strategy-based interventions with diverse levels of intensity and duration in school based and multi-tiered context (Cantrell et al., 2015).

Lovett et al. (2012), in a quasi-experimental study, examined the efficacy of short-term reading remediation for high school students with reading disabilities. A sampling of struggling high school readers referred by school staff was assessed. Students who met the low reading achievement criteria were assigned to reading remediation and randomly placed in a research-based intervention group, or a control group. The reading program, PHAST PACES was a program comprised of a variety of strategy instruction including word identification, text comprehension and phonological decoding skills. All participants were assessed at the beginning and end of the semester. Data were collected in 19 high schools from a large, diverse urban school district in Canada. Participants included 351 students, 14.7 years of age, with average reading performances between 1.5 and 2 SD below average age expectations (Lovett et al., 2012).

Results of the Lovett et al. (2012) study revealed that students who received PHAST PACES intervention achieved higher post test scores on all reading outcomes

compared to the students in the control group. After 60-70 hours of small group intervention, these students achieved significant gains in several areas of reading, including word attack, word identification, and passage comprehension. An average effect size of 0.68 was shown across all measures. Researchers suggested that these students would benefit from subsequent semesters of intervention. The greatest gains in standard scores were in the areas of word attack and passage comprehension, in which the participants gained an average score of 5.86. However, 1 year follow-up data revealed a deceleration growth after the intervention, except for passage comprehension in which growth continued.

Findings from these studies revealed that reading interventions provided to struggling readers in secondary school can make a difference when interventions and reading programs include research-based strategies and teacher training. Although effect size was small, findings revealed that it is not too late to teach struggling readers and to address the reading skills deficits of secondary students. Furthermore, the greatest gains noted were in the areas of vocabulary and reading comprehension, of which reading comprehension continued to show growth 1 year after the intervention (Cantrell et al., 2015; Lang et al., 2009; Lovett et al., 2012). In addition, Cantrell et al. (2015) noted that small group receiving daily supplemental instruction was an effective approach. Computer assisted instruction (CAI) was not found to produce gains in reading abilities in high school students (Paul & Clarke, 2016).

Reading strategies and implementation. Flynn, Zheng, and Swanson (2012) conducted a study that synthesized the literature on reading interventions for upper elementary and middle school students in Grades 5-9, identified with reading disabilities.

This synthesis extends previous meta-analysis. Relevant data bases were systematically scanned for studies from 1960 to 2009 that met the inclusion criteria. Eleven articles met the selection criteria.

Findings revealed that the treatment outcomes across reading interventions for upper elementary and middle school students identified with reading disabilities was small, with an aggregated mean of .04 (Flynn et al., 2012). The reading intervention outcome did not vary significantly as a function of the type of reading skill addressed, focus of reading instruction, and/or variations in characteristics. Flynn et al. (2012) observed that the interventions that focused on comprehension alone or a combination of comprehension and phonemic awareness were larger than phonics alone. The results of this synthesis clearly indicated that strategies effectively used to improve reading for students in lower elementary grades are not meeting the same level of success with students in upper grades.

Edmonds et al. (2009) conducted a synthesis of research intervention studies between 1994-2004 with middle and high school students (Grades 6-12) with reading difficulties, including those with learning disabilities. The purpose was to analyze the difference of reading comprehension outcomes between treatment and students. Reading interventions included decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Thirteen treatment-comparison studies met the stated criteria. Findings indicated that students in the upper grades with reading difficulties improved their reading comprehension when provided with specific reading intervention and word reading strategies; thus, indicating that struggling readers can improve their reading comprehension when strategies are taught in the classroom (Edmonds et al, 2009).

Based on these findings Edmonds et al. (2009) and Flynn (2012) concluded that older students were not making significant gains in reading because they were not provided with effective instruction in reading comprehension. Educators cannot assume that reading instructional practices taught in the elementary grades will be effective when implemented with older struggling readers, as the learning needs and types of expository text for older readers is extremely different. In addition, Edmonds et al. (2009) found that the effects of reading intervention on the comprehension growth of older struggling readers Grades 6-12 were substantially smaller with norm-referenced measures relative to experimental measures. This analysis indicated an effect size of 0.47 on norm referenced measures of comprehension, compared to 1.19 on researcher-developed models.

Wanzek et al. (2013) examined the effectiveness of reading intervention on student outcomes for struggling readers in Grades 4-12. This study reviewed literature from 1995-2011 in a treatment-comparison quasi experimental design, utilizing 19 research studies of interventions with a range of study designs and several types of analysis. Studies included 9,371 students with 75 hours of intervention. Findings indicated reading in the upper grades may be more challenging than in the lower grades, even with extensive interventions. Furthermore, the authors suggested that struggling readers with intervention maintained their growth in improved reading comprehension over struggling readers with regular instruction. Longer hours of intervention produced less improvement in reading comprehension with minimal gains reported for students after Grade 3. Implications suggested that reading comprehension interventions

incorporated in the content area classes would be beneficial not only to the struggling reader but to all students (Wanzek et al., 2013).

Scammacca et al. (2015) conducted a study synthesizing the literature on interventions for struggling readers in Grades 4-12, published between 1980-2011. Eighty-two studies with experimental treatment-comparison examined the effectiveness of reading interventions. Findings revealed that reading interventions produced positive results for students in Grades 4-12, who were struggling readers. Furthermore, the benefits of intervention increased nearly one half of one standard deviation across all studies. In addition, interventions of 15 hours or less had significantly larger mean effect sizes (0.10 – 0.16) than interventions which provided 26 hours or more of intervention (0.10 to 0.22). The authors concluded that providing reading comprehension strategies and vocabulary to struggling readers in Grades 4-12 was beneficial (Scammacca et al., 2015). Furthermore, teachers can provide effective reading interventions when they are trained (Lang et al., 2009).

Swanson et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of published articles from 2000-2015 to examine the efficacy of evidence-based reading instruction delivered in the Tier 1 setting (general classroom). Thirty-nine articles met the criteria for this study. A total of 15,856 sample participants in Grades 9-12, or ages 9-18 were included. Reading instruction was delivered by teachers, which addressed the following reading strategies: vocabulary, comprehension, oral reading fluency, and phonics. Results revealed significant positive effects for reading instruction in comprehension and vocabulary, indicating fourth through 12th graders who received at least one reading

component performed better than their peers who did not, with an effect size range from -0.30 to 0.22 (Wanzek et al., 2013).

Vaughn et al. (2010) conducted a yearlong study with struggling readers in sixth grade who performed below proficiency in reading on a state exam. Teachers were given professional development prior to this study, which continued monthly for the duration of the study. There were 241 students in one group (Tier 2) and 115 students in a comparison group (Tier 1). Teachers taught all students, but only the Tier 2 students were provided with additional daily intervention lessons for approximately 50 minutes. Findings revealed Tier 2 students outperformed those in the comparison group (Tier 1) on word attack, comprehension, and phonics. However, gains were still made in Tier 1 when teachers were adequately trained. Findings indicated when teachers were provided with the proper training and skills to implement reading strategies, student reading outcomes improved (Vaughn et al., 2010).

These research studies indicate positive results for implementing reading strategies in the core content areas with participants in both middle and high school (Edmonds, et al., 2009; Scammacca et al., 2015; Swanson et al., 2017 ;Vaughn et al., 2010; Wanzek et al., 2013). However, Wanzek et al. (2013) maintained that implementing strategies in the upper grades was more challenging than in the lower grades with minimal gains for students after Grade 3. Edmonds et al. (2009) agreed that older students were not making significant gains, but strongly argued older struggling readers needed intervention methods which varied from the lower grades, as these students encountered complex expository text in high school. Furthermore, researchers Wanzek et al. (2013) and Scammacca et al. (2015) agreed that the length of the

interventions had a direct correlation on effect size. Wanzek et al. (2013) maintained that longer hours of intervention resulted in less improvement; whereas Scammacca et al. (2015) revealed shorter interventions of 15 hours or less yielded a larger effect size. Furthermore, Vaughn et al. (2010) and Swanson et al. (2017) revealed positive results when interventions were given to students in the core content area classes and when teachers were trained to implement them. These positive results affected struggling readers but also were found to be beneficial for all of the students. The strategies of comprehension and vocabulary interventions were suggested to have the most positive results for students in Grades 4-12 (Swanson et al., 2017).

Reading comprehension in the content area. The National Reading Panel (NRP) was appointed by Congress in 1997, to evaluate the reading research and ascertain the most effective methods for teaching reading. The NRP reviewed and analyzed over 100,000 quantitative studies to determine techniques that were successful in teaching children to read. In 2000, the final report was submitted. This seminal report was the basis for many national educational reforms including NCLB and ESSA.

In this seminal report, the NRP (2000) highlighted the importance of reading comprehension in assisting students who are struggling to read with specific strategy instruction and cited eight effective approaches. These approaches include comprehension monitoring, cooperative learning, graphic and semantic organizers, story structure, question-answering, question generation, summarization, and multiple strategy instruction (NRP, 2000).

Despite the findings of this large seminal study which synthesized evidence-based research, these strategies in reading comprehension are not being consistently nor

frequently utilized in content area classrooms (NRP, 2000). Many high school students struggle with the text, yet teachers are not providing the evidence-based reading comprehension support to assist them. Teachers often simplify the curriculum in an effort to support struggling readers. This approach is simplistic and does not help them improve their reading abilities and academic success (Ness, 2009).

Swanson et al. (2016) explored teacher's instructional practices of vocabulary and reading comprehension in middle and high school content area classrooms. Participants included 22 social studies and English language arts teachers, from three districts in the southwestern and eastern United States. Data were collected utilizing classroom observations and audio recordings. Researchers recorded teacher instruction of specific strategies to improve vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Results indicated the most frequent vocabulary strategy observed in both classes included teacher directed definitions. Half of the teachers used comprehension monitoring. Eighty percent of the teachers did not engage students in the comprehension strategy of discussion and little to no text reading or discussions were observed in either class. Swanson et al. (2016) further concluded that although teachers were including some instructional techniques and strategies that sustained reading comprehension and vocabulary development, teachers needed to know which strategies are the most effective and how to implement them in order to maximize opportunities to improve reading proficiency.

McKeown, Beck, and Blake (2009) compared the effectiveness of two comprehension instructional approaches: strategies instruction and content instruction. The content approach focused on implementing strategies for purposes of understanding

the text. The strategies approach focused on the direct teaching of evidence-based comprehension strategies taken from the National Reading Council Report (NRP, 2000). The format of each approach was teacher directed. Participants included 115 fifth grade students from six classrooms in a small urban district in southwestern Pennsylvania and nine middle school teachers. Each class was randomly assigned to one of the approaches. Training was provided to the teachers for each approach. Data were collected and analyzed with a one-way ANOVA.

Findings from McKeown (2009) revealed there were no differences between the instructional methods. Researchers attributed this finding to the fact that both of the approaches had positive effects on students. Further examination of the method of implementation revealed that teachers did not consistently follow the lesson plan and instructions provided, which may have also altered the results.

Troyer (2017) examined teachers' variations in instructional practices when implementing reading intervention programs. The ability of teachers to implement a teaching method as presented and to carry it out as planned, is referred to as the fidelity of implementation (FOI). Troyer (2017) studied how implementing a reading program varied at the level of the teacher, and thusly affected student outcomes. Participants included three literacy coaches, 17 middle school teachers, 287 students from nine schools, in four districts in Massachusetts. Student participants performed at least 2 years below grade level on standardized tests and were randomly assigned to a control group or the Strategic Adolescent Reading Intervention group (STARI). Teachers were trained in implementing the strategies prior to the school year and received additional monthly and weekly trainings.

Results disclosed the overall fidelity of implementation was moderate to high (78%) with a significant variation from a low of nine instructional practices (28%) to a high of 31 (97%). Troyer (2017) strongly suggested based on these findings, that overall low effect sizes of adolescent reading interventions may be attributed to a variation in teacher implementation. Teachers who are skilled in implementing reading strategies and interventions may achieve excellent results in their classrooms, while more struggling teachers may achieve poorer results. Findings further revealed teachers who were certificated in reading earned higher FOI scores.

Vaughn, Simmons, and Wanzek (2013) conducted a design experiment to examine two interventions to improve students' reading comprehension and content knowledge. The authors sought interventions that would align with content area learning and be practical for content area teachers in secondary schools to use. The participants were 12 social studies (SS) and seven ELA teachers. This study was conducted in three school districts in two states, in rural, suburban, and urban areas. A series of iterative design experiments was conducted over the course of the school year with each teacher. Instructions in reading strategies were provided. Data were collected and consisted of feedback forms, focus groups, and class observations. Quantitative and qualitative analysis were performed.

Results of the Vaughn et al. (2013) study suggested several important recommendations regarding implementation of strategy interventions in ELA and SS classes to improve student comprehension and content learning. Recommendations for ELA included the use of strategies that easily transfer between novels and informational text, explicit teaching of inferences, and expansion of vocabulary and comprehension

strategies. In addition, increased small group discussions were shown to be more effective than whole class discussions. In SS classes, recommendations included expansion of vocabulary instruction beyond simple definitions, increased comprehension strategies beyond question and answer, and increased student engagement with text. Researchers stated the necessity of data collection in all classes to allow key changes and refinement of strategy implementation to be made. The authors specified that effective comprehension practices must be flexible and adaptable and developing such a tool to improve both content text and reading was challenging (Vaughn et al., 2013).

McCallum et al. (2011) conducted a study to determine if student comprehension was enhanced when the strategy of ask-read and tell (ART) was prompted and applied, and if adding a peer discussion component to ART improved comprehension. Participants were 115 low socioeconomic status, inner city high school students. Students were exposed to three reading conditions: (a) a control condition in which students silently read a brief passage presented; (b) an experimental condition in which students were prompted to use the strategy of ART before, during, and after a selected reading passage was read; and (c) an experiment condition group with ART followed by peer discussion. Students were required to answer 10 comprehension questions after reading the passage presented under all three conditions. The study was conducted at a large Southeastern university for 1 hour a day. Reading comprehension scores were analyzed using an ANOVA to determine if significant differences existed among the three conditions.

Findings from the McCallum et al. (2011) study showed no differences in comprehension across passages assigned to the ART condition and the control condition.

This finding suggested that prompting and instructing students to use ART did not improve their comprehension. It should be noted however that these findings differ from other research findings which found ART to be an effective tool for comprehension. Researchers reported numerous external validity limitations associated with the study. This study was conducted in an artificial setting, in a large university lecture hall with artificial tasks. All passages consisted of 400 words and were written at a fourth grade level. The participants were high school students who were not proficient readers and who participated in a special summer program. Due to these limitations, researchers cautioned generalizing these findings for use in high school education classroom.

Peleaux and Endacott (2013) performed a quantitative study to determine if a reading technique that utilized comprehension strategies, ReQuest would improve reading comprehension of text in a social studies textbook. Participants included 20 world history class students at a public high school in a rural mid-southern state. Data consisted of chapter quizzes that were collected and analyzed.

Results revealed the students' mean quiz scores improved following the use of the ReQuest technique with a corresponding drop in standard deviation. The ReQuest technique increased general social studies text comprehension, which suggests that lower level readers may benefit from using the ReQuest technique. Future research should examine the effects of the ReQuest technique on a larger sample and consider a different source of data collection to measure reading comprehension in greater detail (Peleaux & Endacott, 2013).

Vaughn et al. (2015) conducted a 2-year randomized control study to examine whether the use of instructional interventions would improve reading comprehension of

content area texts. Three diverse high schools in an urban school district participated in the study utilizing a third of the student body. All eighth grade students were tested and screened for participation in their ninth and 10th grade years. Students with substantial reading difficulties were randomly assigned to one of three treatment condition groups and a business as usual model (BAU). Daily intervention in 50-minute classes was provided by certified teachers with experience teaching struggling readers. The teachers were hired and trained by the researchers.

Findings from the Vaughn et al. (2015) study revealed that the 2-year reading interventions with at-risk ninth and 10th grade students were effective in improving students' reading comprehension. The students in reading treatment demonstrated notable gains in reading comprehension (effect size = .43) and improved reading skills associated with better grades in social studies compared to the students in the BAU group, but not in science. The researchers stated that the effects were moderate but have clinical significance when compared to the effect sizes of a similar study, in which the effect size for fourth grade students and older, averaged 0.14 (Vaughn et al. (2015). Future research suggested the need for more extensive research in the use of evidence-based practices to assist struggling readers.

Review of these studies revealed that interventions in core content area classes can assist secondary students with improving reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and content knowledge when strategies are appropriately selected and implemented (McKeown et al., 2009; NRP 2000; Peleaux & Endacott; 2013; Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2015). Furthermore, when teachers are skilled in implementing reading strategies and interventions, and receive support, they may achieve excellent

results in the classroom. In addition, teachers certified in reading were better equipped to effectively implement reading strategies (Troyer, 2017). Researchers suggested more research is needed in implementing reading strategies in the content area to assist struggling readers (McKeown et al., 2009; Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2015).

Chapter Summary

A significant number of high school students in the United States are attending public schools, transitioning through and graduating with reading skills well below proficiency. These students are unprepared to face the literacy demands of the 21st century and lack the necessary reading skills for college or the workforce. For the past 2 decades, national educational reforms have been implemented in an effort to address this literacy crisis, (Center on Education Policy, 2011; ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001). In addition, numerous researchers have continued to examine and evaluate different interventions and reading strategies to help students improve reading proficiency at the secondary level (Edmonds, et al., 2009; Scammacca et al., 2015; Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2010; Wanzek et al., 2013). Moreover, studies have revealed that many content area teachers hold negative beliefs about the explicit teaching of reading in their classrooms and feel ill prepared to do so (Meyer, 2013). Despite the evidence-based body of research regarding reading strategies, the implementation of national education reforms (Center on Education Policy, 2011; ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001), and efforts to inform content area teachers' beliefs and perceptions (Lovett, 2009), the problem still exists.

Research studies have shown that students who are struggling readers in high school can improve their reading skills and knowledge of content, if the strategies of

comprehension and vocabulary are effectively implemented by content area teachers (Cantrell et al., 2015; Lovett et al., 2012; Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2010). Many studies render the teacher to be the most effective instrumental actor in assisting struggling readers, yet many teachers believe it is not their responsibility (Ness, 2009; Troyer, 2017; Wexler et. al., 2017). When content area teachers have knowledge of reading strategies, implementation methods, and support; they are more willing to utilize them (Cantrell et al., 2008; Peleaux & Endacott, 2013). Gains in reading proficiency for secondary students can be made, but teachers must be trained to do so (Meyer, 2013; Ness, 2009).

If this literacy crisis is not addressed and gains are not made at the secondary level, the future of individuals graduating without adequate reading proficiency skills is not promising, not only for those individuals, but for future generations and the nation. As a result of their literacy deficits, outcomes may include socioeconomic disadvantages, low wage jobs, unemployment, and difficulty in attaining college admission or technical careers. There is also ample evidence of the connection between the lack of reading proficiency and involvement in the welfare and/or the criminal justice system. Furthermore, if the United States is to continue to compete in the global market, we must produce graduating students who are proficient readers, capable of critically reading, analyzing, and problem solving (Goldman, 2012; ProLiteracy, 2018; Snyder et al., 2018).

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

In this technologically advanced 21st century, the ability to read and analyze information is critical to being successful as a student and as a productive contributing member of society. Every important social issue is affected by literacy: employment, economics, healthcare, politics, and education. The ability to read proficiently is paramount if educators are to prepare students to become viable members of society in pursuit of higher education, the workforce, and their dreams (Pezolla, 2017). However, many students are attending high schools and graduating with reading skills below proficiency (NCES, 2017).

To achieve academic success, it is vital that students are able to read at or above grade level. With increased rigorous content and academic demands, high school students are expected to read, comprehend, analyze, conceptualize, and integrate increasing amounts, sources, and types of information in various disciplines (Swanson & Wanzek, 2014). However, when students are experiencing difficulty reading, they struggle to comprehend the variety of texts and to meet academic demands, and they continue to fall further behind. In addition, the teaching methods, complexity, and quantity of content, further widen the gap for these students (Torgesen et al., 2007). Without significant resources, supplemental specialists, or content area teachers providing reading strategies and literacy support, these students are left on their own to figure out what they do not know (Ness, 2007, Snow & Moje, 2010).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was implemented as a national educational reform effort to set high standards and improve educational outcomes. Following this reform, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was implemented. These national reforms included implementation of increased literacy in the core content classes. Federal and state governments continue to study, develop, and implement new standards and reforms in an effort to improve academic achievement and reading outcomes. In 2017, the Next Generation Learning Standards were adopted in New York State. These standards include a strong emphasis on literacy and teacher development in an effort to promote increased literacy in the content area and improve students' comprehension of complex text and critical thinking skills (NYSED, 2017).

In spite of these educational reforms, minimal gains in reading achievement have been made (NCES, 2017). Recent data revealed that only 37% of 12th graders nationally were reading at or above proficiency (NCES, 2017). There continues to be a disconnect, as the research indicates evidence-based reading strategies exist and content area teachers claim to know and use them; however, reading achievement scores continue to remain flat without gains, over the last decade.

The purpose of this study was to examine secondary content area history teachers' perceptions of the impact of teaching explicit reading strategies on student reading comprehension and academic performance. In addition, this study explored how content area history teachers experience the challenges, obstacles, and support related to the implementation of reading strategies in the content area classroom. For purposes of this study secondary content area history teachers are defined as high school teachers who teach the content area of history. In New York State at the high school level history

encompasses the various types of history: global history, U.S. history and government and American history. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do secondary content area history teachers describe what they know about literacy learning and evidence-based reading strategies?
2. How do secondary content area history teachers describe their use of evidence-based reading strategies?
3. What perceptions do secondary content area history teachers have about the impact of teaching reading strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance?
 - 3a. How do secondary content area history teachers describe beliefs about the challenges, obstacles, and strengths they experience in their pedagogical practices as they address varied student reading skills?
 - 3b. How do secondary content area history teachers view their role in assisting students with reading in the content area and how do they believe they can enhance opportunities for successful student outcomes?
4. How do secondary content area history teachers' beliefs about reading strategies in the content area classroom influence pedagogical practices including challenges, obstacles, and strengths?

Currently the world is changing rapidly, and schools, colleges, and businesses are demanding more from students and adults in higher education and the workplace (Goldman, 2012). Students need to master not only technology skills, but advanced literacy skills in pursuit of college or the workforce (Pezolla, 2017). Secondary teachers must integrate reading strategies into content areas to equip high school students to

encounter the demands of the 21st century (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Therefore, the findings of this study may serve to influence student achievement and the delivery of instruction. Furthermore, the findings may inform pedagogical practices, decision-making and initiatives proposed by school leaders, administrators, educational curriculum specialists, and policy makers.

To understand the perspective of secondary content area history teachers' knowledge, use, and perceptions of reading strategies related to reading comprehension and student performance, a qualitative research design was used. By utilizing a qualitative study, the researcher provided teachers with an opportunity to self-report and describe their lived experiences, beliefs, obstacles, and strengths of teaching reading strategies in history classrooms on student reading comprehension and academic performance. "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 4). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the qualitative researcher studies participants in their natural setting, collects data through multiple methods, organizes and analyzes data utilizing complex inductive and deductive logic, and applies meaning to the data for a more in depth understanding of the research problem. Moreover, qualitative research is used to adequately "capture the complexity of a problem or when statistical analysis does not fit or answer the problem" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 46). Furthermore, a qualitative approach is advantageous when examining the participants perspectives or personal accounts in the discipline of education (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

Creswell and Creswell (2016) define phenomenological research as “a design of inquiry ... in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced this phenomenon” (p. 13). The goal is to search for copious details regarding the phenomenon in order to provide meaning through the use of a variety of data collected.

In this study, the researcher examined the phenomenon of the relationship between the evidence-based reading strategies that exist and the content area secondary history teachers’ perceptions of the use, usefulness, and influence of reading strategies on reading comprehension skills and student performance. In addition, the researcher explored the challenges, obstacles, and strengths that content area teachers encounter in implementing reading strategies, and solicited teachers’ recommendations for improving student success.

Research Context

This study was conducted via videoconferencing with participants employed in two suburban high schools located in the northeastern part of New York State, in a diverse suburb north of New York City. School District A has a student population of 1,940 students in kindergarten to 12th grade. During the 2018-19 school year, the high school had an enrollment of 472 students (NCES, 2017). Within the district, 68% of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged and were eligible to receive free and reduced lunch. In addition, 5% of the students were classified as English language learners (ELL), 19% as students with disabilities, and 2% were identified as homeless. The reported ethnicity demographics of all the students within this district were 46%

Black or African American, 38% Hispanic or Latino, 9% White or Caucasian, 6.1% Asian, and 1% multiracial (NYSED, 2019). Of the 180 teachers employed in School District A, 3% were secondary content area history teachers.

A score of 3 or more on the New York State Regents Examinations is deemed a level of proficiency. The students in School District A received the following results on the Regents examinations: Regents English examination results yielded 91% of all students at a proficient level of 3 or more. Global History Regents yielded 58% proficient and U.S. History revealed 87% proficient. Science and math Regents exams proficiency achievement was significantly lower ranging from 58%-72% respectively.

During the 2018-19 school year, School District B had a student population of 995 students in kindergarten to 12th grade. The high school had an enrollment of 310 students (NYSED, 2019). Within the district, 57% of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged and were eligible to receive free and reduced lunch. In addition, 15% of the students were classified as ELL, 14% were classified as students with disabilities, and 2% were identified as homeless. The reported ethnicity demographics of all the students in this district were 58% Hispanic or Latino, 21% Black or African American, 9% White or Caucasian, 10% Asian and 2% multiracial (NYSED, 2019). There were 86 teachers employed in this district, of which 5% were secondary content area history teachers.

The students in School District B received the following results on the Regents examinations: Regents English examination results yielded 89% of all students at a proficiency level of 3 or more. The Global History and Geography Regents yielded 75% proficient and U.S. History and Government reported results for all students at 77%

proficient. Science and math Regents exams were significantly lower, with math ranging from 44%-85% and science from 17%-79% respectively.

Research Participants

The participants for this study included secondary content area history teachers located in two suburban high schools, who met all of the following criteria: Participants were (a) certified secondary masters' level history teachers who taught one or more classes in American history or global history to students in Grades 9 through 12; (b) novice teachers with 5 or fewer years in the classroom, or experienced teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience; (c) employed as teachers in the secondary schools utilized for this study; and (d) voluntary participants in this study. Thus, a purposeful sampling method governed the selection process (Bloomberg, 2018).

Bloomberg (2018) described purposeful sampling as “a technique used in qualitative research for purposes of identifying and selecting participants that are knowledgeable about the experience or phenomenon of interest to obtain data to answer the research questions” (p. 237). Certified teachers were used in this study because of their knowledge and expertise in the content area of history. Novice or experienced teachers were used in this study to examine and compare whether their lived experiences with teaching struggling readers, or utilizing reading strategies differed. In addition, the researcher included participant teachers who were employed in the same district to reduce the variable of different teaching environments and resources.

It was expected that between eight to 12 participants would complete the full in-depth qualitative study exploration. Nine teachers were participants in this study. Three secondary high school history teachers from School District B, participated in the in-

depth interviews via videoconferencing. Five secondary content area history teachers from School District A participated in the focus group via videoconferencing. All participants were assured of confidentiality and informed that data reported would not disclose the identity of any participants. Numbers were assigned to participants in lieu of names to further aid in confidentiality.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

For this study data were collected sequentially utilizing multiple data collection sources. Qualitative researchers gather multiple forms of data rather than relying on a single source (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018) several data collection techniques (triangulation) serve to enhance the credibility of the study and contributes to trustworthiness. Furthermore, using a variety of data collection methods supported the research inquiry and provided validity to the research study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

The data collection instruments of a demographic survey, in-depth interviews, and a focus group were used to explore the perceptions and beliefs of content area history teachers' literacy knowledge and use of reading strategies, and the impact of teaching these strategies on reading comprehension and student performance. Demographic surveys were administered electronically to all the participants and provided pertinent information regarding education, teaching experience, beliefs, and relevant knowledge of literacy and reading strategies. The benefit of utilizing an online survey was that it reduced the cost of printing, was easily accessed through a simple e-mail link, and the information was easily secured with the use of a login name and password. The information obtained from the survey was beneficial as it provided relevant information

about each participant and was useful in developing and formalizing the interview questions (Morgan, 1997).

Teachers who met the participant criteria outlined were invited to participate in in-depth interviews via videoconferencing. It was expected that three to five teachers would participate in the interviews. Interviews are purposeful conversations designed to elicit information about a relevant topic. Interviews can be loose or tightly structured to enable the researcher to explore, probe, and gain information as the participants share their lived experiences and ideas freely (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002). For this study, interview questions were predetermined and open-ended. Three secondary high school history teachers from School District B, participated in the in-depth interviews via videoconferencing.

Upon completion of the in-depth interviews, a focus group was conducted. A selected group of teachers employed in School District A, who met the participant criteria and who were not part of the interviews, participated in the focus group. A focus group is a data collection method consisting of a semi-structured group interview led by a moderator, to collect data on a specific topic (Morgan, 1997). A focus group of six content area history teachers was formed to provide access to a wide range of teachers' perspectives in a short period of time. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest focus group interviews should consist of six to eight participants and involve the use of a few unstructured and open-ended questions to stimulate views and opinions from the participants. In addition, the focus group clarified findings from other data collection methods and directly targeted the research questions (Morgan, 1997). For this study, only

five secondary content area history teachers participated in the focus group, as one of the participants was unable to attend the focus group at the scheduled time.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Upon written approval to conduct the study by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the superintendents of schools in both school districts, the data collection process began. The researcher contacted the history department chairs in both school districts via e-mail and requested the following: (a) assistance with recruitment efforts in obtaining volunteer participants for the research study, and (b) distribution of the research informational flyer with the researcher's contact information. Teachers interested in participating in the study were asked to contact the researcher via e-mail. Upon receipt of e-mails from the interested participants, the researcher electronically sent letters of consent to the volunteers to participate in either the focus group or in-depth interviews, along with the demographic survey. Upon receipt of the letter of consent and the demographic survey, the researcher scheduled a video conference with each volunteer participant and provided the videoconferencing link information via e-mail for participation in either the focus group or the in-depth interview.

The participants in this study were chosen using purposeful sampling, as they were knowledgeable of the phenomenon and could best help the researcher to understand the problem and assist in answering the research questions. Prior to participation in the focus group or the interviews, the participants were electronically provided with a letter of consent that they read and signed and provided an explanation of the study purpose and informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. See Appendix A and

Appendix B for informed consent. Participants were informed of the use of videoconferencing recording and plans for the use of the data collected. The researcher informed the participants of their rights in verbal and written forms. In addition, the researcher sent reminders of the scheduled interviews via e-mails to all of the participants prior to the interviews and focus group.

The survey, interview, and focus group questions were reviewed by a panel of experts in the field. The videoconferencing platform was tested prior to the interviews and focus group to test acoustics and to ensure successful recording procedures. In addition, interview protocol of pilot testing was implemented. Yin (2003) recommended the use of pilot testing to define data collection and to develop relevant lines of questions. Moreover, the use of testing the interview questions provided the researcher with an opportunity to review and improve questions, format, instructions, and audio/video-recording equipment prior to the actual data collection.

To guide the data collection process, the researcher established and used interview protocols to ensure the database was well organized (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interview questions were unstructured and open-ended to allow for honest expressions of the participants' experiences and to generate rich discussions. Interviews were video/audio recorded via videoconferencing and the text was later transcribed for data. Length of the interviews was approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The general interview guide approach was used to obtain the same information from each participant interviewed; the same questions were presented to each participant to inform the research questions.

The focus group was conducted 1 week after the final interview and was led by the researcher via videoconferencing and recorded. Text was later transcribed for data collection. Participants were asked to inform the researcher if they could not participate. Questions for the focus group were predetermined. The length of the focus group was approximately 60 minutes. The focus group participants were assigned and identified by numbers. This coding process aided in protecting the anonymity of the speakers and assisted the researcher in identifying the speakers when the data were later transcribed.

The researcher considered and addressed all anticipated ethical issues with regard to respect for persons and concern for welfare by ensuring participants' privacy and consent and minimizing any harm. The researcher adhered to confidentiality standards and ethical interview and research practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, the researcher avoided inclusion of any identifiable information in the documents, profiles, or analyses file.

After collecting data from the interviews and focus group the process of data analysis began. Data were carefully collected and securely stored on the researcher's computer in a password protected and encrypted file. In addition, the researcher developed a back-up copy on an external hard drive and the drive has been stored in a locked fire-proof file cabinet at the researcher's home. The researcher ensured ongoing secure storage of all electronic files and research data.

An embedded analysis approach was utilized. In this approach, through data collection and analysis of the survey, focus group transcripts and interview transcripts, a detailed description of the study emerged (Yin, 2003). The demographic information collected from the survey was organized on a spreadsheet and analyzed. Focus group and

interview data were sent to a professional transcriptionist in a password protected file and data were transcribed and converted from audio to text. Upon receipt of the transcribed data, the researcher reviewed the data with line by line analysis and provided member checking for clarifying and verifying findings to enhance validity. According to Yin (2003), validity can be enhanced through member checking both during data collection and after analysis has been complete.

Text was organized and analyzed for the emergence of possible themes, patterns categories, or issues, as the researcher continued to analyze and display categories, to understand and clarify the data and connect the data to the research questions. As Creswell and Poth (2018) noted, this type of analysis works well with interview data. In the process of data analyses the researcher also “winnowed the data.” This process involved examining and extracting the relevant parts of the data. “...the impact of this process was to aggregate data into a small number of themes, something between five and seven themes” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 192). The researcher continued to confirm categories across multiple data sources through triangulation and responded to the research questions.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological research study was conducted to examine and understand the perspective of secondary content area history teachers’ knowledge, lived experiences, beliefs, obstacles, and strengths of teaching reading strategies in history classrooms on student reading comprehension and academic performance. The participants for this study included secondary content area history teachers located in two suburban high schools, who met all of the participant criteria. Data were collected

sequentially utilizing multiple data collection sources. Data collection instruments consisted of a demographic survey, in-depth interviews, and a focus group. Informational letters, consent forms, and demographic surveys were administered electronically to all of the participants. The in-depth interviews and focus group were all conducted and recorded via videoconferencing.

The demographic information collected from the survey was organized on a spreadsheet and analyzed. Focus group and interview data were sent to a professional transcriptionist in a password protected file and data were transcribed and converted from audio to text. Upon receipt of the transcribed data, the researcher reviewed the data with line by line analysis and provided member checking for clarifying and verifying findings to enhance validity. Text was organized and analyzed for the emergence of codes, categories, and themes, as the researcher continued to analyze and clarify the data to connect the data to the research questions. Timeline for completion of all data collected was 6 weeks.

This study sought to explore the thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs of content area history teachers related to the impact of utilizing evidence-based reading strategies on student reading comprehension and academic performance. The collected data provided an in-depth understanding from the teachers' perspectives of the impact of using reading strategies in secondary content area classrooms. Chapter 4 includes a detailed description and results of data analyses and relevant findings to answer the research questions. Chapter 5 addresses the research implications, limitations, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This qualitative research study examined the perspectives of nine secondary education content area history teachers regarding their use of explicit reading strategies and the impact on reading comprehension and academic performance of students in Grades 9 through 12. The researcher sought to elicit an in-depth understanding of the knowledge, beliefs, challenges, strengths, and pedagogical practices these teachers encountered as they engaged with students who have difficulty reading and engaging in content in their classrooms. Data collection methodology and instruments consisted of a demographic survey, interviews, and a focus group. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions which allowed for the participants to express their beliefs and thoughts and to guide the direction of the interview. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to provide additional inquiry by utilizing follow-up questions to portray the breadth of the participant's perspective and to clarify the meaning of the participants' responses.

Research Questions

In this chapter, the researcher addressed the following research questions:

1. How do secondary content area history teachers describe what they know about literacy learning and evidence-based reading strategies?
2. How do secondary content area history teachers describe their use of evidence-based reading strategies?

3. What perceptions do secondary content area history teachers have about the impact of teaching reading strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance?
 - 3a. How do secondary content area history teachers describe beliefs about the challenges, obstacles, and strengths they experience in their pedagogical practices as they address varied student reading skills?
 - 3b. How do secondary content area history teachers view their role in assisting students with reading in the content area and how do they believe they can enhance opportunities for successful student outcomes?
4. How do secondary content area history teachers' beliefs about reading strategies in the content area classroom influence pedagogical practices including challenges, obstacles, and strengths?

The interview questions (Appendix C), focus group questions (Appendix D) and the demographic survey (Appendix E) were developed by the researcher, guided by the research questions, and formulated to ensure descriptive answers. To ensure validity of the research questions, the instruments were peer reviewed by three reading specialists who were not part of this study, nor employed in the participating districts. The interviews and the focus group were video recorded via videoconferencing and transcribed utilizing a transcription service. Table 4.1 highlights the alignment of the research questions to the data collection instrument questions.

Table 4.1

Data Sources Correlated to Research Questions

Research Questions	Data Collection Methods		
	Survey	Interviews	Focus Group
Research Question 1	7, 9, 10	5, 7, 9, 10	7, 9
Research Question 2	9, 10	8, 9, 10	6, 7, 8
Research Question 3	9, 11, 12	6, 10, 11, 12	8
Research Question 3(a)	11	3, 4, 13	3, 4, 8
Research Question 3(b)	8, 11, 12	4, 5, 11, 13	4, 5, 6
Research Question 4	9, 12	8, 11, 12, 13	6, 10

Research Participants

The nine research participants for this study were selected from a purposeful sample based on the following criteria: certified secondary masters' level history teachers who taught one or more classes in American history or global history to students in Grades 9 through 12; a novice teacher with 5 or fewer years in the classroom; or an experienced teacher with more than 5 years of teaching experience, employed at one of the two participating high schools. All participants were NYS certified in history.

The participants in this study were assigned a given number and were referred to with an abbreviated "P" plus the assigned number. There were two distinct groups of participants in this study. The first group of participants, (P1-P3) engaged in the semi-structured interviews for 30 to 60 minutes and were employed at School B. The second group of participants (P4-P9), engaged in the focus group for approximately 1 hour and

were employed at School A. It should be noted that all participants in the first and second group completed the consent form and the demographic survey, however Participant 9 did not participate in the focus group, due to a schedule conflict. The demographic information of each participant is depicted in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Participant Demographic Information Obtained from the Demographic Survey

Participant	Gender	Age	Number of years teaching	Teacher's knowledge of student's reading skills	Professional development in Literacy Participation	Evidence-based reading strategies used	Interview or Focus Group Participant used
1	M	25-32	5-10	Great	Yes	5	Interview
2	M	33-50	5-10	Moderate	Yes	6	Interview
3	M	33-50	10+	Moderate	Yes	4	Interview
4	M	51+	3-5	Moderate	No	6	Focus Group
5	M	33-50	10+	Little	Yes	2	Focus Group
6	F	33-50	10+	Moderate	Yes	6	Focus Group
7	M	33-50	10+	Moderate	Yes	6	Focus Group
8	F	25-32	5-10	Little	Yes	5	Focus Group
9	F	33-50	10+	None	Yes	4	Focus Group

Participant 1. P1 was a male teacher, aged 25-32, who has been teaching for almost 8 years. He had been teaching for the last 2 years in the district where he was currently employed. P1 is a New York State certified teacher in secondary history and

special education and was working on his administrative degree. P1's prior years of teaching had been in urban school districts. He was currently teaching in a suburban school but had always worked in diverse classrooms. P1 shared his belief that content area teachers know "a great deal" about the reading skills of the students they teach. When asked "Why do you feel that way?" P1 said, "Based on the work teachers provide for students, teachers are able to decide if students are able to comprehend the work."

Participant 2. P2 was a male teacher, aged 33-50, who had been teaching for 13 years. He spent 2 years in urban high schools and the remaining years in the suburban district where he was currently employed. P2 was a New York State certified secondary history teacher and had taught every grade level history course from ninth through 12th grade. P2 was currently teaching 10th grade students and had predominately worked in public schools with diverse students. P2 expressed that content area teachers know "a moderate amount" about the reading skills of the students they teach. When asked "Why do you feel that way?" P2 said, "I think some content area teachers such as math and a little science, might not have a full grasp on how low our students' reading skills are."

Participant 3. P3 was a male teacher, aged 33-50, a New York State certified teacher in secondary history who had been teaching for 25 years. P3 taught his first 2 years in a Catholic high school and had been teaching in the school district where he was currently employed for the last 23 years. He indicated his school had a diverse student body. P3 was currently serving as the history department chair as well as the teachers' union representative. P3 shared that content area teachers know "a moderate amount" about the reading skills of the students they teach. When asked "Why do you feel that way?" P3 responded, "Content area teachers are trained in their content areas. Many

major in specific subjects. Education programs did not focus on specific reading skills, particularly for secondary teachers.”

Participant 4. P4 was a male teacher, age 51+, who was New York State certified in secondary history. This was P4’s second professional career. P4 had only taught in the district where he was currently employed. P4 shared his thoughts regarding content area teachers’ knowledge of their students’ reading abilities. P4 stated that content area teachers know “a moderate amount” about the reading skills of the students they teach. When asked “Why do you feel that way?” P4 stated, “It’s not until the student has done reading work in your class that you can evaluate their reading level.”

Participant 5. P5 was a male teacher, aged 33 to 50, who was a New York State certified secondary history teacher. P5 had been teaching for over 10 years and had been employed in the district for over 10 years. P5 shared his thoughts regarding content area teachers’ knowledge of their students’ reading abilities. P5 stated that content area teachers know “nothing at all” about the reading skills of the students they teach. When asked, “Why do you feel that way?” P5 responded, “Most content teachers focus on covering the curriculum in order to have the students pass the state assessments rather than spend time on literacy.”

Participant 6. P6 was a female teacher, aged 33 to 50, New York State certified as a secondary history teacher. P6 had been teaching for over 10 years and had taught history at both the middle school and the high school levels. P5 shared that content area teachers know “a moderate amount” about the reading skills of the students they teach. When asked, “Why do you feel that way?” P6 responded, “because content area teachers are taught to focus on content, so teaching reading is not an area of expertise.”

Participant 7. P7 was a male teacher, aged 33 to 50, New York State certified as a secondary history teacher, who had been teaching in his current position for more than 10 years. P7's highest degree of educational attainment was a doctoral degree. P7 shared his thoughts regarding content area teachers' knowledge of their students' reading abilities. P7 responded that content area teachers know "a moderate amount" about their students' reading abilities. When asked, "Why do you feel that way?" P7 stated, "because of professional development."

Participant 8. P8 was a female teacher, aged 25-32, New York State certified as a secondary history teacher. P8 had been teaching for at least 5 years, but less than 10 years. P8 had taught history at both the middle school and high school levels. P8 shared that content area teachers know "a little" about the reading skills of the students they teach. When asked, "Why do you feel that way?" P8 responded,

Little information is shared with teachers regarding the reading levels/skills of incoming students. After a month or two into the school year, teachers gain a greater understanding of each students' abilities through classroom interactions and assignments, but it is not typical for social studies teachers to help students with reading and writing. In my experience, most social studies teachers feel that reading and writing is the English teachers' responsibility, although I disagree.

Participant 9. P9 was a female teacher, aged 33-50, who was a New York State certified secondary history teacher. P 9 had been teaching in the district she was currently employed, for over 10 years, and had only taught at the high school level. P9 shared her thoughts regarding content area teachers' knowledge of their students' reading abilities. P9 shared that content area teachers know "nothing at all" about the reading skills of the

students they teach. In response to the question, “Why do you feel that way?” P9 responded, “Busy schedules limit the amount of time available for content area teachers to reach out to colleagues.” P9 did not participate in the focus group due to a scheduling conflict, however P9 signed the consent form and completed the demographic survey.

Data Analysis and Findings

At the conclusion of the interviews and the focus group, each video recording was professionally transcribed and reviewed by the researcher, in a side-by-side comparison, line-by-line, for accuracy. The researcher reviewed, organized, and transcribed the data collected from all instruments manually to code key words, categories, and themes. Comments for each of the research questions were collected, organized in Excel spreadsheets and transcribed. The researcher began with in vivo coding, line by line, paying attention to the data, looking for patterns, themes, and frequencies, developing preliminary codes and characteristics. As the researcher continued to analyze the data using selective coding of process, values, emotions, and axial coding, the coding scheme was developed. The researcher collapsed and expanded the coding as categories and themes developed and were continually refined (Saldaña, 2016). The most frequent and prominent categories and themes reported are discussed by research question.

Research Question 1. How do secondary content area history teachers describe what they know about literacy learning and evidence-based reading strategies? The history teachers described their knowledge of evidence-based reading strategies and literacy learning. Three major themes emerged from the data. Table 4.3 illustrates the major codes, categories, and themes that emerged in response to this research question.

Table 4.3

Research Question 1- Codes, Categories, and Themes

Codes	Categories	Themes
Anticipatory sets, gives a foundation, sets the stage, KWL, front loading, need background info to move forward	Prior Knowledge	
Main idea, short summaries of paragraphs, make sense of reading, 3-1 Rule, short summary of section in a big document, ideas gleaned from the article, put in your own words	Summarization	
Note taking, Cornell notes, quick note, important bullet points, break down into categories, sort, highlight concepts, note key relationships,	Annotations	
Word bank, look up the words in the dictionary, expanding vocabulary, break down vocabulary first	Vocabulary	Evidence-Based Reading Strategies
Monitor comprehension by reviewing summary, one- on-one check in's, do now, exit tickets, review on-line notes for text comprehension	Comprehension Monitoring	
Organizing information, do a lot of graphic organizers, sorting information, categorizing, find graphic organizer helpful, organize students' thoughts, useful, pairs with annotations	Graphic Organizer	
Guided questions, KWL, questions generated	Questioning	
Context cues, try to get the word in context, inferences, inferring meaning using clues, analyzing, cause/effect, figure out the meaning analyze documents	Contextualization	
Working in small groups, partners, peer groups, high-low relationships, students learn from each other, share documents, interactive,	Cooperative Learning	
Categorize, break things up, chunk text, more manageable pieces of information, easy retrieval of information to memorize	Chunking	
Differentiated texts, differentiated lessons, work fits, meets them at their level, modified work, different versions, simplifying text, modifying text, alternate copies of something, differentiated reading instruction	Differentiation	Content and Other Strategies
A lot of class discussions, helps auditory learners, engage in conversation, interactive, hear things and remember	Discussion	
Teach skills needed to get content, teaching content literacy, skills needed to understand the content, strategies to pass the test	Other	
Don't know the technical terms for strategies, not sure if using strategies, no background in literacy, no literacy training, no experience, no idea how to teach reading	Literacy	Literacy and Reading Knowledge

Table 4.4 illustrates 14 categories that emerged during the interviews of all participants for Research Question 1.

Table 4.4

Research Question 1 Categories and Frequency of Participant Responses

Reading, Content and Literacy Strategies	Participants									Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Prior Knowledge		x	x		x	x		x		5
Summarization	x	x	x	x	x					5
Annotations	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		7
Vocabulary	x		x							2
Comprehension Monitoring	x		x	x		x				4
Graphic Organizer		x	x			x		x		4
Questioning	x	x	x			x		x		5
Contextualization	x	x	x		x					4
Cooperative Learning	x	x		x						3
Chunking	x	x	x							3
Differentiation	x	x	x		x	x		x		6
Discussion	x		x		x					3
Other	x			x	x	x	x			5
Literacy Skills			x	x	x	x	x			5

Note. Participant 9 was unable to participate in the focus group interview.

Evidence-based reading strategies. The participants identified and described 14 strategies they used in their classrooms to assist students who presented challenges with reading, as illustrated in Table 4.4. However, only nine of the 14 strategies identified were evidence-based reading strategies. The most frequently identified strategies in which five or more of the participants identified are illustrated in Table 4.5 – annotations, prior knowledge, summarizations, and questioning. The teachers were able to name these

strategies but were not as confident in their knowledge of whether the strategies they used were evidence-based nor if the strategies were implemented with fidelity.

Table 4.5

Categories and Identified Participants for Evidence-Based Reading Strategies

Evidence-Based Reading Strategies
Annotations (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8)
Prior Knowledge (P2, P3, P5, P6, P8)
Summarizations (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5)
Questioning (P1, P2, P3, P6, P8)

Annotation. Seven out of the nine participants identified annotations as a strategy they used in the classroom. Annotating involves directly interacting with the text to increase comprehension and recall of the text. Annotations can include highlighting, underlining key points, or making brief notes about important points in the text (Urquhart & Frazee, 2012).

Participant 8 reported, “I definitely use them (reading strategies). I know I listed a few but I’ll just talk about one. We try to do get them to use the annotations.” P6 concurred and stated, “I’ve also specifically taught annotating. One struggle I think is that everyone (teachers) kind of has their own annotating strategies in different subject areas.” P4 agreed. “Yes, I teach them how to do Cornell notes.” P3 further reported,

I’ll tell them, here’s five articles, you have to make a list of five bullet points. One of the skills I actually work on with them is highlighting. We do a lot of the readings in class and highlighting the main ideas.

Prior knowledge. Prior knowledge is a form of previewing the text to get the general idea of the text and to connect the text to students' existing knowledge (Swanson et al., 2011). The acronym KWL is a strategy which encompasses tapping into prior knowledge. When a new topic is introduced students must first identify K (what they *know* about a topic), W (what they *want* to know), and L (what they *learned*). KWL utilizes the strategies of prior knowledge and question generation. Five of the nine participants identified prior knowledge as a strategy they used in the classroom. P3 reported,

Many of the students don't have the prior knowledge and often background knowledge has to be presented first. A lot of the times kids don't come in with enough knowledge or background. I give them a bit of foundation. Someone has to give you a little background for you to move forward.

P2 had difficulty correctly naming the strategy, but described it this way, "I do a lot of you know KWL, KW something charts, you know where you tell what you know." P3 stated "KWL chart is very helpful." P8 concurred, as she stated, "I use KWL charts, but I feel as though I am constantly 'front loading' the information to them." P5 further noted, "they [the students] need the background knowledge in order to connect the information and to answer the enduring issues essays." P6 shared, "I use an anticipation guide where it's like a graphic organizer."

Summarization. Five of the nine participants reported the use of summarization as a strategy to assist students. Summarization involves identifying and writing the main idea and the most important events that integrate or provide meaning to the text as a whole (NRP, 2000). P4 spoke about the advantages of using summarization. He stated,

“I use the ‘3-1 rule’, read three sentences and create one sentence. If they (the students) can summarize, they can tell us if they’re understanding what they’re reading.”

P2 reported, “I really push for my students to do little, short summaries of a paragraph in a big document. I say, tell me what you gleaned from this article. Not just random facts.” P1 shared, “They [the students] can look at what they read and their several main ideas and put them together to make sense of what they read in a paragraph.” P6 also expressed her use of summarization and noted, “when they submit their notes online, then I can look and see if they are understanding the reading.”

Questioning. The evidence-based strategy of questioning involves both generating questions and responding or answering questions. (NRP, 2000). Five of the nine participants reported the use of this strategy. Often questioning was associated with the prior knowledge strategy of KWL, where the students generate questions. The teachers expressed concerns when presenting the strategy of question-response, as this is directly associated with reading comprehension. P1 reported, “I will use guided questions for them, so they have an understanding of what they are reading.”

P6 shared the students’ inabilities to appropriately respond to questions about the text when they frequently did not read the text or were unable to comprehend what they read. P6 stated,

Often you have to “spoon-feed” the information to them [the students] because they don’t read or don’t comprehend. It’s difficult to answer questions when you don’t understand the text. They [the students] can decode many of them, not even all of them, but then to actually comprehend and be able to answer the questions and connect the questions to a theme, it’s a whole next step for them.

P4 and P8 concurred, as P8 shared, “I agree with P6, they are spoon-fed because they don’t read and the comprehension is not there. They are unable to critically think to answer the questions presented.”

Content and other strategies. The participants identified and reported utilizing a number of strategies not characterized as evidence-based reading strategies, but rather strategies to assist the students in gaining a better understanding of the curriculum content and varied expository texts. Some participants referred to these strategies as “content literacy.” As the participants identified the types of strategies they used, they also shared the need for utilizing these strategies. The strategies reported included chunking, differentiation, discussion, and other. These are depicted in Table 4.6. Differentiation was the most frequently reported strategy within this theme.

Table 4.6

Categories and Identified Participants for Content and Other Strategies

Content and Other Strategies
Differentiation (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P8)
Other (P1, P4, P5, P6, P8)
Discussion (P1, P3, P5)

Differentiation. Six out of nine participants identified the strategy of differentiation. This strategy involves the presentation of diverse literature or modified texts on the same topic to students to address the diverse literacy needs of students, and to enable all students the opportunity to interact with the text and participate in the learning experience. P1 reported,

I know how to really modify and differentiate text for them. I differentiate all of my work. My lower kids will get a very modified language of that same topic. So, I make sure the work fits and meets them at their level.

P3 recalled,

I'll try to give them an alternative copy of something if I can find it," where they can get the same meaning from it. A lot of the things I look to do is I try to simplify things as much as possible.

P2 noted, "I try to mix it up, so everybody gets a different version." P6 expressed an online resource she utilizes with differentiated text.

There are these programs now for reading online like NewsELA. It's a really great resource. They take current event articles and write them at different grade levels. I actually lock the level below, so they can actually have some accomplishment to it.

Other. This category refers to any other strategies the participants used that were not previously reported. The participants spoke about the vast amounts of content in the curriculum they were responsible to cover with the students in an academic calendar year as they prepared for the Regents exams. They further expressed the need to provide students with strategies they could use to assist the students in organizing and comprehending the content material and documents. P1 shared,

I do a lot of discussions, this way my auditory listeners will pick up on things, so when they get to the text, they might remember things they hear. I try to do a lot of partner work. Students learn best from each other. I also try to include visual.

P4 reported, "I teach content literacy skills." When the researcher

followed up and asked for clarification of this term, P4 responded

I'm assisting them with literacy skills, the skills that they need in order to parse through historical content. There is no way you can pour through the density of this information and documents without knowing how to basically read for comprehension first. Then the teacher helps you parse through it line-by-line, word for word. Content literacy is definitely within our wheelhouse. But the basics?

In addition, the participants shared the need for strategies to assist the students in preparation for the Regents exams. P8 shared, "It's really an issue of time and applying those skills and that content knowledge in order for them to be successful and ultimately pass the exam." P6 agreed, "It's a vicious cycle. You expect them to have these skills and they don't have them, and I feel like if we don't assist them, we're not going to get through the curriculum. We're not going to get anywhere."

Literacy learning and reading knowledge. Throughout the interviews, as the participants identified the strategies they used to assist their students, several participants openly shared their thoughts regarding literacy learning and reading as illustrated in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Category and Identified Participants for Literacy and Reading Knowledge

Literacy and Reading Knowledge
Literacy (P3, P4, P5, P6, P7)

P3 expressed,

I'm not fully trained in how to teach reading. I'm a history guy, I went to graduate school. I did history classes. I'm somewhat ill equipped in some ways to deal with it. I've never been trained to help someone who is like a really struggling reader, but you know I would be completely open to it.

In regard to reading strategies, P3 further reported, "Sometimes the things I do, they might be reading strategies, I don't even know." P6 shared,

I don't have a background in literacy that a reading teacher has, and I don't know how they [students] can decode and read fluently and not understand what it says. It's kind of a strange phenomenon to me, I wish I knew how that process worked in their brains, then I could help them.

P5 stated, I agree, "They never really taught us how to teach somebody to read. I don't know how to do that. The only experience I have in teaching someone to read is my own children." P4 shared, "I teach 11th graders, by the time they get to me they're supposed to know how to read. The curriculum assumes they know how to read."

The participants described their knowledge of evidence-based reading strategies and literacy learning by identifying nine strategies by name or description they used to assist their students with comprehending content. The teachers reported a lack of confidence in identifying the strategies and with discerning whether the strategies were implemented with fidelity. The teachers also reported the use of other non-evidence-based reading strategies to assist students with navigating the course content. In addition, the teachers reported a limited knowledge of literacy learning and training in teaching students to read.

Research Question 2. How do secondary content area history teachers describe their use of evidence-based reading strategies? When considering how content area history teachers use evidence-based reading strategies, two themes emerged from the data: organization and comprehension. Table 4.8 exhibits the participants’ responses to this research question. Table 4.9 illustrates the codes, categories, and themes derived from the data.

Table 4.8

Research Question 2 Categories and Frequency of Participant Responses

Uses of Evidence-based Reading Strategies	Participants									Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Organization	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		7
Comprehension	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		8

Note. Participant 9 was unable to participate in the focus group interview.

Organization. Seven out of nine participants reported utilizing evidence-based reading strategies for organization. The use of graphic organizers, annotations, and varied methods of note-taking and summarizations allowed the students to organize the varied complex texts and documents. Several times during the interview process the participants spoke of the volumes of content and the need to assist the students in organizing the vast amount of information. P4 shared, “there’s so much volume in terms of content.” Likewise P8 noted, “We have such a large curriculum to get through. I use annotations and the graphic organizer to help them organize [the information] and their thoughts.” P2 concurred and stated “I teach them to take notes and to break the

information down into categories specific to social studies.” The participants expressed the importance of organization and the need to assist their students with this skill. Table 4.10 illustrates the evidence-based strategies reported by the participants for the purpose of organization and the frequencies of the participants responses.

Table 4.9

Research Question 2- Codes, Categories, and Themes Uncovered by the Participants

Codes	Categories	Themes
Organizing information, sorting information, categorizing, organize students' thoughts, useful, pairs with annotations	Graphic Organizer	Organization
Note taking, Cornell notes, quick note, break down into categories, sort, highlight concepts, note key relationships, focus on concepts	Annotations	
Anticipatory sets, gives a foundation, sets the stage, KWL, front loading, need background information to move forward	Prior Knowledge	
Main idea, short summaries of paragraphs, important bullet points, make sense of reading, 3-1 Rule, short summary of section in a big document, ideas gleaned from the article	Summarization	Comprehension
Note taking, Cornell notes, quick note, break down into categories, sort, highlight concepts, note key relationships, focus on concepts	Annotations	
Word bank, look up the words in the dictionary, expanding vocabulary, break down vocabulary first	Vocabulary	
Guided questions, KWL, questions generated	Questioning	
“Can tell if understand if they can summarize” one- one check in's, do now, exit tickets, check notes for comprehension of text	Comprehension Monitoring	
Context cues, try to get the word in context, inferences, inferring meaning using clues, analyzing, cause/effect, figure out the meaning analyze documents	Contextualization	
Working in small groups, partners, peer groups, high- low relationships, students learn from each other, share documents, interactive, class discussion, auditory learners, hear and remember	Cooperative Learning	

Note. The category of annotations is noted under the themes of organization and comprehension.

Table 4.10

Categories and Identified Participants for Organization

Organization
Graphic Organizer (P2, P3, P6, P8)
Annotations (P1, P3, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8)

Comprehension. The participants emphasized the use of evidence-based reading strategies to foster comprehension of the curriculum content in preparation for the state exams. The students' lack or limited reading comprehension skills and the need for the students to develop comprehension skills was consistently reported throughout the interviews. The participants recognized the students need to improve their reading comprehension but did not report utilizing the evidence-based reading strategies primarily for that function.

P1 emphasized utilizing the strategies of questioning, summarization, and vocabulary for comprehension as he reported,

I will put guided questions for them, [students] so they have an understanding of what they are reading. They can put several main ideas together to make sense of what they read. I also use vocabulary word banks for my lower students to help them understand.

Likewise, P8 reported using annotations and graphic organizers as strategies for and organization and reading comprehension, as she indicated, "I try to get them to use annotations and graphic organizers to pull together that reading comprehension piece."

P6 shared the use of strategies for prior knowledge and summarization as she noted,

I use an anticipation guide, where it's like a graphic organizer, whether statements from the text or about the text that they're about to read, they mark if they agree with the statement or disagree with the statement. Then as they read, they have to mark did the text agree or disagree with that statement. Then they have to add proof from the text. I use that one quite a bit, especially when we read a more complicated chapter.

P2 focused on the need to provide the students with strategies of contextualization to assist the students in comprehending the text and analyzing the information. He shared,

The students need to learn how to analyze information, which is one of the reasons I chose social studies as the content area because of the different types of documents they (students) could be exposed to and expect to be able to interpret and understand. But there's a shift in what kids are expected to do now. The curriculum students now face is much more focused on the analytical parts of reading comprehension. This new test is much more of a reading comprehension exam than anything we've ever had. I think those reading strategies are more important now than they previously were. I try to offer them a different way to tackle the information. I think giving the kids strategies is an important part of them being able to analyze information.

P3 spoke of the various strategies he employed to assist students with navigating and comprehending the varied expository text. He reported,

I try to do a lot of one-on-one check-ins [comprehension monitoring]. I'll say, tell me what you got from this area, and what are you reading right now? The language is really difficult as well. The average person doesn't understand the

language. I also try to break down the vocabulary beforehand. So, when they [the students] read they can actually figure out what it means. (P3)

P3 further expressed,

Content matters in social studies, particularly one that ends in a Regents [exam]. If they [students] can't read, they're going to bomb the multiple choice. They're going to bomb the constructed response portions. I try to teach them how to actually break down the information and look for key words, and to think about how to approach reading the document or question.

P6 shared, when you think about the historical documents, you have to be able to read for understanding because those documents are written in a vernacular that our students are not familiar with, students need help to dissect something that's difficult to read." P8 shared the need to provide the students with strategies and content knowledge, as she stated,

We [teachers] need to cover all aspects of history for them to be able to pull on that background knowledge in order to answer the "enduring issues essay," and then they [students] must apply the skills and the content knowledge in order for them to be successful in that ultimate exam. We're using strategies but we need more, because their comprehension isn't there.

The majority of the participants reported the use of evidence-based reading strategies primarily to assist the students with organizing content and to improve reading comprehension of the curriculum content in preparation for the state exams. Throughout the interviews the teachers reported the students' lack or limited reading comprehension skills. The teachers recognized the students need to improve their reading

comprehension but did not report utilizing the evidence-based reading strategies specifically for that function.

Research Question 3. What perceptions do secondary content area history teachers have about the impact of teaching reading strategies on students’ reading comprehension and academic performance? When considering the perceptions of the participants regarding the impact of teaching reading strategies on students’ reading comprehension and academic performance, three themes emerged from the data: effective, ineffectual, and other factors. All of the participants noted that utilizing the strategies were useful for assisting the students with the curriculum content, yet had limited effects related to improving the growth of the students reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, the data also revealed other factors which may hinder the students’ growth in reading proficiency. As P3 stated, “reading strategies are not the end all.” Table 4.11 reveals the codes, categories, and themes that materialized in response to this research question.

Table 4.11

Research Question 3- Codes, Categories, and Themes Uncovered by the Participants

Codes	Categories	Themes
Helpful, useful, improves content knowledge Helps with test preparation, provides prior knowledge, gives background for essays	Improve comprehension of content Improve test performance	Effective
Comprehension skills remain poor, doesn’t help with comprehension alone, doesn’t make a difference in reading skills, fidelity of implementation, varied methods of strategies used across disciplines, No time to improve reading skills	Absence of growth in reading comprehension skills Lack of Time	Ineffectual
Strategies not retained, students not vested, strategies not consistently taught or used, student motivation, self-ownership, students don’t read Other learning disorders, processing, dyslexia	Lack of student Investment Presence of learning disabilities	Other Factors

Effective. All of the participants in this study reported using reading strategies and shared the belief that as educators they have the ability to improve the performance of secondary readers in their classrooms. A common thread throughout the interviews was how effective the reading strategies were in assisting the students with comprehending the content as well as preparing the students for the state exams.

Table 4.12

Categories and Frequencies Identified by Participants for Effective

Effective
Improve Comprehension of Content (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P8)
Improve Test Performance (P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8)

Improve comprehension of content. The participants described employing reading strategies in the content area as a form of scaffolding to assist the students with maximizing their content knowledge in order to proceed through the curriculum. Scaffolding consists of providing the students with assistance to obtain knowledge beyond what they could learn on their own (Lin, 2015; Lutz & Huitt, 2004). The participants reported the implementation of annotations, summarizations, note taking, analyzing, and other evidence-based reading strategies to support the students with comprehending the content.

P3 conveyed,

The more strategies a teacher knows, the more they can assist their students. I think giving them [strategies] makes it better, makes it easier. The language and

the content are difficult. Reading strategies helps you serve as a guide in the classroom to help the kids who struggle.

P8 and P6 referred to the reading strategies as “helpful” and “useful” with organizing and comprehending the expository text in varied documents. P4 concurred and stated “I provide the students with the skills they need in order to parse through historical content.”

Improve test performance. The participants spoke in detail about the responsibilities and requirements of preparing the students for the New York State Regents examinations in global and American history. On multiple occasions during the interviews the participants expressed the use of reading strategies to assist the students with the content in preparation for the state exams. As P3 disclosed,

Last year my kids exceeded the state and national averages, but I am never satisfied, I want everybody to get a [score of] 5 and I know it’s not going to happen. I was more satisfied with kids who got 3s, who I didn’t expect to get threes. But when I look at certain kids and know they got a three, then I actually feel like maybe some of the strategies I taught them worked.

P5 mentioned that often a month or two before the exam he utilized every strategy and every technique to get the students prepared for the exam. He further revealed that without this preparation the chances of the students passing the exams would be greatly reduced, especially since the students are not reading. He stated,

If you can’t read or write, you can’t succeed at the academic level and in my classes a lot of the kids aren’t doing the reading, so we do end up spoon-feeding the nuts and bolts, giving them the facts, breaking it down, looking at the key

facts, showing them know this, think about it this way, analyze, frantically teaching them bullet points, rather than asking, do they really understand the concept of what happened.

Other participants agreed that the types of questions on the exams and the amount of information the students would need to know in order to successfully complete the exams require using multiple strategies and skills to help them, including prior knowledge, vocabulary, annotating, analyzing, and other evidence-based strategies. P8 shared, “In order to help them be successful” on the exams the teachers must apply the skills [strategies] and provide them with the content knowledge. P2 expressed,

Before students were able to sit down a week before the exam with a Regents study guide and memorize the heck out of that thing because you knew 75% of the test was going to be fact-based questions. But that is no longer the case. I’m still teaching a lot of the same content, but the types of questions that are being asked are different. I think reading strategies help. This new test is much more of a reading comprehension exam than anything we’ve ever had in social studies. But I am more satisfied, than dissatisfied with the results of my students’ history exams.

Ineffectual. Although the participants found reading strategies useful for comprehending the content and for test preparation, they also shared the belief that implementing reading strategies alone in the content area did not result in the improvement of their students’ overall reading comprehension, and thus their reading skills and academic performance. As P3 shared “Reading strategies alone are not the end all.” Furthermore, the participants emphasized other factors that may impact students’

comprehension skills and academic performance. Table 4.13 illustrates the categories revealed by the participants as ineffectual.

Table 4.13

Categories and Frequencies Identified by Participants as Ineffectual

Ineffectual
Absence of Growth in Reading Skills (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8)
Lack of Time (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P8)

Absence of growth in reading skills. The majority of the participants shared that while reading strategies were useful in assisting students who had reading difficulties with comprehension, reading strategies alone did not improve the students' overall reading ability. As P3 shared,

It's not a simple yes or no answer. A teacher can introduce and use strategies to help students better understand complex or even simple readings. However, in a context bound class where students are tied to a test, a teacher may not have the extended time to take a look at reading.

P4 agreed and stated, "If kids don't read independently, they take longer to become competent regardless of the strategy you use. In addition, P4 stated, "Strategies alone don't make the difference in improving reading skills."

Time. The participants agreed that as educators they could make a difference in the reading skills of secondary struggling readers, but indicated time to be a major factor. P8 stressed the vast amount of material the teachers needed to cover to complete the curriculum, as well as the continued growth of the curriculum to cover in the same

amount of time. As P8 shared, “There is no time to use the strategies to improve reading skills. If we had more time to focus, even if it was in the beginning on the actual strategies and build literacy, we wouldn’t have to worry about getting through the curriculum so much.” Furthermore, P6 made a connection about the importance of time on task and the focus of the instruction in the content area classroom. She shared, “Teachers focus on the content, not overall student achievement in reading skills.”

Other factors. The participants emphasized that even though they used reading strategies, there were other factors that may hinder the students from developing growth in their reading skills and academic performance. Table 4.14 reveals the categories the participants identified as other factors.

Table 4.14

Categories and Frequencies Identified by Participants for Other Factors

Other Factors
Lack of Student Investment (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8)
Presence of Learning Disabilities (P1, P3,)

Lack of student investment. In this study the participants overwhelmingly agreed that the students also shared some of the responsibility in their reading progress. P8 indicated, “It is also directly related to the students’ motivation.” P3 stated, “I also think a part of that is self-ownership. That the students have to continually engage on their own to improve as well.” P6 shared, even when you take the time to teach them, “sometimes the kids are resistant to learning the reading strategies.” P4 agreed as he expressed, “in order to improve reading skills, the students need to read, and the kids are

not reading.” P5 also affirmed, “a lot of our kids don’t read and see reading as a form of punishment. When we tell the kids to read, they are immediately turned off. Kids often report they don’t have to read, they can just skim through it.”

Presence of learning disabilities. In addition to lack of student engagement, a few of the participants spoke about the presence of disabilities which can hinder students from making growth in reading comprehension and academic development. P1 expressed,

There are other factors that can prevent that from happening, if you have a student who has delays in processing or a student who might be dyslexic. There are other factors that can weigh in no matter how many strategies you are using. That’s something a little more challenging to get over, that strategies alone won’t fix.

Secondary content area history teachers in this study revealed that utilizing evidence-based reading strategies were useful in assisting students with organizing and comprehending the content in preparation for the state exams. The participants reported the use of evidence-based reading strategies alone did not result in improving the growth of the students’ reading comprehension skills, and thus academic performance. In addition, the presence of other learning disabilities such as processing, dyslexia, etc. may also be contributing factors that hinder the growth of students’ reading skills in the content area.

Research Question 3(a). How do secondary content area history teachers describe beliefs about the challenges, obstacles, and strengths they experience in their pedagogical practices as they address varied student reading skills? Three themes

emerged from the data in response to this research question: challenges, obstacles, and strengths. These are highlighted in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15

Research Question 3(a) Codes, Categories, and Themes Uncovered by the Participants

Codes	Categories	Themes
Poor reading comprehension, students decode but don't comprehend, skimming not deep reading, students don't read assignments, can't have discussions, students resistant to reading, lack of deep dive critical thinking skills, unprepared, unmotivated, no interest in reading, poor reading skills, skimming, students expect quick, fast and easy	Students' Reading Abilities	
Need more time to teach reading skills and content, not enough time to teach vast content, 45-minute period not enough time, more time to focus on strategies, too much material to cover in the limited time, much of the time given away to test preparation, time on task	Time	Challenges
Test preparation, teach to the test, tests difficult, test changing, requiring more critical thinking, analyzing, vast amount of curriculum, vernacular of documents, test questions require more reading, school schedule	Curriculum, Instruction and State Exams	
Socioeconomic factor, students undeveloped in their native language, family structure, support, reading models, literacy not a priority at secondary level, , expect students can read, kids not prepared for questions and analysis, historians and ELA teachers don't prepare kids the same	Bias Perceptions and Expectations	Obstacles
Seeks professional development, literacy not a district priority, ineffective don't know how to teach reading, no knowledge to assist struggling readers, no time to obtain information, more training needed, good chef more tools, teach different strategies among content teachers, fidelity of implementation	Teachers' Literacy Knowledge	
Evidence-based reading strategies, scaffolding, modeling, differentiated materials, differentiated instruction, provide relevant material, material on-line, varied grade levels of reading, chunking text, intensive test preparation	Learning Strategies	Strengths
Willing to learn strategies, desire to implementing with fidelity, flexible, want to help students, seeks professional development	Willingness to Learn	

Challenges. Throughout the interviews the participants shared the challenges they encountered in the classroom when teaching history to secondary students with

varied reading abilities. Three categories emerged from the data and were described by the researcher as challenges: students' reading abilities, time, curriculum instruction, and state exams.

Table 4.16

Categories and Frequencies Identified by Participants for Challenges

Challenges
Students' Reading Abilities (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8)
Time (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8)
Curriculum Instruction and State Exams (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7 P8)

Students' reading abilities. One of the most reported challenges the participants identified focused on students' reading abilities. Eight of the nine participants reported students' reading abilities as a challenge. The teachers revealed that the students' lack of reading, poor reading comprehension, and reduced reading skills all impact their pedagogical practices. P5 shared,

We're high school teachers, the kids should be reading at home. We should be going deeper into the information and looking at cause and effect, looking at opinions, points of view, things of that nature, impacts. Having them read in class, is not ideal instruction.

P6 further expressed,

I have kids who are so turned off by reading, even if I assign reading ahead of time, they don't do it. Then I'm in the position where I can't have a discussion because the majority of the class didn't read the work. So, then I feel like as a

teacher I'm kind of in a cycle where I am constantly front-loading the information to them, because as P4 said, I cannot trust them to read at home because they won't.

P4 further noted that the students resisted reading even if they were offered extra credit for completing the assignment. He further shared,

I tell them in an AP course, you have to read for the who and what. Then when you come to class, I teach you the why and how. So, you have to come in with those five pages read or we can't have an intelligent conversation. I tell the kids if you are one of those kids who just want to skim, you'll never get through this course. (P4)

P6 emphasized, "Even when you do give them a reading assignment it often has to be modified, as many of the students are not on grade level." Moreover, she revealed, to promote interest and motivate students, reading assignments and programs were often given online. She went on to say, "They can read it on their computers, phones, whatever. They won't even do that."

The participants revealed the limited interest the students have in reading and the challenge of motivating the students to read and to understand the value and importance of reading. P2 expressed, "My biggest challenge is motivating my students." P3 shared, "I think the great challenge is getting kids to recognize that when you read and write, it's going to be a part of your life." He went on to say, "One of the biggest challenges is getting them to understand that nobody's telling you, you have to enjoy literature, but you do have to develop these skills to help you move forward" (P3).

Furthermore, the participants disclosed the challenges of teaching students on the various reading levels in a single secondary history class. P1 shared, “Some kids come to me as freshman on a fifth grade reading level. In my ninth grade class, the [reading levels] vary from third grade to 10th grade.” Some of the participants described teaching historical events with the various reading levels they encountered as “hard” and “frustrating.” P3 emphasized this, as he shared,

I have one young man right now who’s reading on a second-grade level and to be honest with you I’m handcuffed. Some of the stuff that we give, I don’t know how to chunk down for him. I don’t know how to make it any easier. And that’s a hard thing for a teacher to admit.

P2 also disclosed, “It’s a challenge to teach different levels of students that are supposed to be able read the same information. I try to do a lot of different types of things to get everybody to the same area in the end.”

The teachers revealed that the students’ lack of reading, poor reading comprehension, and reduced reading skills all impacted their pedagogical practices. Moreover, the participants shared how the students’ inability or lack of reading affected their ability to teach the content and to move forward in teaching the curriculum without adjustments and providing the students with assistance. Furthermore, the participants expressed the need to assist the students by modifying, simplifying, or breaking down the content because of poor reading comprehension skills, incomplete assignments, or students resorting to skimming the text. The participants stressed that these actions impede the teachers’ ability to adequately progress in the curriculum content.

Time. The participants in this study overwhelmingly stressed the emphasis of time: the idea of not having enough time to adequately complete the responsibilities of teaching the vast amounts of historical content and prepare the students for successful outcomes on the state exams, when working with students with varied levels of reading abilities. P8 expressed, “I think time is a huge factor and I think as teachers, every teacher talks about how time is the enemy, especially in history.” P2 agreed,

I think it takes a lot of time, is really what it comes down to, especially if you want to do things with fidelity. It’s a big problem. That’s one thing I would want to change in my career would be to have a little more time to be able to push strategies and do those things more rigorously, but often those things get pushed aside.

P2 revealed that other responsibilities, both work and personal, interfere with having enough time to provide students with more support and strategies to improve their reading skills. He went on to say, “things get pushed aside you know, because you have to make copies, activate the copy machine, and then I have three kids and all that you know, it’s difficult.” Likewise, P8 indicated,

It’s the humdrum of scheduling with schools, we get tapped to do a lot of things, like handing out lockers, picture day, etc. Time is taken away for assemblies, snow days, and other things that pop up during the social studies period, that is also a detriment. If we had more time to focus even if it was in the beginning [of the academic year] to focus on the actual strategies and building literacy, we wouldn’t have to worry about getting through the curriculum so much.

P1 concurred, “It’s very hard in a 45-minute period, which is usually the length of a period, to teach a student how to read on top of teaching content, and I’m the only teacher in the class and I have 25 students. I try to do my best.” P4 added,

The curriculum assumes they know how to read, it assumes I have 180 days to teach them the content. So, tell me, which one of those days am I supposed to drop in order to teach a reading lesson. Do I need 10 days to teach a reading lesson? Which one of these content days do I need to lose in order to teach a student how to read? Because I don’t know how to do that.

The participants emphasized the amount of time required to implement differentiated lessons, modify materials, obtain online resources, and implement strategies to assist the students with reading comprehending and navigating content was reportedly “never enough.” Furthermore, the participants openly shared their ideas of the challenge of time needed to use the reading strategies to support the students in tasks to improve their reading comprehension and overall reading proficiency.

Curriculum, instruction, and state exams. Seven of the nine participants stressed the challenges of implementing the curriculum and preparing the students to successfully pass the state exam. The participants used the words, “frustration, pressure, difficult, hard, worry, and inadequate” as they expressed their feelings regarding their pedagogical practices. P2 expressed, “that’s the biggest challenge of my career is that paradox, because I no longer teach a history class, I teach a reading comprehension class that uses historical evidence.” P2 further shared,

I think in many ways, it’s a crisis in our education system, because I’ve been teaching the kids you have been talking about. I see this and it’s frustrating. I’m

still teaching a lot of the same content, but the types of questions being asked are different. The curriculum the students now face is much more focused on the analytical parts of reading comprehension.

P8 expressed,

I feel the pressure too, as many of us do that we have such a large curriculum to get through. So, we lose time in a sense because in our minds we have to get through this curriculum. You have to cover each part of the curriculum to make sure that the students have enough background knowledge to be able to pull from. U.S. history keeps on growing but the timeframe that we have to teach it keeps getting smaller and smaller.

P5 concurred, “It’s a tremendous amount of pressure to cover the curriculum, especially when you know that a lot of the kids aren’t doing the readings.” He further added, “For the last month and a half we really do an intensive content review that is taken out of what could be instruction and enrichment” (P5).

P1 acknowledged that so much of the time is spent in test preparation because of the reduced reading skills of the students. He shared,

It’s hard because unfortunately in New York State there are Regents exams, and you have to pass those tests, there’s no way around it. The tests have become so abstract now, if you don’t teach to the test and you put a kid in front of it for the first time, they’re not going to know what to do, especially with the new history exams that are coming around. We really teach them how to take the test because with a lot of the test verbiage, they [students] will get lost, even if their reading levels have improved. (P1)

P1 further emphasized, even if the students make gains in their reading skills, the growth is not enough for them to take the exam without any strategies or test preparation.

P1 stated,

Even if by the end of the year I get them to a seventh-grade reading level, they are still not going to be able to read the test, so we really try to teach them for that 1 day how to take it [exam] and beat it, so their low reading level doesn't matter as much. It's a level playing field.

However, P3 shared,

I think a good teacher will tell kids, hey look, this is what might appear on the test and this is what they focus on. But you can go so beyond that and really give them [students] enriching experiences and enriching materials that are not necessarily to the test and I think that comes with experience. I think experience goes a long way as well.

The participants acknowledged that the recent changes in the state exams structure required students to possess a different skill set. As P2 indicated,

What used to be a document-based question (DBQ) is now an enduring issues essay and the documents are fairly long. Kids have a problem like focusing on the passage or understanding the language, it's a different kind of challenge. It's really coming up with strategies to get them to work through what the state is expecting them to be able to do.

P3 concurred,

The language is really difficult as well. The average person doesn't understand the language. And with the enduring issues essay you have to have better critical

thinking skills than with the DBQ. You have to find the connection between the documents and something in history that is reflected.

The teachers agreed that it was necessary for them to teach to the test in order for the students to successfully pass the exams, especially with the reduced reading skills or lack of commitment to reading on the part of their students. Furthermore, the participants shared their concerns regarding the vast curriculum, the vernacular of documents, as well as the recent changes in the state exams and the types of skills students would require to successfully pass the exams.

Obstacles. An obstacle as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary is a thing that blocks one's way, hinders or is a deterrent to action. Two categories emerged from the data and were seen by the researcher as obstacles: bias perceptions and beliefs, and teachers' literacy knowledge. Table 4.17 illustrates these categories and the participants' responses.

Table 4.17

Categories and Frequencies Identified by Participants for Obstacles

Obstacles
Bias Perceptions and Beliefs (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8)
Teachers' Literacy Knowledge (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8)

Bias perceptions and beliefs. People make decisions and take actions based on their bias perceptions or preconceived notions (Henkel, 2020). Likewise, teachers' decisions and instructional practices are shaped by their beliefs and bias perceptions (Dar, 2018). These perceptions could hinder, block, or negatively affect the outcome of the

teachers' decisions. To gain a better understanding of the participants beliefs about struggling readers, the participants were asked to describe their thoughts on why high school students enter ninth grade with reduced reading skills. The participants identified a number of factors they believed to be the causes of why some students enter high school with reduced reading skills.

P1 shared, "I think once they are out of elementary, teachers have shifted away from being reading teachers to being content specific." P4 indicated, "teachers are fooled into thinking the kids can read because they can decode, but they [students] lack that comprehension piece." P6 revealed, "The middle schoolers are used to having everything handed to them, because the kids just don't read. Then when they get to high school, they don't have the skills that the teachers expect them to have." P2 expressed,

I think it's a lack of focus or, in some cases at home reading isn't emphasized. I feel like the parents kind of let them, they [parents] are less involved. I think they need to see people involved in reading, and current events, you know like role models.

P3 shared, "I think it's the family structure and what emphasis they put on the value of education, and how much support they get at home."

P7 and P3 reported that the students are consuming too much technology. P3 reported, "they have you know, everything goes to the phone. They have Netflix, Hulu and that's where they develop what they do." P7 affirmed,

I think it's the electronics, computers, I-Pads etc. The culture is now engrained in just having things. You speak into Siri and Siri gives you the answer right away. Everyone wants to use visuals and cartoons instead of reading and getting through

difficult tasks. I feel it's sort of like modern pop culture with the ease of electronics and having the information presented to you in short snippets as opposed to longer text.

P6 and P3 also confirmed, "They consume so much media visually." "It's a lack of reading, kids are not reading." They read short bursts on Snapchat, Twitter. They don't dive deep into reading."

Additionally, P2 shared,

Many of the districts don't do any social studies reading work in the lower grade levels and if they do it is often marked under the ELA class. Historians and English professors read documents differently, it's a different type of analysis. I don't think it's fair to say they [ELA teachers] do a lot of the social studies skills and analysis that is expected of them [students] by the time they get to high school. The types of questions that are asked in those classes don't allow for the kids to practice the types of questions and skills of historical evidence, analytical, critical thinking skills, and integration of the information the students need.

The researcher further explored beliefs when the participants were asked if socioeconomics, cultural, or racial differences were contributing factors to the varied reading abilities of their students. The participants were more reluctant and hesitant to share their beliefs and perspectives regarding race. However, they were more forthcoming with regards to socioeconomics as a hindering factor. P2 reported he did not feel that race was a contributing factor as to whether one race or one cultural group was more deficient in reading than another. However, he wavered back and forth in his response and further stated, "In some ways I guess a little bit, but I don't think it's a wide

difference. Based on my experience as far as the race of the student, well I guess just a little bit.” P3 however, felt that race did play some role but was not quite sure of how. He reported, “I think it does play a role in some ways. But you have some kids who are really strong [readers] doesn’t matter the ethnic group or kids who tend to be weaker.”

In addition, the participants were asked to describe their beliefs regarding the correlation of socioeconomic status and students’ reading abilities. P2 communicated, “Socioeconomic status, I would say that’s a strong variable for me. To be honest you know, there’s a big gap. I would say that often students [struggling readers] are a little bit from lower. I think very often it’s the starting point of where they come from as far as reading comprehension goes. I think the lower socioeconomic levels tend to have lower starting points of reading levels. But often quite frankly, the ELLs have more of a desire and motivation to work harder than all of them. Those kids have a lot of kind of extra drive to succeed in all aspects.”

All of the participants reported their belief that as educators they have the ability to improve the performance of poor secondary readers in their classrooms. The participants repeatedly expressed the reduced reading comprehension of their students and shared their beliefs of why growth in reading was not occurring in their classrooms. As P4 noted, “you expect the kids to be able to read. P6 echoed, “they are not prepared for the types of questions and analysis needed in high school.” P2 further added, “the focus in ELA and the types of questions that are asked in those classes, don’t allow for kids to practice the types of questions and skills of historical evidence.” P5 expressed how the students are not reading the assignments, but when probed by the researcher if they were reading in the classroom, he responded. “I don’t want to say a waste of time,

but that's not ideal instruction." P3 further noted that the students have to "continually engage on their own to improve." P1 affirmed, the kids need reading intervention but stated, "I don't have time to teach a student how to read on top of teaching content."

The teachers shared their beliefs and expectations of causes of secondary students' reduced reading skills, factors that hinder reading growth in the content area, and the correlation of race and socioeconomic status to students' reading abilities. These beliefs and expectations are carried into their pedagogical practices as they instruct students with varied reading abilities.

Teachers' literacy knowledge. The participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed that they possessed limited knowledge of literacy learning and reading, which hindered their ability to adequately address the literacy needs of their students with varied reading skills. Table 4.16 indicates the participants responses and frequency. The participants used phrases like "ill equipped," "not trained," "strange phenomenon," "history guy," and "teacher of content literacy" when describing their knowledge about reading and literacy learning. P3 stated, "I'm somewhat ill equipped in some ways to deal with it. I've never been trained to help someone who is like a really struggling reader."

P6 described the process of decoding in the absence of reading comprehension as "a strange phenomenon to me." Most of the participants agreed they were trained in the content area of history and not literacy, and had no idea of how to teach students how to read, as P4 emphasized, "they never really taught us how to teach somebody to read. I don't know how to do that." P3 further expressed, "there's so much training on other

things that it is never really offered, literacy or strategy training in the district to help struggling readers. I think the district has different priorities.”

Strengths. Analysis of the data revealed the strengths the participants demonstrated in their pedagogical practices as they addressed students with varied reading abilities in their classrooms. The researcher characterized these strengths as learning strategies and willingness to learn. Table 4.18 depicts the frequencies of the participants’ responses for this theme.

Table 4.18

Categories and Frequencies Identified by Participants for Strengths

Strengths
Learning Strategies (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8)
Willingness to Learn (P2, P3, P6, P7, P8)

Learning strategies. Throughout the interviews the teachers identified a number of learning strategies they consistently used to assist the students in navigating the curriculum content and preparing for the state exams. These learning strategies included evidence-based reading strategies, differentiated instruction, modifying and simplifying text, and other scaffolding strategies.

P1 stated, “I know how to really modify and differentiate text for them. I differentiate all of my work. My lower kids will get a very modified language of that same topic.” P3 recalled, “I’ll try to give them an alternative copy of something if I can find it, where they can get the same meaning from it.” P6 reported, “I use an anticipation guide where it’s like a graphic organizer.” Use of guided questions and summarization

strategies were also revealed, as P4 expressed, ‘I use the 3-1 rule,’ read three sentences and create one sentence. If they [the students] can summarize, they can tell us if they’re understanding what they’re reading.” P1 further disclosed, “I do a lot of discussions, this way my auditory listeners will pick up on things, so when they get to the text, they might remember things they hear.” P7 used the strategy of highlighting the main concepts and building relationships with those concepts. P2 further expressed, “we do a variety of reading strategies, the one thing with teaching social studies, we are constantly reading, writing, and doing analysis.”

The participants reportedly employed these learning strategies in their pedagogical practices to support the students with organizing information, improving vocabulary, and reading comprehension of expository text and complex documents. Furthermore, the teachers disclosed that utilizing these learning tools enabled all students the opportunity to interact with the text and to participate in the learning experience.

Willingness to learn. Five of the nine participants conveyed a willingness to acquire more literacy knowledge and evidence-based reading strategies to assist their students with varied reading abilities. P3 shared,

I would love more strategies, because even if I can help one more kid, that’s the important part. If I sat down with a good chef, they could probably give me a trick or two to make my cooking better and I think the same would come if I were given certain strategies. I’d say, Oh wow. I never thought of doing it that way. But I think that’s what good teachers would do. You always want to add to your toolkit.

Likewise, P2 indicated, “I’m always looking for new ways to kind of present historical documents and things. I’m always having to hunt for these kinds of things.” The participants in the focus group emphasized the need to seek out professional development in literacy and reading on their own as it was not provided by the district to secondary teachers. P8 reported, “I have signed up for many through my district’s learning plan, but I’ve taken just basic literacy in the classroom.” P6 agreed and shared, “I took a few through the center as well. A lot of the explicit reading professional development strategies I’ve had to seek out on my own like cloze reading, annotations, and things like that.”

The need to learn more about literacy development and to obtain reading strategies was echoed by several of the participants who had a desire to seek knowledge and learn more to help the students improve their skills in reading comprehension and ultimately academic achievement.

Research Question 3(b) How do secondary content area history teachers view their role in assisting students with reading in the content area and how do they believe they can enhance opportunities for successful student outcomes? As the researcher analyzed data to consider how content area history teachers view their roles in assisting students with reading in the content area, two themes emerged from the data, content teacher and “not a reading teacher.” Table 4.19 depicts the codes, categories and themes that developed in response to this research question. The participants reported the need to cover the curriculum content and to prepare the students for the state exam, and the challenges they faced due to the student’s lack of reading and reduced reading skills. The participants emphasized the need to assist the students with reading, but primarily for the

purposes of teaching the students content, not for assisting them with development of their reading skills. Table 4.20 reveals the participants responses and frequencies to this research question.

Table 4.19

Research Question 3(b) Codes, Categories, and Themes Uncovered by the Participants

Codes	Categories	Themes
View themselves as content teachers, here to teach history, focus on content, taught to focus on content, should be reading already, role is to teach content literacy	Content Literacy	Content Teacher
Improve reading comprehension of content, use strategies, reading comprehension teacher Not viewed as reading teacher, all teachers teacher of literacy, ,not here to teach literacy, reading not an area of expertise, saying it doesn't make it so, that's somebody else's job.	Reading Comprehension Not a reading expert	 Not a Reading Teacher

Table 4.20

Categories and Identified Participants for Content Teacher

Content Teacher
Content Literacy (P1, P3, P4, P6, P8)
Reading Comprehension (P2, P6, P8)

Content, not a reading teacher. The participants related the idea that they were content teachers, not trained reading teachers. They were trained history teachers but were not prepared to be reading teachers.

Content literacy. The participants repeatedly emphasized their responsibility of teaching history to the students and covering the vast history curriculum with varied documents and expository text. As P3 stated, “one thing about being a high school history teacher is that everybody sees themselves as content history teachers. They don’t see themselves as being a reading teacher or a writing teacher. I’m here to teach history.” P4 concurred, as he shared his responsibility was to teach them enough literacy to be able to comprehend and “parse through historical content.” Additionally, he stated, “I’m here to teach them content literacy. It’s my role to teach them content literacy.” P6 further shared, “content area teachers are taught to focus on content.”

Reading comprehension. Throughout the interviews the teachers repeatedly discussed the students’ reduced reading comprehension skills and the need to provide instructional strategies to maximize their knowledge base in order to proceed through the curriculum. P2 expressed it this way, “that’s the biggest challenge of my career is that paradox, because I no longer teach a history class, I teach a reading comprehension class that uses historical evidence.”

Not a reading teacher. The majority of the participants expressed their limited content knowledge and lack of training to teach reading, as shown in Table 4.21. The participants indicated that their role was not to be a reading teacher as they disclosed that their educational background and training was in history and not in literacy or reading.

Table 4.21

Categories Identified for Not a Reading Teacher and Successful Outcomes

Not a Reading Teacher (P3, P4, P5, P6)

Not a Reading Expert (P3, P4, P5, P6)

The phrase “I am not a reading teacher,” was expressed multiple times from the interview as well as the focus group participants. P5 explained,

When I look at my undergraduate and graduate experiences, I’m a social studies major, secondary social studies history. They never really taught me how to teach somebody how to read. The only experience I have in teaching kids how to read are my own children. Saying I’m a reading teacher doesn’t make me a reading teacher.

The participants in this study acknowledged that their role in assisting their students with reading was primarily for the purposes of aiding the students with their reading comprehension skills in an effort to improve their knowledge of the content. One participant described themselves as using the learning strategies and reading strategies like scaffolding, to assist or guide the students. P3 conveyed, “You serve as a guide in the classroom, helping kids who struggle.”

Enhance opportunities for successful outcomes. Eight of the nine of the participants believed that as an educator they possessed the ability to improve the performance of poor secondary readers in the content area classroom. However, as the researcher probed this question and asked, “What do you do to help these students improve? What do you think the students need?” The participants did not respond to this question in a self-reflective manner, but offered suggestions and thoughts for making changes that hindered the students from making gains in their reading skills in secondary content history classrooms.

P1 and P8 suggested the need to improve the reading program and the manner in which intervention was provided. P1 suggested the need to have regular intervention

classes at the secondary level, “where intervention can be solely dedicated to reading comprehension. The students would be in differentiated groups, working on different skills and strategies, like math groupings.” P8 also agreed the need to improve reading skills beyond decoding. P8 stated “the reading program is great for decoding, but it doesn’t seem to move beyond decoding to reading comprehension.”

P3 noted the need to increase content area history teachers’ literacy knowledge, as he shared, “I think the more we know the more comfortable we are in the knowledge and if we’re trained properly, it will be the trickle-down effect the classroom.” P6 shared, “it would be helpful if the entire building prioritized reading.”

The participants also suggested the need for the district to prioritize reading at the secondary level and provide professional development to content area teachers. P8 further shared, “if we can just focus on three main themes instead of worrying about the whole curriculum, then we can focus on themes and specific literacy and reading strategies within that.” P6 and P4 agreed it would be helpful to obtain the reading levels ahead of time from the ELA teacher or reading specialist, and to work collaboratively with them.

The teachers all acknowledged that reducing the curriculum content or providing them with more time to teach the curriculum would be helpful. As P8 noted, “If we had more time to focus even if it was in the beginning on the actual strategies, we wouldn’t have to worry about getting through the curriculum so much.”

Research Question 4. How do secondary content area history teachers’ beliefs about reading strategies in the content area classroom influence pedagogical practices including challenges, obstacles, and strengths? Four themes emerged from the data in

response to this research question and included: reading strategies are useful, implementing with fidelity, no time—not my role, and not the end-all. Table 4.22 illustrates the major themes of the participants’ beliefs regarding reading strategies, the influences on pedagogical practices, and the frequency of the participants’ responses.

Table 4.22

Research Question 4- Participants Beliefs, Pedagogy Influence, and Responses

Beliefs About Reading Strategies	Pedagogical Influences	Participant Responses
Believe reading strategies are useful	Used for organizing, test preparation, comprehending content, monitoring comprehension of content and vocabulary	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
Believe they are not implementing the reading strategies with fidelity	Did not consistently use reading strategies to build student reading skills, struggled with student unpreparedness, modified and simplified text, increased visuals and discussions, limited deep dive, cause-effect, need for intensive test preparation, created negative emotions in participants	P2, P3, P8
Believe they didn’t have the time to implement reading strategies- nor was it their role to use strategies for building reading skills	Spent more time “frontloaded” or providing background knowledge, using visuals/cartoons. Modifying and simplifying text, connecting dots of information to build comprehension	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P8
Believe that reading strategies are not “the end all”	Not my fault if students are not making progress, continue to differentiate materials, text, simply instructional presentations, teaching methods, reduced expectations of students	P1, P3, P4

Reading strategies are useful. Eight of the nine participants believed that using reading strategies in the content area history classroom was important. This belief has influenced their pedagogical practices as the teachers used reading strategies to assist the students with organizing the data, preparing for state exams, assisting the students with comprehending the curriculum content, and providing the students with background knowledge prior to instruction. As P3 reported, “Many of the students don’t have the prior knowledge and often background knowledge has to be presented first.” P8 noted, “we have such a large curriculum to get through. I use annotations and the graphic organizer to help them organize [the information] and their thoughts.” P3 further conveyed, “the more strategies a teacher knows, the more they can assist their students. I think giving them [strategies] makes it better, makes it easier.”

Implementing with fidelity. The participants believed the reading strategies were useful, but were uncertain and lacked confidence in their knowledge and correct use of the reading strategies. One participant questioned whether he was implementing the strategy correctly and the outcomes or disadvantages of incorrectly implementing them. The inconsistent use of reading strategies affected the participants’ pedagogical practices in reducing the opportunity for the students to build their reading skills. The students continued to struggle with reduced reading comprehension, and often did not read and were unprepared for the class. This in turn led the teachers to modify instructional practices, simplifying text, increasing visuals and discussions, which limited the opportunity for the teacher to engage with the student in deep dive conversations, analysis, and cause-effect.

P5 shared, “it’s a tremendous amount of pressure to cover the curriculum, especially when you know that a lot of the kids aren’t doing the readings.” He further stated, “for the last month and a half we really do an intensive content review that is taken out of what could be instruction and enrichment.” He further emphasized,

In my classes a lot of the kids aren’t doing the reading, so we do end up spoon-feeding the nuts and bolts, giving them the facts, breaking it down, looking at the key facts, showing them know this, think about it this way, analyze, frantically teaching them bullet points, rather than asking, do they really understand the concept of what happened. (P5)

As P2 stated, “I think it takes a lot of time, is really what it comes down to, especially if you want to do things with fidelity. It’s a big problem.”

No time-not my role. The participants reportedly believed that they did not have time to implement reading strategies in the content classroom, nor was it their role or responsibility. This belief affected their pedagogical practices as the teachers spent more time providing background knowledge to support the students, modifying and simplifying text, obtaining materials for differentiated learning, using visuals and or cartoons to assist the students in navigating the curriculum, and building content knowledge. Several of the participants were of the belief that if they took the time to teach reading strategies to help the students improve their comprehension and overall reading ability, then it would take away or limit the amount of time they had to teach the curriculum content. As P8 noted, “if we had more time to focus, even if it was in the beginning on the actual strategies, we wouldn’t have to worry about getting through the curriculum so much.” P2 also shared his desire “to have a little more time to be able to

push strategies and do those things more rigorously, but often those things get pushed aside.”

Not the end all. Several of the participants shared their belief that using reading strategies was “not the end all.” The participants shared their belief that using reading strategies alone was not the defining factor in improving the students’ reading skills. As P4 disclosed, “strategies alone don’t make the difference in improving reading skills.” P2 was of the belief that the presence of other learning challenges such as processing, or dyslexia could also be contributing factors. This belief impacted the teachers’ pedagogical practices as it led to their continued use of differentiated materials and instruction, simplifying instructional presentations and teaching methods, chunking down the text, and creating reduced expectations of the students’ reading abilities.

The participants shared their beliefs about the use of reading strategies in the content area classroom. These beliefs did affect the teachers’ pedagogical practices, and rendered some practices to be strengths, while other remained challenges. The participants believed that reading strategies were helpful when implemented correctly and when given time to be effectively implemented, but they also understood that the use of reading strategies alone was not the single defining factor in improving students’ reading abilities.

Summary of Results

This chapter summarized the perspectives of nine content area history teachers regarding the impact of teaching explicit reading strategies on reading comprehension and academic performance. Themes emerged from the data in relation to understanding the knowledge, beliefs, challenges, strengths, and pedagogical practices these teachers

encountered as they engaged with students who had difficulty reading and navigating the curriculum content in their classrooms. The researcher explored these themes and sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1. How do secondary content area history teachers describe what they know about literacy learning and evidence-based reading strategies? Three themes emerged from the data in response to this research question: (a) evidence-based reading strategies, (b) content and other strategies, and (c) literacy learning and reading knowledge. The participants were knowledgeable of some evidence-based reading strategies and identified and described the use of nine strategies. The teachers reported a lack of confidence in identifying whether the specific strategies they used were evidence-based, and with discerning whether the strategies were implemented with fidelity. In addition, the teachers conveyed a limited knowledge of literacy learning and training in teaching students to read.

Research Question 2. How do secondary content area history teachers describe their use of evidence-based reading strategies? Two themes emerged from the data in response to this research question: organization and comprehension. The majority of the participants reported the use of graphic organizers, annotations, and varied methods of note-taking and summarizations to assist the students with the organization of the varied complex texts and documents. Furthermore, the participants emphasized the use of evidence-based reading strategies to foster comprehension of the curriculum content in preparation for the state exams. Throughout the interviews the teachers reported the students' lack or limited reading comprehension skills and the need to improve the

students' reading comprehension skills, but reportedly did not use evidence-based reading strategies primarily for that function.

Research Question 3. What perceptions do secondary content area history teachers have about the impact of teaching reading strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance? Three themes emerged from the data in response to this research question: effective, ineffectual, and other factors. Secondary content area history teachers in this study revealed that the use of evidence-based reading strategies was beneficial in supporting students with organizing and comprehending the content in preparation for the state exams. Equally important, the participants reported the use of evidence-based reading strategies alone did not result in improving the growth of the students' reading comprehension skills, and thus academic performance, as the presence of other learning disabilities such as processing disorders or dyslexia could also be contributing factors that hindered the growth of students' reading skills in the content area.

Research Question 3a. How do secondary content area history teachers describe beliefs about the challenges, obstacles, and strengths they experience in their pedagogical practices as they address varied student reading skills? Three themes emerged from the data in response to this research question: challenges, obstacles, and strengths. The teachers indicated the challenges of teaching content to students with varied reading abilities, the lack of time, the vast amount of curriculum, and the vocabulary and depth and complexity of instruction, as they navigated the curriculum to prepare their students for the state examinations. Moreover, the participants shared the frustration of the lack of

reading from their students and the pressures of ensuring the students were capable of passing the state Regents exams.

The teachers shared their beliefs and expectations of causes of secondary students' reduced reading skills, factors that hinder reading growth in the content area, and the correlation of race and socioeconomic status to students' reading abilities. The correlation of these bias perceptions and beliefs and pedagogical practices were indicated. Throughout the interviews the teachers identified a number of differentiated learning strategies they consistently used to assist the students in navigating the curriculum content and preparing for the state exams. Furthermore, several of the teachers in this study indicated a willingness to acquire more literacy knowledge and evidence-based reading strategies to assist their students with varied reading abilities.

Research Question 3b. How do secondary content area history teachers view their role in assisting students with reading in the content area, and how do they believe they can enhance opportunities for successful student outcomes? Two themes emerged from the data: content teacher and not a reading teacher. The teachers expressed their role in assisting students with reading was primarily for the purposes of aiding the students with their reading comprehension skills in an effort to improve their knowledge of the content. The phrase "I am not a reading teacher" was expressed multiple times during the interviews, as the participants emphasized the lack of training and experience to teach reading. The majority of the participants believed that as an educator, they possessed the ability to improve the performance of poor secondary readers in the content area classroom. However, they did not offer any suggestions on how they could enhance opportunities for successful student outcomes, but merely offered suggestions and

thoughts for making changes within the school and administration, rather than focusing on what action they individually could make to improve successful student outcomes.

Research Question 4. How do secondary content area history teachers' beliefs about reading strategies in the content area classroom influence pedagogical practices including challenges, obstacles, and strengths? Four themes emerged from the data in response to this research question and included: reading strategies are useful, implementing with fidelity, no time, not my role, and not the end-all. Data analysis revealed the teachers' beliefs regarding reading strategies do influence their pedagogical practices. These beliefs did affect the teachers' pedagogical practices, and rendered some practices to be strengths, while other remained challenges. The participants believed that reading strategies were helpful when implemented correctly and when given time to be effectively implemented, but also understood that the use of reading strategies alone was not the single defining factor in improving students' reading abilities.

The final chapter of this qualitative study provides a detailed summary of the findings and their connection to the literature, as well as implications for finding solutions that may influence literacy skills, student achievement, the delivery of instruction, and pedagogical practices in secondary education. Furthermore, the findings may inform school leaders, educators, administrators, and those implementing educational curriculum and policy changes. Additionally, Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Across the nation a significant number of high school students are attending public schools, transitioning through the secondary school grade levels, yet are unprepared to face the literacy demands of the 21st century and lack the necessary reading skills for college or the workforce. Reduced literacy skills not only set the stage for present and future challenges in the students' lives, but also impact the nation (Goldman, 2012). For the past 2 decades national educational reforms have been implemented in an effort to address this literacy crisis (Center on Education Policy, 2011; ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001). Research studies have shown that students who are struggling readers in high school can improve their reading skills and knowledge of content if the strategies of reading comprehension and vocabulary are effectively implemented by content area teachers (Cantrell et al., 2015; Lovett et al., 2012; Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2010). Despite the evidence-based body of research regarding reading strategies, the implementation of national education reforms (Center on Education Policy, 2011; ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001), and content area teachers' beliefs and implementation of reading strategies (Lovett et al., 2012; Meyer, 2013) the problem still exists.

This qualitative phenomenological study examined secondary content area history teachers' perceptions of the impact of implementing reading strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance. By inquiring of the teachers to understand their perceptions, knowledge, and decision-making process as they teach in

their area of expertise, this study sought to illuminate the way teachers experience the problem of reading deficiency at the secondary level, including barriers, and/or supports in the process of implementing reading strategies in the content area. Furthermore, this study sought to understand the ways secondary content area history teachers see their role and responsibilities in teaching high school students with varied reading abilities, to read, comprehend, and master complex expository texts to achieve academic success. As themes emerged from the data, the researcher explored these themes and sought to answer the research questions. This chapter will provide a discussion of the findings in collaboration with the research literature, implications of findings, limitations, and recommendations future research.

Implications of Findings

As a citizen, it is becoming more urgent to be critical readers and thinkers and to understand the relevance of history. History teachers play an important role in educating students and preparing them to be viable members of society and responsible citizens. Responsible citizens are motivated, educated, possess critical thinking and decision-making skills, and are prepared to effectively participate in society. (NCLB, 2001). A responsible citizen has a valuable role in participating in government and providing a voice that ultimately affects the citizens and the country's future. Secondary history teachers are positioned to ensure that when students leave high school they are prepared not only for college and the workforce, but also to be responsible citizens.

However, in order for teachers to develop responsible citizens, students need to read proficiently, to be able to comprehend expository text, critically analyze varied sources and documents, effectively compare and contrast information, and decipher fact

from fiction in the various media streams of information. This has proven to be a challenging task for teachers, as statistical data and studies show that a large number of high school students lack proficiency in reading (NCES, 2017). Furthermore, the use of texting, computers, blogs, etc. has promoted a decrease in deep reading, and encourages skimming and scanning of text, rather than an increase in comprehension and critical thinking skills (Urquhartl & Frazer, 2012). In order to prepare teachers to develop responsible citizens teachers need to be equipped with the education, skills, resources, and tools to provide solid reading instruction in the content area classrooms to assist students with discerning and applying varied reading strategies.

This study sought to find out if teachers are equipped with the knowledge of literacy and evidence-based reading strategies and pedagogical practices to assist struggling readers in the content area. Furthermore, this study sought to address the challenges, obstacles, and beliefs content area history teachers hold about their roles and responsibilities in assisting these students. In addition, the researcher examined the teachers' beliefs and the effects if any, on their pedagogical practices. The findings of this study will provide recommended approaches to professional development and training so that teachers are prepared to support the students they encounter with varied reading skills in the content area classroom.

Knowledge of literacy and evidence-based reading strategies. In exploring how content area teachers describe their knowledge of literacy and evidence-based reading strategies, two important findings emerged from the study: (a) Content area teachers have some knowledge of evidence-based reading strategies but lack confidence in implementing the strategies and (b) Content area history teachers have a limited

knowledge of literacy development and professional training in teaching students to read.

These findings were consistent with the research literature. The participants were able to identify nine evidence-based reading strategies reported in a seminal study as effective in increasing reading comprehension in secondary students who struggled to read (NRP, 2000). Although the participants were able to name several of the reading strategies, many reported a lack of confidence in implementing the strategies correctly. Troyer (2017) referred to this as the fidelity of implementation. Some of the participants were able to describe the function of the strategy but could not name the strategy. Still other participants identified evidence-based reading strategies in the survey but could not recall the names of the same strategies during the interview. Although the teachers self-reported using a number of these evidence-based reading strategies, neither the frequency nor the consistency of use was evident.

The participants emphasized a lack of training and literacy knowledge. This finding supports Meyer's (2013) research that revealed content area teachers have a limited knowledge of literacy. All of the teachers agreed that they did not receive any formal education in teaching students how to read. As secondary educators the primary focus of their training was in history, not literacy. The participants indicated an absence of college course work and training in reading and literacy development. Some of the teachers obtained resources or attended professional development courses in reading strategies, but this was primarily self-initiated. The high school teachers in both school districts shared that literacy training and development at the secondary level did not appear to be a priority of the district. Many of the participants expressed frustration with the inability to assist students who struggled with reading comprehension and decoding in

their class. One teacher described his inability to assist a struggling reader, as “feeling handcuffed.” These findings align with the research confirming that content area teachers lack confidence and feel untrained and unprepared to assist struggling readers in the content area (Meyer, 2013).

The results of these findings suggest that in order for teachers to adequately assist struggling readers in the secondary content area classroom, they must be trained in the knowledge of literacy, reading development, evidence-based reading strategies, and implementation skills. These findings are in alignment with the previous research (Meyers, 2013; Ness, 2009) that emphasized the need for content area teachers to improve their literacy knowledge and instructional skills to be prepared to assist struggling readers and to understand the value of incorporating reading strategies in the content class. When content area teachers have knowledge of reading strategies, implementation methods, and support, they are more willing to utilize them (Cantrell et al., 2008; Peleaux & Endacott, 2013).

These findings are significant for higher education because it may help focus the process of teacher education and the need for teacher preparation programs to consider a literacy component and/or reading acquisition as part of college coursework. Just as a doctor selects a specialty such as internal medicine, the physician still must be trained in the anatomy of the whole body to be equipped to handle their patients; so should a content area teacher be trained in literacy and reading acquisition to be equipped to handle the varied reading levels and learning challenges of the students they encounter.

These findings are significant for school district administrators and leaders because they support the need for secondary content area teachers to receive professional

development and training in literacy, reading acquisition, knowledge and implementation of evidence-based reading strategies to improve reading comprehension in secondary students, and thus improve students' academic performance.

Use of evidence-based reading strategies and impact. In exploring how content area teachers use evidence-based reading strategies and the impact of this practice, two significant findings emerged: (a) Content area history teachers found the use of evidence-based reading strategies effective and beneficial in assisting students with organizing texts, and enhancing reading comprehension of the curriculum content; and (b) Content area teachers are encountering more students with inadequate reading comprehension skills and an increase in the number of students who are reading less.

Throughout the interviews the participants emphasized the need to prepare the students for the state examinations with the volumes of content the students are required to know. The teachers communicated the use of evidence-based reading strategies to foster comprehension of the curriculum content in preparation for the state exams. The idea of utilizing scaffolding to assist the students in learning what they could not learn on their own, is in alignment with the theoretical framework for this study. The use of scaffolding is supported by the research of Jerome Bruner and Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Lutz & Huitt, 2004). When research participants reported the positive results of applying scaffolding strategies to assist the students with comprehending more complex text and curriculum content, they described the use of evidence-based strategies as "useful."

Throughout the interview process, teachers reported the need to improve the students' reading comprehension skills. However, most of the teachers did not report

utilizing evidence-based reading strategies primarily for that function. The teachers relied on the strategies to assist in their pedagogical practices due to the students' limited reading ability. The participants expressed more concern with their responsibilities of ensuring the students were able to pass the state exam, than in developing the students' poor reading comprehension skills, and utilized the strategies for that purpose. However even though the participants reportedly used the strategies solely for comprehension of content, a research study revealed that, when evidence-based strategies are used for comprehension of content or taught as an explicit strategy for reading comprehension, both instructional practices received positive results in enhancing the student's comprehension skills (McKeown et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the participants in both the focus group and interviews indicated a lack of knowledge in knowing the reading levels of their students, a lack of skills in assessing the student's reading levels, and ultimately selecting the best strategy and/or methods to assist them. This finding was unexpected. The teachers expressed that they often had no idea of the student's reading levels and often had to "figure it out" from their written work, test results, or from their performance on the state exams. One participant expressed how it often takes half the year to figure out the reading levels of his students and how useful this information would be at the beginning of the year to assist with lesson plans, materials, and grouping.

It was interesting to note that vocabulary and comprehension monitoring were not the most frequently used evidence-based reading strategies, yet research studies indicate that the use of these strategies with secondary students have shown to result in

the most positive outcomes in their reading comprehension skills (Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2013).

These findings suggest that although content area teachers are utilizing some evidence-based reading strategies and instructional techniques that support reading comprehension, teachers need to be trained in the explicit teaching of evidence-based reading strategies. Teachers need to know which strategies are the most effective and how to implement them in order to maximize opportunities to improve reading proficiency (Swanson et al., 2016).

Moreover, if content area teachers had access to the reading levels of their students or knowledge of how to adequately assess struggling readers' abilities, they could develop appropriate pedagogical practices to meet their students' needs and enhance their reading comprehension and academic performance (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wendt, 2013). In addition, this finding supports the research that suggests that assessment and intervention are the keys to improving student performance and teachers should rely on these skills and not their own beliefs and perceptions when assessing a child's reading abilities. If teachers are to provide effective and quality instruction, they must become knowledgeable about students' reading skills and assessments in order to plan instruction that best supports individual learning (Christy, 2011).

These findings support much of the research indicating that the use of evidence-based reading strategies in the content area can assist secondary students with improving reading comprehension when content area teachers implement them correctly (Edmonds, 2009; Scammacca et al., 2017; Troyer, 2017; Wanzek, 2013).

These findings are significant for school district administrators and should be taken into account when school districts focus on improving the reading scores and academic performance of their students. For the same reasons, school building leaders need information on the reading skills of their students as they consider the professional development and training needs of secondary teachers. In addition, school district administrators and building leaders need to incorporate reading assessments at the secondary level. Most important, secondary school teachers should be informed of the reading levels of their students to provide appropriate pedagogical instruction so that they can effectively assist all students becoming critical readers and responsible citizens.

Challenges, obstacles, and strengths. When considering how secondary content area history teachers describe the challenges, obstacles, and strengths they experience in their pedagogical practices, three themes emerged from the data and resulted in six significant findings.

1. Teachers expressed challenges with their student's reading abilities. Teachers in both school districts conveyed how difficult it was to teach a content class with students of varied reading abilities, poor reading comprehension, and with students who displayed poor motivation to read and abstained from reading. This affected their pedagogical practices as teachers were frequently required to modify texts, simplify text, differentiate lessons, front load lessons, and provide prior knowledge. This in turn impeded the teachers' ability to adequately progress through the extensive curriculum, which subsequently affected the students' preparedness for the state exams.

2. In addition, the teachers' limited knowledge of literacy further compounded these challenges.
3. The teachers expressed time as a major challenge, or a lack of time to cover the vast curriculum and prepare the students for the state exams. Furthermore, due to the student's reduced reading skills, more time was needed for test preparation. Time was also reportedly taken from the teachers for responsibilities outside of the curriculum area. These findings related to inadequate time to cover material contribute to a clearer understanding of the challenges teachers face in their pedagogical practices. Some of the participants disclosed their lack of utilizing more reading strategies was due to a lack of time. As one participant expressed, he did not have time to take away from the curriculum to teach reading strategies. These findings are in alignment with previous studies that posit content area teachers provide a range of excuses, including time, for the reasons they do not teach reading strategies (Meyer, 2012).
4. The participants disclosed the state exam as a challenge. Several teachers reported feelings of frustration, worry, and pressure around preparing the students for the exam. Most of the participants revealed that they "teach to the test" because of the reduced reading skills and the inclusion of increased reading comprehension, analytical, and critical thinking skills needed to successfully navigate the test. Furthermore, the absence of enriched instruction in the history classes was conveyed because of the added pressure and time needed to prepare for the state exams. When educators began to

simplify and modify text to improve comprehension of the content and support struggling readers, Ness (2009) suggests that oversimplification of the content does not assist them in improving their reading abilities and academic success. Teachers with high self-efficacy do not view challenges as indicators that students cannot learn, but rather as their responsibility to ensure that students do learn.

5. Findings also revealed the teachers' willingness to learn as a strength. This result did not completely align with the previous research studies that indicate content area teachers resist the desire to learn evidence-based reading and held negative beliefs because they did not view it as their role (Cantrell et al., 2008; McCoss-Yergian & Krepp, 2010). It was surprising to see that this was not entirely the case, as the majority of the participants expressed a desire to want to learn more evidence-based reading strategies in an effort to assist their students. Furthermore, the teachers expressed a desire to engage in more professional development in literacy and reading strategies to learn how to implement the strategies with fidelity.
6. Findings revealed that the participants demonstrated a degree of self-efficacy, in spite of the challenges they faced. The teachers utilized a number of learning strategies in addition to evidence-based reading strategies to provide their students with varied supports to engage in the learning process. These findings support the previous research revealing that teachers with high self-efficacy, do not view challenges as indicators that students cannot learn, but

rather as their responsibility to ensure that students do learn (Dembo & Gibson, 1985).

These findings suggest that when secondary content area teachers encounter students with reduced reading skills and are not adequately trained to assist them in the content area classroom, they experience numerous challenges and changes in their pedagogical practices. The learning environment is at risk of becoming reduced to test preparation, modifications, and simplification of texts, and void of an environment full of engagement, critical thinking, and inquiry.

These findings are significant for educational policy makers, suggesting the need to evaluate the content, value, and purpose of the New York State Regents Examinations and to consider the development of alternative measures. Additionally these findings are significant for district curriculum development leaders, to evaluate the content and substance of the curriculum and consider prioritizing the content to reduce the need for teachers to cover such substantial amounts of content and allow time in the classroom for more engaging learning environments of inquiry.

Furthermore, these findings are significant for administrators, curriculum leaders, school building leaders, and for content area teachers, to focus on ways to provide education and support for the content area history teachers. The findings indicate the need to improve pedagogical practices, ensure teacher education in appropriate reading strategies to foster growth in reading comprehension, to assist teachers in maintaining their well-being, and to improve the learning environment in an effort to develop students to become responsible citizens.

Beliefs and pedagogical practices. Exploring how content area history teachers' beliefs influence their pedagogical practices resulted in several significant findings. The participants believed there were a number of factors influencing students entering high school with reduced reading skills ranging from lack of parental support, to socioeconomic status. They further expressed that as educators they have the ability to improve the performance of poor secondary readers in the content area classroom. However, when asked directly by the researcher "What do you do to achieve this?" the participants responses were not reflective of their stated beliefs. The teachers offered suggestions pertaining to steps other administrators, parents, and students could enact to make a difference. The participants overwhelmingly agreed that their primary role was that of a history teacher, not a reading teacher, as they received their education in history.

This finding was in direct alignment with the research literature (Cantrell et al., 2008), in which teachers believed that literacy should be incorporated in the content area classrooms, but did not believe it was their role or responsibility to do so. The phrase "I am not a reading teacher," was expressed multiple times during the interviews, as the participants emphasized the lack of training and experience to teach reading. According to Dembo and Gibson (1985) teachers' expectations and role definitions affect student academic performance. In fact, many studies render the teacher to be the most effective tool in assisting struggling readers, yet many teachers continue to believe it is not their responsibility (Ness, 2009; Troyer, 2017; Wexler et al., 2017).

The teachers shared their beliefs regarding literacy and reading strategies. Most of their belief systems were very similar given their differences in gender, age, and experience. Overall, the teachers held strong beliefs regarding reading strategies and their

role and responsibility in utilizing strategies in the content area. With such strong beliefs that they should not be responsible to teach reading, it was relatively surprising to see that the majority of the participants reported using reading strategies. However, the researcher was unsure of the frequency and consistency of the strategy use.

Research studies indicate that a teacher's belief system does influence their pedagogical practices, and the findings from this study further emphasized this. Even though teachers know and are using evidence-based reading strategies if they do not believe that they can and will achieve results, then the outcomes will be the same. These findings suggest that content area teachers who have not fully committed to the idea that implementing reading strategies in the content area classroom is their responsibility, will not achieve positive results in reading comprehension. The data from this study should provide a clearer understanding of the steps needed for content area history teachers to understand their role in supporting student reading skills and how to do so.

Limitations

As with any qualitative research study, there are limitations, situations, or unanticipated problems that may have impacted the results. The limitations for this study included the following:

Lack of generalizability. The small sample size of the interviews and the focus group participants limited the ability for the findings of this study to be generalized in another school district, urban area, or another state. This study took place in a suburb in the northeast part of New York. The researcher anticipated the number of participants for in-depth interviews to be three to five, and the number of participants for the focus group to be six to eight. However due to a national pandemic and the inability to have face-to-

face contact for the recruitment process, the interviews, or the focus group, the sample sizes of the interviews, and focus group were not as robust as anticipated.

Focus group videoconferencing. One limitation of the focus group conducted via videoconferencing was a lack of free-flowing engagement. At various points during the focus group interview, the researcher was aware that some participants were multitasking and less engaged and required direct questions to be presented to them by the researcher to foster more participation. This in turn interrupted the fluidity of the conversation at times.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that higher education and teacher preparation programs implement a required course “Reading in the Content Area,” as well as coursework in reading acquisition and reading assessment.

2. School district administrators and building leaders should provide professional development to secondary content area teachers in literacy, reading, and evidence-based reading strategies. As the New York State Regents Examinations are changing, the need for teachers to assist students in developing their reading comprehension and analytical skills is critical now more than ever. Teachers need to be trained in the knowledge and effective implementation of evidence-based reading to assist students in this effort.

3. School district administrators and building leaders should promote goals for district wide reading improvement and literacy engagement and provide on-going reading assessment of all students at the secondary levels. School districts should consider adjusting the curriculum for middle school students to lengthen the grade levels that

students learn to read and consider extending that beyond fourth grade, through the middle school grade levels.

4. School district administrators and leaders should implement more history coursework at the middle school level, with emphasis on developing critical thinking and analytical skills.

5. School building leaders and content area secondary teachers need to develop a more collaborative effort between content area teachers of varied disciplines and the reading specialists in an effort to motivate students to read and to enhance the reading skills of all students.

6. A qualitative comparative study should be conducted in a state other than New York, that does not have Regents examinations, in order to explore the use and implementation of evidence-based reading strategies of content area history teachers.

7. Future research should explore whether there is a correlation between content area history teachers' gender and the number of evidence-based reading strategies used.

8. Future research could conduct a qualitative study with a larger sample size of content area history teachers in urban school districts.

Conclusion

Students need to read proficiently, to be able to comprehend expository text, critically analyze varied sources and documents, effectively compare and contrast information, and decipher fact from fiction in the various media streams of information to become a responsible citizen. Secondary history teachers are positioned to ensure that when students leave high school they are prepared not only for college and the workforce, but also to be responsible citizens.

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to explore the perceptions and beliefs of secondary content area history teachers, who potentially play a critical role in finding a solution to this national literacy crisis. Social constructivism is the guiding theoretical framework for this study and includes Bruner's (1960) social constructivist theory of scaffolding and Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory. These theories are relevant to the research topic as they address the manner in which students learn and the critical role that secondary content area teachers play in improving the reading skills of students in the content area.

This study was conducted in two suburban high schools, in the northeastern part of New York State, in a diverse suburb north of New York City. The participants were purposefully selected and included secondary content area history teachers who met the participant criteria for this study. Data collection consisted of a demographic survey, focus group, and in-depth interviews. Data were collected via videoconferencing and audio transcribed from data to text by a professional transcription service. Timeline for completion of all data collected was 6 weeks. Upon receipt of the transcribed data, text was organized and analyzed with line by line analysis for the emergence of codes, categories, and themes, as the researcher sought to answer to the following research questions.

1. How do secondary content area history teachers describe what they know about literacy learning and evidence-based reading strategies?
2. How do secondary content area history teachers describe their use of evidence-based reading strategies?

3. What perceptions do secondary content area history teachers have about the impact of teaching reading strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance?
 - 3a. How do secondary content area history teachers describe beliefs about the challenges, obstacles, and strengths they experience in their pedagogical practices as they address varied student reading skills?
 - 3b. How do secondary content area history teachers view their role in assisting students with reading in the content area and how do they believe they can enhance opportunities for successful student outcomes?
4. How do secondary content area history teachers' beliefs about reading strategies in the content area classroom influence pedagogical practices including challenges, obstacles, and strengths?

The major findings from this study were consistent with previous research literature. Findings revealed that content area teachers have some knowledge of evidence-based reading strategies but lack confidence in their ability to effectively implement them. Teachers recognized the benefits of utilizing reading strategies in their pedagogical practices, even though their use was restricted to comprehension of curriculum content and test preparation. Furthermore, findings revealed that teachers have a willingness to acquire more knowledge in selecting and effectively integrating evidence-based reading strategies in the content area.

Findings also revealed that content area teachers continue to have a limited knowledge of literacy and reading acquisition, which continues to affect their beliefs in their roles and responsibilities of assisting students with reading in the content area.

Teachers' beliefs did not always align with their pedagogical practices. Teachers revealed the belief that they have the ability to improve the reading skills of students in their classrooms, however their actions were not reflective of this belief. Research studies indicate that a teacher's belief system does influence their pedagogical practices, and the findings from this study further acknowledged this. Additionally, findings highlighted the need for teachers to know the reading levels of their students in the content area as well as the need for a more collaborative approach between the reading itinerant teachers and all content level teachers, to further assist students with improvements in their reading and academic performance.

Equally important, the findings indicate the challenges content area teachers encounter as they navigate the extensive history curriculum and prepare students for the state examinations, including lack of time, varied reading abilities, reduced reading comprehension skills, and the lack of interest in reading of their students. These findings are significant for higher education, school district administrators, building leaders, and content area teachers to consider, with the goal of improving the reading comprehension and academic performance of all secondary students.

It should be noted, as the researcher concludes this study, the majority of children in New York State are engaged in remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In spring 2020, in an emergency response to this pandemic, in-person learning was suspended, and students were thrust into remote learning. It was particularly noticeable, the challenges these students faced as they navigated a remote learning environment. There is no research on COVID-19 and the impact on students without

proficient reading skills navigating remote learning. However, the findings of this study revealed that secondary students without proficiency reading skills struggle with reading comprehension in the classroom with the assistance of their teachers. It is conceivable to reason, the longer these students without proficient reading skills are out of the classroom independently navigating a remote learning environment, the more handicapped these students will become.

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Appendix A

Statement of Informed Consent for Adult Participant-Interview

St. John Fisher College IRB Approval Date: May 1, 2020 Approved: May 1, 2020/Expired: May 1, 2021

SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMATION:

The purpose of this study is to examine secondary content area history teachers' perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, and implementation of evidence-based reading strategies and the impact of utilizing these strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance. Approximately 12 people will take part in this study. The results will be used for a doctoral dissertation to inform scholarship, teaching and learning to improve reading outcomes for secondary students by utilizing evidenced based reading strategies in the content area.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study for approximately one hour, 1 day, in the month of May, for one session. Participants will be asked to complete and submit a demographic questionnaire electronically prior to the interview. Time length for completion of the questionnaire is approximately five minutes.

Participation in interviews will take place via video conference- "Zoom", at an agreed upon date and time. Questions will be presented by the researcher and video/audio-recorded. More details will be provided in the body of the consent form. We believe this study has no more than minimal risk. You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may add to your literacy knowledge and practices of effective approaches to student learning.

- You are being asked to be in a research study of [secondary content history teachers' knowledge and use of reading strategies. As with all research studies, participation is voluntary.
- **This study has been approved by St John Fisher College IRB**

DETAILED STUDY INFORMATION

You are being asked to be in a research study of the impact of utilizing evidenced-based reading strategies on student's reading comprehension and academic performance. This study is being conducted via videoconferencing "Zoom." This study is being conducted by: Sandra Dance-Weaver, researcher and doctoral candidate (Dr. Frances Wills, Dissertation Chair) in the School of Education, Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a volunteer participant who met the participant criteria indicated below. Please read this consent form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be in the study.

Appendix B

Statement of Informed Consent for Adult Participant

Dance-Weaver Consent Form-Focus Group Participant

St. John Fisher College IRB Approval Date: May 1, 2020 Approved: May 1, 2020 / Expired: May 1, 2021

SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMATION:

The purpose of this study is to examine secondary content area history teachers' perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, and implementation of evidence-based reading strategies and the impact of utilizing these strategies on students' reading comprehension and academic performance. Approximately 12 people will take part in this study. The results will be used for a doctoral dissertation to inform scholarship, teaching and learning to improve reading outcomes for secondary students by utilizing evidenced based reading strategies in the content area.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study for approximately one hour, 1 day, in the month of May, for one session. Participants will be asked to complete and submit a demographic questionnaire electronically prior to the focus group or interview. Time length for completion of the questionnaire is approximately five minutes.

Participation in the focus group will take place via videoconference- "Zoom", at an agreed upon date and time. Questions will be presented by the researcher and video/audio recorded. More details will be provided in the body of the consent form. We believe this study has no more than minimal risk.

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may add to your literacy knowledge and practices of effective approaches to student learning. You are being asked to be in a research study of secondary content history teachers' knowledge and use of reading strategies. As with all research studies, participation is voluntary.

DETAILED STUDY INFORMATION

You are being asked to be in a research study of the impact of utilizing evidenced-based reading strategies on student's reading comprehension and academic performance. This study is being conducted via videoconferencing "Zoom." This study is being conducted by: Sandra Dance-Weaver, researcher and doctoral candidate (Dr. Frances Wills, Dissertation Chair) in the School of Education, Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a volunteer participant who met the participant criteria indicated below. Please read this consent form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be in the study.

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your background as an educator.?
2. Is there a topic you teach that continues to excite your passion for teaching?
3. Why do you think students are coming to high school with difficulty reading?
4. What factors do you believe would help struggling readers to improve their comprehension skills and become better readers?
5. Do you encounter any students in your classes who have difficulty reading? How do you know? What do you do to assist them?
6. Do any of your students receive reading intervention outside of your classroom? If so, do you have specific conversations with the providers?
7. What is your ability to teach ESL, Special Ed, or Hold-over students?
8. What instructional practices do you primarily use in your classroom?
9. What evidenced based intervention and differentiated instructions do you use in your classroom?
10. Do you use reading strategies? If so, which ones? How do you integrate them into the content area? How do you know you are implementing with fidelity?
11. What is your belief about this statement: Students' abilities to become competent readers are directly related to the teacher's ability to use evidenced-based reading strategies?
12. Are you satisfied with the results of your students' history Regents exams scores? Do you think using reading strategies would improve the test scores? Why or Why not?
13. What recommendations do you have to improve the challenge of needing to teach reading in the content area?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share about teaching his

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

1. As a history teacher, what topic do you most enjoy teaching? Why?
2. What other means of teaching content do you use to assist your students with comprehension, such as audio books etc.?
3. Why do you think some students are entering high school with poor reading skills?
4. What factors do you believe would help struggling readers to improve their comprehension skills and become better readers?
5. What do you think of the phrase “Every teacher is a reading teacher”?
6. Have you encountered any struggling readers or students with reduced literacy skills in your classrooms? How do you know? How do you help them?
7. What do you know about evidenced-based reading strategies? How do you implement them?
8. Do you believe reading strategies are a help or a hindrance in comprehending the expository text and the class content? Why or why not?
9. Tell me about any course work or professional development you have had in literacy or reading in the past few years? What was that like?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about students struggling with reading or teaching reading strategies?

Appendix E

Demographic Survey

The researcher is interested in understanding the educational, teaching, beliefs, literacy knowledge and experience of secondary content area teachers. The information you provide will be helpful in this endeavor. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts.

1. What is your gender?

Female
Male

2. What is your age?

25 to 32
33 to 50
51 or older

3. About how many years have you been teaching in your current position?

At least 1 year but less than 3 years
At least 3 years but less than 5 years
At least 5 years but less than 10 years
10 years or more

4. Are you currently teaching in the subject area you are certified in?

Yes
No

If not, what area(s) are you certified in? _____

5. How much do you think content area teachers know about the reading skills of the students they teach?

A great deal
A moderate amount
A little
None at all

6. Following up to the previous question, why do you feel that way?

7. Have you taken any professional development courses in literacy or reading?

Yes

No

8. Do you believe teachers should assist in the development of all student's reading abilities?

Yes

No

9. Do you incorporate reading strategies into the content area?

Yes

No If not, why? _____

**10. Which of the following reading strategies do you use at least once a week?
(Check all that apply)**

KWL

CLOZE

Summarization

Peer groups

Prior knowledge (Previewing)

Self-questioning or (TRAP) Think, Read, Ask-paraphrase strategy

Graphic Organizer

SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review)

Questioning

Contextualizing

Other, please specify: _____

11. Do you believe students' abilities to become competent readers are directly related to the teacher's ability to use appropriate reading strategies?

Yes

No

Comments _____

12. Do you believe as an educator you have the ability to improve the performance of poor secondary readers in your content area classroom?

Yes

No

Thank you for your participation