BEST PRACTICES FOR INCREASING READING SELF-EFFICACY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the qualitative study was to examine teacher determined best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy. Data for the study were gathered from thirteen interviews with literacy teachers in grades three through eight, student STAR testing data, and classroom observations of three participants. The findings from the study included a list of best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy including modeling, student choice, high interest materials, and encouragement. Also, findings from this study included practices which have a negative impact on a student’s reading self-efficacy including negative feedback, negative teacher attitude, lack of modeling, uninteresting materials, and materials not matched to the student’s academic level.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandparents, Lowell and Cleta Jones. Your unconditional love and devotion to me shaped me into who I am today. When I began this journey, you were both so excited and proud. I wanted you to see me through to fruition with this endeavor on earth; however, I know you have watched from heaven above.
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My parents, Bill and Teresa Nolen, are deserving of many thanks over the course of this process. Thank you for your encouragement and belief that I could complete this endeavor. Thank you for listening to me and offering a shoulder to cry on when I was overwhelmed, and thank you for raising me to chase after my dreams.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“People’s level of motivation, affective states, and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively the case”

-Alfred Bandura

Introduction to Problem

Federal and state boards of education are constantly establishing increasingly demanding educational standards. For this reason school administrators and educational practitioners are continually in pursuit of optimal instructional practices and methods (Hornby, Witte, & Mitchell, 2011). One such area in which practitioners are constantly trying to find the best instructional practices is that of increasing reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension is such an important part of success in not only the reading classroom but other subjects as well, including math, science, and social studies. A correlation between a student's reading achievement and their success in school has been shown in various studies (Anderson, Fielding, & Wilson, 1988). When students are proficient readers it allows for successes in other subjects, such as math, science, and history. When a student is successful in the classroom, his or her confidence as a learner grows (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Reading comprehension skills are not only necessary for the classroom but are an important component of the competitive job market. Functional literacy is a minimum standard for literacy skills in the work force (Hock & Mellard, 2005). Many jobs within the job market require some level of reading comprehension skills (Sticht, 1975; Castleton, 2002). These literacy skills are necessary for the day-to-day functions of jobs ranging from fast food cooks to company CEOs.
The reading comprehension and literacy skills necessary for individuals to be successful at school and in the job market are affected by a variety of factors. Several studies have shown the positive effects of reading a wide range of texts, the benefits of which include increased comprehension, background knowledge, vocabulary, fluency and writing (Krashen, 2004). Additionally, studies have shown that reading comprehension is affected by several other factors including:

- Background knowledge
- Vocabulary
- Fluency
- Comprehension strategies
- Comprehension skills
- Motivation (Tompkins, 2004)

Despite the finding from Tompkins, several other studies indicated reading self-efficacy as a major determinant of successfully meeting the demand of literacy (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002).

**Background of Problem**

Reading students with low self-efficacies do not consider themselves as being equipped to experience success with reading (Scott, 1996). A positive self-efficacy has the power to motivate students to work towards a learning goal, while negative self-efficacy can unmotivate students and prevent them from attempting a learning goal. The level of student’s self-efficacy has the ability to determine what a student does, how much effort he or she puts into the task, and how long to stay the course through the task (Bandura & Cervone, 1983). When students have a high reading self-efficacy, they are more motivated to read and persevere through
complex and rigorous reading tasks. This motivation is key to increasing student learning and reading comprehension skills.

Increasing reading comprehension skills of students in schools has been a major initiative of education for the past thirty-five years (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). Despite the major reform efforts students in American schools are not exiting school with literacy skills needed for the competitive and demanding American workforce. In 1993 it was reported that nearly half of the adult population in the United States were not able to maintain a functional level of literacy (Hock & Mellard, 2011). Even with major reforms happening in an attempt to increase a student’s reading comprehension and literacy skills, a major component of successful reading comprehension has taken a backseat to other components, increasing reading self-efficacy.

Since reading self-efficacy plays such an important part a student’s motivation level, it is imperative that teachers begin to look into best practices for increasing reading self-efficacy. Without positive self-efficacy, students will have little motivation to complete tasks at hand and little learning will occur. Looking at practitioner tested best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy is an under-researched area. In order to increase reading achievement of students with a low reading self-efficacy, teachers need practitioner-tested best practice strategies to implement within their own classroom.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Self-efficacy refers to the belief one possesses about their ability to successfully complete a task (Bandura, 1977). In other words, self-efficacy refers to one's confidence in his or her ability. Self-efficacy is a major component of Bandura's (1986) physiological development theory social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory's main tenet concludes that people learn through the observation of others, and behaviors are repeated by individuals based on the
negative or positive consequences of the behavior (Bandura, 1986). Bandura's theory is comprised of four processes of goal attainment: self-observation, self-evaluation, self-reaction, and self-efficacy. These four processes are not independent of one another but are interdependent (Redmond, 2015).

A student's self-efficacy is an important part of his or her motivation and behavior (Redmond, 2015). A student is more likely to actively participate in an activity if he or she possesses a high self-efficacy for that activity (Van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002). According to Redmond (2015), academic success is fully dependent upon self-efficacy's three assessment processes: analysis of task requirements, attributional analysis of experience, and assessment of personal and situational resources or constraints. Analysis of task requirements refers to what a student thinks is needed to successfully complete an activity; attributional analysis of experience is what a student feels about completing a task; assessment of personal and situational resources or constraints refers to a student's environment when completing activities or assignments (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Self-efficacy is an important concept for teachers, because a student who can see themselves as successful will put forth more of an effort than a student who do not see himself as successful (Owens & Valesky, 2015). If students can see themselves as successful in reading, they will put forth a greater effort and in turn experience greater success.

**Research Problem**

A major goal of education for students in lower elementary school is reading comprehension (Guthrie et al., 2004). This skill becomes increasingly important as students move into upper elementary schools and becomes a major component of learning middle, high
school, and college material (Kirsh et al., 2002). Students who do not possess reading comprehension skills will experience limited academic success (Alvermann & Earl, 2003).

Due to the importance of reading comprehension in school success, educational practitioners and educational researchers are searching for reading comprehension best practices. Since reading self-efficacy is a significant indicator of reading success, teachers are looking for best practices which increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. Current practitioners are using a variety of best practices that increase a student’s reading self-efficacy (Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Alnabhani, & Alkabani, 2014).

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to look at best practices third through eighth grade literacy teachers used to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. Since self-efficacy is such an important indicator in a student's reading success in school, teachers are looking for instructional strategies and programs that have positive impacts on reading self-efficacy. Results from this study provided literacy teachers with identified best practices for increasing reading self-efficacy with students. Due to the study’s results being based on teacher observed best practices, practitioners are provided with teacher tested best practices to be utilized within their classrooms.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this dissertation was to look at best practices upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers are using to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. The research questions for this qualitative study are:

1. What strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe increase a student's reading self-efficacy?
2. What strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy?

**Study Rationale**

This study is significant to literacy teachers and researchers because it looked at best practices of literacy teachers in grades third through eighth. This study is significant to literacy teachers and researchers because it looked at best practices literacy teachers use to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. Moreover, this study was unique because it looked at teacher-determined characteristics of students with a high reading self-efficacy. This study provided the researcher with needed insight into best practices intermediate and middle grade teachers are using to increase student’s reading self-efficacy. Results from this study will provide literacy teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators with best practices for improving reading self-efficacy.

**The Researcher**

The researcher had six years of middle grades Language Arts instruction experience. Throughout these years of experience, the researcher has seen first-hand the impact of self-efficacy in a student’s performance within her classroom. To gain a deeper understanding of best practices associated with increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy, the researcher interviewed and observed intermediate and middle school teachers to determine best practices for increasing reading self-efficacy for students.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

One major limitation of this study was the small sample size that is relatively small when compared to other larger, more inclusive studies. The sample size for this study was eleven literacy teachers at a K-8 school in rural East Tennessee. The interview questions are limited
due to the similar student population composition. Since the sample teacher population was so small, this limited the student population that was considered for this qualitative study.

Since this study was conducted with a small sample size at one school in East Tennessee, it will be hard for the study to be replicated and the results may not be able to be generalized to the general upper elementary and middle school literacy teacher population. Limitations of the researcher include limited access to upper elementary and literacy teachers and the longitudinal effect of time available to conduct the study. Another researcher limitation was the researcher being a member of the faculty at the school in which the study was conducted which could influence the answers to interview questions by the interviewees. Additionally, qualitative data collection are limited "because qualitative research occurs in the natural setting it is extremely difficult to replicate studies" (Wiersma, 2000).

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used throughout this qualitative study.

1. **Functional Literacy.** Functional literacy is the term used to describe how literate an adult must be to be successful in normal adult situations including job skills and life skills (Sticht, 1975; Castleton, 2002)

2. **Literacy.** The ability to read, write, speak, and listen in a manner that allows for effective communication with others (White & Dillow, 2005).

3. **Middle Grades’ Students.** Students in grades 6 through 8 (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

4. **Reading Comprehension.** The ability to read, comprehend, and understand a written text (Naseri & Zaferanieh, 2012).

5. **Reading Self-Efficacy.** One’s belief in his or her ability to be successful with reading and learning new information regarding reading (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006).
6. **Self-Efficacy.** One’s belief in his or her ability to successfully complete tasks (Bandura, 1977).

7. **Upper Elementary Students.** Students in grades 3 through 5 (Finnan, 2009).

**Organization of the Document**

Within this study, there are five chapters. This first chapter briefly introduces the topic of the study, explains the theoretical and conceptual framework surrounding the study, provides a purpose and rationale for the study, and gives definitions of repetitive terms used throughout the study. In Chapter 2 a literature review surrounding reading self-efficacy and reading comprehension can be found. Chapter 3 explains the methodology which guided the study. While Chapter 4 provides the data which were collected and the results from the collected data, Chapter 5 ends this study with conclusions from the results of the study along with implications for future studies surrounding reading self-efficacy.

**Summary**

The value of being an effective reader in school and out of school is immeasurable. Couple that with the ever-increasing standards and high stakes testing in the schools, and practitioners and administrators are anxiously looking for ways to increase student’s reading comprehension skills. This study looked at literacy teachers’ best practices for increasing a middle grades student’s reading self-efficacy, since reading self-efficacy is a major contributor to reading success.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Finding effective strategies for teaching reading within the classroom is a continual process in educational research. A large goal of elementary schools within the American education system is to increase a student’s reading comprehension level (Guthrie et al., 2004). Literacy and reading comprehension are necessary skills for the American workforce. Despite the need for literate working adults in the workplace, there is a literacy deficit among working age American adults (Hock & Mellard, 2005). Even though a youth’s literacy is measured differently than an adult’s literacy level, there has been an increase of practitioners and researchers looking for ways to increase students’ reading comprehension and writing skills (Hock & Mellard, 2005; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

Reading comprehension has a dynamic definition. Historically, reading comprehension was thought to be the natural response when students decoded words coupled with oral language skills. Now reading comprehension is understood to be much more complex in that it involves thinking, experience, teaching and knowledge (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). Yougurtcu (2013) defined reading comprehension as the process an individual goes through when finding meaning from combining words and phrases within a specific context. Hock and Mellard (2005) offered an even deeper definition of reading comprehension within an educational context. Reading comprehension is a combination of different skills, such as identifying main idea, summarizing the text, developing questions about the text, looking for answers to questions about the text, drawing inferences form the text, and creating visual images of the text (Hock & Mellard, 2005).

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of literature related to self-efficacy, self-regulation, motivation, and best practices for increasing students’ reading self-efficacy. This
The chapter is divided into six distinct sections that provide an in-depth look on the topic and sub-topics associated with it. The six sections of this chapter are the history of reading instruction, the history of Social Cognitive Theory and self-efficacy, motivation, self-efficacy in the classroom, increasing self-efficacy, and a summary.

**History of Reading Instruction**

Throughout time every being changes: students, teachers, parents, schools, and society. It is through this change that there have been numerous shifts in reading instructional methods and materials (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). Since literacy has been a requirement for functional citizens within the United States since Colonial times, the history of reading education has seen shifts in philosophy and pedagogy (Binkley & Williams, 1996; Nichols, 2009).

Within educational research, there has also been a shift in what practitioners and researchers are trying to understand. Originally, the interest was centered around a student’s pre-existing skills and abilities. In more recent studies, the focus has moved to role of a student’s thoughts and beliefs during learning (Schunk, 2003). This change in focus has moved the role of the teacher and the student within the classroom. Reading instruction has changed from the transmission style in which students were empty vessels to be filled by their parents, the school, and their teachers. The teacher was the active member in the classroom and the student was a passive member of the classroom. The interactive style of reading theory emerged where the student took on a slightly more active role within the classroom by being asked to make connections to background knowledge. The last phase of reading theory which has emerged in the history of reading instruction is the interactive style. With this theoretical style, the student plays the most active role with the classroom and with interactions with the text. The reader is
expected to actively engage with the text and make inferences from the text (Binkley & Williams, 1996).

**Colonial Times**

During the Colonial period of United States history, literacy was taught using materials which were strongly Christian, Protestant, and Puritan (Barry, 2008). Educators during this early part of American history were young men who could read and write. Educators used the Horn Book which was the first reading instructional book in American reading education (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). The Horn Book was composed of a copy of the alphabet, a syllabary, the invocation, and the Lord’s Prayer (Barry, 2008).

In conjunction with the Horn Book, educators used the “alphabet method.” With the “alphabet method,” students were required to name the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, spell the letters from the list of syllables in the syllabary, and spell and pronounce each word for the Lord’s Prayer. This type of reading instruction relied heavily on reciting and memory. Since the alphabet method was deeply rooted in oral literacy, toddlers received reading instruction (Barry, 2008).

**American Revolution**

After the American Revolution, citizens of the United States held a great deal of national pride. It was this because of the new-found pride that Noah Webster developed his first reading instructional book. Webster developed an American set of spellers with uniform pronunciation and spelling for the newly born American nation. This instructional book contained three parts: spelling, grammar, and essays for American English. Within this first purely American instructional reading book, Webster used the alphabet method and reading selections from Roman tributes and political speeches (Barry, 2008).
19th Century

With the westward expansion, the Gold Rush, and the Civil War, the American population demanded a stronger literacy education (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). During this time of national change, Isaac Pitman developed the first phonetic alphabet, and it was used in schools. This alphabet was especially different from the traditional alphabet. During the 1820s, reading education began to develop instructional materials that provided meaning for the students. In the 1830s, educators began to advocate for teaching students whole words because they believed students learned from whole to part instead of the popular part to whole alphabet method (Barry, 2008).

Phonics instruction began to gain popularity with literacy educators during the time of the Civil War. After the Civil War, the reading instructional materials were like the reading instructional materials schools and educators use today (Barry, 2008). During this time, students were taught through the alphabet method and sight words. The reading level of the reading books increased in rigor with each year (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). Reading instructional materials began to include stories which were geared toward student interest and included for the first-time pre-reading exercises and comprehension questions (Barry, 2008).

First Half of 20th Century

During the early 20th century, a greater number of Americans were attending school and schools began to receive help from federal and state legislatures. Instructional practices that educators were using were dominated by behaviorism (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). Students were beginning to play a greater role in the classroom and were gradually moving from their traditional passive role within the classroom to a more active role within the classroom (Binkley & Williams, 1996).
This part of the 20th century brought a wide range of instructional strategies that were used for teaching reading. Even though phonics was primarily used to teach reading, educators debated on when and how phonics should be taught to students. Researchers, Thorndike and Dolch each developed a list of frequently used words. Publishers used this list of sight words in their reading instructional books. Leveled readers were developed from these lists of sight words and other important vocabulary and were used to teach students how to read from the 1930s through the 1960s. These leveled readers were filled up with made up stories that used specific vocabulary words and specific sight words that were repeated several times throughout the story (Vogt & Shearer, 2007).

During World War II, soldiers were unable to read and comprehend the most basic training manuals. This prompted the birth of content area reading where students were exposed to and taught how to read informational and content specific texts. The focus of reading in the public-school system moved from the Bible and religious doctrine to informational and commerce related reading materials. World War II also brought the first standardized reading comprehension tests. To identify young men capable for combat in the war, standardized reading comprehension tests were administered (Vogt & Shearer, 2007).

During the Cold War, Russia launched Sputnik and the “Race for Space” began. Millions of federal dollars were poured in the American education system to reform math, science, and reading instruction (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). During this critical shift in the public education system, the learner began to play a slightly more active role within reading instruction. However, a majority of the activity during lessons and in the classroom still resided with the teacher (Binkley & Williams, 1996).
Second Half of 20th Century

The last part of the 20th century saw more instructional changes in reading than in all the time periods before it (Nichols, 2009). The 1960s and 1970s brought reading programs that provided sequential lessons in workbooks, cards and worksheets, reading machines, and scripted lesson plans. The purpose of this type of reading program was to engage students in a great deal of decoding practice and introduce students to newly learned linguistic skills using a story and at the appropriate time (Vogt & Shearer, 2007).

In the 1960s the ethnical composition of the American classroom began to change. Minorities began to slowly fill in seats in classrooms with Anglo-Saxon students. Despite this change in demographics, schools and teachers did not change the context in which they asked questions. Because of this lack of change in pedagogy, the education system began to see that students were not meeting proficiency levels in reading comprehension. This lack of proficiency spawned new comprehension skills that were to be taught including finding the main idea and details, drawing conclusions, sequencing, comparing and contrasting, identifying cause and effect, and making generalizations (Vogt & Shearer, 2007).

The 1970s brought basal readers to American teachers and students. These basal readers gave students leveled readers, phonics exercises, and comprehension activities in workbooks. Problems with reading the reading programs in the mid to late 20th century included:

- "Because reading instruction took place in ability groups, there were built-in advantages for capable readers, who were exposed to far more vocabulary in the “high” group reading books than in the books assigned to the “low” groups. Over the years of elementary school, therefore, the rich got richer, and the poor got poorer."
• The contrived texts, for the most part, contained stories (with very little informational text) that reflected little or no diversity in characters, families, and cultures.

• The teachers’ guides and workbooks included end-of-story questions and activities that kept students busy, but they simply tested, rather than taught, comprehension. Once again, the methods and materials for teaching fell into disfavor.” (Vogt & Shearer, 2007)

During the 1980s and 1990s practitioners began to research how readers made connections to text and the thought processes that they went through while reading, and how students develop meaning from the text (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). During this stage of reading instruction, the reader began to play a more active role in the reading classroom and during instructional time. The reader was expected to complete missing information and make connections between texts. Students were no longer seen as empty vessels, but rather were expected to have questions about the text and develop a deeper understanding of the text (Binkley & Williams, 1996).

Additionally, the 1980s brought the whole language movement to American classrooms in which students were taught reading with minimal use of phonics and the reading texts were not leveled or controlled for appropriate vocabulary. Moving from phonics to the whole language approach brought problems to classrooms and to teachers of reading. A large problem with reading programs in the 1980s and 1990s was low performance on standardized reading tests because teachers were using holistic approaches and teaching immigrant students whose first language was not English. From the 1930s through the 1980s, the readers used to teach reading centered on what was considered the “typical” American family. Students in the United States were reading Dick and Jane or a reader with similar nuclear families, consisting of a mother, father, and two children, all of whom were Caucasian (Vogt & Shearer, 2007).
21st Century

The beginning of the twenty-first century brought more goal-oriented instructional activities, and teachers who were results driven. The new approaches teachers were using included an attempt to understand the thinking process of students during learning and to prepare students for cognitive self-reflection. The balanced literacy approach was commonly used within the classroom. The balanced literacy approach was a "comprehensive literacy program characterized by the use of authentic texts and explicit skill instruction" (Vogt & Shearer, 2007, p. 15). With this instructional approach, as a student began to master a skill or strategy, the responsibility slowly shifted from the teacher to the student.

In the late 1990s early 2000s, education was saturated with numerous reports about the state of education within the public-school system. These reports were not just accessible to educators but were widely available for the public to access. Some of these famous reports included The Report of the National Reading Panel, the series of reports from the Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, and the Report from the Committee on Reading Disabilities. These reports had seven major findings:

- “Assessment must be continual, ongoing, dynamic, and inextricably linked to instruction.
- For most children, learning to read is not a natural process and must include explicit, systematic instruction in phonics as well as instruction in specific comprehension skills and strategies.
- Reading and writing are highly interrelated, especially in early stages.
- Adolescents need to spend more time writing and reading high-quality literature.
- Motivation can be enhanced and assessed.
Children not reaching benchmarks can benefit from thirty minutes a day of intensive intervention in addition to regular classroom instruction.

Teachers should actively seek connections between home and school literacies” (Vogt & Shearer, 2007, p. 16).

These reports and findings were a catalyst for changes in pedagogy for reading instruction. Pre-kindergarten programs began to multiply in order to help bridge the gap between low socio-economic students and students from families with a high socio-economic status. Additionally, RTI was implemented in schools throughout the United States in order to help struggling readers (Vogt & Shearer, 2007).

**History of the Social Cognitive Theory and Self-Efficacy**

**Social Cognitive Theory**

In 1977 Albert Bandura introduced the Social Cognitive Theory in order to define how an individual learns behavior. The Social Cognitive Theory looked at human action more comprehensively than the social learning and behavioral approach (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). The social cognitive theory explained psychosocial functioning through triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1977). The triad is composed of environmental events, behavior, and cognitive and other various personal factors (Bandura, 1997). These three influences of psychosocial functioning do not always occur in accord and do not always contribute equally. Due to the mutual relationship of the three influences of psychosocial functioning, individuals are a both a product of and a producer of their environments (Bandura & Wood, 1989).

Bandura developed this theory to suggest persons possess a system that allows them to have control over their feelings, actions, and thoughts. Within this system, a person is able to learn from others, regulate his or her behavior, develop alternative strategies, and self-reflect
Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory rests on the notion that people can control their behavior (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006). Within this behavioral development theory, there are four central features of human behavior: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura & Locke, 2003).

These four core features of human behavior are interrelated with the development of human behavior. Intentionality is the specific behavior of setting a goal, planning how to reach the goal, and beginning the process of using strategies to see the goal to fruition (Bandura, 2006). The process of forethought is more than just making plans; it is the process of setting a goal and defining potential roadblocks and how to overcome those roadblocks to reach the goal (Bandura, 2006; Weibell, 2011). Self-reactiveness expands the role of the individual by making the individual more than just a person who sets a goal and plans to accomplish the goal. When an individual is using self-reactiveness, he or she is using the processes of self-motivation and self-regulation (Bandura, 2006; Bandura, 2009). Individuals must be able to motivate themselves to work through the setbacks, difficulties, and uncertainties that happen through the course of goal completion (Weibell, 2011). Self-reflectiveness happens when an individual self-examines himself. Throughout the process of completing a goal and after goal completion, individuals reflect about their thought processes throughout the course and whether their actions were appropriate to meet the pre-established goal (Bandura, 2009).

**Self-Efficacy**

A component of Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory that researchers attribute to success in school is self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000). Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as one’s confidence he or she has about his or her abilities to be successful when executing a specific task. Self-efficacy is a personal measure of performance capabilities instead of a
measure of personal qualities, also focusing solely on performance expectations on a specific task (Zimmerman, 2000). Since self-efficacy is more focused on what a person believes he or she can do instead of focusing on the ability level of the individual, it is a pre-judgement made about one’s own abilities to successfully complete the task (Zimmerman, 2000; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

An individual’s self-efficacy is believed to influence behavior in one of three ways: choice of behavior, amount of effort sustained in a task, and thought patterns and reactions (Pajares, 1995). Bandura (1977) gave a more in depth explanation to self-efficacy and how it relates to an individual’s success:

Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments…Such beliefs influence the course of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacle and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands and the level of accomplishments they realize (Bandura, 1977, p. 3).

This personal belief relates to a student’s intrinsic motivation to complete an academic task (Zimmerman, 2000). Intrinsic motivation to complete a task is a characteristic needed by individuals to begin, persist, and complete a given task. Without intrinsic motivation, students will continually be looking for an outside reward before completing an academic task.

Self-Efficacy Development

Zimmerman (2000) stated that self-efficacy is not a one-dimensional phenomenon but rather it is multidimensional. When students are successful with a task, their self-efficacy is
raised; however, when a student fails at something or struggles with a task, his or her self-efficacy is lowered (Schunk, 2003). Bandura found four categories which determine one’s self-efficacy:

- Enactive mastery experiences
- Vicarious experiences
- Verbal persuasion
- Physiological arousal (Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Zimmerman, 2000).

The combinations of these four categories are what strengthens or weakens an individual’s perceived self-efficacy. The first source of self-efficacy is enactive mastery experiences or past performance and has been identified as the most important source of developing a person’s self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Bandura, 1977; Zimmerman, 2000). Enactive mastery experiences are defined by past successes or failures with certain tasks (Lunenburg, 2011). When one experiences success on completing a certain task, he or she has confidence that he or she can experience success again with a similar task (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). This is the only source of self-efficacy which provides direct information to the individual about personal success or failure with tasks.

The second component of self-efficacy development is vicarious experiences. Vicarious experiences are best defined as modeling experiences (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). When an individual sees someone successfully complete a task, his or her self-efficacy for completing the same task is raised (Lunenburg, 2011). Modeling is an important strategy teacher, employers, and individuals can use in an attempt to boost a person’s self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003).

Verbal persuasion from someone whom the individual trusts can strengthen his or her self-efficacy (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). When an individual receives comments from
someone that her or she will be able to complete a task, that individual’s self-efficacy is raised (Lunenburg, 2011). The Pygmalion Effect has been found to produce higher results from groups of students. The Pygmalion Effect is a psychological phenomenon where when someone thinks something can happen, they subconsciously make sure it happens (Lunenburg, 2011).

The last element of self-efficacy development is physiological arousal or emotional cues (Bandura, 1977). Physiological arousal acts as a signal to individuals about their ability to perform on a task (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1988). When an individual experiences signs of stress, such as sweating, increased heartrate, increased urination needs, increased blood pressure, feeling flushed, sweaty palms, dry mouth, and headaches, he or she perceives those signs as indicators about his or her lack of ability to successfully complete the task (Lunenburg, 2011).

Self-efficacy is not a stagnant quality but rather changes over a person’s life due to learning, experience, and feedback (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). The more a person learns or the richer his or her experiences are with something, the greater his or her self-efficacy becomes. Individuals can change their self-efficacy through experiences and feedback. Additionally, reinforcements from significant others, past experiences, and social comparisons are foundational components of a person’s self-efficacy (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). The person’s environment, peers, family, activities, and interests are all factors in developing that person’s self-efficacy. Schunk (2003) asserted that a student’s self-efficacy is developed through comparison of personal performance with performance of peers.

Another factor in a person’s self-efficacy is anxiety levels experienced when completing a task (Yesilyurt, 2014). Students of all academic levels can experience anxiety symptoms in relation to an academic task (Fletcher & Speirs, 2012). The anxiety levels individuals experience has a direct impact on their self-efficacy. When a student experiences physiological indicators
such as an increase in heart rate, sweating, feeling flushed, higher blood pressure, and dry-mouth, he or she believes they lack the necessary skills needed to successfully complete the task. These behaviors and bodily reactions alter self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003).

High levels of anxiety have negative implications for student academic performance because it lowers self-esteem and the student begins to focus mostly on the worry instead of the task at hand. Owens, Stevenson, Hadwin, and Norgate (2012) found that students who had high levels of anxiety associated with a task performed worse than students with lower levels of anxiety. When students experience high levels of anxiety, it affects their working memory (Owens et al., 2012).

**Self-Esteem vs. Self-Efficacy**

A person’s self-efficacy is different from a person’s self-esteem, there are distinct differences between the two (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Self-esteem is defined as “your overall evaluation of your worth as a person, high or low, based on all the positive and negative self-perceptions that make up your self-concept” (Bailey, 2003, p. 388). Whereas self-efficacy is dependent upon a task, self-esteem is considered a trait of an individual that reflects an individual’s judgement of themselves. Task specific self-esteem is similar to self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

**Self-Efficacy vs. Self-Concept**

Self-efficacy is a component of self-concept, and the two are not one in the same (Pajares, 1995). Self-concept is a general self-descriptive belief that is based on self-knowledge and self-evaluative feelings (Zimmerman, 2000). One forms self-concept through his or her experiences with the environment and the reinforcements they receive from significant others. An individual’s self-concept is a multi-dimensional construct and is developed through five
components: frames of reference, causal attributions, reflected appraisals from significant others, mastery experiences, and psychological centrality (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

Self-concept and self-efficacy are both thought to be indicators of expected thoughts, emotions, and actions of individuals. Self-efficacy is less concerned about the abilities an individual possesses, but rather, it focuses on more concerned with what the individual feels he or she can do successfully. Even though both concepts are believed to be predictors of outcomes, self-concept is mostly concerned with competency, while self-efficacy is mostly concerned with ability to successfully complete a task (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation

Self-efficacy is a large component of self-regulation. Individuals who are self-regulated learners tend to have a high self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Even though students are most influenced by social influences during the early phases of self-efficacy and self-regulation development, a student that is self-controlled and self-regulated uses social sources less often (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Students who are self-regulated are autonomous and can monitor, direct, and regulate themselves toward goal attainment; in addition, these learners understand that intelligence is not a fixed quality and attribute realize that they can control successes or failures in goal attainment (Koseoglue, 2015).

Per Zimmerman (2002), self-regulation consists of three different phases: forethought, performance control, and self-reflection. The three phases of self-regulation are reciprocal and interdependent upon one another. Within the forethought state of self-regulation development, there are two phases. The first is task analysis and the other is self-motivation. During task analysis, an individual sets goals and develops a strategic plan to meet the goal. Within the self-
motivation component of the forethought state, an individual is motivated through intrinsic motivation and interest on the subject matter (Zimmerman, 2002).

The self-reflection state is composed of two parts: self-judgment and self-reaction (Zimmerman & Campillo, 2003). Self-judgement happens when a person compares his or her performance to prior performance, another’s performance, or a standard of mastery. When going through the stages of self-judgement, individuals look at errors and assign a reason for the error. Additionally, self-reflection is composed of self-reaction which is defined as the reactions one experiences after he or she succeeds or fails at a task (Zimmerman, 2002).

During the third phase of self-regulation development, the individual accomplishes this phase through self-control and self-observation. Self-control strategies are used to ensure goal-attainment which was established in the forethought phase. Next, a person begins self-observing where he or she reviews the events and goal-attainment levels and determines the cause of these results (Zimmerman, 2002).

**Development of Self-Regulation**

Zimmerman and Schunk developed a social cognitive model for the development of self-regulation (Schunk, 1991; Zimmerman, 2000; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Within this model, there are four levels of development:

- Observational
- Emulative
- Self-controlled
- Self-regulation (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007)

Within the observational level of development, the learner gains skills from modeled and verbal instruction. During the emulation stage, the learner is expected to demonstrate the skill with
feedback from the teacher and peers. When a learner enters the self-controlled phase of the development of self-regulation, the learner can independently demonstrate mastery of the skill. In the final phase of the development of self-regulation, the learner can take the skill and adapt the use of the skill to personal and contextual conditions (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

Implications for Self-Regulation and Academics

A student who is a self-regulated learner sets regular rigorous academic goals for themselves and are more successful in attaining those academic goals (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). There are three important components of self-regulation that are a part of academic performance:

- Metacognitive strategies for planning, monitoring, and modifying cognition
- Management and control of effort spent on academic tasks
- Cognitive strategies used to learn, remember, and understand new information (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

When students are self-regulated learners with a high self-efficacy for the task, they are better performers in the classroom and on high stakes tests. In addition, to a positive reading self-efficacy, self-regulation fosters reading and writing achievement (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Students with higher self-efficacies are more likely to self-regulate when working on a rigorous academic task (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

**Effects of High Self-Efficacy**

The effects of self-efficacy have far reaching consequences for educators. Self-efficacy directly and indirectly influences a student’s accomplishments (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Self-efficacy is a more robust indicator of academic success than other theories (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991). Numerous studies have shown the positive effects for
students with high self-efficacy (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Zimmerman, 2000; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Yogurtcu, 2013). Students can have various levels of self-efficacy. A student’s self-efficacy is dependent upon the subject and even the specific task within a subject (Zimmerman, 2000).

Zimmerman (2000) found that self-efficacy was a high predictor of a student’s learning and motivation within the classroom. Individuals who possess high self-efficacy for academics are more successful within the educational realm (Yogurtcu, 2013). Also, Pintrich and De Groot (1990) found that self-efficacy was positively related to student performance and cognitive engagement on an academic task. Students who possessed a high self-efficacy for the task were more engaged and persisted longer on a complex task and had a higher level of success on the task.

A student’s self-efficacy has been found to be a factor in a student’s academic performance (Bandura & Locke, 2003). Essentially, self-efficacy and self-belief are powerful predictors of student performance (Pajares, 1995). Since research on self-efficacy has shown to have such a powerful impact on student success, researchers have begun to look at how self-efficacy predicts student success. Solheim (2011) found that reading self-efficacy was a predictor of performance on standardized reading test for middle school students. Students who felt confident that they would perform well on the test, did perform well on the test. In another study conducted by Mills, Pajares, and Herron (2006), the researchers found that self-efficacy was a better predictor of a student’s academic success than the student’s prior skills, knowledge, and accomplishments.

Gist and Mitchell (1992) found that self-efficacy was linked to a student’s goal level and commitment to reaching that goal. Students who possessed high self-efficacy made goals which
were more rigorous than those students who possessed a low self-efficacy. When the students worked at achieving that goal, the researchers found that the students with higher self-efficacy worked harder and longer at reaching the more rigorous goal than the students who did not have a high self-efficacy. However, when a student begins a task with low self-efficacy, but his or her self-efficacy is raised during the duration of the task, the student’s success level is also increased (Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

Researchers have found that self-efficacy is believed to predict and illustrate a student’s thoughts, emotions, and actions (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Anxiety levels are increased or decreased due to a student’s self-efficacy level. Mills, Pajares, and Herron, 2006 concluded that self-efficacy in relation to academic success plays a pertinent role in a student’s anxiety level. A student with a low self-efficacy will experience extreme anxiety symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweaty palms, dry mouth, and headaches (Owens, Stevenson, Hadwin, & Norgate, 2012). Additionally, a student with a high self-efficacy is less likely to experience these anxiety symptoms.

The roles a student presumes they are to fulfill, what a student believes they are capable of, how they view they fare when compared to others, and how they think they are judged by others are self-thoughts that play a substantial role in that student’s growth and development (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). A student’s growth and development are important indicators along with self-efficacy in a student’s success (Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

**Research on Self-Efficacy**

The purpose of self-efficacy research is to assist students in their function and adaptation to meet higher academic demands (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Researchers have tried to find ways to help students raise their self-efficacy; however, one concern about collecting data is whether
one can precisely predict their own behavior (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Zimmerman (2000) discussed one important finding from a study conducted by Shell, Murphy, and Bruning.

Shell, Murphy, and Bruning (1989) measured self-efficacy in terms of perceived capability to perform various reading and writing activities, and they assessed outcome expectancies regarding the value of these activities in attaining various outcomes in employment, social pursuits, family life, education, and citizenship. Efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies jointly predicted 32% of the variance in reading achievement, with perceived efficacy account for virtually all the variance. Only perceived self-efficacy was a significant predictor of writing achievement (Zimmerman, 2000, p.84).

In addition, various meta-analyses have confirmed that a person’s efficacy beliefs are a significant contributor to the level of performance and motivation for completing a task (Bandura & Locke, 2003). In a meta-analysis conducted by Multon, Brown, and Lent (1991), the researchers found that self-efficacy has a strong relationship to academic achievement.

**Motivation**

**Motivation’s Role in Academic Achievement**

Upper elementary school is a time of great change for students. Students begin to move to classrooms where there is a greater focus on grades and testing (Finnan, 2009). School experiences are major components in shaping the paths student’s take which determine life outcomes (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Because of the change in focus, students in upper elementary school begin to lack the enthusiasm and motivation to learn and do well in school that they had in lower elementary school (Finnan, 2009). Lack of motivation adversely affects a student in reading.
Along with self-efficacy, motivation plays a key role in student academic achievement and success. Motivation has been found to have a significant link to academic achievement in reading. Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) found that even though a student’s reading and writing skills depended upon verbal abilities, motivation and cognitive variables play a powerful role in success with reading and writing. Motivation is a key indicator of academic performance in reading (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008). Students who do not possess the motivation to read and learn have a limited amount of academic success in upper elementary, middle, and secondary school (Guthrie et al., 2004).

Solheim (2011) claimed motivation as a major driving force in a student’s reading development. Students who are motivated to read develop reading comprehension skills at a faster rate than students who do not possess intrinsic motivation to read. This is because motivated students read more and this extra experience reading supports increased reading proficiency (Guthrie et al., 2004). Guthrie (2004) also found that reading comprehension is driven by student motivation and engagement.

Students who are fully engaged with the reading content and are motivated to read the content are successful with reading comprehension skills. Additionally, motivation was found to be linked to cognitive engagement on a task and academic performance with the task (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). If students are more engaged with a task, they are likely to see an improvement success with that task. In 2011, Solheim also found that student performance on tests was dependent upon the test questions and the student’s motivational levels with the content.
Motivation’s Link to Self-Efficacy

Student motivation is related to a student’s self-efficacy. A student’s self-efficacy level plays the primary role in a student’s motivational level (Wang & Neihart, 2015). When teachers improve a student’s self-efficacy in reading, students are more motivated to read (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). When a student feels as though he or she is an effective reader, he or she has a high motivation to engage in reading activities (Solheim, 2011). Students with positive self-efficacy are more engaged within a classroom and therefore exhibit more motivation during instructional activities (Schunk, 1991).

Improving Motivation

Motivation for reading is driven by an array of factors. Intrinsic motivation has been found to be driven by four instructional strategies used by reading teachers:

- “Content goals for instruction
- Choice and autonomy support
- Interesting texts
- Collaboration for Learning” (Guthrie et al, 2004).

Students who are in classrooms with specific content goals for instructions were more intrinsically motivated to accomplish the goal because they could clearly articulate what the goal was for the lesson. Reynolds and Symons (2001) found that students whom were given a choice on which text to read performed better on reading tasks than those students who were not given a choice in texts. Using a text that students found interesting was found to be a third instructional strategy for improving intrinsic motivation because when students were engaged in the text because of interest did better on performance tasks. Lastly, when students could collaborate with peers during instruction, their intrinsic motivation was increased and a deeper level of learning
occurred (Guthrie et al., 2004). To improve motivation for reading, teachers should be improving a student’s reading self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

A strong indicator of academic success is the amount of reading in which students engage. A middle school student who spends six or more hours a week reading performed better academically than those middle school students who read for five or less hours a week (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008). Students who are not motivated to read will not read. Motivation for reading is needed for students to be successful academically.

**Self-Efficacy in the Classroom**

**Characteristics of High Self-Efficacy**

Students who possess a high self-efficacy perform better academically when compared with peers who possess a low self-efficacy (Ohrtman & Preston, 2014). Self-efficacy influences the amount of effort a student puts into completing a task, how long the student persists at completing the task, and how the student perseveres when the task becomes more complex and rigorous (Pajares, 1995; Ohrtman & Preseton, 2014). Furthermore, when a student’s self-efficacy is raised or improved, the student uses more cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The increased use of these cognitive and metacognitive strategies leads to better performance and completion of an academic task (Pajares, 1995).

There are various attributes of students with positive self-efficacies. First, students with a positive self-efficacy can set challenging yet attainable academic goals. Secondly, positive self-efficacy allows for a student to enjoy academic work without the negative effects of anxiety. Thirdly, students sustain more attention on rigorous task when they possess positive self-efficacies. Lastly, a student with high self-efficacy has a better feeling of himself as a student and as an individual (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).
When students possess a high reading self-efficacy, they exhibit differing characteristics than students who possess a low reading self-efficacy. Yogurtcu (2013) found that students with a high reading self-efficacy used different reading strategies. The use of these different reading strategies allowed for the student to gain a deeper comprehension level of the reading material (Yogurtcu, 2013). Moreover, a student with a high reading self-efficacy persists longer on rigorous reading tasks than students with low reading self-efficacies (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991).

**Characteristics of Low Self-Efficacy**

Low self-efficacy for academics has adverse effects on academic performance. When students have low self-efficacy surrounding a task or subject, their anxiety level toward the subject increase (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006). Anxiety levels have an inverse relationship with academic achievement. As anxiety and fear concerning a subject increase, academic achievement decreases. When a student feels anxious about a reading task, he or she exhibits physiological signs that indicate he or she is experiencing anxiety. These signs can include but are not limited to fidgeting, sweating, high blood-pressure, and dry mouth. Academic anxiety can interfere with learning, concentration, and testing. Also, students who are anxious are more likely to be distracted by outside stimuli and are unable to demonstrate mastery of skills (Nadeem, Ali, Maqbool, & Zaidi, 2012).

A student with a low reading self-efficacy will not engage in complex tasks and will withdraw from active engagement when a reading task seems difficult (Solheim, 2011). Students with negative reading self-efficacies do not engage in reading regularly and will often not read when it is required. Students who possess negative self-efficacies do not believe they are capable of being an effective and successful reader (Bandura, 1984). Also, a student with a low
self-efficacy will find working on complex reading task difficult and will give up easily (Scott, 1996). Low self-efficacy can override a student’s ability and that student can experience failure even if he or she is truly capable.

**Increasing Self-Efficacy**

In recent years, self-efficacy as a malleable student quality has seen attention from researchers, and there are a variety of strategies which have been found to increase students’ self-efficacy (Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Alnabhani, & Alkalbani, 2014). Teachers can use certain instructional strategies to increase student’s self-efficacy in reading. Effectively increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy can positively affect his or her reading performance. A student’s self-efficacy and achievement can be increased through specific instructional methods (Schunk, 2003). Since there has been little investigation into increasing motivation through instructional strategies to improve reading comprehension, teachers should use instructional strategies to increase self-efficacy to increase reading motivation (Guthrie et al., 2004). To increase a student’s self-efficacy, a learner must be taught the learning process and experience success (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

Developing a reading program that increases a student’s reading self-efficacy is an important component of a successful reading program. However, finding ways to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy is not the only component of a successful reading program. Fielding and Pearson (1994) concluded that a successful reading program must also include the following four elements:

- Substantial increments of time for authentic reading
- Instructional lessons directed by the teacher on comprehension strategies
- Several occasions for peer and collaborative learning
- Authentic opportunities for students to talk to teachers and peers about their reading

**Reading Comprehension Strategies**

Self-efficacy for reading is increased when students are taught reading strategies and have many opportunities for reading success. A noteworthy increase in reading comprehension assessment was found by Klinger, Vaughn, and Schumm (1998) when students were taught previewing, summarizing, monitoring, and questioning strategies. Previewing strategies included looking at the text structure before formal reading of the text and using the knowledge about text structures and features for the beginning stages of understanding (Edmonds et al., 2009). Summarizing strategies are used when a student breaks the text into chunks and provides a short summary of each of the main ideas of the chunks (Klinger & Vaughn, 1998). Students monitor their comprehension of the text when they go back and use other reading strategies when comprehension begins to break down. With the questioning strategy after the reading of the text is finished, students formulate their own questions about the text and then answer those questions (Klinger, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998). The direct teaching of strategies influence a student’s reading self-efficacy because these strategies provide students with effective cognitive tools to use when comprehending texts (Guthrie et al., 2004).

**Self-Regulation Strategies**

To improve self-efficacy, researchers have taught students how to self-regulate through learning task and providing effective feedback (Zimmerman, 2000). Students need to be explicitly taught self-regulation strategies along with being allowed to practice these self-regulation strategies to be successful self-regulators (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Teachers can teach students how to use these self-regulation strategies through modeling the use of these
strategies. Self-regulation strategies that students must be taught are goal setting, environmental control, self-consequences, and self-evaluating (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986).

**Modeling**

One way teachers can improve a student’s reading self-efficacy is using modeling (Schunk, 2003). Within Bandura’s (1977) Social Cognitive Theory, modeling was listed as an important strategy for increasing an individual’s self-efficacy. When a teacher models a skill, it can inform and excite the learner (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Cognitive modeling has been found to be the most effective modeling practice for increasing a student’s self-efficacy. Cognitive modeling occurs when the model goes through the thoughts and reasons for completing a specific action (Schunk, 2003). Modeling is defined as a teacher demonstrating a new concept by thinking aloud and using visual, auditory, tactile, or kinesthetic techniques (Coffey, 2008).

**Feedback**

Feedback has also been found to impact a student’s self-efficacy. A student’s self-efficacy was found to be effected by the frequency and timeliness of the feedback (Zimmerman, 2000). When students received frequent, timely feedback about their performance and their efforts on completing the task, the student’s self-efficacy was affected. For a student to maintain a positive self-efficacy, he or she must receive positive feedback about his or her ability to acquire a necessary skill to complete an academic task (Schunk, 2003).

The type of feedback a student receives also matters. When parents, teachers, and peers offer encouragement about the student’s ability to successfully complete a task, the student’s self-efficacy is temporarily raised. When a student’s self-efficacy is raised during a task, the chance that he or she can successfully complete the task is raised also. Teachers can foster
positive self-efficacy by providing specific effort feedback, such as “you are working very hard on that” instead of judgement feedback, such as “good” (Schunk, 2003).

**Increasing Motivation**

Self-efficacy and motivation are interrelated. Students who are motivated readers tend to have a higher reading self-efficacy than students who are not motivated readers. Achievement motivation has a profound impact on student achievement and proficiency (Poortvliet & Daron, 2014). Motivating students to read is one of the most crucial tasks of teaching reading (Mucherah & Yoder, 2008). To increase self-efficacy in reading, teachers should increase reading motivation. Reading motivation is increased through various ways within the classroom. Guthrie et al. (2004) found in their study on ways to increase students’ motivation in reading that when teachers used hands-on activities, the student’s motivational level was increased. Examples of hands-on activities for reading include interactive book reports, foldables, graphic organizers, and interactive small group games (Young, 2015).

Also, a student’s perception of his or her classroom can be a factor within that student’s motivation to complete a task (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Teachers can increase a student’s reading motivation by developing a classroom which is happy, inviting, and makes the students feel safe. The reading classroom should be a text rich environment that welcomes students to explore and read the various texts.

Student interest in a task is also an important component of student motivation (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Additionally, Guthrie et al. (2004) found that allowing students a choice in the text they were reading increased those students’ motivation to read. When students were given a choice about what they were reading, they performed better with reading comprehension assessments than students who were not given choice about their text (Guthrie et al., 2004). If
students are given a choice about their reading text, they will choose a text that is interesting to them. Interest in the topic is a component of motivation (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

When teachers incorporated motivational instructional practices into their instruction, students’ beliefs in their abilities as readers grew (Guthrie et al., 2004). Students need to be motivated to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies within the classroom (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Since motivation plays such an important role in academic success, teachers need to be incorporating motivational strategies within their classroom to increase success.

**Goal Setting**

Another way teachers can increase motivation and learning with students is to set goals with them (Schunk, 2003). Goals are an important part of increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy because goals provide specific requirements for success (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Schunk (2003) found that setting goals with students and monitoring goal progress and goal accomplishments was one way to increase a student’s self-efficacy. However, the goals must mean something to the students before they will begin to work toward attaining that goal (Ohrtman & Preston, 2014). When students see these goals and their progress towards meeting these goals, they feel as though they are capable to complete a task well and successfully. Students who received verbal encouragement to set their own academic goals experienced an improvement in their self-efficacy, academic achievement, and goal attainment (Zimmerman, 2000).

Reaching an achievement goal helps improve a student’s self-efficacy (Poortvliet & Darnon, 2014). Educators who help student’s set proximal goals, goals that can be met within the near future, are encouraging positive self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000). Setting a proximal goal with students whom exhibit low self-efficacy helps increase their self-efficacy, academic
achievement, and interest in the subject matter (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). When setting goals, teachers must be careful to ensure the goal is not too easy or too difficult (Schunk, 2003). If a student sets a goal that is too difficult, he or she may have a tough time reaching that goal which in turn can have a negative impact on the his or her self-efficacy. When student’s set goals, the goal they choose and the rigor of the goal is based upon a combination of his or her perceived self-efficacy and the goals that their parents and teachers have set for them (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992).

For goals to be successful in increasing student motivation and learning, teachers need to ensure the student’s goal is related to a specific performance standard and can be self-evaluated. Teachers can foster self-evaluation by having students periodically assess their progress with the question of that skill (Schunk, 2003). Experiencing success towards reaching goals is one of the most influential factors in developing a student’s self-efficacy (Merriman, 2012).

Re-teaching

When a student does not grasp a concept and the teacher reteaches the material in a different way, the teacher is creating an environment that fosters positive self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003). Students who are struggling to master a concept when a teacher is explaining the concept begin to experience a decrease in self-efficacy. Teachers who take the time to redeliver the information in a different format for the student are providing the student a second chance to master the concept. Once the student masters the concept, his or her self-efficacy is raised.

Summary

Reading instructional practices have evolved throughout the history of the United States. With the changes in instructional practices, there have been changes in theories that attempt to explain how and why students are successful academically. Alfred Bandura introduced the
concept of self-efficacy in the 1970s, and the implications for the educators have been profound. Through much research, researchers have found that self-efficacy and motivation play an important role in academic success for students (Bandura, 1977; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991; Zimmerman, 2000; Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Solheim, 2011; Yogurtcu, 2013; Ohrtman & Preston, 2014).

Self-efficacy is a changeable quality in students, and an increase in self-efficacy can increase a student’s academic success (Koseoglu, 2015). When teachers incorporate best practices for raising a student’s self-efficacy into their instructional practices, they are providing an environment that encourages academic success. Teachers can use a variety of best practices to raise a student’s self-efficacy. Teachers who teach reading comprehension strategies and self-regulation strategies, provide timely and effective feedback, model, work to increase motivation, allow for student choice, set appropriate goals, and re-teach concepts when needed are using instructional strategies that increase self-efficacy.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine best practices that upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers use to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. When students possess a positive reading self-efficacy, they put forth a greater effort when assigned a rigorous task and have more motivation to see the task to completion (Bandura & Cervone, 1983). Conversely, when a student has a low reading self-efficacy there is little motivation from the student to put forth an effort to complete a reading task (Owens & Valesky, 2015). Increasing the reading self-efficacy of a student who has a low reading self-efficacy is an imperative practice for literacy teachers because students who possess higher reading self-efficacies experience greater success in reading. Due to the potential of improvement of reading achievement, it is essential that literacy teachers in upper elementary and middle school find best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy.

Research Questions

These two research questions were the driving force behind this qualitative study:

1. What strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe increase a student's reading self-efficacy?

2. What strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research’s goal is to provide the researcher with real-life, useful, quality results (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In 1998, Strauss and Corbin defined qualitative research as
research that arrives at a conclusion without the use of statistical data or any other means of quantitative data. This type of research allows researchers to obtain a deeper understanding about individual’s lives, experiences, emotions, feelings, and behavior within a social context. Using qualitative research, rather than quantitative research, provides practitioners within a field a deeper understanding of phenomena (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Qualitative research is used to accomplish the following:

- Verify previous research on a topic.
- Provide an in-depth understanding about already known information.
- Gain insight into new view.
- Broaden the scope of an existing study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The researcher chose qualitative research to gain meaningful, valuable insights into the best practices upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers use to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. Additionally, this type of research allows the researcher a chance to explore the phenomena of reading self-efficacy in a natural setting. Using qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding and identify best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy allowed the researcher to interview and observe this phenomenon in the natural setting. The researcher was involved in the data collection process throughout the entire study through personal interviews with the participants, observations of the three participants, and collection of student STAR data.

**Research Approach**

When choosing the research approach for this study, the researcher examined the research questions to be answered and the most appropriate way to gather the data for the
research. For this study, the researcher utilized the grounded theory approach. This approach was chosen because of its definite and strict guidelines.

Within the grounded theory approach, the researcher uses the voice of the participants as a building block for developing a theory about the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Within this study, personal interviews with upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers were used to determine best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy. Once the interviews were completed, the answers to the questions and the transcripts from the interviews were grouped into codes, and the data from the interviews were analyzed. After the coding of the data, the researcher looked at trends and patterns from the interview answers to develop a theory about the best practices upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers employ to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy.

**Research Participants and Setting for the Study**

The participants for this sampling were gathered via convenience sampling. These participants were chosen because they had convenient access and proximity to the researcher. The thirteen participants worked within one K-8 school as certified literacy teachers. The school where the participants worked is a school-wide Title I school with one hundred percent of its students receiving free lunch and breakfast. Within this school, the student population is 90.8% white, 6% black or African American, and 3.2% Hispanic or Latino. Of the 585 students, 14.7% are classified as students with disabilities (AdvancED, 2014).

The sample of this study was comprised of N=13 literacy teachers in grades third through eighth. The sample for this study was selected because of convenience for the researcher. The years of experiences for the thirteen participants ranged from four years to forty-four years.
Literacy teachers in grades three through eight were chosen because of the shift in curriculum and the increase in high stakes testing in these grades.

Before conducting the research, the researcher contacted the superintendent of the school system to obtain permission to interview participants within the selected school (see Appendix A). Next, the researcher approached the school principal seeking permission to interview third through eighth grade literacy teachers within the school. The prospective candidates were contacted with information regarding the study; and they were asked to voluntarily participate (see Appendix B).

The researcher arranged times and dates to conduct the one-on-one interviews with the participants. As the interview date approached, the researcher sent reminder invitations to the participants. Before the official interview began, the researcher had the participants sign a letter of consent to participate in the study (see Appendix C), and they were reminded their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time during the study.

**Data Collection Procedures**

As soon as permission was gained from the Carson-Newman University Institutional Review Board, the superintendent, and the principal, the researcher immediately began to collect the data. To triangulate the data, the researcher used three sources of data collection for this study. First, the researcher conducted personal one-on-one interviews with the thirteen participants. During the interviews, the researcher asked participants to identify a student whose reading self-efficacy had increased during their class. While the data from the interviews were being coded, and analyzed, the researcher selected three of these examples and gathered STAR testing data to examine the changes in their reading level when the reading self-efficacy
increased. Thirdly, the researcher observed three of the thirteen teachers within their classrooms to see best practices in action and to verify their use of the identified best practices.

Before conducting the interviews with the thirteen selected participants, the researcher piloted the interview guide with four literacy teachers to assure there was no ambiguity in the instrument. The teachers in the pilot study were a similar representation of the population of the chosen participants. The pilot participants were interviewed with the same semi-structured interview questions. The pilot participants were asked to identify any problems with clarity. After the pilot participants completed the interview, the researcher made the necessary changes to the wording of the questions and the order of the interview questions.

The researcher chose semi-structured interviews for the qualitative data collection of this study because of the flexibility this data collection technique provides. With this type of data collection technique, the interviewer has the choice to determine what he or she talks about, how much he or she says, and how he or she expresses it (Drever, 1995). An interview was conducted with each of the thirteen participants using the semi-structured interview questions as a guide (see Appendix D). Each of the interviews lasted between 16 and 45 minutes. During the personal one-on-one interviews, the researcher wrote responses while recording the participants’ responses. After the interviews were conducted, the researcher listened to the audio recording of the interview and transcribed the answers.

The three observations were conducted at a time that was determined by the participants. The researcher completed the observation during a regular literacy class. While completing the observations, the researcher took notes, scripted the lessons, and monitored student interaction during the lessons. The observations notes were transcribed and strategies used by the teachers were identified.
Ethical Considerations

Due to the study’s use of human participants, the researcher had to gain permission from Carson-Newman University’s Institutional Review Board. Before permission was granted, the researcher contacted the superintendent of the chosen school system and received permission from him to conduct the study. After IRB approval, the researcher obtained permission to conduct the interviews with the thirteen participants from the selected school’s principal. The researcher contacted the thirteen participants to explain the purpose of the study and ask for voluntary participation in the study.

Before the interviews began, the thirteen participants were reminded that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and the researcher had them sign an informed consent form. Also, the researcher informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time, all responses would remain anonymous, and direct quotations from the interview may be used when necessary. Prior to recording the interviews, the researcher asked permission from the participant to audio record the interview. The researcher stored the tapes and transcripts from the interviews on a hard drive.

After the researcher analyzed the data from the interviews, the researcher looked for similar responses and best practices that required further insight. The researcher chose three of the participants to be observed to verify their use of best practices within their classroom during their literacy instruction. Once the researcher received permission from the three participants, the researcher asked the participants to select a time for the observations and collected field notes during the observed lesson.
Data Analysis Procedures

Once the interviews were completed, the researcher used an Excel spreadsheet to organize the demographic data of the participants. Then, the researcher used the NVivo software to perform content analysis on the transcripts from the interviews to reduce and simplify the data into common codes. The researcher analyzed the coded data into various categories to determine themes and sub-themes that were present in the answers to the interview questions. Several themes and sub-themes emerged during the analysis process.

To achieve data triangulation, the researcher analyzed two other types of data in addition to the interviews. Classroom observations and student reading level data were also examined. After analyzing the data from interviews, the researcher began the process of comparing the observation notes and practices utilized to those identified during the interviews. Notes were made about the strategies used during instructional time versus the strategies that were identified during the interviews. While the researcher was organizing the data, three examples of students whose self-efficacy was raised were chosen. The researcher contacted the participants and asked the participants to provide STAR reading level data for the identified student. The researcher noted the change in the example student’s reading level.

Summary

For this study the researcher used the natural setting to find best practices literacy teachers employee when trying to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. For this reason, qualitative research was chosen. Grounded theory was chosen as the research approach to allow the participants to be the driving voice behind the theories that were developed.

After the researcher received the required permissions for conducting research using human participants, interviews with the thirteen participants began, STAR reading level data
were collected for three students, and classroom observations were conducted. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher entered the answers into the NVivo software program and the examined the answers to find patterns in answers about best practices that these literacy teachers were using. Verification of these strategies was achieved through the classroom observations, and the academic importance of raising a student’s reading self-efficacy was verified through STAR testing data.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine best practices that effective third through eighth grade literacy teachers used to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. The information obtained and concepts developed contributed to teacher determined best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy and the practices which hinder a student’s reading self-efficacy. Data for this study were collected through three different means. First, 13 literacy teachers in grades three through eight were interviewed using 14 semi-structured interview questions. Next, the researcher observed three of the 13 participants to find examples of best practices being used within the classroom. Lastly, three of the participants provided STAR data for students whose reading self-efficacy had been increased. The interviews lasted between 16 and 45 minutes.

Descriptive Characteristics of Participants

The 13 literacy teachers who participated in the study were chosen from one K through eight school in the researcher’s school district. The participants were chosen based on experience in the literacy classroom, grade level assignment, and level of effectiveness as literacy teachers. Of the 13 participants, 11 were chosen because they were third through eighth grade literacy teachers. Two of the 13 participants were certified literacy teachers who worked as Response to Intervention (RTI) literacy teachers. Table 4.1 provides demographic data on the 13 participants.
Table 4.1  
*Demographics of Participants (N = 13)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy and Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Literacy RTI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy and Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy and Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy and Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>ALL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Literacy and Social Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

The following research questions were investigated during this qualitative study:

1. What strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe increase a student’s reading self-efficacy?
2. What strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy?

To answer the two research questions, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with 13 participants using 14 semi-structured interview questions. The questions were intended to determine the participant’s demographic information and answer the two research questions. The first three questions of the interview were to determine the participant’s age range, number of years teaching, current grade level, current subject, and level of preparation as a literacy teacher. Questions that were used to determine practices that were effective in increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy were:

- Describing a reading lesson
- Personal definition of a best practice
- How to increase knowledge of best practices
- Description of students with high or low reading self-efficacy
- Practices which help a student with low reading self-efficacy
- Most effective practices when working with a student with low reading self-efficacy
- Practices used to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy.

The second research question was answered with an anecdote about a student with low reading self-efficacy and personal experience with practices that were detrimental to student’s reading self-efficacy.
Typical Reading Lesson

With the implementation of the new TNReady English Language Arts state standards, the typical reading lesson has changed within the ELA classroom. Reading does not solely focus on literature but on informational texts as well. Students are exposed to an equal number of literature texts and informational texts. To gain a deeper understanding of the strategies used within the participants’ classrooms, the researcher asked the participants to describe a typical reading lesson within their classroom. Once all the responses were recorded and coded, six themes emerged. The six themes were bell ringers, close reading, vocabulary instruction, text dependent questions, writing, and explanation of daily goals. Figure 4.1 represents the number of participants identifying the six themes within their daily reading lesson during the interview.

Figure 4.1
*Themes within typical reading lesson (N = 13)*

Table 4.2 represents the responses participants gave when describing a typical reading lesson in their classroom.
Table 4.2
*Responses to Daily Reading Lesson* (*N* = 13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
<th>Coded Responses to Daily Reading Lesson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>bell ringer, close reading, questioning, vocabulary instruction, establishing goals, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>bell ringer, close reading, questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>questioning, vocabulary instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>bell ringer, close reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>questioning, vocabulary instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>close reading, questioning, vocabulary instruction, establishing goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>close reading, questioning, establishing goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>close reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>close reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bell ringer.** Three of 13 participants identified using a bell ringer at the beginning of their reading class. Bell ringers include daily oral language and questions for thought. The purpose of the bell ringer was to change the students’ frame of mind and focus on reading.

Participant 1 used the first five minutes of class as bell ringer time; he stated:

> We first start out with our DOLs. The students come in and there are two sentences on the board and as they correct those sentences, it gives them time to mellow out and calm
down. I give them about five minutes on that, then we go over them. We talk about all the grammatical errors that need to be corrected and why. As I give them the correct answers, they correct any mistakes they may have made.

Each of the three participants spend between five and 10 minutes at the beginning of class on the bell ringer to allow students time to get adjusted to the literacy classroom. Participant 2 uses the bell ringer as a time for reflection for students. His students are given a something to consider question that is related to the primary sources they are studying for the lesson. This provides students with a chance to think without fear of being right or wrong and “provides them a little insight into what we will be doing for the day.” The three participants who used bell ringers in their classroom do so as an opportunity to begin the class in a non-threatening way to focus the student’s mind and thinking.

Close reading. Seven of the 13 participants identified using close reading to teach reading skills in their daily reading lessons. Close reading is defined as the deliberate reading and rereading of complex texts to develop a deeper comprehension of the text (Boyles, 2013). During their daily reading lessons, the participants choose a complex text and read and reread the text as a whole group and individually to gain a deeper comprehension of the text. Participant 9 uses close reads as the core basis of her reading instruction. When asked about her typical reading lesson, she responded:

It has evolved over the years. First, we read a text straight through with no stopping or answering questions. During our second read, we annotate the text. They make the same notes I make on the text by paying attention to the skills which are the focus of my lesson. For our third read of the text, the students read individually and annotate any newly discovered information or meaning from the last read of the text.
Other participants discussed annotation strategies where the students and the teacher underlined main ideas and circled unknown vocabulary words in the text. Participant 11 discussed the close reading which happens during her typical reading lesson. Once again students are exposed to a text at least three times to gain a deeper understanding of the text. Participant 11 explained:

When we first look at a text, we do three reads. The first read we read it one time and look for any unknown words where students circle unknown words and we define those words. For the second read of the text, we dissect it paragraph by paragraph making sure students have a basic understanding of the text, then we answer text dependent questions. For the third read of the text, we look at how certain aspects affect the story.

Participant 2 stated that close reading has been the most effective strategy for helping his students gain a deeper understanding of the complex primary texts that his students are required to read. During his close reading portion of his lesson, students read texts as a whole group, small group, and individually. He explained that this practice allowed his students to be exposed to fluent readers and allows them to apply those strategies individually.

**Text-dependent questioning.** Correctly answering questions is one of the six components of reading comprehension (Hock & Mellard, 2005). This theme was the second most popular theme, with six of the 13 participants stating they use text-dependent questioning during their lessons. Questioning was completed throughout the daily reading lessons of these six participants. The types of questions ranged from specific questions asked that are centered around the skill for the lesson to deep analysis questions answered after the third read of the complex text. Participant 3 stated that within her reading lessons her students worked through guiding questions while completing a read of the text. Once the students have completed all
three reads of the text, she has them work in small groups to complete analysis questions on the text. However, Participant 8 develops questions that are centered around the skill they are studying for the lesson. Participant 7 said, “After completing a read of our primary text, I normally use the book as a guide for questions by using the ‘Think and Review’ section for our questions.”

**Extended writing.** The Report of the National Reading Panel, the series of reports from the Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, and the Report from the Committee on Reading Disabilities found that reading and writing were highly interrelated and suggested that adolescents spend more time writing to increase their reading competencies (Vogt & Shearer, 2007). Three of the 13 teachers interviewed stated that they used extended writing as a part of their regular daily reading instruction. Participant 1 stated:

After we complete our readings of the text and answer our questions, I then have the students write to a prompt. If there are two texts that we have read on the same topic, I come up with a writing prompt that makes my students find information from both texts. Participant 11 stated that she always makes the students complete a weekly writing on their weekly text. However, Participant 5’s writing is integrated differently than the other two. She utilizes the Self-Regulated Strategy Development method to teach writing, and she dedicated the last 30 minutes of her 90-minute block would be dedicated to writing instruction. The texts used for this writing are different than the texts used during her reading time.

**Establishing goals.** Establishing content specific reading goals was one of the factors which helps increase a student’s reading self-efficacy because they provide specific requirements for success (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Three of the participants established and explained the goals for the lesson to the students as a part of their daily reading
lesson. Participant 1 makes sure his students understand their daily objectives by making the students read them aloud together. Participant 8 gives her students a preview of the daily objectives; she stated:

When we begin our lesson, I go over the skills we are focusing on with our weekly reading story. I tell the students what I expect them to learn, and then we do a few practice activities with the skill so they have a clear picture of what we are doing for the week.

Participant 8 stated she sets goals for the week so that students have a clear understanding of what they will be doing for the week. She believes this keeps them focused for the week.

**Vocabulary building.** Personal vocabulary is one of six important factors that impact reading comprehension (Tompkins, 2004). As a student’s vocabulary increases, their reading comprehension increases. When asked about a typical reading lesson in their classrooms, four of the 13 participants stated they use vocabulary instruction as part of their daily reading lessons. Participant 3 has her students skim the text and find unfamiliar words. After they find the unfamiliar words, she has the students discuss the words and develop a working definition for the words. Participant 6 uses a similar routine within her classroom, but she has the students skim their text for unfamiliar words and then use the context clues within the text to determine the meaning of the words. Before reading the text, Participant 7 discusses any unknown vocabulary with her students, so they have a working definition when they read the text for the first time.

**Personal Definition of Best Practice**

Best practice is defined as “a procedure that has been shown by research and experience to produce optimal results and that is established or proposed as a standard suitable for widespread adoption” (Merriam-Webster, 2017). One of the research questions of this study
examined teacher determined best practices, so to discern personal definitions for best practices the researcher asked the participants what a best practice meant to them. After typing the transcripts and coding the data for this interview question, the researcher found three themes from the answers. The three themes were doing what is best for the student, using individualized instruction, and using a research based strategy. Figure 4.2 represents the number of participants who identified the three themes in the participants’ answers concerning a personal definition of best practices.

Figure 4.2
*Themes in Best Practice Definition (N = 13)*

Table 4.3 represents the participants’ coded responses to the question about defining a best practice.
Table 4.3  
*Coded answers to best practice definition* (*N* = 13)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
<th>Coded Responses to Best Practice Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>best for students, individualized instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>research based strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>best for students, individualized instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>research based strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>best for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>research based strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>best for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>best for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Best for students.** When the participants were asked for a definition of what a best practice meant to them, five of the 13 participants responded that it was practice that a teacher uses that is the best way to help the students learn. Participant 1 said, “It is the best way to reach all my students during my lesson.” Participant 10 related best practices to her daily objectives by stating, “A best practice is the best strategy to use so my students meet the daily objective.” Similarly, Participant 6 told the researcher a best practice is a practice that achieves a reading goal. Participant 9 elaborated what a best practice meant by stating, “Best practices are what is
working in the classroom and per research, what is the best way to teach the skill we are working on.”

**Research based strategy.** Of the 13 participants, four identified research-based strategies in a personal definition of best practices. Participant 2 replied a best practice is a research-based strategy that has been proven effective with students. Expressing a similar sentiment, Teacher 4 stated, “A best practice is something that has been proven through research to be effective with students.” As she elaborated she said best practices have been tried and tested by educational researchers, and they have shown student growth and improvement. Participant 5 observed that a best practice is a “teaching method that has been shown to be most effective in helping a student learn.” Lastly, Participant 7 stated a best practice is the most effective means of teaching reading.

**Individualized or differentiated instruction.** Individualized or differentiated instruction was the least common response in the three themes identified during the participants’ responses for best practices. Tomlinson (2005) defined differentiated instruction as an instructional method where teachers instruct each student based upon their individual level of readiness, interest, and learning style profile. The purpose of individualized or differentiated instruction is taking advantage of every student’s learning ability. Participant 8 suggested that a best practice is:

The different teaching strategies that work best for each individual student and applying those different strategies to your classroom to meet the needs of all students so that all students can be successful no matter their current level, whether they are above, on, or below grade level.
Participant 3 expressed her feeling that a best practice was differentiation used to help all students learn, while Participant 1 felt as though a best practice was the best way to reach each individual student in his classroom so they are successful.

**Increasing Knowledge of Best Practices**

To determine how teachers find information about best practices or where they find new strategies which help students learn reading, the researcher asked the participants how they increased their knowledge of best practices or where they found information on new best practices. After reviewing the responses from the participants, the researcher found five themes within their answers; colleagues, internet, personal evaluation, professional journal readings, and profession development workshops. Figure 4.3 represents the number of participants identifying the six themes within their daily reading lesson during the interview.

Figure 4.3
*Themes in increasing knowledge of best practices (N = 13)*
Table 4.4 represents the participants’ responses about where they found new best practices or teaching strategies to use within their classroom.

Table 4.4  
*Coded answers to increasing best practice knowledge (N = 13)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
<th>Coded Responses to Increasing Best Practices Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>colleagues, personal evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>internet, professional journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>colleagues, professional development, professional journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>colleagues, professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>colleagues, professional development, professional journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>colleagues, internet, personal evaluation, professional development, professional journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>colleagues, internet, personal evaluation, professional journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>colleagues, personal evaluation, professional development, professional journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>personal evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>professional journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>colleagues, internet, personal evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Characteristics of High Reading Self-Efficacy**

This study focused on strategies for high and low reading self-efficacy students. These are two different types of students that literacy teachers will encounter in their classroom. Students with high reading self-efficacy demonstrate very different characteristics than students with low reading self-efficacy. A student’s level of self-efficacy determines how much effort a student exerts and the length of persistence on completing a complex reading task (Pajares, 1995; Ohrtman & Preseton, 2014). When asked about the characteristics of a student with a high reading self-efficacy, participants provided various answers to the researcher. Once the researcher examined each answer for the interview question concerning characteristics of high reading self-efficacy five themes emerged: active participation, confidence, enthusiastic, read for enjoyment, and have a high reading level. Figure 4.4 represents the frequencies of the five themes with the 13 participants.

Figure 4.4

*Themes in characteristics of high reading self-efficacy (N = 13)*
Table 4.5 represents the various responses the thirteen participants had when asked what characteristics a student with high reading self-efficacy had.

Table 4.5  
*Coded characteristics of students with high reading self-efficacy (N = 13)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
<th>Coded Responses to High Reading Self-Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>actively participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>actively participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>actively participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>actively participate, confident, read for enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>read for enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>confident, enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>actively participate, confident, enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>read for enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>actively participate, confident, read for enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>actively participate, enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>enthusiastic, read for enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>read for enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>actively participate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Characteristics of Low Reading Self-Efficacy**

Possessing a low reading-self efficacy can have negative academic effects for students. A student with a low reading self-efficacy will withdraw from the classroom during reading instruction, give up quickly when faced with a complex task, and will be easily distracted by
outside stimuli (Solheim, 2011; Nadeem, Ali, Maqbool, & Zaidi, 2012). To ensure participants understood the differences between a student with a high reading self-efficacy versus a student with a low reading self-efficacy, the researcher asked participants to describe students who had low reading self-efficacy. After recording the answers, the researcher coded the answers to find themes about the characteristics of students with low-reading self-efficacy. During the data analysis of this question, six themes emerged to describe the characteristics of a student with low reading self-efficacy: lack confidence, lack excitement about reading, do not read outside of class, have reading level that is below his or her grade level, are not motivated, and are withdrawn in the literacy classroom. Figure 4.5 illustrates the number of responses for the six identified themes.

Figure 4.5
*Themes in characteristics of low reading self-efficacy (N = 13)*

Table 4.6 provides the responses the 13 participants gave when describing the characteristics of a student with low reading self-efficacy.
Table 4.6  
*Coded characteristics of students with low reading self-efficacy* (*N* = 13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
<th>Coded Responses to Characteristics of Low Reading Self-Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>lack confidence, not motivated, withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>do not read, lack excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>do not read, lack confidence, withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>lack excitement, not motivated, withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>do not read, low reading level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>lack confidence, withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>lack confidence, low reading level, withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>lack confidence, lack excitement, not motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>do not read, lack confidence, not motivated, withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>lack confidence, lack excitement, not motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>lack confidence, low reading level, withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>do not read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Benefits of High Reading Self-Efficacy**

When a student possesses a high reading self-efficacy, he or she will experience many academic benefits. Students who possess a high academic self-efficacy have a better school experience and accomplish more academically (Yogurtcu, 2013). Conversely, a student who possesses a high reading self-efficacy performs better academically in other subjects and has a higher sense of self-confidence as a person (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). The researcher asked the participants about the benefits a student receives when he or she possesses a high reading self-
efficacy. Despite the various answers from the 13 participants, the researcher identified six themes within the answers concerning a student who possesses a high reading self-efficacy: seems to enjoy school, performs well in other disciplines, is more confident, is attentive in class, experiences success academically in English/Language Arts, and sets and reaches appropriate academic goals. Figure 4.6 below illustrates the frequency of the themes in the participants’ answers.

Figure 4.6
*Themes in academic benefits of high reading self-efficacy (N = 13)*

Table 4.7 shows a detailed list of participants and their coded responses.
Table 4.7  
*Coded answers of academic benefits for students with a high reading self-efficacy (N = 13)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
<th>Coded Responses to Benefits of High Reading Self-Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>set &amp; reach goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>enjoy school, confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>successful in ELA, successful in other disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>enjoy school, successful in ELA, successful in other disciplines, confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>successful in ELA, successful in other disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>successful in ELA, successful in other disciplines, confident, attentive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>successful in ELA, set &amp; reach goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>enjoy school, successful in ELA, successful in other disciplines, confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>enjoy school, set &amp; reach goals, attentive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>successful in other disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>enjoy school, confident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Enjoy school.** Bong and Skaalvik (2003) found students with high academic self-efficacy enjoyed academic work without the negative effects of anxiety. When the 13 participants were asked about the benefits of a student with high reading self-efficacy, five of the participants observed what Bong and Skaalvik found, a student with a high reading-self-efficacy enjoyed school and learning. Participant 2 reported that a student with high reading self-efficacy truly enjoyed reading. She said, “They don’t just read because they have to; they read because they want to.” Participant 9 acknowledged that a student with high reading self-efficacy...
“approaches reading with a better, different attitude.” A student who wants to come to school because they enjoy it was an academic benefit for student with high reading self that Participant 10 identified. Expressing similar beliefs, Participants 13 and 5 stated that students with high reading self-efficacy had an interest in school and reading.

**Academically successful in ELA.** Students who possess a high reading self-efficacy are more successful in the ELA classroom because they employ various reading strategies to gain a deeper understanding of a complex texts (Yogurtcu, 2013). In addition, when a student possesses a higher reading self-efficacy, he or she will tackle rigorous tasks relentlessly (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991). When asked about academic benefits for students with a high reading self-efficacy, six of the 13 participants identified being successful in the ELA classroom as an academic benefit for students with a high reading self-efficacy. Participant 4 stated that students in her classroom who possess a high reading self-efficacy comprehended texts on a deeper level. Participant 8 reiterated Participant 4’s observation by saying, “Those students have a better comprehension of the reading material in my class.” Being more successful in reading was an expressed benefit by Participants 7 and 9. Participants 5 and 6 noted that students with high reading self-efficacy made better grades and had higher test scores when compared to students with a low reading self-efficacy.

**Academically successful in other disciplines.** When students possess a high reading self-efficacy, their academic success reaches beyond the reading classroom (Anderson, Fielding, & Wilson, 1988). After coding the answers to question about benefits for students with reading self-efficacy, the researcher found six of the participants asserted that those students performed better academically in other disciplines. Participant 11 recounted:
My students who have had high reading self-efficacy just seemed to do better in school. They learn better when they enjoy reading, and reading is so important because in all classes even math they will be reading. To do good in those classes, they need to have a high reading ability.

Participant 9 believed that students who were successful in the reading classroom were successful in other classrooms with texts as well. Two participants, Participants 5 and 6, pointed out that students with high reading self-efficacy had higher grades in other subjects when compared to students with low reading self-efficacy. Participant 7 said students who possessed a high reading self-efficacy were more successful academically.

**Confident.** Students who are successful with academics have a greater level of confidence than students who are not successful with academics (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). When asked about the academic benefits of a student with high reading self-efficacy, five of the 13 participants identified confidence as a benefit for these students. Participant 13 stated that students with high reading self-efficacy were more “confident in their work” and did not require the teacher to check it as often as a student with low reading self-efficacy. However, Participant 7 saw a student’s confidence differently by stating that a student with a high reading self-efficacy was “more willing to participate” in the classroom. Participant 3 expressed her opinion that students with high reading self-efficacy were very confident in their work and ability to complete the tasks assigned.

**Ability to set and reach academic goals.** Students who possess a high reading self-efficacy can set challenging yet attainable personal academic goals (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Three of the 13 participants verified this finding by stating in their interview that a student with high reading self-efficacy can set and reach goals. For example, Participant 10 stated that her
experience with students who possess a high reading self-efficacy enjoyed setting academic goals and achieved those goals more readily than students who possess a low reading self-efficacy. Participant 2 stated that students with a high reading self-efficacy “challenged themselves” by setting academic goals that were not too easy to reach. Lastly, Participant 8 expressed her opinion that students with a high reading self-efficacy set a goal of “increasing their reading level in a certain time period” and were more likely to meet that goal than their peers with a lower reading self-efficacy.

**Attentive.** Van der Bijl and Shortridge-Baggett (2002) found that students with a high reading self-efficacy were more active and attentive within the classroom. Two of the 13 participants verified Van der Bijl and Shortridge-Baggett’s finding by stating that a student with high reading self-efficacy was more willing to participate and more attentive during class. Participant 10 stated:

Students who have high reading self-efficacy are the students who always have their hand up and pay better attention during class. They are more attentive because they are confident in their ability as a reader. They always want to give the teacher the answer and always want to ask questions or add more to my lesson.

Participant 7 felt as though students with a high reading self-efficacy were “more willing to participate in whole group and small group instruction” and these students willingly give answers, “answer aloud,” and know what is occurring in the lesson.

**Successful Best Practices**

To reach students, teachers employ a variety of best practices in their classroom every day (Alkharusi, Aldhafri, Alnabhani, & Alkabani, 2014). The use of these best practices provides students with successes in the classroom. When a student experiences success, his or
her self-efficacy is increased (Klinger, Vaughn, and Schumm, 1998). In order to determine what successful best practices teachers were using within their classroom, the researcher asked the 13 participants for examples of best practices that they use in their classroom. After analyzing the interview answers and assigning codes to the responses, the researcher found five types of best practices that are used in classrooms: modeling, note-taking, previewing, small group instruction, and vocabulary development. Figure 4.7 represents the frequency of the themes in the participants’ answers.

Figure 4.7
*Themes in successful best practices (N = 13)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note-taking</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activating Background Knowledge</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Instruction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8 provides a coded list of the participant answers to the question about best practices used when teaching a new reading concept.
Table 4.8
Coded participant answers to best practices for teaching a new reading concept question (N = 13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
<th>Coded Responses to Best Practices Used in the Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>activate background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>work with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>modeling, note-taking, activate background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>modeling, work with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>modeling, work with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>vocabulary instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>activate background knowledge, vocabulary instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>modeling, activate background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>modeling, vocabulary instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>Modeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>work with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>vocabulary instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>note-taking, vocabulary instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Modeling.** Schunk (2003) found modeling was a best practice for teachers to use when working on a new skill set and that this practice was effective in helping raise a student’s reading self-efficacy. Modeling happens when a teacher demonstrates the correct use of a new skill and the students learn by observation (Coffey, 2008). When asked about best practices that are used within their classroom, six participants identified modeling as a used best practice. Participant 10 uses the strategy “I do, We do, You do” where the students watch her complete the task then
the class completes a similar task and finally the students are performing the skill on their own. When Participant 9 introduces a new skill within her classroom, she models through a “think aloud” and gives the students visual and auditory examples of how they need to approach the new reading skill. When working on reading fluency with students, Participant 4 models by reading aloud so the students can hear what a fluent reader sounds like.

**Note-taking.** Note-taking allows for a student to enhance long-term retention, provides an external source for their memory, and allows him or her to make connections between different ideas presented at different times (Peper & Mayer, 1978; Bohay, Blakely, Tamplin, & Radvansky, 2011). Two of the 13 teachers interviewed stated they used a form of note-taking as a best practice when they were introducing a new reading skill or concept. Participant 13 noted that she used note-taking when there were “terms that needed to be identified and defined,” to help students gain a basic understanding of the new reading concept. Using PowerPoints to deliver notes was an identified best practice by Participant 3. She used PowerPoints to “review important points in our readings or to give students needed information,” so they will have a basic understanding of the concept.

**Activate background knowledge.** Background knowledge is defined as what students already know about the content being presented (Marzano, 2003). Researchers have found a positive correlation between activating background knowledge and increasing a student’s reading comprehension (Marzano, 2003; Thompkins, 2004). Of the 13 participants in this study, three identified activating background knowledge as a best practice used within their classroom. Participant 3 activated background knowledge while also providing some needed background knowledge by using Flocabulary videos within her classroom. Flocabulary is an internet program featuring hip hop videos which are engaging for students in all discipline areas.
Participant 8 also uses technology to activate the student’s background knowledge. She stated, “I find a video that will explain the concept in terms they know, so they have some sort of background knowledge about what we will be doing in class.”

**Working with peers.** When asked about best practices used within their classroom for literacy instruction, three of the 13 participants identified working with peers as a best practice they used. Fielding and Pearson (1994) identified four components of a successful reading program, and two of the four components encompassed working with peers during the learning process. Participant 2 stated that he uses partner reading when students were reading a more complex text. With this practice, he allows the students to work in a small peer group of two or three students on similar levels to read a text and begin the outlines when they have an extended writing task. Participant 4 allows students to participate in peer evaluation of each other’s work. This participant provides students a copy of a rubric by which to evaluate another student’s work; after the students have peer reviewed the student’s work, the evaluator meets with the person they evaluated to explain what needs to be changed in their work to meet the requirements of the assignment.

**Vocabulary instruction.** Vocabulary instruction was the second most popular theme for the question focusing on best practices used when teaching a new reading concept, with five of the 13 participants citing it as a best practice. An expansive vocabulary has been linked to reading comprehension and achievement (Krashen, 2004; Thompkins, 2004), and five of the 13 participants identified vocabulary instruction as a best practice used within their classroom. Participant 12 said when she begins a lesson she “front loads with a lot of new vocabulary words.” When she was asked to explain, she elaborated by saying when students are working on a close read of a primary text, she ensures that students have an understanding and a working
definition for many of the complex words in the rigorous text. Also, Participant 13 stated she begins a new text by working on unfamiliar vocabulary words within the text. Students in Participant 6’s class take a moment to scan a text and ask about unknown words. She does this because “sometimes I may not know what words students already know and what words they do not.” Participant 9 uses vocabulary instruction when working on a new text, but instead of providing a definition she “guides students to develop their own definition through context clues within the text.”

**Best Practices for Students with Low Reading Self-Efficacy**

The first research question for this study focused on teacher determined best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy. The researcher asked participants what effective practices they have used when working with a student with a low reading self-efficacy. When teachers utilize best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy, they are fostering environments for student success (Koseoglu, 2015). Self-efficacy is not a fixed quality in a student, and depending upon the classroom’s environment, a student’s self-efficacy can be raised. Best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy include modeling, providing feedback, increasing motivation, setting goals, and re-teaching (Schunk, 2003). Once the interview answers to this question were analyzed and coded by the researcher, 10 themes were discovered: differentiation, high expectations, feedback, interest, working with peers, small group instruction, student choice, positive reinforcement, and vocabulary building. Figure 4.8 provides a visual for the frequency of the themes in the thirteen participants’ answers.
Figure 4.8
*Themes in best practices for students with low reading self-efficacy (N = 13)*

Table 4.9 provides the participants answers that were coded into the nine themes.
### Table 4.9
*Coded answers by participant for identified best practices when working with a student with a low reading self-efficacy (N = 13)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
<th>Coded Responses to Best Practices for Low Reading Self-Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>differentiation, working with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>vocabulary instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>feedback, modeling, encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Modeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>differentiation, high expectations, modeling, encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>feedback, interest, modeling, vocabulary instruction, working with peers, encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>modeling, working with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>vocabulary instruction, working with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>feedback, differentiation, interest, modeling, student choice, working with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>differentiation, small groups, encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>high expectations, differentiation, interest, student choice, encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>differentiation, small groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>high expectations, differentiation, modeling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Differentiation.** Differentiation or individualized instruction had the highest number of responses when participants were asked about best practices for working with a student with a low reading self-efficacy. Eight of the 13 participants mentioned differentiation as a best practice due to the individualizing of the curriculum to meet the needs of a student with a low
reading self-efficacy. Participant 13 stated she has found that when she can individualize the instruction to the level of the student “they are successful and that raises their self-efficacy.” Also, she tries to ensure that the assigned tasks are not too hard or too easy for the students. In Participant 10’s classroom, she provides one-on-one instruction to review the skill or concept in terms that are “appropriately matched to the student.” Further, during this time it allows “the student with low self-efficacy to work with me in a situation where it is ok to make a mistake.” Participant 11 said, “Don’t box the student into a certain reading level.” Allow the student to work on a reading level that is a little higher than their tested reading level so they are challenged and can grow as a reader. Participant 9 stated that he teacher needs to modify the task to meet the needs of that student, “What works for Sally might not work for Bobby.”

**High expectations.** A link between high expectations and motivation has been found in research studies (Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006). When teachers have high expectations for their students, the students are more motivated and will meet the high expectations at a much more consistent rate. Two participants told the researcher during the interviews that high expectations were a best practice they used when working with a student with low reading self-efficacy. Participant 11 explained that she always “pushes my low self-efficacy students by setting high goals for them.” She warned that the reading goal should not be so high the student cannot reach it, but the goal should be high enough to effectively challenge the student. Participant 13 said a best practice for working with low reading self-efficacy students is setting “goals where they will be successful, but still challenged.”

**Feedback.** One of the components that changes a person’s self-efficacy is feedback (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Timeliness and frequency of feedback affect a student’s self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000). Providing timely and frequent feedback is a best practice for working with
a student with low reading self-efficacy. After analyzing the data and coding the answers, the researcher found that three of the 13 participants thought that appropriate and timely feedback was a best practice for working with a student with low reading-self-efficacy. Participant 3 stated that a best practice she uses when working with a student with a low reading self-efficacy is reviewing the student’s answers with the student quickly after the student has completed the assignment. She indicated that this practice helps give “the student an idea about the correct way to answer the problem, and they are able to see what they got correct.” Participant 9 told the researcher that providing specific encouraging feedback is a best practice for working with her students that have a low reading self-efficacy.

**Using high interest materials.** Student interest relates to student motivation to start and finish a task (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). When students are motivated, they have a higher rate of success, and when they are successful, their self-efficacy is raised. Students who are motivated readers have a higher reading self-efficacy (Guthrie et al., 2004). When asked about best practices for working with a student who has a low reading self-efficacy, three of the 13 participants explained finding materials and texts that were interesting to the student worked well. At the beginning of the school year, Participant 9 has her students complete an interest inventory to help her gain a better understanding of what interest the students. She does this so she “can match students with books and texts that are interesting to them.” This teacher has observed that when a student reads something that is interesting to them they will continue to read. Participant 6 found that her students with low reading self-efficacy responded better to texts that “they are interested in.”

**Modeling.** Schunk (2003) found that modeling was a critical best practice for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy. Modeling allows the student to see the correct use of new
strategy or skill. Six of the 13 participants stated that modeling was a best practice for working for students with a low reading self-efficacy. Participants 3 and 9 told the researcher that a best practice for working with a student with low reading self-efficacy is modeling by reading with the student. Participant 9 said she has seen increasing in reading self-efficacy when she pulls students in small groups and models fluent reading with the students. Participant 13 uses modeling in her classroom by "showing students how to do something the right way.” She said this helps low reading self-efficacy students because they have a chance to see a skill used in an appropriate way so they can self-check when they use the skill. Participant 4 models the cognitive processes she goes through when reading. She said this is a best practice for students with a low reading self-efficacy because they “see inside the mind of a fluent reader.”

**Working with peers.** Working with peers and peer feedback are some of the factors a person uses when developing their self-efficacy (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Allowing time for students to work with peers and providing ways for peers to offer feedback are best practices for working with students who have a low reading self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003). When asked about best practices for working with students that possess a low reading self-efficacy, five of the 13 participants found working with peers was a best practice for students with low reading self-efficacy. Participant 1 said, “Peer tutoring has been a strategy I use because sometimes a student is able to help another student out in a way that I cannot.” Participants 6 and 7 uses peer modeling when working with students with a low reading self-efficacy. “Having a student model the process of fluent reading or skimming skills for the class really helps my low students see how other students do it.” Participant 9 uses partner pairs in her classroom because “working with someone other than me is always a little more interesting to my students.”
**Small group instruction.** When asked about best practices used within their classroom for literacy instruction, three of the 13 participants identified small group instruction as a best practice which they used. Foorman and Torgesen (2001) found that small group instruction was a critical best practice for meeting the needs of all students within a classroom. Two of the teachers expressed their agreement with Foorman and Torgesen in that they used small groups to help with their low reading self-efficacy students. Participant 12 groups her students into small groups based on their proficiency level with a skill. During small group time, she works individually with the “small groups to re-teach or provide extra opportunities for practices with the skill or standard they are working on.” This is a similar practice for Participant 10 who uses small groups as a chance to work on skills students are lacking.

**Student choice.** Increasing student motivation is an important best practice for improving a student’s reading self-efficacy (Guthrie et al., 2004). One way teachers can increase student motivation is to provide students a choice in the tasks they must complete and a choice in the texts they are required to read. Offering students a choice was identified as a best practice by two of the 13 participants. Participant 11 was very passionate about offering students a choice in their reading texts. She stated, “So many times I have seen a student’s interest and desire spark for reading by just letting them choose what they want to read about.” She said that if those students had not been given a choice in reading materials they may not have become readers. Participant 9 lets her students choose their outside reading texts because they “are more likely to actually read a book that they chose as opposed to me assigning them a book to read.”

**Vocabulary instruction.** Three of the 13 participants identified vocabulary instruction as a best practice for working with students with a low reading self-efficacy. Participant 2 stated that he used “glossing” to help the students within his classroom understand the complex
vocabulary words in the primary texts that he uses. “Glossing” is the practice of skimming over the text to identify unknown words and working as a class to relate those vocabulary words to words or concepts they already understand. Participant 8 will go back to phonics to teach students the correct pronunciation of words before defining the words for students. Participant 6 has her students “break apart the words” into suffixes and prefixes to determine word meanings for unknown words. She stated, “This helps my students because they have a reference for many of the suffixes and prefixes and can use that to determine unknown word meanings.”

**Encouragement.** To foster an environment that raises a student’s reading self-efficacy, a teacher can offer students positive encouraging feedback about the student’s ability to complete a task (Schunk, 2003). This type of encouragement temporarily raises a student’s self-efficacy. Five of the 13 participants agreed with Schunk’s findings by telling the researcher that encouragement was a best practice for working with a student who has a low reading self-efficacy. Participant 5 said, “Encouraging them can go a long way with those students because many times they have not been told that they can do it.” She expanded and said she always tries to be an encourager to her students because “I could have been the only positive adult influence in their lives.” Participant 11 uses encouragement in all areas in her classroom; she stated, “Telling them they can do and you are there to help them do it can do a lot to raise how they think about themselves.” Having seen how praise and encouragement has increased motivation, Participant 3 told the researcher that this was a best practice for working with students with low reading self-efficacy because they now have a reason to try because someone “believes in them.”

**Anecdote of Student Whose Reading Self-Efficacy Increased**

To determine best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy, the researcher asked participants to recount a time they had a student whose reading self-efficacy was
increased. Three of the participants provided short stories about students whose reading self-efficacy had increased. After the participants gave the example, the researcher asked the participants to provide STAR testing data to analyze how the student’s reading level was impacted. STAR reading tests are computer administered test that determine the student’s reading level.

Participant 11 provided this synopsis about a student whose reading self-efficacy had increased in her classroom and the effect it had on his reading level:

I had a student last year who was a very low reader. After taking his STAR reading test at the beginning of the school year, his reading level was a 2.0. He constantly complained about reading and hated to read. As a reading teacher, I really push reading but he would not read. Through many months of trying books we finally found a series that he loved, the TombQuest series. After reading the first book in the series he was hooked and read most of the series in the year I had him. I really had to praise him and even got his mom involved on the praising. When he would read a book and pass the AR test, I would call his mom and let him tell her so she could praise him immediately. When he took his final STAR test last year he ended the year at a 4.2 reading level. He made more than two years’ worth of growth in a year.

Participant 4 provided an example of a student she had for several years in her literacy RTI classroom. Over the course of several years, she has been observed this student’s reading self-efficacy increase. This student’s STAR data showed she began two years ago on a 1.7 reading level, and currently she is working on a 5.0 reading level. In two years, she has had over three years’ worth of growth.
I had a student who was a very low reader. She had been in RTI for a couple of years. Fluency activities provided an opportunity for her to experience necessary reading skills repeatedly, and participate in peer evaluation. During each class, reading fluency was modeled and oral reading was required. Through these practices and progress monitoring, this student began to experience success. She read orally more willingly. Her self-confidence began to bloom. She is still making continued progress and appears to have a much higher self-esteem.

When asked to provide an example of a student whose reading self-efficacy had increased, Participant 6 gave this story:

I had a student who came to me and told me over and over again he hated reading. However, when the student was given choices and had some control over the content of what he was reading, his opinion began to change. We found something that he liked outside of school. He enjoyed He-man cartoons, so we looked for He-man books. He loved reading those books and began to have confidence in himself. He also wrote his own stories about himself and He-man going on adventures. He made almost a year’s growth in reading.

Participant 6 and the researcher found the student’s STAR reading level data from three years ago and discovered he started the school year at a 4.7 reading level and ended the school year at a 5.5 reading level.

**Instructional Practices Detrimental to Students with Low Reading Self-Efficacy**

In order to answer the second research question on what strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy, the researcher asked the participants to provide examples of strategies that a teacher uses which
have a negative impact on a student’s reading self-efficacy. After the researcher gathered the data for this question, five themes were found in the participants’ answers: inappropriate level, negative feedback, negative teacher attitude, lack of modeling, and using uninteresting materials.

Figure 4.9 graphically represents the frequency of the five themes in the participants’ answers.

Figure 4.9
*Frequency of strategies that negatively impact student’s reading self-efficacy (N = 13)*

Table 4.10 provides a list of the participants and their coded answers to the question about strategies that have a negative impact on a student’s reading self-efficacy.
Table 4.10
*Coded answers for strategies that have a negative impact on a student’s reading self-efficacy (N = 13)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Number</th>
<th>Coded Responses to Practices Negatively Impacting Reading Self-Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Negative Feedback, Uninteresting Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>negative teacher attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>inappropriate level, not modeling, uninteresting materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>negative teacher attitude, not modeling, uninteresting materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>negative teacher attitude, uninteresting materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>negative teacher attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>negative teacher attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>inappropriate level, negative feedback, negative teacher attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>uninteresting materials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Inappropriate level.** When students are presented with academic tasks that are not matched to their academic level, self-efficacy is negatively impacted because they will not put forth the effort required to finish the task. When asked about instructional practices or strategies teachers use which negatively impact students’ self-efficacy, two of the 13 participants stated that when teachers use materials which are not on the student’s instructional level negatively
impact his or her reading self-efficacy. Participant 10 said, “When teachers give students work that is too hard for them, they give up and don’t even try.” Participant 11 agreed with Participant 10 and told the researcher that when a student sees material that they believe is too hard for them to complete, they do not work to complete it and do not believe they can successfully complete the work.

**Negative feedback.** A person’s self-efficacy is developed through verbal persuasion which are verbal comments someone else makes about their ability to complete a task (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). When a person receives positive feedback about his or her ability to complete a task, his or her self-efficacy is increased. Conversely, when a person receives negative feedback about his or her ability to complete a task, his or her self-efficacy is decreased. Two of the 13 participants identified negative feedback as practice that is detrimental to a student’s self-efficacy. Participant 1 said when teachers discourage students through negative comments, it negatively impacts students’ self-efficacies. “When teachers are not positive, it can have a negative effect on a student’s self-efficacy.”

**Negative teacher attitude.** A teacher’s attitude has long lasting effects on students. A negative teacher was the most frequent answer to the interview question about practices which are detrimental to a student’s reading self-efficacy. Participant 5 told the researcher “if a teacher does not provide encouragement” it can have negative effects on a student’s reading self-efficacy. She elaborated by stating that when a teacher never provides a kind or encouraging word to a student and ignores them, they are providing the student with a negative image of themselves as a student. Participant 7 said, “When a teacher makes a student feel inadequate or inferior, it has a devastating impact on that student’s self-efficacy.” Participant 9 cautioned the
researcher to “be so very careful with words” because your words are what help a student develop their self-efficacy.

**Lack of modeling.** Modeling was found to be the most effective strategy for improving a student’s reading self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003). When a teacher does not model, he or she is developing a classroom which does not foster high reading self-efficacy. During the interview, two of the 13 participants told the researcher that when a teacher does not model new skills in his or her classroom, a student’s reading self-efficacy is negatively impacted. Participant 4 said, “When a student is not shown how to complete the new skill” their self-efficacy is negatively impacted. Also, Participant 5 expressed her opinion by saying when teachers “do no modeling in their classroom” it has a negative impact on a student’s reading self-efficacy.

**Using uninteresting materials.** A student must be interested in the material being presented for he or she to be motivated to complete the assignments. Motivation is a key factor in a student’s self-efficacy (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). After being asked about practices which had a negative impact on a student’s reading self-efficacy, five of the 13 participants stated that when teachers use material that is not interesting to the students it can be detrimental to students’ reading self-efficacy. Participant 1 said if a teacher “bores the student” their self-efficacy is negatively impacted. Participant 5 agreed with Participant 1’s statement and told the researcher that “if material is uninteresting, they lose motivation to read” therefore negatively impacting their reading self-efficacy. Participant 4 reverberated other participants’ answers by saying that “not using interesting materials” is a practice that teachers use which negatively impacts a student’s reading self-efficacy.
Observations

To triangulate the data for this qualitative study, the researcher observed three of the 13 participants during a literacy lesson. During the observations, the researcher looked for identified best practices that were being used within the lesson and the effect on students. The three participants who were observed were Participants 2, 9, and 12.

Participant 2 Observation

The lesson began with a review of the agenda on the board. Participant 2 reviewed went over with the students what was to be completed in the class for the day. After going over the lesson’s agenda, the teacher explained the lesson’s objectives and what students should be able to do after the lesson. Students were each provided a laptop to begin the lesson and were asked to answer key questions about the Westward Expansion from a website. Once students answered the questions, the teacher reviewed the correct answers with the students, and short discussions happened around the topic. The students were provided a copy of an informational article about the Westward Expansion and the health problems individuals encountered as they moved westward. The teacher gave students about three minutes to complete a cold read of the text. Next, the teacher proceeded to read the text aloud and clarified any vocabulary words in the reading. When the reading was complete, the teacher had the students move to their reading partners to complete analysis questions about the text. As partners finished their questions, the teacher provided them with a laptop again for them to continue their game of “Oregon Trial.”

After the observations, the researcher compared the field notes from the observation of Participant 2 to his description of a daily literacy lesson within his classroom. During the interview, Participant 2 gave the basic outline for his daily literacy lesson. After completing a bell ringer, Participant 2, along with the students, completed a close read of a primary source.
The whole class discussed certain elements of the primary source and the students engaged in conversations focused on the primary source. The lesson ended with analysis questions about the text. During this observation, the researcher observed the participant using a close read and questioning strategies with students. A bell ringer was not observed and the text was not a primary source. Four of the best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy were observed during this lesson: feedback, vocabulary instruction, working with peers, and student interest.

**Participant 9 Observation**

Participant 9 began her class by having her students watch a short video clip on Easter Island. When the video was over, she gave each student a copy of two informational texts on Easter Island. The students were instructed to skim through the articles and look for any unknown words. She brought the class back together by asking students what words needed to be defined. Some students asked questions about words, but most the students did not ask for definitions. After providing definitions, the teacher read the two texts aloud to the students while completing a “think aloud” with the students. When she came to information which needed to be pointed out, she would stop and have the students highlight it as she highlighted it. She would then explain her reasoning for highlighting the specific information. If she came to information that was like information they had learned in the video, she would make a note in the margin about it and have students to do the same. As she was completing the notes, she was thinking aloud by asking herself questions that would help her gain a deeper understanding of the text. In the class, all students were on topic and were completing the notes on their texts as she had suggested. After she annotated the texts, she provided the students with an argumentative writing prompt focusing on the two texts. Students were given paper to plan their writing and
then write their argumentative paper. After giving the students 30 minutes to complete the writing task, she ended the lesson by having students turn in their argumentative papers.

Once the observation was completed, the researcher compared the structure of the daily reading lesson to answer to the question about a daily reading lesson. In the interview, Participant 9 said this about her daily reading lesson:

It has evolved over the years. First, we read a text straight with no stopping, then we go back and they annotate as I annotate. We stop to pay attention to the skills which are the focus of the lesson. They struggle to annotate so I make them slow it down to look at the details and annotation allows us to do that.

During the observation, the researcher was able to verify Participant 9’s modeling of annotation skills. She modeled these skills meticulously with the students. Students copied everything she did. When comparing the ten identified best strategies for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy, the researcher found two of the best practices in the lesson: modeling and vocabulary instruction.

Participant 12 Observation

The researcher observed Participant 12 completing a review lesson before a unit test of a two-week unit on articles about energy and types of energy. The teacher began the lesson by giving the students an overview of the agenda for the day. She explained to the students they would be reviewing content learned in the energy articles they had been focusing on for the past two weeks. She asked for volunteers to provide examples of energy and types of energy before beginning the lesson. Most students were actively listening as this was a topic that was very interesting to them. Students were quickly giving answers about rollercoasters, bows and arrows, baseballs, and microwaves. After the short discussion about the topics covered over the
last two weeks, the teacher passed out the game of “I have, Who has” and explained the rules to students. Students were to call out the information or definitions on their card and another person with the vocabulary word matching the definition would say, “I have.” Students were actively engaged in the game and every student was participating. Some students made mistakes, but the teacher quickly told the students it was ok and moved on without staying focused on the wrong answer. Once the game was completed, the teacher projected a few examples of TNReady type questions for the type of informational text they were covering and worked as a group to answer the questions. To conclude the lesson, the teacher distributed the test to the students. There were three versions of the test. The three versions were deliberately handed to certain students because the test was differentiated. Matching the students reading level, there were three versions of the test: above level, on level, and below level.

When comparing Participant 12’s lesson to her description of a typical reading lesson, the researcher found no similarities between them. In the interview, Participant 12 stated she used round robin reading a lot in her reading lesson to keep everyone on track. Also, she cited the use of cooperative groups when working on text-based questioning and analysis questions of a text. During the observation, the teacher used a quick whole group discussion, a game, and leveled tests. When comparing the use of identified best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy, the researcher found that Participant 12 used student interest, vocabulary instruction, encouragement, and differentiation within this lesson.

**Summary**

During this qualitative study, the researcher interviewed 13 literacy teachers concerning about best practices for raising a student’s reading self-efficacy and practices that negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy. To answer the two major research questions, the
researcher asked the participants a variety of questions. The researcher found several themes in the participants’ answers. This chapter discussed the data gathered from the interviews, student data collection, and observations. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings of this study, implications for practice, and recommendations.
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into five sections to discuss the findings, conclusions, and implications of this study. The first section contains a short summary of the study, along with its purpose. The second section discusses the findings of the interview questions, observations, and student data and how these three types of data helped answer the two research questions. The third section discusses the conclusions in relation to the research questions that can be drawn from the data gathered. The fourth section examines the implications for the issues which were raised during this study. Lastly, the fifth section of this chapter provides suggestions for future research concerning increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine the literacy best practices from upper elementary and middle school teachers and how they apply these practices in their literacy lessons and routines to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. The study involved collecting data through semi-structured interviews with 13 literacy teachers in grades three through eight. Additionally, data were collected through three observations and STAR testing data on three students.

Gaining an understanding of the development of a student’s self-efficacy and the academic importance of self-efficacy garnered much attention in the literature review. Students’ success relates to their self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000). Enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal determine one’s self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Zimmerman, 2000). The positive effects of a high self-efficacy have far
reaching consequences for educators. Self-efficacy is directly related to a student’s academic accomplishments (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). The following is a descriptive analysis of the results from the interview questions that included coded data where themes emerged that were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe increase a student's reading self-efficacy?
2. What strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy?

Findings

Daily Literacy Lesson

The first question of the interview asked participants to describe a daily literacy lesson within their classroom. Each of the participants’ answers were different and there was not a consistent framework within every literacy lesson. Despite the various answers and routines in each answer, the researcher found six themes within the answers: bell ringers, close reading, questioning, vocabulary, goals, and writing.

Bell ringers. One-fifth of the participants used bell ringers at the beginning of their daily literacy lesson. These bell ringers last between five and 10 minutes and are used at the very beginning of the class. Using a bell ringer allowed students to change their frame of mind and mentally prepare for the literacy lesson.

Close reading. More than one-half of the participants used close reading in their daily literacy lessons. Teachers used this practice to teach students how to read and reread a text to gain a deeper understanding of a complex text. Part of the close reading process involved
modeling for the students. The participants incorporated this practice to expose students to fluent readers.

**Questioning.** Close to one-half of the participants utilized questioning strategies in their daily reading lesson. To assess a student’s comprehension of a text, teachers must ask questions about the text. The questions used by the teachers ranged from basic questions about the text to in-depth analytical questions about the text. Teachers developed these questions or used the questions from the reading series.

**Vocabulary.** Of the participating teachers, 30 percent incorporated vocabulary instruction within their daily literacy lessons. Vocabulary was either explicitly taught or taught during the close reading section of the literacy lesson. A portion of the participants have students look for unknown words or develop a vocabulary list for the text. While some teachers review unknown vocabulary before reading the text, others explain the vocabulary words while reading the text.

**Establishing goals.** One-fifth of the participants established goals for the lesson and gave students a preview of the goals for the lesson. Teachers used goals to give students a clear understanding of what was needed to succeed in the lesson. Goals guided the students learning and helped keep the teacher on track for the lesson.

**Writing.** Of all the participants, only one-fifth included writing in their daily literacy lesson. Students write to prompts which relate to their reading texts or to a different text that is used only for teaching writing. While some students write daily, others wrote as a culminating weekly project.
Definition of Best Practice

Personal definitions will vary greatly between each person. However, when participants were asked to define best practices, the researcher found three themes within the participants’ answers: best for the student, individualized instruction, and research-based strategies. The most popular theme for this question was doing what is best for the student ($n = 5$). The second most popular answer was a research-based strategy ($n = 4$). The last theme discovered that individualized instruction ($n = 3$) was an incorporated best practice.

Successful Best Practices

To answer the first research question for this study, the researcher asked participants to identify successful best practices used within their classroom. Participants were asked to provide examples of the best practices implemented that allowed for students to experience success. When students experience success, their self-efficacy is raised. After the answers were coded, five themes emerged: modeling, note-taking, activating background knowledge, small groups, and vocabulary instruction.

Modeling. Close to one-half of participants identified modeling as a best practice for teaching a new reading concept. Other researchers have found modeling to be a successful best practice for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003). Participant 10 utilized the strategy “I do, We do, You do” to slowly release responsibility to the student, and she had seen success with this strategy for students with low reading self-efficacy. Modeling allows the student to see how to successfully complete a task. Modeling used in the classroom ranged from listening to fluent readers to teacher “think alouds.”

Note-taking. One-sixth of the participants considered note-taking as a best practice for teaching a new reading concept. Participant 3 used PowerPoints to deliver notes to students.
Teachers see note-taking as a strategy that students can use to gather their thoughts and review important information at their own pace.

**Activating background knowledge.** Of the 13 participants, one-fifth found that activating background knowledge was a successful best practice when teaching a new reading skill. Participants used technology to give student’s needed background knowledge about the topic covered in the lesson. Activating background knowledge increases a student’s reading comprehension (Thompkins, 2004).

**Small groups.** One-fifth of the participants incorporated small group instruction because they felt it was a best practice for introducing new information to students. Small group time provided students an opportunity to work with peers and see how other fluent readers interact with a text or new information. One participant used small group time as an opportunity for students to analyze each other’s work.

**Vocabulary.** Vocabulary instruction was the second most popular best practice for teaching a new reading skill with more than one-third of the participants using it while teaching a new skill. The participants used vocabulary instruction at the beginning of a new skill or text to build a foundation of background knowledge for the students. Providing students with working definitions of new words allowed students to read without stopping to look at definitions.

**Best Practices for Increasing Reading Self-Efficacy**

When participants identified best practices for increasing reading self-efficacy, the researcher found 10 themes in responses. Of the 10 themes, three themes were discovered as successful best practices used to teach a new reading skill: modeling, small groups, and vocabulary instruction. Participants identified these strategies and practices as being used within their classroom and worked to increase students’ reading self-efficacy.
**Differentiation.** Differentiation was the most popular response for the question concerning best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy. Two-thirds of the participants cited differentiation as a strategy which helped increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. This strategy is effective for students with a low reading self-efficacy because the teacher can tailor the instruction to meet the individual needs of the student. Individualization of the curriculum allows for a higher rate of student success.

**High expectations.** One-sixth of the participants stated that holding students to high expectations was an effective strategy for increasing reading self-efficacy. Setting high yet achievable goals was a cited successful practice by two of the 13 participants. According to Meece, Anderman, and Anderman (2006), there is a link between a teacher’s expectations and the student’s achievement level.

**Feedback.** Feedback has a direct relationship with a person’s self-efficacy (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). One-fourth of the participant echoed this statement and recounted to the researcher that feedback was an effective strategy for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy. Feedback provides the student with information needed to make their work successful. However, for feedback to be effective, it must be consistent and timely (Zimmerman, 2000).

**Interest.** One-fourth of the participants indicated that the use of high interest materials was a best practice for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy. Student interest is related to student motivation, and motivation relates to success. When students feel successful, their self-efficacy is increased (Guthrie et al., 2004). These teachers realized the importance of student motivation and found a way to increase it using high interest materials.

**Modeling.** Modeling was the second most popular best practice cited by the participants with one-half of the participants identifying it as a best practice for working with a student with
low reading self-efficacy. With this strategy, the student sees how to correctly use a new skill or strategy. Schunk (2003) found modeling to be a best practice for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy.

**Working with peers.** Over one-third of the participants named working with peers as a best practice for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy. Participants cited using partners and peer reviewing as strategies they showed to help improve a student’s reading self-efficacy. Working with peers provides students with an opportunity to work with other students in a non-threatening way.

**Small groups.** One-sixth of the participants stated that using small groups was a best practice for working with students with a low reading self-efficacy. Small group instruction provides a practical means for teachers to meet the needs of all the students within their classroom (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001). Teachers grouped students according to proficiency level.

**Student choice.** An important best practice for working with students with low reading self-efficacy is student choice (Guthrie et al., 2004). However, only one-sixth of the participants cited student choice as a best practice. The two participants that cited student choice mentioned that student choice sparked an interest and the student began to read more.

**Vocabulary building.** One-fourth of the participants told the researcher that vocabulary building was a best practice. The participants used vocabulary building by the student skimming the text looking for unknown vocabulary words or breaking unknown words down into the phonemic parts. Providing students with definitions for unknown vocabulary words helps them read a passage more fluently.
**Encouragement.** More than one-third of the participants stated that using encouragement was a best practice for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy. Schunk (2003) found that teachers can foster an environment that raises a student’s reading self-efficacy by providing them with encouragement. The participants saw encouragement as a necessary tool for increasing the reading self-efficacy of a student who has a low reading self-efficacy.

**Negative Teaching Strategies for Low Reading Self-Efficacy Students**

In order to answer the second research question, the participants identified teaching strategies that negatively impacted a student’s reading self-efficacy, through the use of classroom examples. After the answers were analyzed and grouped, the following five themes emerged: inappropriate level, negative feedback, negative teacher attitude, not modeling, and uninteresting material.

**Inappropriate level.** One-sixth of the participants cited academic tasks not matching a student’s academic level as a detrimental practice to a student’s reading self-efficacy. When students are given tasks that do not match their academic level, they do not put forth the effort required to successfully complete the task. When students are not able to successfully complete an academic task, their self-efficacy decreases.

**Negative feedback.** Verbal persuasion, or verbal feedback, about a person’s performance is a major component of a person’s self-efficacy. One-sixth of the participants stated that negative feedback decreases a student’s reading self-efficacy. Participants explained that negative feedback was the negative comments a teacher makes about a student’s performance.

**Negative teacher attitude.** The most cited detrimental practice for a student’s reading self-efficacy was negative teacher attitude. More than half of the participants cited negative
teacher attitude as having a negative impact on a student’s reading self-efficacy. Negative teacher attitude encompasses lack of encouragement, making a student feel inadequate, and ignoring students.

**Not modeling.** One-sixth of the participants stated that not modeling for the students was a detrimental practice for a student’s reading self-efficacy. Modeling was the second most popular best practice for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy, and two of the participants cited that the lack of modeling has a negative impact on a student’s reading self-efficacy. When teachers do not model, students do not know what is required for success.

**Uninteresting material.** The second most popular negative teaching strategy for a student’s reading self-efficacy is the use of material that is uninteresting to the student. More than one-third of the participants identified the use of uninteresting material as a practice that has negative effects on a student’s reading self-efficacy. Using boring material demotivates the student, and their self-efficacy is negatively impacted.

**Student Data**

Three of the participants provided the researcher with student data for a student whose self-efficacy had increased. STAR reading level data were provided.

**Student 1.** The first student’s reading level moved from a 2.0 to a 4.2 in one school year. The successful best practices that were used with this student were interesting materials and high levels of encouragement. The student found a book series he was interested in and the teacher encouraged this interest by providing him access to these books. She also provided him with a lot of encouragement, praise, and positive parental notification.

**Student 2.** The second student had been with the teacher for two years. Over the course of two years, this student’s STAR reading level had moved from a 1.7 to a 5.0. The identified
best practices used with this student were working with peers and modeling. The student worked closely with the teacher while the teacher modeled fluent reading. Also, the student had to participate in peer evaluation activities with reading.

**Student 3.** The third student was a self-professed non-reader. However, the student’s teacher used two of the identified best practices to increase his reading self-efficacy: student choice and interest. The student chose his own reading materials which were interesting to him. After being given a choice, the student began to read and his reading level increased from a 4.7 to a 5.5

**Observations**

In order to observe best practices in action, the researcher observed three of the 13 participants during a literacy lesson. As the observation was being conducted, the researcher examined the implementation of best practices in action. During the observations, the previously identified best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy were observed.

**Observation of Participant 2.** During the observation of Participant 2, four of the 10 best practices identified by participants were included in the lesson: feedback, vocabulary instruction, working with peers, and student interest. Students were provided feedback when the teacher provided students with the correct answers to the questions. Participant 2 incorporated vocabulary instruction by reviewing unknown words with the students and having them “skim” the text for unknown vocabulary words. After the teacher conducted a close read of the informational text, students worked with peers to answer analysis questions about the text. To keep student interest, the students continued their game of “Oregon Trail.” Students were actively engaged in the lesson. There was not a lack of participation by any student in the
classroom. Students were comfortable with looking for unknown words and working within
groups to answer the questions. The teacher set students up for success with this lesson.

**Observation of Participant 9.** In Participant 9’s observation, the researcher noted two
of the best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy were a part of the lesson.
Participant 9 used vocabulary instruction and modeling in her lesson. For vocabulary
instruction, students found unknown vocabulary words in the two informational texts.
Vocabulary instruction was a part of the lesson even though students did not actively participate
in this portion of the lesson. While reading both texts aloud to students, the teacher completed
“think alouds” and modeled how to appropriately annotate the text. The modeling provided in
the lesson was maximal. It looked as if students began to lose interest in the lesson because the
modeling was too extensive for their academic level, and this may have caused them to become
disengaged in the lesson.

**Observation of Participant 12.** Participant 12’s lesson reviewed information the class
had been studying for the past two weeks. This lesson used four of the 10 identified best
practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy: interest, vocabulary instruction,
encouragement, and differentiation. The teacher was reviewing a unit on energy that was
interesting to the students; moreover, the researcher saw the interest and enthusiasm of the
students through their eagerness to provide examples of types of energy and to actively
participate in the brief discussion at the beginning of class. Vocabulary instruction was
accomplished through a game, and during the game, the teacher used encouragement by not
focusing on the wrong answers the students provided. The teacher differentiated the tests by
matching the students reading level to one of the three tests. Students were actively engaged in
the lesson and were eager to participate in the classroom.
Conclusions

Research Question 1

The first research question was *what strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe increase a student's reading self-efficacy?* In order to answer this question, the researcher asked participants to identify best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy. The answers to the interview questions provided the researcher with a wide variety of strategies. These answers were consistent with the research presented in the literature review. Differentiation, modeling, working with peers, and encouragement were the most provided answers to this question. Providing students with feedback, providing high interest materials, and vocabulary instruction were also repeated strategies discussed during the interviews. Three of the identified best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy were identified as best practices for introducing a new reading skill or text: modeling, small groups, and vocabulary instruction.

The researcher verified the use of the cited best practices in the classroom through classroom observations of three participants. The participants used some of the identified best practices but not all the identified best practices. In two of the classrooms, the researcher observed the effective implementation of the best practices. Students in these classrooms were actively engaged in the lesson and were active participants. If there was anything that they did not understand, they were willing to ask for help. However, in one of the classrooms, the researcher saw best practices in use, but the students were disengaged in the lesson. The teacher incorporated modeling in the lesson, but it appeared that the modeling was done to such an extent the students became bored and disengaged in the lesson.
Research Question 2

The second research question was what strategies do upper elementary and middle school literacy teachers believe negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy? The researcher asked participants to identify practices or strategies that teachers use that negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy. After reviewing the data, it was clear that the practices which were thought to be most detrimental to a student’s reading self-efficacy were negative teacher attitude and using material that is not interesting to the students. Also, the participants in this study identified negative feedback, lack of modeling, and materials not matched to a student’s academic level as having a negative impact on a student’s reading self-efficacy.

Implications

This qualitative study examined best practices in which third through eighth grade literacy teachers used to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy and practices which negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy. The interviews were mostly positive and provided a variety of strategies to use to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy. Important implications for the literacy classroom emerged within this study. Teachers can readily identify several best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy and several practices that negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy.

After conducting the three observations, the researcher found the use of some of the identified best practices but was not able to observe all 10 identified best practices. The use of these identified best practices must be incorporated in such a way that students are still engaged. Practitioners must be careful to not overuse an instructional strategy. Overusing a strategy appeared to have had a negative impact on student engagement in the lessons.


**Future Research**

Despite the research that has been conducted on self-efficacy, little research exists on reading self-efficacy and ways to increase it. This was a small study conducted with 13 literacy teachers in grades three through eight; therefore, results cannot be generalized to the larger educational population. Further research could offer a deeper analysis of practices for increasing reading self-efficacy. Practitioners would benefit from a deeper analysis of teacher determined best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy.

Further research could be conducted concerning student determined best practices for increasing reading self-efficacy. With this research, the researcher could interview students to determine personal experiences with the strategies used within these classrooms. This research would provide the needed insight into student perceptions of best practices for increasing their reading self-efficacy and how effective they feel those practices are.

Additional research might include quantitative data concerning the effectiveness of the implemented strategies. This could be achieved using student TCAP like data. The researcher could gather TCAP like data for selected low reading self-efficacy students before the use of the suggested instructional strategies. After the course of a school year where the strategies were implemented, the researcher would gather ending year data to compare achievement increases for the identified students.

**Summary**

This qualitative study examined teacher determined best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy and what practices negatively impact a student’s reading self-efficacy. Data were collected through personal interviews with participants, observations of three participants, and student reading level data for three identified students. The conclusions
from this study provided the researcher with a list of 10 strategies teachers use to increase a student’s reading self-efficacy and five practices that have a negative effect on a student’s reading self-efficacy. These findings for best practices for increasing a student’s reading self-efficacy are reflective of the effective practices found in the literature review.
References

AdvancED. (2014). Executive summary: Edgemont elementary school Cocke County school system. AdvancED. Alpharetta, GA.


Appendix A

Director of School Approval Letter
November 15, 2016

Dear Mrs. Joey Lynn Byrd,

As the Director of Cocke County Schools, I am aware of the research procedures for your study. I give permission for your study to take place at the schools throughout the county and for you to have contact with the teachers as described in the research protocol. My permission is contingent upon IRB approval.

Sincerely,

Manney Moore

Director of Schools
Appendix B

Letter to Potential Participants
Dear [Participant’s Name],

My name is Joey Lynn Byrd. I am a doctoral student in Carson Newman University’s education department. I am working with my committee chair, Dr. Brenda Dean. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, which concerns literacy teacher best practices for helping students believe they are better readers.

If you agree to participate in my research, I will conduct an interview with you at a time of your choice. The interview will involve questions about some of your practices when you are teaching reading. It should last about thirty minutes to an hour. With your permission, I will audiotape and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide and will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose not to be audiotaped, I will take notes instead. If you agree to be audiotaped, but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. Or if you do not wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

Please let me know if you are interesting in participating in this study or if you have any questions or concerns. Please contact me at (865) 322-1061 or jsbyrd@cn.edu.

Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Joey Lynn Byrd
Appendix C

Consent to Participate in Research
Consent to Participate in Research

Best Practices for Increasing a Student’s Reading Self-Efficacy

Purpose of this research study:
The purpose of this study is to look at teacher best practices for improving a student’s reading self-efficacy for students in grades 3 through 8.

What you will be asked to do:
If you agree to participate you will be asked to participate in an interview where I will be asking various questions about your reading instruction and practices that help your students believe they are good readers. I will audiotape and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide.

Time required:
1 Hour

Risk and benefits:
There are minimal risks for you by participating in this study. You will receive no direct benefit for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:
Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results from this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will assign a code number and pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this number will be locked in an off-site location. Once the study is complete and the data have been analyzed, the code numbers and pseudonyms will be promptly destroyed.

Rights:
Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in this study. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the study at any time. Whether you choose to participate in the research and whether you choose to answer a question or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you.

Right to withdraw from the study:
You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time.

Whom to contact if you have any questions:
Joey Lynn Byrd, (865) 322-1061 or jsbyrd@cn.edu

Agreement
I have read the information above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: ________________________________ Date: ____________________
Appendix D

Interview Questions
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please describe a typical reading lesson in your classroom.

2. What does a “best practice” mean to you?

3. What does high reading self-efficacy look like? Low reading self-efficacy?

4. What are the benefits for students when they have a high reading self-efficacy?

5. Describe one practice you use in teaching a new reading concept in your class?

6. How does this practice help students with low reading self-efficacy?

7. Which practices work best when working with a student with a low reading self-efficacy? Why?

8. Think about a time you saw a student’s reading self-efficacy increase. Tell me about that time.

9. What were the instructional practices you were using during that time?

10. How did the student respond to those?

11. How did this affect their achievement level?

12. In your experience, what are instructional practices that lower a student’s reading self-efficacy?

13. How did this instructional practice affect the student’s achievement level?