Perceptions of Out-of-School Reading Motivation for Female Middle School Students

Danielle Porch

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PERCEPTIONS OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL READING MOTIVATION FOR FEMALE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
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PERCEPTIONS OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL READING MOTIVATION FOR FEMALE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Literacy engagement and motivation to read is lacking in middle school reading classrooms. Educators struggle with the challenge of motivating students to read and actively engage with text both inside and outside of school. Research indicates that female and male middle school students have unique characteristics and habits as readers. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of female middle school students regarding their out-of-school recreational reading time, their attitudes towards reading, and their reading habits. The themes derived from this study indicated the students’ desires to have their reading instruction personalized and have their reading education built upon their own reading interests. This study identified strategies to increase the amount of time female middle school students devote to reading inside and outside of school in conjunction with suggested policies that will aid middle school female students with increased reading time.
PREFACE

As a middle school reading teacher, it was always a struggle to determine what would get students to participate in the books and reading-related activities I had planned for the class. The students tend to complain about text selections, and the associated assignments, along with receiving minimum engagement and motivation to read from students. Despite many efforts and changing instructional practices, none yielded desired outcomes of students actively engaging with the texts and completing the assignments with effort. Over time, I noticed those female students, once engaged with the reading class, began to show diminished motivation in class. The lack of reading motivation and engagement from the female middle school students was disappointing primarily because that particular population had always engaged with reading and was more willing to participate in reading-related activities than the male students. Exploring new tactics to get all students' full participation was needed. A shift within the classroom needed to take place.

Experimenting with various instructional practices to encourage more reading took place. Reading to the students by utilizing various character voices and creating assignments thought of as fun was designed to accompany the reading. None of the proposed changes were embraced by the students. Going back to the “drawing board” and creating another way to get buy-in from the students to read more in class ultimately leads them to want to read even outside school. After attending professional development opportunities for reading teachers and reviewing research on middle school reading, a commonality amongst both was to allow middle school students a level of autonomy within instruction and allow students opportunities to self-select their reading material. As a reading teacher, being open to moving away from the traditional way of teaching reading had to take place. Forging a new pathway forward included more student autonomy and allowing
students to self-select their reading material.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are quite a few people to acknowledge and thank for their support throughout my journey to pursue my doctoral degree. First and foremost, I would not have been able to begin this journey without the love and support of my son Robert Spicer, Jr., my mother, Pamela Porch, and my sister and best friend, Jerelyn Denson, who each rallied me to the finish line. Each was supportive and understanding of all those times when I had to miss outings and was forced to make other sacrifices that had to be made when I needed to write or attend class. Each was dynamic in their support of me. Every step of this process, from checking in on my progress to lighting a fire under me when I ran out of steam, taught me to give myself grace and remain a constant anchor throughout the process. They gave tough love when needed and offered sympathy when tears arose. To each of them, I say I love you and will forever be eternally grateful. You EACH are my anchor, and I LOVE YOU ALL IMMENSELY.

I also have to express how grateful and fantastic it has been working with my Chair, Dr. Christine Nelson. Dr. Nelson’s support is unmatched. She encouraged me to continue even when my journey looked bleak and that it may come to a premature end when I had to become a caregiver. I will always be grateful to her for that. Dr. Nelson’s feedback and expertise were simply invaluable. You spent countless hours reviewing and providing suggested revisions for my body of work. I truly appreciate your commitment to helping me advance with my writing, never letting me give up, and seeing my true potential.

Finally, I would also like to thank two members of my cohort, Carrie and Ebony. We started this journey together like the Three Musketeers, always supporting each other on this journey. I learned a great deal from both of you. I appreciated the late-night laughs when we each
felt like giving up and the ongoing support and sisterhood. We have grown together throughout this process, and I consider ourselves life-long sisters. We are collectively at the point where we can say WE DID IT, and CONGRATULATIONS to both of you!

These past three years, I can honestly say I feel honored and blessed to have a great pool of family and friends who are incredibly encouraging and caring. My doctoral journey would not have come to fruition without all of these exceptional people in my life.
DEDICATION

To my son Robert, everything I do has always been for you. I want to show you that anything and everything is possible as long as you believe in yourself and have perseverance. Please know I loved you even before I met you - Just the Two of Us.

To Giselle Ray, my Goddaughter, I want to show you that Black Girl Magic is a real thing, and you possess it as well. All things are within your grasp. I want to live by example and show you that your dreams can become a reality. Always go for your dreams.

To Mommy – Pamela Porch, and Sissy - Jerelyn Denson, thank you for always helping me see all the blessings and beauty around me even when I have not. You both show me love and support even when I feel unworthy, and you stand in the gap for me, and I will forever be eternally grateful.

To every girl who pushes through when difficulty and lack stare you in the face. To every girl who feels unheard even when screaming from the rooftop. To every girl who feels ignored, not special, or left out, please know I feel you, I support you, I love you, and I got you. Let your inner glow light your path to a fantastic future.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I remember the day I distributed and revealed the title of the latest novel I would be reading with my eighth-grade students. I decided to introduce them to a hardcover, two-inch-thick piece of literary work entitled *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings* written by Maya Angelou. I chose this book because of the symbolism and themes such as racism and oppression which my students experienced. My students expressed how their experiences began once they embarked upon their teen years and shared examples of being followed around stores or constantly being stopped by law enforcement when they were in cars with parents or other family members. The students’ stories aligned with the characters within the text they opted to read. Those shared experiences became a great place to start sparking an interest in what we were reading. Dialogue transpired around what was happening in the text and with the characters. This piece of literature was not a school or district requirement. I gave the book to my students to bring about an interest to read something different from what they were traditionally assigned to read in their prescribed textbook. As I distributed the books, I watched as each student carefully inspected the front cover and turned it over to see what this book entailed. They sat passively and waited for me to tell them what to do. I worked diligently to read aloud from the novel with all the enthusiasm and theatrics I could muster as a way to engage and spark interest in the adolescent faces before me. They yawned and tolerated my level of excitement as I attempted to bring each character’s voice to life. My endeavors encountered very little engagement and lackluster reactions on the student’s part. The lack of engagement prompted me to stop reading before the end of class to explain why they should love reading. No response, and so, the battle began. As the weeks passed, the novel became integrated into our classroom environment. Because of our constant
references to situations that occurred in the text, the students made connections, and their desire to want to read more and more of the book emerged.

Being a reading teacher for 14 years and being cognizant of student exposure to various genres plays a significant role in developing reading skills. Reading skills such as decoding and using context clues while working through a piece of text is essential, primarily when provided with opportunities to self-select text which is generally done in isolation and not as a collective activity. As the students worked with the reading material they selected, it became noticeable that they were more engaged because they made more requests to read their book selections during reading class. The students’ requests were based purely on their interests.

Student choice is not just a menu of decisions, but it is about empowering students to establish what they want to learn. It involves a paradigm shift of inspiring possibilities. It allows freedom and power in the classroom. It provides students the autonomy to determine the route in which they want to go to learn new skills. Student choice enhances students’ excitement about topics, curriculum, and their interests (Selena Kiser p.1).

This new reading behavior contrasted with their behavior when required to read stories from the basal reader, which is nothing more than an anthology of short stories of various genres compiled into a textbook. The students became absorbed by their self-selected books, the reading classes were quiet, and the time raced. Subsequently, students would come to class eager and excited because they could continue to read their book of choice during their regular reading class rather than focus on structured text and assignments. Independent reading was a break from the norm and provided students with choice and time to read, which became the primary focus in the classroom. Through anecdotal observations and discussions with students, they developed an enthusiasm to read outside of school in addition to increased motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy as readers. Well over half of the class would share their latest read with all of us in the class during the “Maybe You’d Like It Too” segment during reading class. During the weekly
share about book time, students shared information about the characters, plot, and setting, as well as what they truly enjoyed about the text and what they would change about the story itself if they were the author. Students did not share the ending of the book or any plot twist. It was also noticeable that results from graded assignments or exams were more in-depth responses that included examples and literary terms. This shift was unlike any previous experience. For example, the responses tended to consist of incomplete thoughts without examples to substantiate their answers. The change encountered by the students and their new reverence for reading was evident in their improved grades.

During student choice time, being aware of the classroom atmosphere meant being cognizant of the boys and girls in the class while observing whether they were engaging with the text. Their expressions sometimes showed how they felt about our newly acquired reading practice. Some mouthed the words on the pages they were reading. Some had their head in their hands with the appearance of boredom. Some vigorously turned the pages as if they wanted to get in as much reading as possible before student choice time was over. The type of reading material that the students chose was essential. The books they picked coincided with their interest, and the selections made them more motivated to read. If they did not like their selection, then they remained passively engaged. The students’ gender was the primary factor in how the classroom library was supplied. Since the optimum goal was for all students to engage in reading during student choice time actively, the available material types were crucial to success. For example, stocking a library full of teen romance would not be beneficial because if gender norm stereotypes held true, boys would not be interested in that particular genre. Similarly, if the classroom library contained books about mechanics or video games, the girls’ population could be deterred from reading those texts. Ultimately, observations revealed that students’ chosen
books determined their motivation and engagement level. Those pieces of text in the classroom library, most importantly, determine if the students were going to go a step further and continue to read recreationally outside of school since they could now see firsthand how reading can be enjoyable and linked to their interests. At the end of every student choice period, students of both genders would approach me about taking their book home to finish or simply to continue reading. If the students remained engaged with their choice books and enjoyed what they were reading, then as their reading teacher, it is believed that they would continue reading and fully participate in choice time.

**Purpose**

This study examines five eighth-grade girls’ perceptions and experiences regarding their out-of-school reading time, how middle school students select books, and how instructional practices influence out-of-school reading habits. This study will focus specifically on the factors contributing to students’ opting to read outside of school. Few studies focus on urban middle school girls' out-of-school recreational reading time (Cantrell, 2018). These studies also neglect to investigate the contributing factors that lead students to engage in out-of-school reading. The perceptions of middle school girls are missing regarding student choice and its’ relationship to out-of-school reading. Much of the literature addresses why boys are not motivated to read inside or outside of school, but current literature omits the stories and descriptions of what, how, and why urban girls believe their out-of-school reading time has decreased or increased as they progress through their adolescent years (Cantrell, 2018). This study focuses on capturing the perceptions and stories of five eighth-grade girls regarding their out-of-school recreational reading time. This study also examines how teacher instructional practices and behaviors influence student motivation, self-efficacy, engagement, and choice.
Much of the existing literature that speaks to out-of-school reading time for middle school students include the concept of allowing students autonomy and choice to impact motivation and self-efficacy (Eccles & Wigfield, 1997). The amount of reading time needed for and devoted to middle school students is missing from the current literature. Rarely are students afforded opportunities to engage with choice texts inside of school. The International Reading Association (2014) shares that when teachers encourage students to read outside of school, external reading opportunities develop into an extension of what takes place within the classroom, resulting in increased reading achievement and motivation. Mullis et al. (2012) also found that teachers see the relationship between reading achievement, motivation, and engagement when students read outside of school.
Table 1.

Definition of Terms

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<td>Motivation</td>
<td>It is what initiates behavior, controls its intensity, maintains behavior, stops the behavior, and mediates choice (Weiner, 1992)</td>
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<td>Engagement</td>
<td>The degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education (Glossary of Education Reform, <a href="https://www.edglossary.org/student-engagement/">https://www.edglossary.org/student-engagement/</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>An individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's motivation, behavior, and social environment (Bandura, 1977).</td>
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<td>Student Choice in Reading</td>
<td>Student empowerment and ownership of the reading experience, including what, when, how, and even where they read. Choice encourages students to read in a way that supports their individual needs, goals, and interests and—most importantly—yields better outcomes (<a href="https://www.waterford.org/resources/student-choice-tips-to-boost-reading-comprehension/">https://www.waterford.org/resources/student-choice-tips-to-boost-reading-comprehension/</a>)</td>
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<td>Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>A methodology to describe the personal stories utilized by researchers to understand and then present real-life experiences through the stories of the research participants (Connelly, F. M., &amp; Clandinin, D. J. 1990).</td>
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<td>Expectancy-Value Theory</td>
<td>Expectancy-Value theory suggests that if students value active learning, believe they can successfully participate in active learning, and perceive a low cost to doing active learning, they will choose to deeply engage in active learning activities (Cooper, K. M., Ashley, M., &amp; Brownell, S. E., 2017).</td>
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I am inspired to conduct this study because I have observed students being more engaged with the self-selected material versus when reading short stories or excerpts from the prescribed reading material. Student choice moves students towards independence and increases their likelihood of reading outside the school environment.
As an educator who implements and follows the constructivist instruction model centered around the theory that learners are active participants and knowledge is built on individual experiences, I wanted students to have active ownership over and participation in their learning. Herman (1995) suggests learning is effective when students are engaged in the academic environment, such as asking and answering questions and demonstrating what they have learned versus sitting passively in their seats receiving information from the teacher. Furthermore, providing middle school students opportunities for engagement through student choice and selecting their reading material opens the door for students to take responsibility for their learning and their learning happens as a result of the constructivist model. When students read frequently, they practice reading skills such as identifying the main idea of a passage and utilizing context clues to understand the material better. The more students have opportunities to read, the more adept they become at using those literacy skills (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

According to research by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), teachers must design instruction for students to uncover new learning and apply new understanding to avoid disconnection from the learning process.

According to Noori (2007), learning occurs when students can find a way of creating or finding meaning in what information the teacher is providing. Students learn most when participating through conversation or discussion and demonstrate what they have learned through their assignments (Sloat et al., 2007). Educators increase student efficacy by building upon connections and prior knowledge of the material. The elevated self-efficacy will motivate them to work harder academically (Coleman, 2005; Blum, 2005). The books within my classroom library had to incorporate not only the interest of my students but stories that made connections or mirrored their experiences. Once I incorporated relatable material for my students, my
classroom shifted from idle, unengaged students to a community of readers where students read more than before.

Willard Olson (1987) indicates that learning is a process that requires students to experience elements of choice with instruction. With guidance from teachers who offer students opportunities to choose, the learner will discover and learn confidently, improve motivation and self-efficacy, and increase school reading time with success and a growing sense of personal achievement. Offering middle school students an opportunity to choose and the time to engage with the text exemplifies literacy instructional practices that develop students’ reading understanding. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) share a theory that motivation has to be at the forefront of any academic challenge students are faced with in school. Literature on the topic of student motivation and its impacts is plentiful (Schiefele et al., 2012; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). One theory that has risen out of motivation is the expectancy-value theory. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) identify ways in which student motivation assists with academic expectations, and the expectations can mirror the outcomes the students strive to receive in their classes. The expectancy-value theory is often used to predict and determine academic behaviors relating to specific tasks across a myriad of grade levels. This study will investigate why five eighth-grade girls feel that their out-of-school recreational reading time has changed and if the change impacts their attitude and habits towards reading.

Through this study, shifting policy in reading and introducing a reading instructional practice is the focus. Middle school students’ engagement with literacy hinges upon their motivation, efficacy, and the instructional practices employed in reading classes. When motivation, efficacy, and instructional practices meet the classroom norms, then the needs of all students will be met, and achievement becomes impacted.
Utilizing a reading survey and an interview with open-ended questions will be the source for obtaining information that drives this study. Understanding all the facets that create an environment where middle school students are supported and encouraged to read can further drive students to read outside of school.

**Rationale**

This qualitative study will use the perceptions of eighth-grade girls to inform how middle school girl students can increase their out-of-school reading based upon shifts in instructional practices and behaviors, leading to increased academic motivation, academic achievement, and engagement.

Gathering information on girls’ perceptions and stories allows educators to garner instructional best practices that highlight student motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy in reading. The student’s perceptions and stories shape the views on in-school and out-of-school recreational reading. This study will further explain the challenges as they emerge. As a former elementary school reading teacher, I understand how vital it is to foster a love of reading in middle school students. Allowing students autonomy and the opportunity to engage with books that interest them will open the door for students to engage and practice reading various texts. If texts align with student interests and students are exposed to material that coincides with their experiences, then positive shifts emerge with motivation and engagement. The students will likely continue reading the same or similar texts outside school (Cox & Guthrie, 2001). Because of my experience with middle school students and reading, this study will expand educators’ knowledge of assisting their middle school students with engaging more with text outside of school and possibly impacting their overall attitude and habits towards reading inside of school.

Reading motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy directly coincides with how much students participate in the act of reading. Academic achievement becomes evident when reading
occurs inside and outside of school (Cox & Guthrie, 2001). Understanding what motivates students to engage with the reading process inside and outside of school helps educators make shifts so that students ultimately become successful in the content area of reading.

**Goals**

This study strives to determine and understand the perceptions of why middle school girl students’ out-of-school reading time has changed, and how any instructional shift impacts their reading attitudes and habits. When students engage with texts in school that they prefer and enjoy, the hope is that they will be motivated to continue reading outside of school. Providing middle school students autonomy to self-select their reading material allows for more engagement with the reading process inside and outside school. Once the students are engaged, motivation toward reading naturally follows (Gallik, 1999). It is the hope that the findings in this study will inform instructional practices and influence motivation, engagement, and achievement that elevates student interest in reading outside of school.

Current literature shows that providing students with opportunities to self-select their reading material increases engagement, motivation, and self-efficacy and allows student participation to emerge (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). The positive changes that arise from allowing students’ reading interests to be considered when selecting or assigning reading material result in positive reading experiences in and outside of school.

Many of the negative feelings associated with reading tend to come from a lack of confidence in reading. It is paramount to pave the way for students to engage and participate in reading class while adjusting instructional practices to create opportunities for students to shift their feelings towards recreational reading, ultimately leading to more engagement with the text. Employing classroom instructional strategies such as student choice can support motivational
and engagement deficits.

**Research Questions**

How will five eighth-grade girls narrate and describe what they read, how and why they feel their out-of-school recreational reading time increased or decreased, and whether the reading shift impacts their attitude and habits towards reading?

1. What do the participants report that they read outside of school?
2. How do the participants feel that their out-of-school recreational reading time has changed over time and
3. What classroom structures and pedagogy influence students' attitudes and habits towards reading?

A qualitative research methodology allows readers to understand a study's happening through the subjects' experiences and stories (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). This methodology allows the participants to share their insights regarding out-of-school recreational reading in conjunction with their feelings and beliefs about reading with the study's researcher. These rich conversations and elaborative stories allow the researcher to understand varying perspectives and permit the participants to share their experiences with text. In contrast, the researcher observes the participants in environments where they are most comfortable. The qualitative research design allows the participants to be natural in their responses and demeanor (Creswell, 2007). Because this study will focus on the perceptions and experiences of five urban middle school girl students, a qualitative method is suitable. A more comprehensive description of methodological approaches will be discussed in Chapter 3, and expectancy-value will be used to frame my results.
This study intends to extract student stories by utilizing a narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provide a roadmap for conducting a narrative inquiry-based study along with how to decipher the information provided by the participants. They share that:

Inquiry and narrative stories are both a phenomenon and methodology. Narrative names the structured quality of the experiences that are to be studied and the pattern of inquiry. To preserve this distinction, we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon ‘story’ and the inquiry ‘narrative’. Thus, by nature, people lead layered lives and tell stories by those lives, whereas researchers describe such lives, collect and tell their stories, and write narratives of their experience (p. 2).

Narrative inquiry is needed to illustrate the information gained by the participants regarding their perceptions and experiences with out-of-school recreational reading. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further state how people are storytellers and narrative inquiry studies how humans experience the world (p. 23). The participants’ perceptions and experiences shed light on what factors prompt them to read outside of school and illuminate what factors encourage them to continue reading on an ongoing basis and how much time they devote to reading outside of school. Combining their perspective and feelings regarding the topic provides clarity and awareness when determining whether eighth-grade girls will or will not read outside of school.

**Conclusion**

Understanding and exploring the perceptions of middle school students’ diminished motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy and their relationship to reading requires a qualitative study. I will explore five eighth-grade girls’ perceptions and personal narratives regarding their book selections and how they engage with out-of-school recreational reading. I will also explore reading educators' instructional practices influencing middle school readers’ engagement and motivation to read. In order to determine if there is an impact on their attitude and habits toward reading, addressing diminished motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy requires an
understanding of the reading perceptions of middle school students. Examining what they choose to read, their reading habits, and their attitude toward participating in reading outside of school will shed light on their reading habits and attitudes toward participating in reading outside of school. This study will provide some insight into what makes female middle school students more engaged with the reading process inside and outside school. Once students become engaged, they become more likely to be motivated and continue engaging with reading inside and outside of school. Understanding what instructional practices prompt middle school girl students to become motivated to engage with the texts on an ongoing and consistent basis becomes discovered.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will examine research regarding out-of-school time reading time for urban middle school girls. Discussing the literature on middle school adolescent reading will take place first. Next, I examine motivation and self-efficacy in female middle school students. Then, analyzing Expectancy-Value Theory, the impact on student outcomes, and finally, analyzes the instructional practices that support engagement, motivation, and self-efficacy. Through this literature review, the goal of understanding practices used to improve reading time outside of school for girls is at the forefront.

Adolescent Reading

Cantrell (2018) studied the reading motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy of middle school students who reside in a rural school district. Her study explored the impact reading outside of school had on the 851 girls and 931 boys as they transitioned to high school. Within her research, Cantrell investigated variables that contribute to and alter the reading behaviors of middle school students and how out-of-school recreational reading time contributes to a student’s motivation and achievement. Cantrell explains how self-efficacy, motivation, engagement, student choice, and autonomy lead to reading achievement. The outcome of the Cantrell study is that out-of-school recreational reading time diminishes amongst rural middle school girls. Cantrell’s study further adds that when rural middle school students transitioned into high school, many did not feel the need, or have the extra time, to engage in recreational reading. The shift happens because they focused on attending a trade school or enlisting in the military upon completing high school.
Cobb et al. (1989) conducted a similar study on rural middle school students. The results were similar to those of Cantrell, who found both genders were equally disengaged with out-of-school reading for various reasons but most importantly because of the lack of interest and motivation. The student responses of Cobb et al. study shared the feeling that the highest level of education needed was a high school diploma because employment is more important for their future. The students also indicated they felt their teachers and counselors “did not care” nor did they promote higher education, and as a result, students were not interested in placing a great deal of effort into their academics.

For middle school students, there are distinct differences in their reading engagement, such as the willingness to read outside of school and reluctance to read inside of school. The barriers arise because the reading material becomes solely based on teacher selections (Eccles, 2009). The obstacles to reading are even more evident between boys and girls. For example, it is widely discussed that girls tend to perform better academically because they are more complicit with the learning environment, and the boys are less engaged. Jon Scieszka (2001), the author of Guys Read, states that boys are action-oriented learners and generally are naturally competitive. The traditional way that classroom environments are structured makes engaging in class for boys a struggle. Whitmire (2010) argued that the lack of engagement with reading for boys stemmed from the earlier grades when they received poor instruction with phonics and a lack of books that appealed to their interests. Sax (2005) further adds that as boys progress in grade level and reach middle school, books are not readily available, and boys see far fewer men reading. The model of males reading is not prevalent in their world. Girls tend to have women model reading and reading behaviors. Many books in classroom libraries are often geared toward girls and their interests, making girls more inclined to engage with reading (Espinoza, A., &
Eccles (2009) argued that gender and age play a role when analyzing reading behaviors in students but more so with middle school students who tend to be non-readers and claims that a higher number of males are classified as least likely to participate in out-of-school recreational reading. Eccles & Wigfield (2002) discovered that middle school boys preferred not to read outside of school, even when attached to reading assignments. They also did not participate in out-of-school recreational reading. The reading changes for boys are similar to girls who report the same thing. The phenomenon of not reading outside school continues to rise for both genders (S. Sparks, 2015). At times, each gender is more likely to engage with out-of-school recreational reading than the other. For example, boys tend to read more to obtain information, while girls generally read for enjoyment. Clark and Douglas (2011) share that there are distinct differences in the preferred reading material of genders. For example, garnering information is what boys tend to want, so reading informational text is their preference, while girls will tend to read more fictional pieces. Some additional findings indicate that boys will read comic books and girls will read biographies of their favorite celebrities. Moje et al. (2008) caution researchers that gender overgeneralizations about reading preferences can produce inaccurate findings primarily because the variables are too vast to pinpoint linear reasons.

Evidence from Pilgreen & Krashen (1993) states that students who choose their reading material tend to engage with reading more outside of school than when told what to read. The engagement with student reading choice has led Pilgreen and Krashen to assert that middle school students prefer to select their reading material and that allowing them to do so in the classroom encourages learning. When there is a personal connection to reading, whether it is the experience of picking up a book and turning the pages or looking through text to locate and
secure information, it indicates the beginning characteristics of a reader and determines if reading engagement will continue (Csikszentmihalyi, 2001; Nell, 1988). According to Shafer (2003), any reader, despite age or gender, shares a commonality when reading: they opt for the material that is of some interest to them. Middle school students respond to books in the same way, leading educators to tap into the interest of their students. When the components of text selection are present, students will place more effort and energy into learning and understanding what they read (Schiefele, 1996).

**Middle School Readers**

For this study, middle school means sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students. What is noticeable and evident in school is that as students transition from elementary to middle school, some motivation toward school in general and student academics diminishes. Eccles, Lord & Midgley (1991) claim that motivation declines as students become adolescents and move to the corresponding grades. The students in those middle school grades outwardly project a lack of enthusiasm that occasionally results in academic failures. Keeping middle school students motivated to read while building upon their self-efficacy can be challenging for middle school educators. Both are needed to develop students into those who perform well academically throughout the learning process. When readers exhibit proficiency, they also possess motivation and self-efficacy (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). The student’s motivation and self-efficacy are closely aligned to their reading competence and achievement, and those who struggle in reading will have difficulty with motivation and self-efficacy (Allington, 2001). Motivation refers to what initiates the students to read, and self-efficacy is the belief one has in their ability to execute a task (Weiner, 1992; Bandura, 1977).

Studies conducted on middle school reading motivational trends showed that eighth-grade students had a lower level of motivation to read than those in the sixth grade (Kelley &
Decker, 2009). Frequently, students' frustration regarding reading is aligned with negative school experiences, such as being called on to read with diminished fluency and vocabulary skills. Students with positive school experiences, such as being avid readers who contribute to classroom discussions, develop a belief in themselves and have expectations of being academically successful, especially in reading (Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012). The study results also indicate how much time middle school students will spend engaging with reading (DeNaeghel et al., 2012; Varuzza Sinatra et al., 2014). Motivation is essential to the learning process; without it, poor academic performance becomes imminent. Motivation is not only a predictor of student engagement and achievement but also speaks to students’ self-efficacy to persevere. Motivation and self-efficacy levels cause the students to persist in task completion to the best of their ability (Verhoeven & Snow, 2001; Chapman et al., 2000; Pintrich, 2003; Clark & DeZoysa, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). When students show signs of motivation and self-efficacy in the learning environment and when motivation and self-efficacy are high, procrastination is almost non-existent, and determination to complete any assignment or task is elevated (Artino Jr. & Stephens, 2009).

Motivation and self-efficacy stem “from the will to do an activity for the satisfaction felt while learning or searching for new information, succeeding or creating something new, and cognitive and physical pleasure, respectively” (Arik, 2019, p. 24). Through their interview, the students who were part of this study stated their lack of motivation to read impacted their academic performance and openly admitted to struggling academically across all core content areas. The stark declines were noticeable in their grades in their reading classes.

When middle school students struggle with reading, whether recreationally or
academically, they generally lack confidence (Beers, 2003) which can likely alter how middle school students interact with reading on future occasions (Moore et al., 2000). Middle school students who struggle with reading tend to fall into high-risk academic categories, which may indicate the need for additional support. They may experience reading failure and subsequently not meet their full capability and potential as students (Goetze & Walker, 2004). Middle school students must have opportunities to improve their motivation and self-efficacy throughout the learning process. These opportunities can come through educational challenges and participation in various learning activities.

Carver and Leibert (1995) conducted a study on reading achievement among middle school students discovered that when middle school students were given autonomy and, more specifically, when provided with opportunities to self-select the material they read, more active engagement in class became evident. According to the study, by shifting instruction to include self-selection, students experienced increased standardized test scores and grades. Revising traditional instructional methods allows students to experience freedom and take ownership of their education. Carver and Leibert (1995) also found that increased engagement and practice lead to reading achievement and advancement. Ley et al. (1994) conducted a similar study on student choice and autonomy, and their work showed that students become more engaged readers with authentic learning opportunities. Those students participate actively in discussions and become reflective of the reading material. The middle school students who were part of the study incorporated the skills they had practiced with their individualized reading. That individualized reading propelled them to read even more, ultimately leading them toward reading achievement. The more the students read, the more they experience academic success. When autonomy in middle school reading classrooms is present, engagement, motivation, and achievement follow.
Characteristics and Habits of Female Middle School Readers

Engagement

Reading teachers would ultimately like their students to engage with reading in and outside school. This desired consistent level of interaction with text supports literacy behaviors that can affect achievement (Middle School Association, 2010). The Middle School Association further adds that fostering reading for middle school students allows for scaffolding reading skills where students interpret information regardless of the genre. The reading interchange promotes students to read for enjoyment and fosters continuous opportunities to engage with reading (Allen-Lyall & Davis, 2020).

There are distinct and noticeable differences related to gender when looking at reading in the middle school environment. Gender-related distinctions differ as students change socially and developmentally (Hyde, 2014). Boys and girls will exhibit different levels of reading engagement and book selection behaviors. Many studies indicate that girls tend to engage in reading more than boys do (Logan & Johnston, 2009). In essence, middle school girls show that their perception of reading is generally positive compared to boys (Jacobs et al., 2002). These changes between boys and girls become evident within reading classrooms as early as fifth grade (Cole et al., 1999). As students develop specific reading preferences and the types of text they select to read, their reading self-concept becomes more defined, along with the value they place on the act of reading. Middle school boys begin to show a decline in their intrinsic motivation, while girls tend to display elevated intrinsic motivation along with task value (Wigfield et al., 1997). Engagement with reading activities hinges on task value and motivation. Middle school girls, as a result, show an increased positive attitude when engaging with reading.

The middle school students’ new independence and peer perceptions serve as influences
for student educational behaviors. These influences can challenge the middle school students’ motivation to participate in academic activities such as reading (Ladd et al., 2012). Girls are likely to be more actively involved in reading and participating in reading-related activities. This active engagement level increases their motivation to read in conjunction with their level of interest in reading (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010). Middle school girls tend to be more actively involved in reading and participating in reading-related activities than their male counterparts. When girls interact with texts chosen by teachers or themselves, their effort to contribute to classroom reading discussions increases, and girls will dominate class discussions around the text (Asselin, 2003). Once girls become more present in reading discussions, boys remain passive and quiet participants in reading class. As a result, middle school girls become more self-confident, interested, and motivated to read.

Marinak & Gambrell (2010) revealed that girls’ reading achievement surpassed boys’ because girls are more motivated than boys and engage far more with reading than boys do inside the classroom. Their study showed that girls engage with the text earlier than boys, thereby aiding girls with comprehension and the ability to discuss what they read. The gender distinctions reveal a gap in middle school reading, and teachers struggle to get students to engage with reading without being motivated to read. Once teachers alter instructional practices to include choice and autonomy, motivation will carry over to students’ out-of-school reading time (Shumow et al., 2008). Shumow et al. suggest that providing boys with opportunities to select texts primarily focused on their interests (such as comic books) versus texts deemed acceptable and appropriate for school (like informational texts) will open boys to engage more with reading. Ultimately, instructional adjustments will begin to shrink the gender achievement gap that appears to happen between girls and boys and reading (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010). Over time,
the gender gap between boys and girls shrinks once they approach middle school. Girls begin to lose interest in reading and reduce the amount of effort that goes with reading and activities associated, whether inside or outside of school.

**Motivation**

Ryan and Deci (2000) define motivation as “the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges” (p. 70). Using their definition as a framework conceptualizes motivation in the classroom. When students are educationally motivated, they tend to engage in school, become driven to succeed, and place more time and effort into their school assignments yielding results that show elevated confidence levels and increases in the students’ academic ability.

Transitioning from early childhood and primary grades to intermediate and upper-grade levels is associated with students' declining reading motivation. During the developmental shifts, researchers identified a decrease in motivation from around the third grade. Around fourth grade, however, reading demands increase, and school expectations elevate, and these demands and expectations only get more challenging with each academic year (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Maulana et al., 2013). Once motivation begins to decline, the descent serves as a preview for how students will engage in school and their reading habits (De Naeghel et al., 2012). Students in the intermediate and upper grades begin to encounter objectives and standards that are more challenging than those in the lower academic levels. These challenges include developing organizational skills and cognitive strategies and mastering goals, standards, and objectives. Those skills require more rigor than in earlier grades and are necessary when interacting with texts (Patrick et al., 1999).

In a study conducted by Locher et al. (2019), entitled “The Relation Between Students’ Intrinsic Reading Motivation and Book Reading in Recreational and School Contexts”, the
researchers share that:

School-related reading is expected to be perceived as less intrinsically motivating because students have a low level of autonomy, given that teachers and other school-related aspects are predominantly responsible for determining which books they have to read. Teachers are somewhat bound to the national curriculum which regulates what students need to learn. Teachers tend to choose books that will help students reach the curricular learning targets. In comparison with school-related reading, recreational reading is expected to be perceived as more autonomous. Students may choose the genre or content that they like and the texts that they believe they are capable of reading. Furthermore, they may choose a book on the basis of recommendations that they have received from their peers, parents, or the media, thus giving them the opportunity to engage in follow-up communications. It might be assumed that the more autonomy that students have in choosing books, the better the match between students’ interests or abilities and the reading matter, which in turn might result in a higher level of intrinsic reading motivation. In summary, the differences in the given autonomy of choosing a book between school and recreational reading should result in motivational differences. (p. 3)

Motivation allows students to push and go further academically, especially when they experience success. The motivation and success of middle school readers will drive their determination and endurance to continue reading. It becomes essential for middle school reading teachers to understand that expectancy-value theory and motivation are directly linked. In a typical middle school classroom, expectancy-value and motivation propel students to engage in school-related activities, including reading. Learning is prominent when students are motivated to engage with every aspect of what their teachers teach and present. Allowing students to engage and examine what they have previously learned and align it with newly acquired knowledge forms connections with their learning. These opportunities allow students to be reflective, increase the quality of education, and improve their academic motivation.

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) find that reading motivation directly correlates to a student’s individual goals and beliefs (self-efficacy) in their reading abilities. Motivation
encompasses efficacy, an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments and interests. Motivation becomes a critical component that aids students in learning and is essential to academic success (Harackiewicz, J. M., Smith, J. L., & Priniski, S. J., 2016; Bandura, 1997). Students who are academically motivated in school possess a sheer love of learning and acquiring knowledge (Metsapelto, 2017).

The motivation to engage in reading often indicates how well students will progress, achieve, and endure content-based assignments in the elementary grades (Gambrell, 2011; Schiefele et al., 2016; Schiefele et al., 2012). Existing research addresses the issues of reading motivation. Teachers struggle to keep students motivated to read (Majid & Venus, 2007). The concept of motivation fosters the belief that when students encounter reading-related activities, they opt to do so for countless reasons. Learning and understanding why students engage with reading are vital to keeping them motivated to read (Gambrell, 2011). Research has found that students with low reading motivation will perform poorly in reading-related activities (Chapman et al., 2000). Utilizing educators to foster students’ engagement and motivation for reading is critical for academic success. High reading motivation among students enhances their reading competency and improves reading achievement. Having reading skills play a vital role in ensuring that students are successful as they progress through school and when students are actively engaging and motivated with reading, it becomes a predictor of success in reading and overall achievement (Miller & Meece, 1997; Schiefele, Stutz & Schaffner, 2016).

Studies on reading and gender show that there are significant differences between middle school boys and girls, including being motivated to engage with reading (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006). Both genders in the primary and early intermediate grades display healthy
motivational levels as early as the primary grades. As each gender progresses through grades and age, the motivational levels dissipate. Dissipating motivation is especially noticeable in the content area of reading (Sclafani & Wickes, 2017). Gender differences occur in middle school students. Motivational levels decline as students get older and sometimes fluctuate based on the subject matter and content presented (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). As early as the primary grades, academic gender stereotypes appear and correlate to motivational levels. Girl students often show more academic interest and efficacy than boys, especially with reading (Simpkins et al., 2012).

Middle school girls’ motivation and self-efficacy levels increase depending on the opportunities they have to experience academic success (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013). Boys, on the other hand, show signs of disengaging. Duckworth and Seligman (2006) offer that, to flourish academically, middle school boys need instant success and gratification that often does not happen in the school context. They further share that boys fail to plan and set academic goals that would set them up for success. Boys’ academic deficits lead to their frustration and put them back academically, thereby widening the learning gap between boys and girls (Kenney-Benson et al., 2006). In a study conducted by Marinak and Gambrell (2010), 288 elementary readers discovered that boys felt capable as readers and in their reading skills; however, the emphasis was not placed on actual reading because the interest to do so was missing. Applegate and Applegate (2010) focused on 433 elementary readers. The results showed that boys believed in their reading ability but did not find the act of reading satisfying enough to engage with it continuously.

Girls are motivated to read by different factors than boys (Corpus & Lepper, 2007). Gender norms influence how girls engage with and choose books (Pacheco & Gutierrez, 2009).
Chapman et al. (2007) conducted a study on book selections based upon gender, and he discovered that girls and boys stayed true to gender stereotypes within his study. Merisuo-Storm (2006) found that girls are more inclined to switch stereotypes based on their interests.

Girls’ engagement with reading becomes predicated upon the reading material given in conjunction with the type of reading-related activities and assignments they receive. The distinctions between what girls and boys prefer in terms of reading are information that middle school reading teachers need when creating lessons, assignments, and assigned texts for the students to read.

**Expectancy-Value Theory**

In order to understand motivation, engagement, and achievement as it relates to reading, the expectancy-value theory applies in research related to personal efficacy. “I know and understand this information”; “I can get an A out of my reading class”; “I am sure I know how to complete this task.” These statements are clear internal responses students have when they ask themselves, “Can I do this?” The judgment of one’s capability is expectancy, and the importance of the task is its value. When the expectation and belief about task importance merge, the result is expectancy-value. According to Wigfield and Eccles (2000), expectancy-value theory indicates that “choices based solely on achievement become motivated by a combination of an individual’s expectation for success and the value of a task in particular domains” (p. 337). When expectations and values combine, they guide learning opportunities and academic decisions and determine the level of engagement and motivation. John William Atkinson (1964), who initially developed expectancy-value theory during the 1960s, did so within the discipline of psychology in order to understand achievement and motivation within individuals. Since that time, the expectancy-value theory has applied to all subject areas and genders. Expectancy value
theory within the context of reading suggests that if students of both genders value actively reading in school, they will believe they can be successful and actively participate in reading. Students choose to engage in reading-related activities that ultimately drive their motivation positively.

Theorists Eccles and Wigfield developed and expanded on Atkinson’s work in the 1990s. It was their goal to address how Expectancy-Value Theory would relate and transfer to the educational arena. Wigfield and Eccles determined that student choices regarding school tasks, assignments, and projects align with their academic performance. Students who are diligent about completing any school-related assignments tend to show high expectancy-value beliefs primarily when focusing on content-specific areas (Wigfield and Eccles, 1994; Wigfield et al., 2016). For example, when a student prefers social studies over science, the expectancy changes along with the value placed on the subject. Wigfield and Eccles (1994) concluded that students are motivated by what they like, enjoy, and feel are essential. Student motivation becomes necessary when they are allowed to experience autonomy with their learning. Providing students with choice elements in school helps them focus on their expectancy-value, resulting in academic success through motivation and engagement.

**Self-Efficacy**

Motivation is a subjective term, and as such, educators must understand aspects of what constitutes motivation in the educational arena. In the most simplistic view, motivation is a student’s ownership and confidence in a subject (Au, 1997). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) define reading motivation as individuals engaging with reading primarily for enjoyment. As students expand their motivational level, their self-efficacy is enhanced. Self-efficacy is the noticeable engagement with a subject while believing in success and achieving in the content area.
Self-efficacy and student engagement in instruction equally aid students with autonomy and “owning their learning” (Cambourne, 1995; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). The level of self-efficacy a student has becomes the predictor of their motivation and performance with knowledge. Self-efficacy impacts motivation in myriad ways, primarily by goals set, the effort expended toward undertaking and completing tasks, how individuals persevere when faced with adversity, and their level of resiliency. Self-efficacy builds upon a persons’ belief in their abilities to experience success, while their motivational level stems from a desire to achieve and be successful with all undertakings. Those with a higher level of self-efficacy will tend to have elevated motivation (Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 2003; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Students who exhibit motivation and self-efficacy with reading engage more with the literary process. Research done by Bandura (1977) indicates that self-efficacy and motivation are intertwined in that self-efficacy is the source of motivation that propels students to set goals and become self-evaluative while deciding on their academic activities. Students who possess motivation and self-efficacy will further accept academic challenges and do so for individual achievement.

**Impact on Student Outcomes**

A primary goal and mission of students in their reading classes are to ensure that they can comprehend what they read and be able to apply reading skills across content areas. As students enter the early childhood grades and progress through the primary levels, reading proficiency is paramount, and the proficiency level transcends through intermediate and middle school (Fuchs et al., 1999). If motivation is not evident beginning in the primary grades, students may falter and begin to struggle academically throughout their academic careers (Nelson & Manset-Williamson, 2006; Valleley & Shriver, 2003). In the earlier grades, some factors that diminish student reading
motivation include the learning environment's aesthetics and the reading material's caliber. For example, when the classroom is inviting, students are eager to be in the learning environment. Having students see themselves in what they are reading and mirror their stories in the text is another way that elevates their motivation leading students to become more actively engaged (Conlon et al., 2006). When tasks and assignments associated with the classroom reading material are monotonous, work such as defining vocabulary terms or using words in sentences instead of creating authentic projects with the vocabulary terms likely causes reading motivation to diminish (Safi, 1996; Stanford, 2003).

Studies conducted around reading motivation begin by exploring how those in kindergarten through second grade demonstrate motivation in school. Those in the primary grades can start to identify what motivates them about school and the reading-related assignments, tasks, and projects with how they respond to engaging and completing all their teachers' assignments. Wilson and Trainin (2007) studied ways to determine if students in the primary grades were motivated for reading and other reading-related tasks and assignments; to do so, they used the early literacy motivation survey. Utilizing this tool with students in the first grade showed that they could identify and pinpoint their interests and what they liked about the assignment and why. Their beliefs and perceptions then become linked to their motivation to feel that succeeding at the task is likely. Patrick et al. (2008) discovered that kindergarten students could identify what they liked about their science class. Those in the primary grades can articulate their level of motivation around the content areas. A study by K. B. Cartwright et al. (2015) further substantiates that reading motivation’s effects begin in the primary grades.

As students progress through grades, reading motivation begins to decline, along with their belief in their ability to succeed in the content area of reading, precisely because the act of
reading happens in each content area. The decrease happens even more quickly with students that struggle academically in the primary grades (Marinak & Gambrell, 2010). A study conducted by Marinak and Gambrell (2010) showed that students in third grade who possess the average reading ability and are unmotivated to participate in reading-related activities began to lag behind those with the same reading ability. The only significant difference between the third-grade students was that one group possessed a higher level of motivation. The third-grade group with declining motivation decreased their grades and academic performance. The study noted that as students progress through grade levels, their enthusiasm for school diminishes, and students who have lackluster feelings about being in school will also exhibit reduced motivation. Researcher Susan Harter (1981) conducted a study on elementary students’ grades, and she found that by the time students reached third grade, their motivational levels declined. Harter further found that the lessened motivation levels continued well into high school and that motivation levels directly impacted learning, especially in the content area of reading.

Reading is the basis and foundation from which all other content areas grow, so reading becomes the initiating point for motivation and academic achievement (Morris et al., 1990). Students who do not display motivation with reading may struggle with other subject areas and possibly perform worse in subsequent grades (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). Multiple studies were conducted on reading and student motivation. Many of those studies suggested that students classified as successful readers who value the reading process do so because they will engage more with reading. Students who participate in reading activities will likely develop strong reading skills. According to researchers, when academic motivation is evident, it plays a vital role in student performance. Motivation becomes the students’ component towards completing the tasks while working diligently to ensure their academic success (Baker & Wigfield, 1999;
Oldfather & Wigfield, 1996; Rowe, 2011; Wigfield, 1994).

Motivation serves as a framework on which to build thinking and participation. It serves as the foundation for academic success and propels students to push forward despite obstacles. These areas dissipate as the students move to the higher grade. The trends happen when students begin to transition into the intermediate grades. When students enter the intermediate grades, it is the last opportunity for struggling readers to experience success before moving into higher grade levels (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). These academic experiences shift the feelings students have regarding their reading experience. When intermediate and middle school students have negative feelings toward school and reading, their achievement will falter as negative emotions emerge and engagement and motivation decline. The result is that students will tend to avoid reading, causing a decrease in the overall learning process.

Lepper, Corpus, and Iyengar (2005) have studied reading achievement and motivation and they discovered a decline in motivation for students as they advance with each grade level. Wigfield et al. (2016) found that as students progress with each grade level, their achievement belief deteriorates through adolescence. Once this happens, engaging with academic tasks becomes less appealing for students, and the decline is even more evident with reading. McKenna (1995) studied 18,185 students ranging from first through sixth grade over a year and found negative feelings toward reading as they progressed with their grade level. At the onset, while students were in the first grade, they showed positive emotions and responded well when interacting with reading. As the students entered sixth grade, they became disinterested. Utilizing the information from the study, it is critical to determine what classroom adjustments need to happen before students enter middle school. Understanding that the adjustments could reverse students' motivational decline with reading.
Kendra Cherry (2021) explains how elements of motivation become driven by autonomy because students are motivated when autonomy is fulfilled by having a sense of control over their goals. Oxford University Press (2013) defines learner autonomy as “students who take control and responsibility for their learning, both in terms of what they learn and how they learn. It takes as its starting point the idea that students are capable of self-direction and are able to develop an independent, proactive approach to their studies” (p. 509). Autonomy for students means that students are responsible for their learning along with the accompanying assignments while working in tandem with the teacher. For academic motivation to be present, students must have freedom, feel challenged, and have a system of support (Lyons, 2003).

With reading education, research indicates that students must have text autonomy to reach a level of motivation. This combination allows students to take on a task with the certainty that success will happen. Triggering the place where autonomy and motivation reside becomes an integral part of academic development, and the merger of the two results in student success despite difficulties and challenges. The level of motivation students need to believe in themselves begins to build and grow, encouraging them to immerse themselves in the text and work harder in class. The student participants who were part of this study concurred with the established research on student motivation by sharing that they are afforded autonomy in their reading classes. The students tend to work harder because they are motivated due to their reading interests being allowed to emerge. Motivated students will be more able to participate comfortably and openly in class, and the more the students participate, the more their inward confidence expands (Yarborough, C. B., & Fedesco, H. N., 2020).

Research conducted by Schiefele et al. (2012) contend that belief in oneself is vital and needed for academic success. Student confidence with assignments becomes their task
performance (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). When we look at student performance on school assignments and projects, we better understand their reasoning behind wanting to do well. Student motivation becomes related to their academic performance. The term instructional practices refers to teacher designs to disseminate information to students (Wigfield et al., 2008). When students are motivated to learn reading, science, or social studies, teachers must use the students’ level of motivation to capitalize on their desire to learn and engage academically. Hammerberg (2004) shares how motivation and instructional practices apply to specific student activities. Those instructional practices drive students to stick with what they are learning consistently. For example, in the content area of reading, decoding words and text, and predicting skills are the instructional practices teachers will use to engage students. These activities and teaching methods assist with learning and assess student engagement and motivation to stick with and complete the task.

Students will likely become excited about completing assignments when they believe they will succeed with the outcome and feel they possess the skills needed to take on the academic challenges. Students will also undertake the assignments if they associate them with personal experiences or deem the task valuable. Students who welcome new skills and challenges have established internal motivational beliefs, resulting in students who invest their time and energy into opportunities that allow them to put those skills into practice. Motivational factors influence students to engage in learning activities and tasks, and motivation happens even when the lessons prove to be challenging (Malloy, 2013). The motivational factors include how students feel about the subject area or task. Usually, when defined, motivation is engaging with the activity and persisting, even when challenging (Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006).
Common Core State Standards and Academic Achievement in Literacy

Common Core State Standards provide clear and concise learning goals designed to prepare students for college and careers. The standards dictate the goal, but the roadmap is in the hands of districts and educators. The Common Core State Standards map out what students need and expected to learn at every grade level and focus on the concepts and procedures needed at every grade level for students to demonstrate academic mastery. While the standards at every grade level identify specific goals required for mastery, what happens to be missing is the execution of the standards and what materials are needed to support learning the standards. Through the use of Common Core State Standards for literacy, students have to have exposure to various texts with a range of readable texts. The shift in the standards and the layout of literacy instruction aids students with advancing with grades and all elements that make students better readers, such as comprehension and fluency. Because Common Core State Standards do not impose pedological mandates and do not require specific instructional aids, teachers, including choice in middle school reading classrooms, become an ideal opportunity to get students to read more often (Holly Korbey, 2019).

Instructional practices that teachers employ in classrooms have an impact on students’ willingness to read. When utilizing the freedoms of Common Core State Standards and student choice in reading classrooms for middle school students, students can gain an average of 3.9 years of academic growth on high-stakes assessments (Ozburn, 1995). Student choice correlates to achievement with vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension and impacts their success in school (Krashen, 1993). Ultimately, Common Core State Standards allow reading teachers and students to tailor instruction and meet the individual needs of each student.
Instructional Practices and Environment that Support Engagement, Motivation, and Self-Efficacy

Providing students opportunities to choose text within reading class helps develop reading skills and academic and reading motivation. Through their study, the National Reading Panel (2000) found that for students to advance to become skillful readers, opportunities to engage with independent reading are needed, and allowing students these opportunities advance their fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. Allington and McGill-Franzen (2008) further add that reading proficiency levels increase as practice increases when students engage with reading regularly. There is far less work for them when it comes to comprehension and writing. Many of the skills acquired through consistent reading practice generally emerge when that consistent reading happens on a recreational level (Snowball, 2005).

Out-of-school reading is classified as reading that students engage with outside of school and opt to do so for sheer pleasure. Sometimes students participate in out-of-school reading to gain information or only for enjoyment. Krashen (1993) shares that out-of-school reading does not get assigned by a teacher, nor do academic assignments accompany the reading. Krashen further expounds that out-of-school reading time decreases as students progress through school. A study prepared by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2015) found that there is a widening gap between girls and boys regarding out-of-school reading. PISA also showed that between 2000 and 2009, both genders lost interest in reading for pleasure outside of School. The decline was more significant for boys.

Eccles (2009) indicated that middle school students’ reading identities which speak to a student’s capabilities along with how adept students are with reading-associated skills, will shape and define their reading behavior. When they compared girls and boys, girls read more
outside of school, and as students enter the eighth grade, girls’ reading selections tend to become aligned to their identity but also shows a decrease in the amount of reading done outside of school and for recreation. The work of Durik et al. (2006) reveals noticeable gender differences when it comes to middle school out-of-school reading selections. Middle school readers will generally opt to read texts outside of school containing information about their lives or relatable topics, along with books that they consider inviting content. Middle schoolers tend to transition from in-class reading to out-of-school reading by selecting light content. As they start with light reading, they gradually increase to heavier content if they choose. In the interim, the students gain more practice, and this practice improves reading motivation and reading skills (Feitelson & Goldstein, 1986).

When investigating middle school readers’ reading habits, PISA (2015) wanted to understand what they enjoyed reading as well as how much time they spent reading outside of school. The student selections ranged from “not reading outside of school” to “reading up to two hours daily.” The study discovered that middle schoolers who were part of the study did not read outside of school for pleasure. The results starkly contrast with a study done in 1988 by Manna et al., which surveyed 407 Ohio middle school students. Their research showed that 89% of middle schoolers enjoyed reading recreationally, and 71% of boys within the study read for enjoyment outside of school. This percentage was still lower than the one for girls. A survey conducted indicated that 84% of the girls enjoyed reading outside of school. For many years, outside of school recreational reading has shown a downward trajectory, and this decline includes middle school students. It has also been associated with a declining enjoyment of reading (Endowment for the Arts, 2008).

Out-of-school reading, or recreational reading, involves students making their own
reading choice (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). Student interests are cultivated, and their reading skills are improved through this out-of-school reading time when students engage with books that interest them, such as fiction, comic books, or magazines. This engagement improves comprehension and vocabulary (Strauss, 2014; Krashen, 1993). In the study by Gallik (1999), magazines are the most popular text for out-of-school reading done by middle schoolers. Within this study, emails and texts played a more prominent role in reading for girls. The least read material was comic books because boys were the only students interested in reading that type of material. Taylor et al. (1990) show that the average middle school student devotes a minimum of 15 minutes per day to their reading engagement. Girls tend to surpass the 15-minute minimum benchmark indicating that boys’ reading engagement is far lower than girls. Since the time of the study, girls have shown a decline in out-of-school recreational reading time. Some reasons for the reduction in out-of-school reading time included television and increased social activities (McCoy et al., 1991). Student engagement in out-of-school recreational reading will prompt them to become more engaged readers inside and outside of school.

When middle school students' feelings towards reading and academic motivation diminish, it becomes attributed to discontent with school and the content area of reading. The same motivational level will determine the students' subsequent reading engagement (Guthrie et al., 2006). Positive and negative school experiences impact reading self-efficacy and motivation making shifts in reading instruction influence the type of engagement adolescent students will put forth. Employing instructional strategies that impart reading and the desire to engage in reading is essential to achieve before students enter middle school. Torgesen et al. (2007) stated that best practice strategies for improving student participation, such as reading texts that interest middle school students and a variety of genres in conjunction with enthusiasm, must become a
priority within literacy classes. Johnson et al. (2007) suggested that for any reader, four self-efficacy elements are evident in and outside of the classroom, and they describe these as: “confidence, reading independence, metacognitive awareness, and reading stamina” (p. 96). Consequently, reading engagement is inescapable when each element is present along with motivation.

Middle school reading teachers continuously face the challenge of capturing their students’ attention, and it becomes equally vital to extract engagement in conjunction with developing student confidence in reading. Engagement happens through what educators offer students in the learning environment. Implementing various reading instructional practices paved the way for adolescent students to become active learners instead of passive participants. Huey et al. share that providing opportunities to read for enjoyment, rather than just reading from basal textbooks, is the gateway toward student engagement. Huey et al. further elaborate that when adolescents engage with reading, it should not merely be an obligation or mandated exercise. Allowing students to have personal interactions with texts hinges upon allowing adolescents some autonomy with reading. Sprinthall and Sprinthall (1987) indicate that educators must feel the pressing need to offer middle school students opportunities that tap into their responsibility and independence as readers to select material where personal connections are present with selected text. Employing the freedom mindset with instruction helps educators to serve their middle school students better.

**Conclusion**

After reviewing studies and literature about reading choice and recreational reading outside of school, it is clear that student choice is needed to engage middle school readers. Providing students with autonomous opportunities while in school increases motivation and the
desire to read more often. When experiencing autonomy during reading class, students tend to participate in the learning activities and complete reading-related projects. Ultimately, providing opportunities for student choice in reading can lead students to academic achievement, and through choice, students will receive better grades in class and on standardized assessments. Allowing student choice in school results in improved literary skills, such as comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary, and leads students to want to engage more with text outside of school. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology used to address and answer the research questions and obtain the stories from the five female middle school participants through the use of Narrative Inquiry. Through a student survey on reading and interviews, more insight is gathered regarding the lack of engagement from middle school girl students.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

This section describes the qualitative methodology for this study which utilized Narrative Inquiry (Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. 1990). Implementing Narrative Inquiry to examine the perceptions of five-eighth-grade girls’ regarding what they believe impacts their reading engagement and motivation and why they believe their out-of-school recreational reading time has changed as they age. The Rhody Reading Assessment (1980), designed to survey student attitudes towards reading, was administered to five middle school girls. Individual interviews followed to help gain insight into middle school reading experiences and the influences that drive their motivation and self-efficacy for reading. The intention to examine reading habits, attitudes, and motivation and how they might impact a reading teacher’s instructional practices is central to this study.

Research Questions

Central and Secondary Research Questions

The following research questions guided the data collection and strategies for analyzing the findings.

1. How will five eighth-grade girls narrate and describe what they read and how and why they feel that their out-of-school recreational reading time increased or decreased with their age and whether or not it impacts their attitude and habits towards reading?

2. What do the participants report that they read outside of school?

3. How do the participants feel that their out-of-school recreational reading time changed over time?

4. What classroom structures and pedagogy influence students’ attitudes and habits toward reading?
Research Design Overview

A qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study. Qualitative research is grounded in the interpreted truths narrated by the participants in this study. The participants’ truths represent their personalized experiences, and it is here that the expressions of their specific encounters take shape (Barone, 2000; Saldana, 2009). Researchers have to create a well-rounded picture by analyzing words and perceptions from the subjects organically as the information is being shared (Creswell, 2007). Two sources of data collection used to gather information from the participants were, 1.) The Rhody Reading Assessment Survey assesses students' attitudes towards reading and reading-related activities, and 2.) One-on-one open-ended interviews with the participants to hear their personal narratives about their experiences with reading.

Narrative Inquiry

This study elicited students’ stories by using the narrative inquiry approach. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the narrative inquiry approach as:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social. Simply stated,…narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p. 15).

Saldana (2009) shared a clear and concise way to represent narrative inquiry, which is by creating detailed and full descriptions of the participants’ stories in a multi-faceted way. Capturing their full descriptions is essential to constructing stories from the collected data while shaping the stories and giving them context and meaning (Creswell, 2007).

The narrative inquiry approach provided opportunities that would offer five middle
school girl participants a time and place to voice their perceptions considering their experiences with out-of-school recreational reading and its impact on their attitudes towards reading. The student stories provided insight into what they deemed essential and in-depth information regarding their reading experiences and practices. Their stories provided insight into their activities surrounding reading, possible barriers that prohibited them from reading outside of school, what books they preferred to read outside of school, and the amount of time they engaged with books outside of school. The participants’ disclosed stories that were personal and solely from their perspectives. Merging their responses regarding their out-of-school reading experiences shaped an understanding of how middle school girl students felt about their reading experiences outside of school.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry explains how humans experience the world. Creswell (2007) shares that for “educators looking for personal experiences in actual school settings, narrative research offers practical, specific insights” (p. 502). The focus of narrative inquiry highlights the participants’ experiences surrounding a specific topic and encompasses a variety of procedures, including how data is collected. Gathering data through the participants’ stories and experiences will assist with ordering and constructing the meaning of these personal narratives and experiences (Creswell, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that understanding the experience is vital in narrative inquiry due to its nature of making sense of the subjects’ experiences.

Researchers use various forms of inquiry to understand participants’ narratives of their experiences. Thorne (2008) contends that the purpose of a study, in conjunction with the research questions, propels the methodology of a study. Fontana and Frey (2008) indicated that the narrative stories of a study’s participants come alive through their words and experiences. Within
this study, implementing narrative inquiry provided opportunities to offer girl students a voice through their perceptions regarding their out-of-school recreational reading.

Chase (2008) shared that eliciting participants’ narratives could be received in various ways, such as in the form of written or oral responses collected through interviews and conversations. When understanding narrative accounts, the representation generally comes in three forms: a) short stories highlighting character events; b) an all-encompassing story that covers critical events; and, finally, c) events that span over a lifetime (Kim, 2015; Chase, 2008). Clandinin and Conelly (2000) suggested how to notate using narrative inquiry. These include representing the participants’ stories, not as exemplars, but as the narratives they receive from the participants. The narrative approach for this study allows the focus to be placed on the subjects to help make meaning of their experiences in storied ways (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Chase, 2008). Implementing and utilizing narrative inquiry brings participants’ stories to life, making it easier for the reader to absorb their narratives.

**Recruitment Strategy**

Students chose to participate in this study voluntarily. Flyers were posted around the common areas and in each of the private rooms within the church. Applying special attention to ensure that the recruitment flyers were placed prominently in areas of the church that middle-school-aged students frequented happened. Some areas included the teen church area, the restroom area, the vestibule area, and the fellowship hall eating area. The flyer contained information to sign up for the study. My email was provided in case the participants or their parents/guardians needed to contact me to answer questions. Once the assent and consent forms were collected, determining which five middle school girl students would participate became the next step in the process. Although there were only a few requirements to be part of the study, such as grade because all participants had to be in eighth grade to be part of the study, and all
participants had to be girls. The selection phase was the next step. The first five girl students who met the requirements were selected and notified via phone call to the parent and through email. Through a phone call, parents and the prospective student participants had another opportunity to decline participation before the start of the study.

**Setting**

This study occurred at a Baptist church on the south side of Chicago, Illinois. The church is located in the Auburn-Gresham community and has a population of 300 parishioners. Ninety-nine percent of the parishioners are African-American, and one percent classify themselves as “Other.” The building has a sanctuary where worship service takes place and nine additional rooms for classes and meetings. The initial interest meeting for the study took place in one of the larger meeting rooms. Conducting an interest meeting and presenting information about the study to parents and adolescent girls took place. Eleven interested students attended with their parents to gain information regarding the study. During this time, parents and students could ask questions about their participation. Distributing assent and consent forms to all those in attendance transpired next. Of the eleven who showed up to get information about the study, five girl participants agreed to participate, and their parents agreed to consent for their child to participate.

**Participants**

Five African-American middle school girl students agreed to volunteer for this study. Although a small population of Hispanic and Caucasian people attends the same Baptist church, none met the grade and gender requirements to participate in the study. The student participants ranged from twelve to thirteen years of age. Utilizing purposeful sampling to uncover and understand the specific topic of study was needed to discover the phenomenon studied (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1987).
Participant Demographics

The five enrolled participants were all in eighth grade at the time of the study, and all were girls. Assigning pseudonyms to each student participant took place after the participants joined the study. All participants are African-American, but ethnicity was not a prerequisite to participate in this study. Every one of the participants resides on the south side of Chicago, Illinois. Although the participants attend the same after-school program where they receive assistance in reading and math, each comes from different Chicago Public Schools. The schools the participants attend are within their neighborhood boundaries. None of the student participants attend a selective enrollment or magnet school. The populations of their respective schools range from 275 students to 351 students and cover pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The student participants follow a middle-school model, which means that the students change classes and receive instruction from different teachers for the four core subject areas (reading, math, science, and social studies). The table below identifies the student participants by their pseudonym, age, and grade.
Table 2.
Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 = Jerelyn</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 = Pamela</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 = Giselle</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 = Ashleigh</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Stephanie</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sampling Strategy and Saturation**

Webster’s Dictionary (1998) defines sampling as “the act or process of selecting a representative part of a population to determine parameters or characteristics of the whole population (p. 2008). In *Qualitative Design and Data Collection*, Patton (2002) shared that homogenous sampling is a strategy in qualitative research that uses a small sample of participants to understand and describe a particular subgroup's phenomenon in depth. Using Purposeful Sampling to uncover and understand the study topic occurred within this study (Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research to discover the phenomenon of reading engagement, and the study of motivation should be applied (Patton, 1987).

Saturation is also used in qualitative research as it is integral to determining when sufficient data from the participants happens. Saturation determines when sufficient data occurs to have a clear and valid understanding of the information studied (Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B., 2019). Saturation is essential because it provides data clarity and assesses the quality of research conducted. This study’s small sample size was a limitation.
Ethical Considerations

Assent for Student Participants

Students who volunteered for the study were under eighteen and completed assent forms that provided details regarding what would transpire within the study identified expected risks and offered the potential benefits of participating. All student participants received assurance that they were volunteers who could withdraw their participation without any adverse effects. Informing the participants that their responses would remain confidential and informing them that their identities would remain private took place during the meeting.

Informed Consent for Parents

The parents and guardians of the five student participants received an informed consent form which provided detailed information about the research study. Parents and guardians received assurance that the students were volunteering to participate in the study and could withdraw their participation at any point. The needed information had to be shared with the parents and guardians during an informational meeting at the church transpired. Conducting a meeting with the selected participants individually to review the study for a second time to discuss what the study entails happened at the final meeting and before the one-on-one interviews began. Sharing how data would be collected and reported also happened during the final meeting. Distributing, discussing, and obtaining signatures on the consent form happened at the initial meeting.

The assent and consent forms contained detailed and descriptive information regarding how information from the participants was gathered and securely stored. Collecting participant information and their responses happened with audio recording, and handwritten notes were recorded and stored in the researchers’ notebook. The physical copies of all documents were
locked and secured in the researcher's home in a password-protected hard drive.

The assent and consent forms contained detailed and descriptive information regarding how information from the participants was gathered and securely stored.

**Data Collection Techniques**

Initial data collection was conducted by the student participants completing the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey, followed by one-on-one student interviews incorporating open-ended questions. Each student participant answered the interview questions after the completion of the surveys. The survey and the one-on-one interviews took place on different days.

**Survey**

After selecting the five female student participants for the study, scheduling times for the student participants to take the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey needed to happen. This survey provided baseline data to indicate how the students feel about engaging with reading, their motivation to read, and what they constitute as reading. Although the initial Rhody Reading Assessment Survey consisted of 25 questions; adding five additional questions made the survey more up-to-date socially for middle school students. The initial assessment survey did not account for the changing times, such as the internet, social media, and texting, all of which are current and relevant for the times in which we live. Five additional questions were added to the original assessment survey to account for how society has changed. The student participants shed insight into their thinking regarding reading, their engagement with reading, and how they view various types of reading material.

Once initial contact occurred with all five student participants and their parents and guardians, setting a time for the students to arrive at the church meeting room was scheduled. The surveys were all conducted over two weeks. Planning the surveys around the schedule of
each participant’s parent or guardian took place. Notifying parents and guardians what time to arrive at the venue and the expected time for each student to complete the survey were shared. Providing the students with their time slot to come in and complete the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey was also shared. The students' parents were allowed to wait in the waiting area to provide the student with privacy and free from interruptions. The room where the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey would take place contained a table, a bottle of water, kleenex, pens, a single copy of the survey inside a folder, and a manilla envelope. Each envelope had a corresponding number in the upper right corner and the number associated with the responses on the survey to the respective participant. The number on the envelope aided in assigning pseudonyms for data analysis, coding, correlating, extracting themes, and assigning responses to the respondent.

I entered the room with the participant, read the instructions, and answered any clarifying questions from the participant. Participants were advised not to put their names on the survey. After completing the survey, it was shared that the participants needed to place the survey inside the manilla envelope and leave it on the table. Upon completing the survey, the participants rejoined their parents or guardian in the waiting area. Surveys stayed closed until all five were completed. There were 30 questions on the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey and used a Likert Scale with responses ranging from “strongly disagree,” “disagree,” “undecided,” “agree,” and “strongly agree.” Although providing students with an unlimited amount of time to complete the survey, all student participants completed the survey within 30 minutes.

**Interviews**

The second phase for data collection included scheduling the student participants for the individual interviews. Prior to leaving the church after completing the Rhody Reading
Assessment Survey, parents and students scheduled their time slot for the individual interview. They were provided a date and time based on their choice and signed their name on the personal interview form. Each student interview transpired at a convenient time for the participant and their parent and guardian. I allowed the participants the option of completing their interview either in person, on Zoom, or through Google Meets. None of the student participants opted for the Zoom or Google Meets option. The one-on-one interviews began a week after all student participants completed the study's survey portion. The reserved rooms at the church for the student interviews and the holding room for parents and guardians were utilized.

Conducting semi-structured interviews for this study took place. The semi-structured interviews allowed student participants to present unanticipated responses. The open-ended questions allowed the interviews to happen in a less formalized way while allowing for unconstrained and spontaneous responses. Exploration through this interview-style allowed issues and related avenues to be uncovered (Tod, 2006). Employing a flexible line of questioning was aligned with the semi-structured interview style. The more specific interview style used, which falls under the umbrella of semi-structured interviews, was Discovery Interviews. This interview style is a one-on-one style of interviewing and allows the interviewee more control over the process. Discovery happens because the interviewee is free to be open and discuss the topic without being rigidly held to simply answering the questions posed by the interviewer. The discovery model allows the interviewed person to tell their story from their perspective. The individual perceptions allow the interview and the collected data to contain richer data (Bridges et al., 2008).

The room where the interviews took place contained a table, a bottle of water, Kleenex, a mini recorder to capture the responses of the student participants, and a single copy of the
interview questions. None of the participants had access to the interview questions before the session to prevent rehearsing or pre-planned responses. At the onset of the individual interviews, the informed assent form reviewed was for the study’s purpose.

There were 20 interview questions, and all focused on students’ reasons for reading, how they engage with reading, and what motivates them to read. The first two questions were getting-to-know-you or ice-breaker-style questions. The remaining 18 questions were open-ended, and the student participants had opportunities to describe their reading experiences.

It was paramount to ensure an enclosed, private, and comfortable environment for the student participants to feel privacy and the ability to be transparent about their reading experiences. The student participants engaged in in-depth conversations about their feelings toward reading inside and outside of school. Allowing the student participants opportunities to clarify their responses throughout the interview took place. During this time, probing questions were used to better understand student responses, and follow-up questions asked to improve clarity.

Recording the interviews with a handheld audio recorder happened. To ensure the student participants’ confidentiality and responses, the researcher was the only individual to have access to these recordings. The transcribed interviews were kept in the notebook, and any pertinent and follow-up responses asked. The additional information included notes on verbal responses and non-verbal observation. The journal aided in avoiding bias because the recorded words of the participants were used as stated. Individual interviews conducted with the student participants happened over a span of two weeks.

Conducting these individual interviews was essential to this study because the questions designed were to gain insight into the participants’ thinking about their reading habits,
choices, and motivation. M. Allen (2017) indicated,

Qualitative studies that utilize open-ended questions allow researchers to take a holistic and comprehensive look at the issues being studied because open-ended responses permit respondents to provide more options and opinions, giving the data more diversity than would be possible with a closed-question or forced-choice survey measure (p. 446).

Through these individual interviews, being able to ascertain a more transparent and more precise understanding of the participants’ journey and experiences through reading is paramount. The individual interviews also provided insights into how the student participants feel about reading as they encounter the subject in their school environment and how they feel about reading recreationally. The information acquired through the individual interviews contributed to a specific data collection aspect that will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Data Analysis Techniques

Conducting data analysis happened in two stages; first, content analysis which is

Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique. In conventional content analysis, coding categories are derived directly from the text data. With a directed approach, analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes (p. 1277).

was utilized for the survey to identify patterns in the respective responses. Two pre-determined themes derived from the research: activities outside of school that were more of a priority other than reading, although it was unclear what those activities would end up being. The second pre-determined theme was identifying what constitutes reading. Utilizing Narrative Inquiry to analyze the interview transcripts and collect student participants’ stories at the heart of the study took place. The interviews allowed the researcher to gain insight into their perspective on reading instruction and what motivates them to read inside and outside of school. An inductive coding structure was used for the interviews because it required the researcher to read through the data and allow the student participants' words to speak for themselves while allowing the codes to emerge as they come from the interviews. Part of the inductive coding comes from raw
data derived from the student participants without allowing bias to infiltrate data but allowing the data to emerge on its own. For bias to not come through, relying solely on the information presented by the participants and reporting the data in its original and organic state took place. Inductive coding works in tandem with thematic coding. In Vivo codes were also used because using the words and terms directly from the student participants rather than being supplanted by educational jargon. The codes from the interviews expressed the perspective of the student participants.

Thematic coding for the results of the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey and the one-on-one interviews occurred. Utilizing Thematic Analysis as a coding method was needed to analyze the survey and one-on-one interviews because both data sets had identified patterns and themes. According to Braun and Clarke, 2006,

thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. It is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (p. 6)

Thematic Coding analysis describes the data sets while interpreting the data presented into identified themes. Employing Thematic Coding for this study is a method to use when translating the stories of the student participants’ survey responses and through their interviews as a way to share their experiences with reading, their thoughts towards reading, and their reading behaviors not only in their reading classes but with their individual time as well.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the methodology used to conduct this study. It explained the structures that were put into place to select the student participants and described the role of the parents and guardians in the process. The researcher also provided information on the data-
collection methods used in this qualitative study. One data collection method was the student participants engaged in individual interviews and the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey. The interview styles applied to this study were Semi-Structured Interviews and Discovery Interviews. These specific interview styles elicited authentic and unrehearsed responses. The impromptu responses provided by the student participants provided a detailed understanding and account of why the five student participants are unmotivated to read inside and outside of school. Chapter Four will elaborate on the results obtained from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey and the one-on-one interviews.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

This study examined the perceptions of out-of-school reading motivation for middle school girl students. The researcher surveyed and interviewed five eighth-grade middle school girls recruited from the same after-school church program. A homogeneous sampling of middle school-aged girls residing in and attending Chicago public schools was selected. This chapter presents the data results in two areas: survey and interview data, and describes and explains the survey and the interview findings. The findings align with Wagner’s 4 Cs—Context, Culture, Conditions, and Competency (Wagner et al. 2006, p. 98-110). From there, explaining the judgments and interpretations of the data and then finalize the chapter with the conclusion. The following research questions guided the data collection and strategies for analyzing the findings.

1. How will five eighth-grade girls narrate and describe what they read and how and why they feel that their out-of-school recreational reading time increased or decreased with their age and whether or not it impacts their attitude and habits towards reading?

2. What do the participants report that they read outside of school?

3. How do the participants feel that their out-of-school recreational reading time changed over time?

4. What classroom structures and pedagogy influence students’ attitudes and habits toward reading?

Findings

The results of this section directly informed the data collected within this study.

This study works to identify the root causes of why girl students opt not to read recreationally
outside of school. Understanding and examining why middle school girl students no longer want to engage with out-of-school recreational reading needed examining by analyzing the data focused on the results from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey and the responses from their one-on-one interviews. It was paramount to focus on themes within the interviews while paying careful attention not to allow personal bias to interfere with the data collection. Finally, utilizing the scoring instructions from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey helped determine outcomes. The data exposed expected as well as unexpected results. These results are helpful when choosing how to improve middle school reading classrooms and the reading experiences for middle school girl students.

**Rhody Reading Assessment Survey**

The survey the participants completed was based on the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey. The original assessment survey consisted of 25 questions, and the responses used a Likert Scale with the range of the responses being: Strongly Agree - 5; Agree - 4; Undecided - 3; Disagree - 2; and Strongly Disagree - 1. The findings from this study focus on data from two distinct points. The first set of collected data comes from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey. The Rhody Reading Assessment Survey assesses students’ motivation to engage with reading and their attitudes towards reading and is geared towards students in grades seven to twelve. The Rhody Reading Assessment Survey originates from the belief that a student’s attitude towards reading directly impacts their academic achievement (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander, 1980).

The Rhody Reading Assessment Survey originated in 1980, and because four decades have passed since the assessment’s inception, it does not account for current trends such as reading content in text messages, emails, and information on social media. Five additional
questions were added to the survey that reflected the changing times and included the students' reading experiences. These additions made the survey questionnaire 30 questions in total versus the original 25 questions.

Table 3.

*Additional questions on the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey*

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>You like to read to escape your problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>There aren’t characters in the books you read that resemble your life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>You seldom read except when you have to for school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>You prefer to read texts, emails, and information on social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reading books about the lives of others helps you with your own life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The assessment survey’s questions determine why adolescent students engage with texts and choose to read. The results uncover how adolescents feel about reading, their reading attitudes, and their motivational reading levels concerning reading. It also determines how students engage with the text and how they feel about books and reading. For the reasons mentioned above, the assessment survey was used for this study because it provides data specifically for understanding reading attitudes and motivation, both of which are central to this study. Final scores determined the participants’ overall reading attitude score (30–150). Any score under 55 indicates a negative attitude towards reading. Conversely, scores between 56–115 show a neutral attitude toward reading, and a score range of 116–150 means a positive attitude towards reading.

The Rhody Reading Assessment Survey has questions that assist with determining the
level of positivity or negativity associated with reading from its participants. Questions 4 through 8, 10, 15, 17, 20, and 22–25 determine the level of positivity. More robust responses such as “agree” (score 4) or “strongly agree” (score 5) versus “disagree” (score 2) or “strongly disagree” (score 1). Questions 1–3, 9, 11–14, 16, 18–19, and 21 warrant a negative response toward reading. If the response was strongly disagreed (score of 5) or disagreed (score 4), then strongly agree receives a score of 1. Despite the positive or negative connotation, undecided responses receive a score of 3.

**Rhody Reading Assessment Survey and One-on-One Interviews Common Themes**

When reviewing the data obtained from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey, commonalities and themes were present. Some themes indicate positive and negative aspects of reading for the students in this study. Each theme identified within this section accompanied corresponding data.

**Positive and Negative Themes**

The similarities based on the student participant’s responses to the Rhody Reading Assessment identified three themes that suggest a positive attitude and positive feelings toward reading. Those three themes are indicated in Figure 1. Three themes in the same assessment survey indicated a negative attitude or feeling towards reading. Those three themes are identified in Figure 1.
Themes extracted from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey

**Positive Response**

- Reading Enjoyment
- Accessibility to Reading Material
- Reading as Escapism

**Negative Response**

- Dislikes Reading
- Engages with Activities other than Reading
- Reading for Educational Reasons Only

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**Reading for Enjoyment**

The first theme that emerged from the student participants’ responses to the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey fell in the positive feelings and attitudes toward the reading category. The merging of parallel statements determined the theme, and the responses identified whether it yielded positivity. Figure 2. *Survey Theme – Reading for Enjoyment* identifies the responses from the student participants to questions 6, 7, 10, 22, 23, and 25, followed by supporting information that aligns with the theme.
Figure 2.

Survey Theme – Reading for Enjoyment

Table 4.

Reading for Enjoyment Themed Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>You get really excited about books you have to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>You love to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>You like to stay home and read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>You like to broaden your interest through reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>You read a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>You like to get books for gifts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three of the five participants were undecided about reading a lot. In their interviews,
those same participants indicated that reading inside of school and inside their reading classes does not motivate them to read more than is required. The paradox with Jerelyn is that she stated in the survey that she reads a lot. In the interview, Jerelyn shared that she only engages in reading outside of school when other things are not at the forefront of her schedule, such as obligations with parents, completing chores, and being with friends. Once meeting the commitments, there is a possibility of her engaging with books outside of school. Pamela indicated in her interview that she does not like to read inside of school and does not want to engage in reading outside of school unless she must complete homework that requires reading. Because she reads for school assignments when needed, Pamela did not feel a score of 1 was an accurate depiction of how much she does, in fact, read.

Two of the five participants “strongly disagreed” with receiving books for gifts under any circumstances. Three of the five participants stated that they would like to receive books as gifts. Although most participants would like to receive books as gifts, the participants shared that they do not engage in reading outside of school.

The responses to the survey questions from the student participants indicated mixed reactions. The students shared during the one-on-one interview segment that they enjoy book series such as Harry Potter and Twilight, among others. The participants indicated that the author matters less than the book’s content. Jerelyn stated, “I like authors that my friends tell me about.” Pamela shared, “the characters in the books by the authors I know I like.” Essentially, what matters more than the author is readability, characters, and their ability to understand the material. These responses from the one-on-one interviews substantiated the responses obtained on the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey.
Accessibility to Reading Material

The second theme that emerged based on the student participants’ responses to the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey also fell in the positive feeling and attitudes toward reading category. Again, similar statements merged to determine the theme and if the identified responses produced positive replies. Figure 3. Survey Theme – Accessibility to Reading Material identifies the responses from the student participants to questions 2, 4, and 9, followed by supporting information that aligns with the theme.

![Survey Theme - Accessibility to Reading Material](image)

*Figure 3.*

Survey Theme – Accessibility to Reading Material
Table 5.

**Accessibility to Reading Material Themed Questions**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>You seldom buy books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>You have a lot of books in your room to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>You check out books from the library.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students in the study “overwhelmingly agreed” or “strongly agreed” with having books in their bedrooms. Although the questions asked about having access to books, within the interview segment, participants unearthed that while they may have access to books, the quality of the books they have access to is an area of concern. The books they generally access may not be age or grade-appropriate and may not capture their interest. Each student participant also unanimously indicated that they rarely, if ever, go to the library to secure books. It was evident in how they scored on this particular assessment survey question, where each gave it a score of 1 or 2. As indicated in their interviews, the students shared that they primarily obtain their reading material from the books already in their possession and those they occasionally receive as gifts despite not wanting books as gifts. The responses from the one-on-one interviews partially aligned with the responses derived from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey. Pamela indicated that she goes to the library or Barnes and Noble for reading material.

**Reading as Escapism**

The third theme that emerged based on the student participants’ responses to the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey again fell in the positive feelings and attitudes toward reading. Merging similar statements to determine the theme and if the responses identified produced positive responses was done. Figure 4. *Survey Theme – Reading as Escapism* identifies the
responses from the student participants to questions 15, 26, 27, and 28, followed by supporting information that coincides with the theme.

**Figure 4.**

Survey Theme – Reading as Escapism

**Table 6.**

*Accessibility to Reading Material Themed Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>15.</strong></td>
<td>You like to read to escape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>26.</strong></td>
<td>Reading helps you understand life better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>27.</strong></td>
<td>Reading books about the lives of others helps you with your own life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>28.</strong></td>
<td>There aren’t characters in the books you read that resemble your life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overwhelmingly, the participants agreed that reading assists them with coping with the issues or problems they face. During the one-on-one interview, the participants shared that they deal with issues at school, such as bullying and grades. Students have areas of concern in their out-of-school life that focus primarily on their home life. Four of the five participants indicated that reading offers a form of escape. Ashleigh shared during her interview that “my parents are getting a divorce, so I read when they argue.” Pamela said, “I feel like I don’t have a lot of friends, so when I have no one to be with, I will read.” During their individual one-on-one interviews, the student participants shared that when they read and often pretend they are the characters within the books they read or that the characters have better lives than the life they are experiencing. The one-on-one interviews' responses aligned with the responses derived from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey. The students’ responses scored between 3 and 5, indicating high positivity.

**Dislikes Reading**

As themes emerged that indicated positive feelings and attitudes toward reading, so did themes that indicated that the student participants had negative feelings and attitudes towards reading. The first negative theme that emerged based on the student participants’ responses to the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey was disliking reading. Fusing similar statements to determine the theme happened. Figure 5. *Survey Theme – Dislikes Reading* identifies the responses from the student participants to questions 3, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19, and 21, followed by supporting information that coincides with the theme.
Figure 5.

Survey Theme – Dislikes Reading

Table 7.

Dislikes Reading Themed Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>You are willing to tell people that you do not like to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>You think reading is a waste of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>You think reading is boring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>You think it weird when people read a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>You tend to make fun of people who like to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>You hate reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>It takes a long time to read a book.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The five student participants present overlapping themes regarding reading being their preference, where they choose to engage with reading, and how they each feel about their current middle school reading class. Four of the five participants consistently stated across all questions that they were not motivated to read outside of school and had difficulty seeing the value of reading for pleasure. Based on their responses, the participants need to feel they gain something in return before actually engaging in the act of reading. Those participants shared that the reading they participate in at school is sufficient. The participants also indicated that they are not motivated to engage in recreational reading and their motivation to read is lackluster. All five of the student participants indicated on their survey that because they do not care to read, it takes them quite a bit to get through a book, and it did not matter whether the book was for recreation or school. While the student participants shared that they do not care to engage with reading, they also do not view those who love reading differently. Many of the scores yielded scores of 1 for questions that asked how much reading they like to engage with consistently. The one-on-one interviews' responses aligned with the responses derived from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey. The students’ responses scored between 1 and 2, indicating high negative feelings and attitudes toward reading.

Engages with Activities Other Than Reading

The second negative theme that emerged based on the student participants’ responses to the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey was engaging with activities other than reading. Uniting similar assessment survey statements to determine the theme was done. Figure 6. Survey Theme – Engages with Activities Other Than Reading identifies the responses from the student
participants to questions 1, 5, and 20, followed by supporting information that corresponds with the theme.

Figure 6.

Survey Theme – Engages with Activities Other Than Reading

Table 8.

Engages with Activities Other Than Reading Themed Questions

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong></td>
<td>You feel you have better things to do than read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong></td>
<td>You will read whenever you don’t have other things to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20.</strong></td>
<td>You prefer to read texts and emails over books.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants indicated that they prefer to engage in the more social aspects of being a teenager. For example, the students opt for spending time with friends and family. The students also prefer engaging with social media and texting rather than reading. These activities are far more interesting for the student participants. The participants share how books must capture their attention in the way that the other activities seemingly do for them. The students shared that they prefer what they read at home, and reading for pleasure takes a back seat for them now that social media apps are available. The student participants indicated that engaging with their cell phones is more important than reading outside school.

The majority of the participants had an indifferent response to these types of questions. One out of the five had a clear answer to question 5. When interviewed, the students shared that they only read emails for school. All five indicated that they do not have personal email accounts. All five stated that they read text messages from their friends several times a day and engaged by sending return texts. During the interview phase, Stephanie indicated that she classifies reading texts as reading. She further added that emails are not reading material. Stephanie believed that emails are more for sending and receiving information, which explains her higher score on this question. The one-on-one interviews' responses aligned with the responses derived from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey. The students’ responses mainly scored a three, but question five is where the scores had more of a variety of responses which indicated high negative feelings and attitudes toward reading.

**Reading Only for Education**

The final theme that indicated negative feelings and attitudes towards reading based on the student participants’ responses to the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey was engaging with reading only for educational purposes. Combining similar assessment survey statements to
determine the theme was again done. Figure 7. Survey Theme – Reading Only for Education identifies the responses from the student participants to questions 11, 18, 24, and 29, followed by supporting information that corresponds with the theme.

![Survey Theme - Reading Only for Education](image)

**Figure 7.**

Survey Theme – Reading Only for Education

**Table 9.**

*Reading Only for Education-Themed Questions*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>You seldom read except when you have to for school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>You would rather have someone just tell you the information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>You like to improve your vocabulary, so you read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>You would like to be a better reader in school that understands the information so you read.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four of the five student participants agreed with learning through reading, and one out of the five students was neutral in her response. Jerelyn disagreed with learning more through reading. Within the interview portion, the participants expounded more on this topic and stated, “whatever I am interested in, I just google it or look at YouTube videos.” Pamela presented a different approach and explained that when she sees an exciting story or understands facts in school, she will travel to her local library to do more research on the topic. Pamela explained that going to the library to learn about various issues is part of her routine. She stated, “I go to the library every weekend just to see what’s new, and I usually go there to research whatever I learned about during the week. It doesn’t matter to me what the subject is.” Stephanie indicated in her interview, “I always look in books or magazines for stuff I want to know about. I really wanted to learn about makeup and how to put it on. I mainly looked in magazines but a book my mom had about beauty shows how to put makeup on. I look in that book a lot”.

Three of the five students were undecided about reading for the sole purpose of reading to improve their vocabulary. Ashleigh and Stephanie indicated that they are indifferent to reading. They scored “reading to improve their vocabulary” as “strongly agree.” For question 23, Jerelyn suggested that she read a lot, but she was undecided about reading to improve her vocabulary. During the interviews, vocabulary was never a motivation for reading inside or outside school. Stephanie states, “my mom always says having a great vocabulary is important. She said the only way to do that is to read more. That’s why I want to read”. Ashleigh stated, “I know I don’t really read a lot, but I know that the only way to improve my vocabulary is to read. My reading teacher says that to the class all the time. I know it is crazy that I don’t read more, but I will be starting soon.” Jerelyn said, “I love to read, but I don’t read just to improve my vocabulary. I just really like reading”. Pamela conveyed indifference to both. She stated, “I know
how important reading is, and I know how important it is to have a great vocabulary in life. I just think I have time to get a great vocabulary”. The one-on-one interviews' responses aligned with the responses derived from the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey. The students’ responses mainly scored a 4 and 5, but on questions 24 and 29, the scores indicated high negative feelings and attitudes toward reading.

**Student Interviews**

The secondary part of the data collected came from student interviews. Twenty open-ended questions were created based on the research questions needing answering throughout the study. The open-ended questions get to the heart of what types of material the students read, what motivates them to read, and what other activities occupy their time if they are not interested in reading. The research and interview questions align with the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey. Questions from both the Rhody Reading Assessment Survey and one-on-one interview questions ultimately aid the researcher in understanding the perceptions of whether middle school girl students who were part of the study will engage in out-of-school reading. If the student participants do not engage with reading outside of school, we have to question what will motivate them to read outside of school.

**Wagner’s 4 Cs – As -Is**

This study answered the following research questions and understood how five eighth-grade girls would narrate and describe what they read and how and why they felt their out-of-school recreational reading time increased or decreased with their age. The study also addressed whether or not it impacts their attitude and habits towards reading. The interview portion of the study also discovered if their reading attitude were impacted. Incorporating the responses from the student participants and aligning those responses with the 4 Cs will take place within this
The findings of this study will be organized according to Wagner’s 4 Cs Framework, the results from the Rhody Reading Assessment, and the individual student one-on-one interviews. Wagner et al. (2006) speak of 4 Cs—context, culture, conditions, and competency—and address the analysis of information that paves the way for change (Wagner & Keagan, 2006, p. 98). Wagner refers to culture as sharing beliefs and values and encompassing shared expectations and behaviors. “Conditions” refer to the external factors surrounding the work, space, and time of what is studied or questioned. Wagner (2008) further explains how context plays a role in analyzing information. He shares that context includes the formal and informal expectations placed on teachers, middle school students, and others within an organization. Wagner explains how competencies align with influences and the awareness that shapes what we do and how we act and respond. This data aimed to determine what motivates adolescent girls to read outside of school and what can be done in school to foster reading engagement. Instructional strategies supporting adolescent students could yield more reading time for middle school girls. Placing the 4 Cs into practice results in shifts that develop from addressing each area individually to addressing the 4 Cs as a unified system that brings about change.
Wagner’s 4 Cs are aligned with this study because he provides context surrounding change and overall school improvement. An evaluation of the conditions indicates that teachers lack multiple instructional strategies to motivate students to be engaged readers who want to read.
inside and outside school. Teachers must understand the importance of student choice to bring about change in students. In turn, student choice could possibly usher students into recreational reading.

**Judgment**

1. What do the participants report that they read outside of school reading time?

**Context**

The five student participants shared the types of books they preferred. Jerelyn shared, “I’d say that I like to read some books, probably when I have some free time or when I don't have a lot of stuff to do. Maybe some books about mystery books and probably science fiction books.” She further went on to say, “I read probably some... A lot of mystery books, ’cause I like mysterious stuff, and that’s probably it.” Pamela indicated:

I also like reading a lot because there are books on everything. So if I wanna learn something and I don’t really know where to find it, I can usually just go to my library and find a book to read. So that’s just mainly the things that I’m interested in. Usually, I’ll read books on fiction or science fiction. The type of stuff that I really like is *Harry Potter* and the *Percy Jackson* series. Stuff that deals with historical stuff like magic and myths, the Greek gods, but the input that into the real world.

Giselle stated, regarding her reading choices:

To be honest, I don’t read that much outside, but if I do read, I like to read online books where they read it to me because it helps me understand the text better. I used to go to the library with my grandma, but I moved away from her, so I just started going online and like finding books.

Ashleigh shared her reading preference, “I read podcasts about boxing, and I read... A book I read is Diary of a Wimpy Kid. That’s my favorite book.” Finally, Stephanie stated, “I read like graphic books and chapter books.” The student participants in this study could share the types of
books that interest them. The student participants did not receive exposure to these types of texts in their reading class.

Culture

The participants shared that their reading classrooms' culture aligns with how traditional reading classrooms function. The literature review shows that students’ academic success hinges upon several factors. These factors contribute to and identify the likelihood of academic success or failure. An article in The Atlantic written by Natalie Wexler (2018) explains the struggles with the traditional way of engaging middle school students with reading. She expounds that because middle schoolers continuously learn reading using antiquated methods, reading progression and reading achievement in middle school classrooms has remained stagnant over the past 20 years. Wexler further adds,

On a daily basis, teachers have their students practice skills and strategies such as ‘finding the main idea’ or ‘making inferences.’ And teachers select books that match the given skill rather than because of the text’s content. Rarely do the topics connect: Students might read a book about bridges one day, zebras the next, and clouds the day after that (p. 27).

Inconsistent Curriculum

Many middle school classrooms have traditionally followed what can be classified or deemed a “cookie-cutter” model, which indicates that all aspects of instruction are for the masses without the luxury of tailoring instruction to fit the needs of individuals in the class. For years, reading instruction has been inconsistent across the 300 public schools in Chicago. Some schools within the district did not have the literacy or math curriculum needed to address the Common Core State Standards that all schools must follow. An article entitled Reading Fundamentals by Rebecca Harris in the Chicago Reporter explains what reading instruction is theoretically
supposed to look like and shares that current instruction does not meet the expectation in reality.

The article explains that:

the Office of Reading works to teach best practices and strategies, such as interactive read-alouds, in which the teacher models critical thinking about a story and connects it to prior knowledge; shared reading, in which the teacher helps the class as a whole read poems or short stories; and guided reading, having a teacher guide students as they reading out loud in a small group, with a focus on developing vocabulary and comprehension skills. But schools can decide on their own whether to implement the strategies (p. 1).

No clear-cut direction has been established to educate middle school readers using approaches that do not involve preparing for standardized assessments.

On some level, as it relates to the 4 Cs, culture equates to the environment and all it encompasses. The culture in middle school reading classrooms will generally follow a predetermined formula. The teacher will either read to students or pick a story or book that the students read to themselves. Students will either answer a series of questions or complete a book report. As described above, the repetition and monotony of reading classes lead to compliant readers versus active and engaged readers. According to K. Gallagher:

There is a difference between compliant reading and engaged reading. Unfortunately, too many students have come to see reading only as an act of compliance. They read because they are assigned chapters to read; or to answer the teacher’s questions; or to prepare themselves for writing an essay. For these students, reading has become a chore, a task to be completed to earn a desired grade (p. 1).

**Teacher-Directed Culture**

Teacher-directed culture places the teacher at the forefront of instruction and thus has a pre-determined direction for how instruction will happen. During each of their individual interviews, the participants specifically shared their recent middle-school reading experiences and recounted how their eighth-grade classrooms looked and felt. Below are the results of the
student’s perceptions regarding their eighth-grade reading classroom. The number 0 on the figure represents the student who has not experienced the particular action described in their middle-school reading class. The number five signifies what the participants are experiencing in their eighth-grade classroom.

The teacher sets the tone and feel of the classroom environment, and the students comply. Generally, middle school reading classes are not conducive to students engaging in discussions. There are few or no openings for students to have discourse regarding opposing viewpoints, leaving them in a position where they do not have a leadership role in their learning.

![Figure 9. Participant’s Current Reading Classroom Design](image-url)

**Figure 9.**

Participant’s Current Reading Classroom Design
This data indicates some of what middle school students encounter daily in their reading classes. As reading classes mimic the trend shown above, students become less likely to engage with reading outside of school as it means that reading becomes a less enjoyable, monotonous task. Four out of the five participants feel their reading class and learning experiences are designed to prepare them for upcoming standardized high-stake assessments. Four of the five participants share that their teachers often pick reading passages with multiple-choice responses. The reading passages and accompanying questions would imitate what the students see when given standardized assessments. This type of reading practice pushes the students to be prepared to take standardized assessments but not become engaged, lifelong readers. The participants indicated that very little reading-for-enjoyment occurs during these instructional times. The student participants shared that, for a myriad of reasons, they experienced difficulty in getting through the passages. Some significant reasons included that the reading selections were extraordinarily long and unrelatable, which turned the student participants away from reading more than required.

Aligned with how students had to prepare for standardized assessments, students admitted to going through the rote exercise of answering questions after every reading passage. This specific exercise happened after every reading passage they received. Again, this monotonous task proved unmotivating for the young readers interested in doing more engaging work within their reading class. The participants shared that reading classes did not mirror what was transpiring in math classes. For example, all five participants shared that their math classes were, more times than not, interactive and engaging. The participants were also allowed to share their reasoning behind their answers. They shared that their math classes offered them opportunities to move around the class, collaborate with peers, and ask questions.
This description of their math class is in stark contrast to their reading classroom experiences.

The student participants’ reading classrooms are within various Chicago Public Schools. Once they enter the learning space, they are seated in assigned seats (usually in a row formation) and then given a text, whether in book form or a handout. From there, the students explained that they would have to sit in their assigned seats, read the text independently, or, in some instances, engage with round-robin style reading. There was little-to-no interaction with peers unless it was a rare occasion when students worked together on a class project. Each participant shared their dislike for their reading class, although their expressed “dislike” is in varying degrees. Apart from being provided with occasional activities where enjoyment could occur, the participants overwhelmingly felt that their reading classes were uninteresting and did not motivate them to engage in reading and reading-related activities.

Competencies

Teachers who usually teach middle school are generally only responsible for teaching one subject; this is the middle school model. Teachers have students in reading class for sixty to ninety minutes, as is the students’ experience in this study. Based on the information provided by participants in this study, their teachers follow what classifies as a formula for disseminating information to the students. According to the participants, specific routines happen within their classes. For example, students are given basal readers or reading passages, after which there may be a brief discussion about what students have read. The teacher usually leads the conversation with a rapid-fire succession of questions. Students raise their hands to answer questions their teachers ask the class. Immediately after, students complete questions following the passage and turn the assignment into the teacher for a grade.

Teachers within Chicago Public Schools, a system that all participants are part of, are
mandated to teach utilizing their Common Core State Standards. According to the Illinois State Board of Education website,

Illinois adopted the Common Core Standards for ELA in 2010, and teachers and administrators across the state implemented the new standards during the 2013–14 school year. Many schools have successfully aligned the new ILS into their curricula and continue to refine instructional practices to improve student achievement and prepare students for not only the next grade level, but life after high school.

Furthermore, the Illinois State Board of Education website indicates,

The Illinois Learning Standards (ILS) for English Language Arts (ELA) establish clear and coherent expectations for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. By emphasizing depth over breadth, the ILS for ELA ensures students are provided a comprehensive understanding of key concepts. The Common Core ELA standards set a level of high quality, rigorous expectations for all students which emphasize application of knowledge to real-world situations and prepare students for the challenges of college and career.

Conditions

According to the participant’s interview, picking books of their choice would significantly improve the books and passages they currently receive to read, a substantial amount of books in the classroom library should be readily available. Allowing reading choice gives students an active role in their learning process. They pick reading material that piques their interest and holds their attention. The students can engage with texts that mirror them culturally and socially. The student participants shared their current reading class experiences and ways to enhance their reading experiences; their indicated perspectives are in Figure 10.
Suggestions to Improve Middle School Reading Experience.

1. How do participants feel their out-of-school reading time has increased or decreased with their age, and if there is an impact on their attitude and habits towards reading?

**Context**

When the participants were asked during their interviews if they felt they read more or less than when they were in the primary grades, they offered myriad responses. For example,
Jerelyn stated, “I feel like I read less. I know I’ve learned why reading is important and how it could benefit you in real life, so, yeah, that’s why I want to start reading a lot more, but I don’t.” On the other hand, Pamela shared how an early life event triggered her to shift from reading less to reading more as she progressed in age. Pamela stated,

I really had a hard time actually reading in the first grade. In first, second, and third grade, I was really frustrated with it ‘cause I feel like I could read perfectly fine and I could write good, but it's like when reading a book, I could not read it, I couldn’t understand it. And my mom took me to the doctor, and there was nothing wrong or anything, but later on, a couple of weeks after going to the doctor, I realized that I couldn’t bring the image to my head ‘cause I didn't understand what the words meant. So now my mom has a dictionary, basically, and any time that I need to understand a word or if I’m reading a book, and I know that the book is for older people, like The Hunger Games or Harry Potter, where it has a lot of words that are from Greek, then I’ll go to her dictionary, and I’ll read through a couple of words, and then I know that when I’m reading that book, I’ll understand those words.

Pamela then stated,

I feel like I read more, definitely. My grandma has moved, my grandma on my mom’s side, she’s moved. So she had this. Her room was full of books and stuff, and it was just. It was a bunch of books. Now she has new books and stuff that are in her house, so whenever I go over there, there’s always a book for me to read, ‘cause she doesn’t have WiFi. So there’s always a book for me to read. And overall, it’s just super, it’s super fun. So now I can actually understand the books and understand the meaning. ‘Cause back then, I would just read a book, just to read it, just ‘cause I wanted a book to read. But now I can know what genre I like, the authors that I like, the type of tropes, or the type of storylines or plots that I like. And, yeah, I like it. So I read more now, definitely.

Giselle summed up her reading frequency by saying, “I think I started reading a little less probably. So yeah. I read less now than when I was younger.” Ashleigh shared,

I think I read a little bit more. Not a lot more. Maybe I can say I read about the same amount when I was smaller, but it’s probably less because I am on my phone a lot, and I am not reading. I wish I could read more, though. I need to start.
Finally, Stephanie indicated that her reading frequency is as such, “I feel like I read less because the work gets harder and they [the school] really don’t have a library for us to take books from and read what we like to read.” Three of the five participants indicated that they felt that they read less than when they were in the primary and intermediate grades. One of the participants shared that she reads more than when she was in the primary grades. Finally, one participant was indecisive in her response. Ultimately, she settled on her belief that she reads less and even provided a reason for the decline.

**Culture**

The participants shared the elements of motivation and engagement missing from their reading classes. Their statements revealed that they would be motivated to read if they had the opportunity to select their reading material instead of receiving material predetermined by their reading teacher. All the students felt that adding the opportunity to self-select texts and enhancing classroom libraries to include culturally relevant texts would motivate them to read inside and outside school. Providing students the opportunity to read self-selected material could reverse the decline in reading as students progress in school. The students in this study wanted to ensure that the texts in their classroom library mirror their experiences. Having self-selection and relevant texts incorporated into the fabric of their reading classes would make learning more engaging and motivate the students to participate actively in reading class.
The participants stated in their interviews that they rarely engage with reading outside of school. Of the five students, one definitively engages with reading outside of school. One participant will engage in recreational reading outside of school if no other obligations exist. The remaining three participants acknowledged that reading is not a preferred pastime. They
explained that the activities that occupy their spare time primarily include social media, extra-curricular activities, family commitments, and friends. Pamela shared during her interview that reading inside and outside of school is a personal priority. She even expressed her favorite genres and characters. She then shared her much-loved literary prose from her favorite authors. Pamela explained her passion for reading and her weekend reading ritual, including a trip to her local library or asking her mother to take her to a Barnes & Noble Bookstore. Jerelyn indicated that she occasionally reads recreationally. However, the other participants share that recreational reading is not a principal activity.

**Conditions**

All five participants suggested that reading teachers must implement changes to garner their attention as students. The most important change suggested was to allow student choice within the school. According to the participants, teachers offering reading choices would motivate them to read more. The participants shared ideas that they believe their teachers can do within the classroom to ensure reading is enjoyed and engaged by all students. The overwhelming theme extracted from the student responses was that of student choice. The participants shared that reading autonomy is essential to retain their interest and hook them into the actual act of reading. Teachers sharing their instructional time allows students to learn the fundamental standards and skills while utilizing their chosen texts.

Student choice can happen in the classroom, and transitions seamlessly occur with strategic planning. Allowing students to share their interests and incorporate those genres into the classroom library ensures enough material to read and share. Planning how to incorporate those student-chosen texts into the mandated material could make learning more enjoyable and engaging for middle school students. Ultimately, middle school students can translate active
engagement with text outside of school. Although students do not possess the educational background of teachers, the participants were able to articulate what they feel is needed for them to progress with reading inside and outside of school.

1. Why do participants feel their out-of-school reading time has increased or decreased with their age, and if there is an impact on their attitude and habits towards reading?

**Context**

Jerelyn shared during her interview that “probably at home is where I don’t like to read because, it’s like I’m reading to myself and some things that I don’t understand, so it was hard to comprehend some of the texts.” Jerelyn further explained, “I’d say that I read some, probably when I have some free time when I don’t have a lot of stuff to do.” Jerelyn then indicated that her motivation to read stems from her teacher. Jerelyn still does little-to-no recreational reading outside of school. Jerelyn says, “Ms. Wright, when she gives us these passages in class; it makes me wanna read more so I can understand the stuff that I read.” Pamela indicated her motivation to read comes from a variety of places. Pamela said,

> Usually, what motivates me to read is when I get done with stuff, I feel like when I do my chores, and then I eat dinner, and then I get ready for bed and stuff, usually, I need something to read to put me to sleep. So usually, I’ll put on some music, and I’ll read, and I have a little bookshelf in my room. And it’s super fun that I can just take a book and read it and know that it'll be there when I wake up. So that’s my motivation to read; getting done with stuff and knowing that I’ve got a book there that I could read. ‘Cause, it's going into this completely different world of these new people.

Pamela then shared how much time she devotes to out-of-school reading. Pamela says,

> Okay, so I don’t really have an accurate hourly of how much I read, but I know that it takes me at least an hour and a half to do my chores. Usually, I’ll say about four or five hours is me just reading, not school-related. School-related is probably an hour, hour and a half. We have reading work, which is where we read a story, and then we answer the questions and stuff, but the story is always really fast, and we get the assignments all in one, all in bulk, and stuff. So we just get the
assignment and then we read it, and then we answer the questions, so it’s not really a thing for me to read a lot for school, but I do enjoy reading, just not it ‘cause the stories are really entertaining.

Hence, Pamela’s reading outside of school has increased from the primary grades.

Giselle shared,

in middle school, my reading experiences they kinda went down from elementary school because I didn’t start reading as much until in the middle of this year when I got out of school, I started reading more during my free time. I think I started reading a little less, probably even now. So yeah. I read less.

Giselle then shared why she feels she does read less outside of school. Giselle shared, “Probably because I was out with my friends, and then yeah, or I’ll probably get on social media or something. That’s why I don’t really read outside of school.”

Ashleigh stated about her reading frequency, “I think I read a little bit more. Not a lot more.” Ashleigh said, “Cause when I was little, I didn’t really like to read, but now that I’m older, I get to have more time now since we’re all online, so I could just read a book and then go about my day.” She further adds, “It’s very important. It needs to be a habit to read, but I am not motivated now to read a lot”. Ashleigh’s motivational level has not propelled her to read more. In essence, if educators feel there is a possibility that content, such as skills or standards, that have gotten covered in the classroom will show up on standardized assessments, it then shifts to what gets taught in class.

The culture of what occurs in middle school classrooms across Chicago Public Schools remains a potpourri across the 476 elementary schools. Educators can teach what they want along with the instructional methods they choose to implement as long as the Common Core State Standards get addressed. A plausible and fair assumption is that what the five participants experience in their reading class possibly mirrors what is happening in other middle school
classrooms across the district. Ultimately, engaging reading lessons are paramount to ensure students learn the presented material. Dweck (2002) states that when teachers cultivate environments that motivate students to actively engage with content and texts that relate to the students’ lives, that environment ultimately draws them into the learning process. Creating a reading culture in middle school classrooms is needed to encourage the desire to read. The culture for reading rests mainly on what the teacher creates within the learning environment. All five participants shared that if they were allowed choice in their reading material, it could impact their level of engagement and motivation. Students who were part of the study shared that having some autonomy would inspire them to be active readers, including their motivation to read, thereby becoming active learners.

**Competencies**

The instructional roadmap for all teachers employed by the Chicago Board of Education provides certain expectations. Although the expectations were there to show what implementing Common Core State Standards would yield, many teachers within Chicago Public Schools lacked the resources to understand how to implement Common Core State Standards correctly and with fidelity. The lack of understanding and instructional resources led some Chicago Public Schools teachers to revert to conventional methods. An article by Susan An and Adriana Cardona-Maguigad (2019), entitled “Common Core: Higher Expectations, Flat Results,” shares that certain districts, such as Chicago, receive less funding than wealthier districts. Some of the more affluent school districts encompass the northern suburbs. The wealthier school districts can provide the necessary training for full implementation and more coordination in engagement and instruction.

Within this study, the participants expressed that they were bored and unmotivated to
engage with the reading. Motivation is not at the forefront for the students in the classrooms as they are currently structured. The participants shared that there are various other things they prefer to engage with aside from reading during their recreational time, which in some ways was similar to the results derived from the study conducted by Cantrell (2018). The students who were part of this study did engage with reading for school-related obligations. An overwhelming majority of students ceased reading because of more social aspects. Three of the five participants shared that reading outside of school is not their preference.

**Conditions**

*Figure 12.*

Participant Statements on Motivation to Read

Throughout the interviews, the participants shared that they are motivated to read because of their teachers. The teacher’s role is vital to encouraging students and motivating them to read
inside and outside school. The students who participated in this study respected their teacher’s reading values. Although the participants value their teacher’s emphasis on reading, no one gave insights into what keeps them reading. The students shared that they did not engage in recreational reading despite their teachers articulating that the students should read more. The participants said they did not know how to participate in out-of-school reading may initially sound implausible. As the interviews progressed, the participants unconsciously shared that specific barriers prevent recreational reading from happening. Students indicated that a lack of out-of-school reading is due to the lack of access to books and other resources that come from school and home. This lack includes books and quiet places to read in order to concentrate on the text.
Figure 13.
Reasons for Not Reading Recreationally

Interpretations

The interpretation of the results of this study is affected by the urban context of the participants within Chicago. The students in the study indicated external influences that interfere with recreational reading outside of school. The middle school classroom culture, the number of students in the study, and statewide literacy mandates limit and impede generalizing results to urban students in various cities and states. Future studies should explore how expectancy-value
among middle school students shapes their reading and thinking. Additional work with middle school girl students, their reading behaviors, and their motivational factors should be explored and compared to the motivational factors for boys concerning their reading experiences and reading education. Educators can utilize the information to shape literacy instruction further. Additionally, it will be helpful for future research to focus on academic achievement after students are allowed to self-select their reading material.

**Recommendations**

The primary recommendation that arose from this study encompasses allowing students to select their reading material within the classroom environment. By making the academic shift and allowing for student autonomy to emerge, the belief is that students will continue to read more outside of school and improve the likelihood of academic achievement. This recommendation would require an instructional shift from the middle school reading teachers, who will have to relinquish some control of the learning environment.

**Conclusion**

The five girl student participants in this study revealed and explained their beliefs about why their engagement with reading outside of school had increased or decreased over time. The overwhelming majority of student participants admitted to not engaging with reading outside of school. In addition, the student participants offered possible approaches teachers could use to engage students more in reading inside and outside of school. Offering student choice is the major contributor to changing reading habits, increasing motivation to read, and increasing reading engagement. The student participants shared that moving away from the traditional ways reading classes take place must be abandoned to ensure students' full engagement. Other suggestions included allowing more project-based learning opportunities and student choice for
reading material. The project-based learning model places learning in the hands of the students by exploring and investigating problems. The origin of the investigation uses their text at the core. The project-based learning model removes the monotonous routines that happen daily.
CHAPTER FIVE:
To–Be Framework

Introduction

Reading instruction should encompass student motivation, student engagement, student choice and add a level of autonomy. Researchers on the topic have shared,

Although students may possess more or less intrinsic reading motivation as a personal characteristic, experiences of autonomy support for reading have positive effects, immediate and cumulative (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2017, p. 30).

Teachers can provide autonomy support for reading and thereby bolster intrinsic motivation by fostering relevance and affording choice, as these practices encourage students to link their reading to their interests, preferences, and sense of control (Assor et al., 2002; Wigfield et al., 2016, p. 27).

Understanding the connection between motivation, participation, engagement, and choice for students in reading assists teachers with vital information that can help them garner more student participation and lead to their academic achievement. As shared in Chapter Four, the students shared that having student choice is paramount to their active learning and engagement. Four out of the five participants indicated that there are times when they feel disconnected during instruction and are not inspired to participate in class. Ultimately, the lack of participation will affect engagement and motivation. Student choice provides autonomy, an element currently missing in the learning process for the middle school students who were part of this study. According to the participants, the inconsistent moments in which they receive autonomy lead them to want more opportunities for autonomy and choice. The participants shared that if teachers offered opportunities for student choice, they would be more motivated to engage in reading class. This chapter will explain the To-Be concept for middle-school female students and outline what leads them to want to engage in recreational reading outside of school.
To-Be Student Choice

As students develop and grow as readers, so do their reading skills. Nonreaders will struggle in every academic area, and those who are readers will develop better comprehension, improve vocabulary, and improve fluency. According to the National Council of Teachers of English (n.d.),

the more one reads, the better one reads. The more one reads the more one acquires knowledge of words and language. The more one reads the more fluent one becomes as a reader. The more one reads, the easier it becomes to sustain the mental effort necessary to comprehend complex texts (p. 37).

When middle school students increase their frequency of reading opportunities, they become better readers. Better readers do not simply call the words; reading more in volume encompasses other pertinent literacy skills.

Survey and interview data revealed the participants’ desire to engage with their chosen texts. All five participants showed that being able to self-select the book for their reading class would enhance the learning experience. All five participants indicated that because their reading classes ranged from “boring” to non-engaging, being afforded the opportunity for student choice and self-selection opens the door for more engagement. The student participants indicated that connecting with their texts would make reading more enjoyable. Having texts that mirror student experiences ensures that the reading classes are more pleasurable for the students. Researcher Guthrie shared information regarding practices teachers should implement in the classroom to encourage and pave the way for students to interact with books more. One specific strategy that Guthrie brings to the forefront for reading teachers includes

making reading relevant, affording choices, assuring success, arranging for collaborations, emphasizing the importance of reading, organizing thematic units, and integrating multiple motivation supports during instruction (2011, p. 183).
In 2012, a study conducted by Sarah Pak and Allyson Weseley on eighth-grade student readers shared,

when students receive reading options, increased reading volume, a reduction in students failing the state test, and changes in peer relationships, self-regulation, and conceptions of self are the result”. (p. 263)
Table 10.

*Classroom environment – As-Is vs. To-Be.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As-Is</th>
<th>To-Be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o The traditional reading program consists of assigned text and answering questions at the end of the reading passage.</td>
<td>o A progressive reading classroom includes student choice, projects, and student collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Teachers utilize Common Core State Standards as the anchor for instruction.</td>
<td>o Teachers utilize Common Core State Standards as the anchor for instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Instruction centered around standardized assessments</td>
<td>o Instruction centered around learning and engaging with the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Experienced reading educators</td>
<td>o An experienced reading educator in the classroom is essential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Rote learning</td>
<td>o Rigorous lessons centered around texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Whole group instruction</td>
<td>o Collaborative environment, small group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Depth of Knowledge at recall</td>
<td>o The Depth of Knowledge is at the application level.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Making the instructional shifts needed for the students to thrive academically could be the difference between a fully engaged and participatory classroom. Ultimately, this study aims to get students to engage more with reading inside and outside of school and turn female readers into engaged, consistent readers.
Also, the AS-IS competencies speak to teachers using reading practices to encourage students to become consistent readers outside of school. The general culture of an AS-IS classroom indicates that students are not engaged and that this lack of engagement leads to diminished motivation to read. The culture has also traditionally shown that students are seated in rows, have inadequate classroom libraries, and the material they access does not represent various ethnicities. Furthermore, reading instruction is structured so that students must comply with teachers who have to follow district-wide instructional mandates. The district and state instructional mandates serve as the context for the AS-IS, which currently speaks about how instruction is disseminated to the students. Ultimately, classroom instruction for reading is driven by how students perform on standardized assessments. For students to succeed on these assessments, teachers create routines for teaching reading. The routines include reading and answering questions and taking practice tests. These collective AS-IS domains are what drive this study. The elements of AS-IS are the reason that could impede students from reading outside of school. These AS-IS areas have led to a decline in reading among female middle school students, preventing them from engaging in out-of-school reading.

**Envisioning To-Be**

Creating an environmental culture that makes reading instruction more relevant for middle school students is ideal. According to reading specialist Melissa Kruse, there are steps that teachers can employ to create a reading culture within the classroom. According to Kruse (2021), teachers can ask themselves the following questions,

- Do students voluntarily check out books from your classroom and school library?
- Have you regularly overheard students talking about what they are reading in a positive way?
Will your students make book recommendations to their friends?

Are students engaged in mini-lessons? Do they accept the challenge to transfer the skills they learn in these mini-lessons in independent practice? (p.1)

Kruse further added that shifting the environment to make the classroom feel a presence of a consistent reading culture is the beginning step of drawing students in and becoming readers. Ensuring that books are readily available for students in the classroom should be a priority. Middle schoolers can embrace the idea of recreational reading if provided with texts that draw them in and place them the desire to read more. One way of ensuring this happens is if time is explicitly earmarked for students to engage with choice. The allotted time allows the students to grow and develop as readers.

When teachers select reading material for their students, it does not have the same impact as when students get to choose their reading material (Guthrie et al., 2006). Student choice also impacts a student’s comprehension and motivation to read regularly (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016). When students are allowed to select their reading material, pleasure in their reading gets evoked. When afforded time for student choice reading, the students become in tune with who they are as readers; they understand the genres preferred, their chosen authors, and the types of characters they prefer. The reader’s self-awareness can only occur if access to books and opportunities for choice are present (Wilhelm & Smith, 2014).
Table 11.

*Student Choice—As-Is vs. To-Be.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As-Is</th>
<th>To-Be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Underdeveloped classroom libraries; book selections do not</td>
<td>o Extensive classroom libraries that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mirror the ethnicity of students</td>
<td>represent the student demographics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>o Teachers provide protected student choice time and incorporate various instructional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Teachers struggle to implement various teaching strategies that</td>
<td>practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide autonomy to students.</td>
<td>o Ongoing professional development to implement student choice into the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Traditional instructional model</td>
<td>o Classrooms need embedded student expectations and protocols for student choice time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 60–90 class periods</td>
<td>o Collaboration between teachers and students and student-to-student discourse for book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Teachers do not receive training on implementing student choice</td>
<td>discussions are needed for engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>into the curriculum.</td>
<td>o Personalized learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Embedded opportunities for student growth in reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Classroom Reading Culture

Creating a culture in middle school classrooms that welcome a reading experience for every student is vital. The Harvard Educational Review (2008) posted an article that defines student choice as a way to link engagement and motivation in the learning environment. The article further explained that student choice allows students to have autonomy elements that align with their learning. Four out of the five participants of this study explained that they do not feel safe in their reading classes. They shared that their fear stems from having to read aloud and say vocabulary words they are unfamiliar with and have never used. The students shared that they would classify some of the vocabularies in their reading class as foreign words and terms.

The reason behind the resistance to actively participate and engage in reading is that the teacher pre-selects the texts. This process of pre-selecting texts does not consider the readability level of the passage nor the reading level of every student in the class. When the students’ reading levels are not considered, the overall reading experience for the students can feel anxious. Placing students in a comfortable space with texts fosters engagement and participation.

Research conducted by Hanover Research (2015) states that,

Student choice makes students active participants in their educations, thereby increasing levels of engagement. Notably, researchers highlight the fact that such autonomy is generally associated with greater personal well-being and satisfaction in educational environments as well as in terms of academic performance (p. 8).

In the To-Be framework, middle school classrooms value student participation, engagement, and motivation over standardized test scores.

To-Be middle school reading classrooms have characterizations that shift from standardized test scores being at the forefront to student learning experiences being the catalyst for engagement and motivation. Currently, As-Is classrooms have consistently yielded middle school students who do not want to engage nor participate in reading due to a lack of motivation.
Because middle school students lack the motivation for in-school reading, they do not read outside of school either. The lack of motivation to engage with reading is especially true of middle school girl students.

Figure 14.
To-Be Reading Classroom Culture.

Conclusion

When middle school students are allowed opportunities to select their reading material,
their engagement and participation levels increase. Together, these collectively drive the motivational level up in reading. Students with high reading motivational levels will continuously engage with reading in school, ultimately leading them to read recreationally outside of school. For engagement, participation, and motivation to occur together, the classroom has to be structured in such a way that aids student choice. Chapter Six will address the strategies and actions that accompany this study and focus on motivational and engagement strategies that can be implemented in the classroom to foster more out-of-school recreational reading for middle school girl students.
CHAPTER SIX
Strategies and Actions

Introduction

A series of changes have to occur to transform non-engaged and unmotivated middle school girl non-readers into readers who engage and are motivated to read recreationally outside of school. Teachers continuously grapple with ways to motivate students to learn and engage with books in reading classes. Rallying students to get motivated about reading is a complex undertaking. Incorporating student choice is a significant component of reading that can spark motivation to engage with reading outside of school. Allowing girl students to engage with the text they have chosen allows for emersion to happen with that text. When emersion occurs, interest becomes heightened. Interest sparks engagement, and engagement paves the way for motivation to happen, and motivation then propels students to become active learners rather than remaining passive in the learning environment.

Expectancy-value is at the heart of motivation and ensuring that students progress academically. Hulleman et al. (2016) summarize expectancy-value as a philosophy that addresses expectancy, value, cost, and student performance. Expectancy refers to what students expect when taking on an assigned task and their expectations for how well they will perform in that assignment. When expectancy meets the outcome, the students become encouraged and willing to continue their academic-related tasks. Value refers to students’ perception of the importance of participating and engaging with a school-related assignment and is where students see and place importance on school assignments. Finally, cost speaks to the possible impediments to a student’s success within expectancy-value. Students can have expectations and place a high value on the assignment, but cost barriers that could negatively impact their studies
will ultimately affect their motivational level. Possible questions that enter the student’s mind when undertaking a task related to expectancy-value are listed in Table 12.

Table 12.

*Expectancy-Value Student-Centered Questions.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectancy</th>
<th>Am I able to be successful on this task/assignment?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Am I interested in doing this task/assignment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>What will prevent me from being successful on the task/assignment?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expectancy-value is embedded within students once they begin school, and it gets shaped over a period of time. Although the inner voices of students speak negatively about their ability to succeed academically, teachers have the job of combatting and silencing that negative inner voice of their students. However, encouraging students through successful opportunities elevates motivational levels, ultimately encouraging students to experience success. Teachers then can implement various instructional strategies to address the needs of all students.

**Strategies and Actions**

This section details the strategies and actions needed and should be implemented to increase the motivational levels of middle school girl students and encourage them to engage in out-of-school reading. The first strategy is to have a fully stocked classroom library with books representing students’ races and experiences.

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real
or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation and readers often seek their mirrors in books (Rudine Sims Bishop, 1990, p. ix).

In many classrooms, books do not represent all types of students. Animals and other non-human objects are the central characters in many books, and noticeably this trend begins in the primary grades. As students progress and transition throughout their elementary career, a consistent lack of representation remains. Only students who are part of a majority ethnic group are represented in books (Edith Campbell, 2017). Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) further adds that when a majority ethnic group are only exposed to books representative of themselves, this lack of representation of other groups provides an inflated view of their cultural group and possibly devalues other groups. Some researchers advocate for representation in books for classroom libraries.

Table 13.

*Researchers and Diverse Representation in Books.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feger (2006)</td>
<td>Student motivation correlates with culturally diverse reading material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teale and Gambrell (2007)</td>
<td>Students are more likely to experience academic achievement by engaging with various ethnicities’ books.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Middle school classroom libraries are vital to ensuring that students experience motivation to propel them forward with reading, not only inside of school but also encouraging them to read outside of school. The lure is especially essential for girls who have declined outside-of-school recreational reading over the years, which is generally the case. Although reading teachers can make suggestions and encourage the students to engage in out-of-school recreational reading, something more is needed to aid the process of actually getting students to read outside of school. Historically, middle school girls are the demographic that partook in most recreational reading, while boys tended to lag with out-of-school recreational reading. With the emergence of cell phones, and their capabilities, such as texting and social media, middle schoolers show little-to-no interest in out-of-school recreational reading. It becomes incumbent upon the teacher to do more than the norm to bring in-school and out-of-school reading back to the forefront, especially for girls, since they experienced the most significant decline over time.

Middle school reading teachers have to recognize the link between the types of reading material and the desire of students to engage with reading. Clark et al. (2006) conducted research for the Reading Champions and discovered that 61% of middle schoolers like to engage with reading. Although they outpaced the number of books read by boys, girl students still showed an overall decline over the years, as was discovered through research on elementary girl literacy. The decline in girl literacy shows a decline as they progress in their grade level, and their study also noted that reading motivation declined as the students aged. A significant number of students surveyed within Clark et al.’s study (2006) shared that reading is boring and further added that they cannot find books that interest them. Boys and girls were more likely to think that reading is boring, that they find it hard to find interesting books, and only read at school. Furthermore, the percentage of girls who say that they enjoy reading has declined from 85% in 1998 to
75% in 2003. Furthermore, this research found that children were less likely to enjoy going to a library and more likely to prefer watching television to reading than they were in 1998 (p. 13).

Classroom libraries with adequate reading material that interests students are vital for encouraging recreational reading inside and out of school. Unfortunately, the downside is the expensive task of acquiring the books for the classroom libraries. Securing enough books that address the interest of all students is costly. Each of the books would have to be purchased or donated. Teachers would have to secure funding from the school’s budget and garner donations from outside sources. Securing the books for the classroom library is done after the teacher knows what interests the student. Gathering information regarding students’ reading interests can come from students volunteering the information or from a survey. Omitting this step leads to a possible risk of the library meeting the students’ interests while lacking cultural connections.

Another important strategy for teachers to employ to get students, particularly middle school girl students, to read outside of school would be to allow opportunities for student choice within the classroom. Research conducted by Krashen (2004) found that students are more likely to be motivated to read books by offering them a chance to select reading material of their choosing. Gambrell (2011) states that middle school students positively respond when asked about student choice and reading. He further adds, “80% of them said that the one they had enjoyed most was the one they had selected themselves” (p. 28).

There are other academic benefits to allowing students to select their reading material. For example, Flowerday and Schraw (2000) stated that student reading choice increases motivation, participation, and academic achievement. Student choice directly links to student engagement in the lesson assignments and classroom discussions. Academic progress becomes inevitable when participation, engagement, and motivation work together. Hunt (1996/1997)
shares that any reader “who finds a really good book … that has ideas he truly wants to learn about, frequently will outdo his own instructional level of performance” (p. 281). Furthermore, other reading researchers state that “some books may be very difficult to read, but because they are so interesting students decide to read them anyway” (Tomkins & McGee, 1993, p. 278).

Nell (1988) created a flow chart depicting how student choice and academic motivation align. He classifies pleasure reading as reading that comes from choice and continues because of motivation. Nell explains that once middle school students view reading as pleasurable, they will continue to read, and if enjoyment is not present for them, they will stop reading. The figure addresses barriers to pleasure reading and the consequences that arise from a lack of pleasurable reading. Ultimately, student choice impacts motivation to read inside and outside of school.
Figure 15.

Nell (1988, pp. 8–9) Motivational Flow Chart for Recreational Reading
For student choice to happen in middle school classrooms, the teacher has to be knowledgeable about how student choice instruction should take place. From the onset, teachers must convey the expectations accompanying student choice of reading material to the students. Students have to know that accountability will work in tandem with student choice. Therefore, students will understand that their reading will happen with assignments, projects, and assessments. Students will continue to learn the state standards in conjunction with reading skills. The difference is that they will do this with a book they have selected. Also, teachers must set parameters for the students before the student choice process. For example, students must be in tune with why they select certain books. When allowing student choice in the classroom, teachers pave the way for students to make errors, learn through discovery through student autonomy, and have authentic learning experiences. Once teachers allow student choice in the classroom, they should not discard all their instructional practices. For example, begin increasing the amount of student autonomy by adding incremental changes, such as the choice of an assignment, project, or how to answer questions on an assignment. Assignments and projects can be completed with a book the student has chosen.

Conclusion

This study addresses the components that motivate middle school students to engage in out-of-school reading time, particularly girl students. The benefits of student choice are engagement, participation, and motivation, which together foster a love for reading. Teachers need to promote a love for reading by ensuring that classroom libraries contain reading material that mimics the culture and experiences of those within the classroom. Additionally, teachers must provide and protect students' time to engage in school with student choice time. Ensuring that specific elements are in place to drive students towards reading is essential for literacy
instruction. Chapter Seven will address the implications and policy recommendations based on the findings from this study.
CHAPTER SEVEN
Implications and Policy Recommendations

Introduction

Middle school reading classrooms follow the same formula: students receive a text, followed by possible round-robin style reading or something similar, and then complete related assignments. Students are not allowed to select and engage with a text they have selected themselves. Providing students with autonomy makes for a rich learning experience in reading classrooms. Author Kelly Gallagher of Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It shares in his text, “There are not enough books in schools. There is not enough choice of books in schools. Furthermore, there is not enough time for kids to read in school. Those factors have to change” (p. 20). Barbara McCombs (2018), author of Developing Responsible and Autonomous Learners: A Key to Motivating Students, elaborated on how and why providing students’ reading choice and time is vital. She shares,

Many teachers fear that presenting more choices to students will lead to losing control over the classroom. However, research shows that in fact the opposite happens. When students understand their role as agent (the one in charge) over their own feeling, thinking and learning behaviors, they are more likely to take responsibility for their learning. To be autonomous learners, however, students need to have some actual choice and control (p. 143).

Additionally, in some ways, middle school students have failed to have the motivational levels needed to engage in recreational reading. Students’ motivation levels determine whether they are passive or engaged readers inside and outside the classroom. Educational policies are vital to creating and implementing rules for students’ success. Policies then become the lenses by which we determine if students are learning and what they have learned. B. D. Wong et al. (2009) wrote in The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher that,
Policies are important because they help a school establish rules and procedures and create standards of quality for learning and safety, as well as expectations and accountability. Without these, schools would lack the structure and function necessary to provide the educational needs of students. Ultimately, policies are necessary to the success and safety of a school (p. 96).

Educational policies centered around reading have transformed over time. With that, more autonomy has been bestowed upon teachers to decide how to implement standards within the classroom. According to an article written by Timothy Shanahan entitled “Educational Policy and Literacy Instruction,” educational policies indicated that the state standards have shifted over time. The Common Core State Standards are goals for students to master but do not spell out the teacher’s road map to get students to mastery. Timothy Shanahan (2015) further states,

The CCSS represent the greatest change in literacy education policy in a generation. These standards differ from the ones they replace in many ways, but perhaps the most fundamental shift is that they reassert the division between outcome goals and curriculum. Previous standards were so thorough that they specified everything that students had to accomplish. In that, past standards were less like goals and more like a curriculum or a scope-and-sequence guide to daily instruction. In this, the CCSS shift many key instructional decisions back to classroom teachers (p. 11).

While educational standards shape the learning process for teachers and students, determining the steps needed to make learning engaging for students is not easy. What is needed to forge students forward to be active participants in the learning process is not the same for every state as with Common Core State Standards. Ensuring that middle school students’ academic needs happen becomes the priority.

**Policy Statement**

Potential policies could address what middle school readers expect in their reading classrooms. The potential policies could increase the out-of-school recreational reading time for female middle-school students. Each recommended policy addresses recommendations and
benefits and outlines why the policy would be effective. Expanding opportunities for student choice beginning at the 4th-grade level and lasting throughout the 12th-grade foster reading engagement, thereby improving reading motivation. When students interact with the texts of their choice, the result is an increase of students who read recreationally, which, in turn, leads student readers to increase the number of times they opt to read over engaging with other forms of recreational activities.

This policy supports the program evaluation by determining and linking student motivation and engagement to reading and policy requirements. The “Student Self-Selection Policy for Elementary Schools” will ensure that students develop a love for reading that carries over to recreational reading while acquiring needed literary skills to help them achieve academically. Currently, there is not much information available at the state or national level that spells out or identifies opportunities for students to self-select their reading material in their classes. There is information that speaks to why embedding self-selection opportunities inside the reading curriculum is needed and beneficial for students. Studies conducted on the idea of students self-selecting their reading material consistently emerge. The idea of student self-selection is research-based and results from the practice yield proven benefits.
Table 14.

Authors and Researchers who Advocate for Student Self-Selection of Reading Material.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title and Details</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atwell, N. (2007).</td>
<td>The reading zone: How to help kids become skilled, passionate, habitual, critical readers. New York: Scholastic.</td>
<td>The text has a chapter that suggests that teachers allow students to select their independent reading material.</td>
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Currently, literacy mandates are left up to the individual districts at the state level, although utilizing the Common Core State Standards remains non-negotiable. These policies can be implemented at the state level because, according to http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/ (2021), 41 states employ the Common Core State Standards, and the Common Core State Standards guidelines get implemented at the state level. Many states around the nation allow schools at the local level to decide what methods and strategies to use in reading classes.
Schools within each state could insert caveats to allow students to self-select their reading material resulting in far more engagement within reading classes.

Nationally, three recent pieces of educational legislation (variations of the same legislative bill) enacted become the roadmaps that states utilize to educate students. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) was signed into law and provided funding for low-income students while improving the quality of education for elementary and secondary schools. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) revamped ESEA. It required schools to shape their yearly results by improving performance on standardized assessments and instruction through research-based methods and curriculum while focusing on the core subjects of reading, math, science, and social studies. Another variation of ESEA is ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act), which delved into many of the same areas as ESEA and NCLBA, which had all aspects of education under the umbrella of high-quality instruction.

Analysis of Needs

A small-scale study employed students’ perceptions regarding being afforded opportunities to engage in the self-selection of reading material within their reading class. Allowing students the autonomy to self-select their reading material should be implemented at the middle school grade levels to foster more engagement in reading that could ultimately lead to recreational reading outside of school.

Educational Analysis

Some issues impact reading and how reading instruction goes forth, especially within the middle school grades. These issues primarily arise because state requirements omit or, alternatively, fail to spell out the specific methodologies that educators can implement throughout their reading lessons. Currently, recreational reading engagement has decreased amongst middle school girls, making it challenging to engage with reading inside of school.
Based on this study’s findings, educators should employ strategies that allow for more autonomy with the material they read in the classroom environment. If the instruction does not address the needs of students, engagement in reading and motivation to read are affected.

The educational aspects that impact policy center around states and school districts shifting with reading education. Getting students engaged and motivated to read in school and recreationally while being afforded the opportunity to select their reading material is vital to student academic success. According to researchers Denise Johnson and Anne Blair,

> Because the engagement of readers is key to the reading process, it is essential that educators find ways to increase engagement. Student self-selection of literature can be one means to this end. In addition to fostering intrinsic motivation, allowing students to make choices gives them control. When real-world readers choose a text, they are reading to learn and to enjoy. They accomplish these tasks by selecting a text that fulfills their needs. Selecting what to read is a major part of becoming a reader (Ollman, 1993). According to Darigan, Tunnel and Jacobs (2002), self-selecting literature is so essential to the reading process that without its inclusion into a reading program, no reading development can be accomplished. In order for students to engage with text, they must feel like they have control in selecting materials that are interesting to them (p. 183).

This educational issue of a lack of reading engagement and motivation in middle school students with reading inside and outside of school arises because students are not afforded opportunities to select their reading material.

The academic gains that middle school students can potentially make in reading can prove valuable if implemented, especially if educators align the policy with instructional methodologies that constitute research-based best practices. Schmoker (2018) stated, “the most successful leaders are those that understand that success depends largely on implementing what is already known” (p. 14). Implementing the policy within all middle school reading classrooms with fidelity, motivation to read, and engagement in reading will be enhanced because the
students select their reading material. Aside from increased motivation to read and engagement with books, the result of students self-selecting their reading material and the policy being enforced in middle school would also include improved comprehension, fluency, and increased vocabulary. Another by-product of the policy is the progression of student reading grades and students engaging with more recreational reading.

**Economic Analysis**

The economic impact of implementing this policy for school districts will be significant primarily because of what must be purchased in order for schools to have the necessary resources for full implementation. Funding would have to include professional development opportunities for teachers who might not be familiar with the notion of students learning the required standards and objectives by selecting and interacting with reading material they selected themselves. Within the professional development opportunities for teachers, participants will learn what it means for students to self-select reading material, how to utilize those self-selected texts within reading instruction, and understand the benefits for students who self-select. School districts must cultivate professional development opportunities centered around student self-selection before full implementation. The cost of professional development needs to include hiring presenters knowledgeable about all aspects surrounding student self-selection and how to prepare educators to address the new instructional methodology.

Another financial implication is the cost of the requirement of having fully stocked classroom libraries. The classroom libraries are the central element of bringing the self-selection process for middle school students to the forefront. This program does not simply require ordering books to stock the classroom libraries; it entails a more strategic plan to ensure that each library is fully functional and used for self-selection of reading material with fidelity. Gathering information from students to determine their interests is critical for book purchases.
A strong research base supports the importance of access to books. Children who are allowed to self-select to read and who have access to varied sources of print materials in their classrooms, school libraries, town libraries, and at home read more and read more widely, both for pleasure and for information. Children who do a substantial amount of voluntary reading demonstrate positive attitudes toward reading, and these students tend to be the best readers (International Reading Association, p. 2).

**Social Analysis**

The social aspect of this study is invaluable to the middle school population for a couple of reasons, and mainly, the students raised points that relate to how they feel in class. Specifically, they mentioned they wanted to feel more comfortable reading in class. When students are allowed to self-select their reading material, they become more engaged with reading and motivated to read. The motivation then has the positive impact of improving their self-esteem. Many students are reluctant to read aloud in class or work with classmates because they feel that the reading text may be above their abilities. The same is true for the associated assignments that accompany the text. When students self-select their text with their teacher's consultation, the process allows the selected reading material to match the student's interest and reading level. Students will increase the amount of reading they do and become motivated to engage with reading continuously.

An equally significant social gain is that fewer students will receive failing grades in reading, ultimately reducing the number of students retained or forced to be in summer school. When reading, educators often only use the cookie-cutter model of having all students read the exact text at the same pace and complete the same assignments without opportunities for differentiation. An outcome of this model is that students who may be unable to comprehend or read the material fluently begin to fail assignments and grades, which affects their self-esteem,
motivation, and engagement. Once self-esteem, motivation, and engagement falter, there will likely be a decrease in students’ grades, leading to summer school or retention.

**Political Analysis**

Allowing middle school students the opportunity to self-select their reading material will have some political implications. The Local School Council (LSC) serves as a board of two teacher representatives, three parents, and five community members at the local school level. This board is responsible for approving all things related to academics and school budgets, which are approved or disapproved through the Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP). The CIWP aligns each school’s mission to the school’s priorities and looks at the steps in place to accomplish the academic goals, including budgetary necessities. Aside from the role of the Local School Council, other political aspects are required to bring middle school students’ self-selection to the local school level. Getting the self-selection model in place for middle school students would require acceptance from the school district and the school board.

The District and the School Board would have to offer school support and support for middle-school reading teachers. Both entities must recognize and understand how the support and resources would benefit the students and the classroom environment. The school districts will need to hire literacy coaches who thoroughly understand the self-selection process and can model the practice for middle school reading educators. Approving budgets to ensure that classrooms have the needed resources is also vital to ensure that all middle schools around the district have a variety of texts of various genres and reading levels and address a myriad of interests of the students.

**Legal Analysis**

Implementing the self-selection policy for middle school students with all the needed
resources could improve reading grades and overall education quality. The Common Core State Standards currently drive reading instruction per the state mandates. Allowing students to self-select their reading material will align with state mandates and will not pose any legal backlash. School administrators must provide all students with a quality education that is frequently the same for all students without attempting to individualize the students’ education. According to the Department of Education, “effective school leaders demonstrate that student learning is their top priority through leadership actions that build and support a learning organization focused on student success” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011c, p. 1).

Once the district and the school board approve the new reading method for all middle school educators and students, it becomes a mandate, and educators will be required to implement students’ self-selecting reading material. The mandate would become the law within the district. Once administrators provide educators with professional development and utilize coaches who will model how the self-selection process should implement for the educators and students, then individualized learning for students will begin. Adjustments regarding self-selection would assist students with reading achievement, comprehension, and fluency, which is considered a priority for all stakeholders.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

There are moral and ethical issues surrounding the idea of quality instruction. Quality instruction is usually associated with the expectation that middle school students receive the necessary tools in literacy and math to make them successful in subsequent grades. Some believe that following the standards and curriculum meticulously and utilizing basal readers is the universal approach that is best suited for all students. This approach leaves no room for individualized learning opportunities to take place. Students not receiving personalized learning opportunities goes against what educators are trained to do with their instructional
practices, including tailoring a student’s education to meet their specific academic needs.

Limiting the amount of reading material made available to students and limiting reading material that is representative of those in the class is not a sign indicative of an equitable learning environment. Research shows that where there is a lack of representation in students’ reading material, they become unable to relate to the characters’ experiences or the locations in which many of the texts occur. According to Jodie Rodriguez in an article written for Scholastic, when kids enjoy reading titles with characters who look like them, it helps form a connection to the book on another level. Identifying with the characters in a story allows for a deeper comprehension of the text because kids are making these kinds of self-connections (p.3).

The lack of representation in reading material that students are exposed to will lead to low engagement and motivation with any text the students have to read in class. When these elements of engagement and motivation are missing, they result in students having a less than stellar reading experience in middle school.

**Implications for Staff and Community Relationships**

This reading policy must have commitment and complicity from administrators and not just the principal but all who serve in a leadership capacity, including middle school reading teachers. Securing a commitment for full implementation from all stakeholders allows the policy to be implemented with fidelity. Once there is consistency in the policy, addressing the students’ reading needs and customizing a reading learning plan can commence. It can be carried out throughout their duration in middle school. Having stakeholders with an intense interest in the academic reading success of the students means that those same stakeholders can implement the reading policy consistently and effectively. Stakeholders will receive constant training from literacy coaches at the local school level. This training will include taking a needs inventory from the students to determine their interests and a skills assessment to determine reading level.
Ongoing training would also include incorporating the standards, objectives, and student-related assignments to accompany the selected text chosen by the students. Educators, in particular, will need intensive training because this new policy goes against the norm of current reading instruction for middle school students. Implementing the reading policy within middle school classrooms will become the responsibility of the educators and other stakeholders to identify how student accountability will be achieved and track the academic changes that arise from students’ self-selecting their reading material. Through tracking, the educators, in particular, can address the gaps that may occur and the onset of implementing the policy. If needed, interventions become implemented to assist students who may struggle to meet state, district, or local school assessments.

Another element would be to include the usage of the local libraries within the community as a collaborative partnership. Libraries contribute to educating students while fostering a love of reading, developing learning skills, and developing critical thinking skills. Having access to a variety of reading material centered around student interests can propel students to begin reading as a habit. Because libraries have a limitless amount of reading material, students can pave the way for other students to understand their reading experiences while simultaneously undergoing who students are as readers. Creating library card drives at the local school level show students the value and importance teachers place on reading. Also, having local librarians speak to middle school classrooms as guest speakers also provides students with the wealth of information their local library provides. Getting students to understand that libraries promote readership and the development of reading skills aside from what happens in the classroom. Furthermore, libraries will offer students critical reading
assistance and build upon existent deficits. Ultimately, the local library could turn periodic visits into consistent visits that creates lifelong readers.

Through this policy, the community would acquire an elementary school that fosters individuality and provides students with a learning experience that meets them where they are and provides them with opportunities to grow. Schools implementing the policy will advance equity in learning, especially for disadvantaged communities. Middle school students exposed to evidence-based, high-quality instruction can raise classroom expectations.

**Conclusion**

There are positive impacts of the self-selection reading policy for middle school students. These include more student engagement, motivation, and opportunities for an educational experience that meets their individualized reading needs and improves their reading abilities. The self-selection reading policy also affords educators with resources to assist their students in a better way consistently. Chapter Eight will address the leadership lesson gained as a result of this study.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Introduction

Change in reading policies is in the current literature. Change increases opportunities for middle school students to engage in reading fully and participate more in their reading classes. In order to ensure that the motivational reading levels among middle school students are increased amongst girl students, several elements are introduced to middle school classrooms. These include providing interesting reading material, providing opportunities for autonomy when selecting reading material, and an educator well versed in how to instruct students with various texts. This approach challenges the typical middle school reading classroom agenda, which entails a general formula for educating students, such as reading a passage, answering questions about the passage, completing homework related to the passage, and finally taking an assessment on the passage. This new approach aims to provide students with the opposite of what they tend to encounter daily. Educators play an extremely critical role in affecting this change by creating and providing students with a classroom environment that addresses the learning needs and interests of the individual. ASCD’s senior director Sean Slade states,

Understanding the needs of each student can only occur in environments which respect and cater to the individual needs of each teacher also. These two things are inseparable. If we truly want to personalize learning, it can only take place when we allow teachers and school staff to personalize teaching, taking the whole person into consideration (as cited in Rodman, 2019, p. 110).

Providing students with autonomy and attributes that aid learning increases motivation to read and engagement with reading.

Discussion

This research aimed to investigate improving reading instruction for middle school
students and ways to implement changes to reading-related instructional practices. I reviewed research, interviewed girl students, and developed a reading learning policy to achieve these aims. The interviews and the research helped to understand more about how middle school girl students view their reading classes. The research did not simply look at how they are instructed but also the types of materials they utilize in class. The study also analyzed what changes could be made to instructional practices to ensure that more students become actively engaged with reading. Students reading more in class could also possibly lead them to read recreationally.

The themes derived from this study were about students’ desires to have their reading instruction personalized and have their reading education built upon their reading interests. As the study progressed, the interviews revealed commonalities between the participants' perspectives. One significant consensus among all five participants regarding their reading instruction was related to students self-selecting their reading material throughout reading class. Through my assessment of this topic, I learned that when offered opportunities, students pick the books or short stories they read in class and use the same texts they chose to complete assignments. For the autonomy of self-selection to be an element of instruction, educators have to be willing to move from the traditional approach to teaching reading. Wolf et al. (2017) shared that if the educational road forward does not have sights set on a goal or result, it will result in failure. They share that “the failure to develop a vision focused on teaching and learning is often cited as the biggest pitfall in a personalized learning effort” (p. 17).

Wolf et al. (2017) add that “when instructional vision aligns with instructional change, it leads educators to take on the role of a risk-taker to develop their teaching practices better, thereby assisting students to explore more academically yielding their success” (p. 6). Personalizing student learning must include educators and students being academic
collaborators. Educators will have to have a deep knowledge of the students before them, including understanding their academic level, reading level, and interests. Universal instructional strategies will not be conducive to creating a classroom culture of personalized learning to take shape in middle school classrooms.

Another theme from the interviews spoke directly to the lack of access students have to read material of their choosing. The participants spoke about the lack of reading material in their homes, the lack of interest-based texts in their reading classroom libraries, and the lack of reading venues, such as libraries or bookstores, near their homes or within their community. This theme must be addressed for students to begin to engage and be motivated to read inside and outside of school. Students are linear in their perspective of recreational reading, and their perceptions become shaped solely based on what is easily and readily available inside of school. Often the classroom libraries do not contain newly acquired material. In fact, they encompass books and texts that have been passed on from educator to educator or have been a fixture or unutilized staple of the classroom environment, thereby rendering the books unusable for middle school students. Students are motivated to read by the texts placed before them and will read if the material provided becomes linked to their interests. Aligning reading texts to students’ interests encourages more reading in middle school reading classrooms and spills over into students’ lives outside of school.

Gerzon and Gleason (2013) indicate how understanding any changes in schools means educators and administrators take on the responsibility of discerning how policies can be organized to serve our best hopes and plans for equity and achievement. Policies and mandates, at every level, may help raise the bar of equity and personalization, but they do not set the ceiling on what achievement can be (p. 159).

The recommended policy identifies and focuses on what traditional reading classes and strategies
have looked like and provides suggestions for what student-centered reading instruction can become for middle schoolers to propel them to become avid readers outside of school and within the classroom. My policy suggestions move away from the norm of a typical middle school teaching model within reading classes and take on a more individualized approach, with student interest playing a vital role and component of personalized learning. This suggested policy assures that: (a) students offer reading material that is not only of interest to the students but connects with their reading levels; (b) assignments tailored to coincide with standards, objectives, and student reading material; and (c) there is an increase in student engagement and motivation to read inside and outside of school.

**Leadership Lessons**

Throughout this process, I have learned essential leadership lessons, which include elements that address administrators, educators, and students. First and foremost, administrators ensure that a reading policy has all the required elements. These elements include well-stocked classroom libraries that have large numbers of student selections. Administrators must incorporate purchasing books for classroom libraries into the yearly school budgets so that all middle school classrooms are fully stocked when the reading policy is implemented in classrooms. Once the initial purchases are made, a commitment to replenish depleted libraries is also a requirement of full policy implementation. Removing the barrier of not having enough reading material for middle school students to choose from also removes access obstacles that tend to transpire with typical reading classroom libraries in middle school environments.

Another leadership lesson derived from this study is that middle school reading educators need to be well versed in the reading policy. Gerzon and Gleason (2013) elaborate that “Personalizing learning for students school-wide can happen when collaboration and learning is
central in the context of an ambitious agenda. It is about changing the way work in school happens” (p. 157)

Students become the direct recipients of the work and training that educators undergo to change the traditional way students take part in their reading classes. Having educators participate in ongoing training on how the policy needs to unfold is essential to yielding consistent student engagement. It is critical for instructional success that in these proposed training sessions, educators should learn how to properly plan lessons aligned with the standards and objectives and manage a plethora of texts to use within the lesson. Continuous professional development for middle school reading educators is required for the new policy to be enacted.

Finally, a further leadership lesson aimed at students is to address ways to propel all students towards academic success. Academic success entails ensuring equity in all middle school classrooms by having a variety of available reading material. Implementing the policy requires that schools ensure there are fully stocked classroom libraries with interesting and exciting reading topics and characters and that the reading material is culturally relevant for diverse student populations. The interviews with the participants discovered that middle school students want reading material that emulates their experiences with characters who look like them. Reading disengagement is when students do not have a relationship or connection to what they are reading. A void in reading will make for a less cohesive experience with texts within the school and lead to a non-existent relationship with books outside of school.

Conclusion

Despite the various changes in middle school reading classrooms, one consistent approach to teaching reading remains. The changes entail students receiving the exact text, discussing what was read, completing a classroom assignment related to the text, and completing a homework assessment. This approach to reading classes can change with a new reading policy.
Altering traditional classroom protocols to allow for student self-selection of reading material encourages motivation to read inside and outside of school.
Appendix

*Directions:* This is a survey to assess how you feel about reading. The score will not affect you or your grades in any way. Read the statements, then put an X under the letter or letters that represent how you feel about the statement.

*SD* – Strongly Disagree  *D* – Disagree  *U* – Undecided  *A* – Agree  *SA* – Strongly Agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>SD</strong></th>
<th><strong>D</strong></th>
<th><strong>U</strong></th>
<th><strong>A</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. You feel you have better things to do than read.</td>
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<td>2. You seldom buy books.</td>
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<td>3. You are willing to tell people that you do not like to read.</td>
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<td>4. You have a lot of books in your room to read.</td>
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<td>5. You will read whenever you don’t have other things to do.</td>
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<td>6. You get really excited about books you have to read.</td>
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<td>7. You love to read.</td>
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<td>8. You like to read books by well-known authors.</td>
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<td>9. You check out books from the library.</td>
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<td>10. You like to stay home and read.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. You seldom read except when you have to for school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. You think reading is a waste of time.</td>
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<td>13. You think reading is boring.</td>
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<td>14. You think it is weird when people read a lot.</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>You like to read to escape</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>You tend to make fun of people who like to read.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>You like to share books with your friends.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>You would rather have someone just tell you the information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>You prefer to read texts and emails over books.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>It takes a long time to read a book.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>You like to broaden your interest through reading.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>You read lot</td>
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<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>You like to improve your vocabulary, so you read.</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>You like to get books for gifts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Reading helps you understand life better.</td>
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<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Reading books about the lives of others helps you with your own life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>There aren’t characters in the books you read that resemble your life.</td>
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</table>

*Figure 2. Rhody Reading Attitude Assessment Survey 2*
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<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>You would like to be a better reader in school that understands the information, so you read.</td>
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<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>You believe reading emails and text messages are reading</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


*Figure 1. Rhody Reading Attitude Assessment Survey 3*
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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Open-Ended Interview Questions</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Research Questions</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Central Research Question</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will five eighth-grade girls narrate and describe their perceptions considering what they read and how and why they feel their out-of-school reading time increased or decreased with their age?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What do the participants report they read outside of school reading time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How do the participants feel their out-of-school reading time has increased or decreased with their age?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Why do the participants feel their out-of-school reading time has increased or decreased with their age?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Tell me about yourself and what interests you outside of school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Tell me about what you read outside of school. This can include anything that you read.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Where do you get the materials you like to read?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Tell me about a time when you were &quot;hooked&quot; on a book. What was that like?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Describe some of your good reading experiences. Where did they happen?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Describe some of your negative reading experiences. Where did they happen?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. What motivates you to read?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. If you would like to read more but do not feel you have the time, what prevents you from doing so?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. How often do you read news articles, websites, blog posts, or other print items (including social media) on your electronic device for fun?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. For ALL your classes this year, how much reading OUTSIDE of class are you doing each day? How much is school-related? How much is not school-related?</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. In your opinion, how important is it that a student enjoys reading?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Is there anything else about your experiences with reading or feelings about reading that you would like to share?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4. Reading Open-Ended Interview Questions 1*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>What are your reading experiences like in middle school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Do you feel like you read more, less, or the same as you did in the primary and intermediate grades? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>How often do you talk about books unrelated to school with your friends?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>When you are assigned to read outside of class, how likely are you to read the entire assigned text?</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Are you more, less, or as likely to read in a book club or independent reading than you are with a whole-class novel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>What could a reading teacher do to help you read more or enjoy reading more?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>What would lead you to read outside of school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>What activities do you engage with outside of school?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5. Reading Open-Ended Interview Questions 2*
REFERENCES


